



Clerk's office mails first advance ballots today

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

Five p.m. marked the close of voter registration for the special election set for April 8. Voters who filled out registration cards delivered to Seward County Clerk Stacia Long's office before the close of business will be allowed to vote, provided they show proof of citizenship on or before April 7.

One deadline down, hundreds more to go.

That’s because pre-election business at the clerk’s office never really stops.

“We have to start mailing out the advance ballots (today),” Long said in an interview Monday. “We’re also receiving applications daily for people who want those.” Voters who wish to receive a paper ballot by mail may request one in person, or by phoning the office at 626-3355.

Advance voting by mail is favored by people who have physical disabilities or difficulties that make traveling to the Seward County Activity Center on election day difficult. Some mail-in ballots are requested because travel plans mean voters won’t be in town April 8. Other citizens “like to take a little longer in actually casting their ballot,” Long said. “They like to sit down at the table with a cup of coffee and think it through one more time” rather than standing in a busy place with the electronic panel of the voting machine waiting for a tap with the stylus.

Ways to check registration:
The government-sponsored website <http://www.elections-nebraska.org> walks users through simple steps — putting in a name, date of birth, and address — online, checking to see if the user is a registered voter. It also allows users to view a sample ballot on the website.
When logging onto the site, be sure to log in with the user's "username" with the state's name completely spelled out. That second website is a separate application that is not operated by the state or by election officials. Should the voters run into any problems with the Seward County Clerk's Office or step by to double-check their registration status. Located at the

Ways to vote:
Registered voters in Seward County have three options for how to participate in the April 8 Special Election.
— Request a mail-in, advance ballot, available starting today.
— Plan to vote in advance, at the county clerk's office beginning March 27.
— Vote in person at the Seward County Activity Center on election day, April 8.

Seward County Administration Building at 212 N. Washington, Suite 101. The office is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., weekdays, with some limitations on hours during election season. The phone number is 626-3355.

All voters can take a look at a sample ballot online, in today’s paper or by visiting Long’s office. The special election is for a bond issue to improve schools in USD 480. It asks two questions: should the district proceed with a bond issue to build schools as described by the Vision Team plan, which was created by a panel of community members with input from the public? And it asks, should the City of Liberal levy a half-cent sales tax in order to help fund the proposed projects?

For the bond issue project to move forward, voters will have to say “yes” to both questions. If the bond question passes but the sales tax does not, the project will be scrapped. If the sales tax meets with approval, but the school bond issue does not, the city will not collect the additional half-cent of retail taxes.

Long, who's seen plenty of elections during nearly two decades as clerk, said the ballot questions, while long, are straightforward.

"People who want to say 'yes' will actually vote 'yes,'" she said. "Over the years, we have heard from a lot of people that different ballots were not clear. One time, the language was so complicated, people who wanted to support something had to vote 'no.' This time, it's pretty straightforward."

In the coming weeks, the clerk's office will do more than mail out advance ballots. It will also continue to tie up loose ends in the registration process.

Although yesterday was the deadline for new voters to register, they did not have to produce proof of citizenship on the spot. Long's office is permitted to receive and record proofs of citizenship right up to April 7. Not only that, she said staff will cull through incomplete registration lists and do everything possible to nudge potential voters into the booth with phone calls, reminder letters and explanation of how to find and deliver proof – in person, by photocopy, email or even smartphone messages.

Long said she'd had a moment of clarity when thinking through what she would do if she was unable to find her own birth certificate.

"I was born here in Liberal, so I would go to Southwest Medical Center to get a document called a 'Proof of Birth' from the hospital," she said. "I think there may be a cost, and it takes maybe a day or two, but they can certify a proof of birth that is on the list of documents we can use as proof of citizenship." Long noted that the Proof of Birth document is not the same as the decorative birth "certificates" provided to parents when a baby arrives.

"The one with the footprints will not do," Long said.

Voters who have moved to a new address, who began the registration process but have not

completed it with proof of citizenship, or who are just uncertain of their status, can find out online. The website <https://myvoteinfo.voteks.org/> walks users through simple steps — putting in a name, date of birth, and address — before checking to see if the user is a registered voter. It's also possible to view a sample ballot on the website.

In the courthouse, Long and her staff won't have a quiet moment as they mail out ballots, receive and record them, and prepare for the advance, in-office voting that opens in 10 days. The clerk's office will provide walk-in voting until April 7, and then will begin the task of setting up and implementing the special election at the Seward County Activity Center.

"A lot of people take the preparation for every election for granted. They do not understand how much work is involved," Long said. "Money, too. Whether I have 1,000 or 5,000 people come out to vote, it's going to cost the county the same amount of money to put on the election."

With a staff of "good, competent employees," to keep things running smoothly, Long is ready for the three weeks ahead.

"It's fun," she said. "We enjoy this time."