

AN ELECTION FIASCO RECALLED

by Vic Berecz

Next week we'll be voting in local elections on our little island in paradise ... in the *land of hanging chad*. I'm very pleased that here our local elections are non-partisan. But, this election got me thinking again about voting in America. Voting mechanisms have improved greatly since the *Election of 2000* debacle ... especially here in Florida. Also, there has been progress regarding early voting, absentee ballots, and provisional ballots.

At least 32 states have some form of early balloting in addition to absentee ballots. Florida and many other States have implemented more liberal absentee balloting policies than those I had to negotiate in Connecticut years ago. The goal of these initiatives ... make it easier for everyone to vote. That's a good goal. Maybe it'll increase voter participation. That would be a very good result! The other new voting initiative is *provisional ballots* when there are questions concerning registration, prior voting, etc. These are good in theory, but may be very difficult to work out in practice. As Igor Sikorsky once told me and a group of other young, eager engineers: "Theory is great, but the only important result is what occurs in actual tests." Here's the tale of my experience with provisional ballots.

In 1964, I was a registered Democrat living in Connecticut. My party affiliation was the product of being brought up with great Connecticut Democrats like Tom Dodd and Abe Ribicoff always in the news. In the Johnson vs. Goldwater race of '64, my choice seemed obvious. At the time, I was working at Sikorsky Aircraft and in that Vietnam War era we were putting in a lot of hours. The evening before the election, I received a *get out the vote* phone call from our local Democratic headquarters. "Will you be voting?" ... "Yeah, sure." ... "When?" ... "I plan to vote before I go to work." ... "Thanks, we need your vote."

In the morning there was some minor problem with the baby; our son was less than a month old, so I didn't make it to the polling place before work. We were working overtime, so it was 7PM before I got to the polls after work. I went in to vote -- no ID required, just give your name and address. The lady says I voted already. The other lady says, "I remember. About an hour ago a man in his 60s, unshaven and in dirty work clothes came in and gave your name. I wondered about it, because your wife was here this afternoon and I held your baby while she voted. I couldn't imagine that slovenly old man being the father of that beautiful baby."

So that's the story. They gave me a form to sign, to attest to the fact I hadn't voted, then sent me to the voting booth. Obviously the Dems had sent in a ringer when they thought I wouldn't show before the 8PM closing. That way they got my vote. Now they figured they'd really won ... they would get two votes from me. But, that didn't happen. I was *pisst* and voted for Barry Goldwater. The next week I quit the Democratic party. Since then, like most Americans, I have been registered proudly as an *Independent* in Connecticut, Virginia, and now Florida. My advice ... don't be *True Blue* (or *True Red* either). Think hard about each and every candidate and whether or not you believe they will represent you and your values.

Hopefully, stories like mine above will put the *kibosh* on those people who oppose voter ID as an infringement of their privacy. So much for those who say sending ringers in to vote only happened in Richard Daly's Chicago. The reality is we do need greater controls on this most cherished privilege. The reality is we have the biometric ID card and database technology to make it work well. The reality is ... let's just do it! Maybe then we won't need to exercise the *provisional ballot* option very often. In any case, even in this little local election, it's important that all of us GET OUT AND VOTE!