



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

10/29/24

With this week finding us in the 2024 general election final stretch, it seemed as good a time as any to visit with Columbia County Board of Elections Commissioners Kelly Miller-Simmons [R] and Mara Estribou [D] for a look at how the process has been going.

First things first. Early voting is now open and continues through Sunday, November 3. Regardless of where in the county one resides, eligible voters may cast their early vote at either the county office building at 401 State Street, Hudson, or the Martin H. Glynn Municipal Building, 3211 Church Street, Valatie.

Traditionally, Columbia County has experienced an engaged electorate. To that end, the county has turned out the highest percentage in New York State since early voting was instituted. "It's definitely popular in Columbia County," the commissioners said.

Preparations for this election commenced months ago, of course, yet as Commissioner Estribou points out, "The good news is that all elections basically run on the same schedule, so there are no last minute surprises."

That said, the commissioners indicated an "unprecedented volume of transactions" have already occurred in the days and weeks heading into the days of early voting, which opened last Saturday, October 26.

Those transactions have come in form of "very heavy" absentee and early mail ballot requests, phone calls from voters confirming their registration, an increase in mail, and the like.

In addition, this year the Board of Elections has seen an uptick of overseas voters, a group that "checks in every four years. For those only interested in voting every four years, they're making sure their paperwork is all set. Different types of elections wake up different groups -- there are some voters who only want to vote in school elections, for instance."

While concerns exist that polling sites around the country may draw disruptive behavior, Commissioners Miller-Simmons and Estribou are "not anticipating trouble. We're looking at everything, trying to be prepared. There are no specific threats as far as anyone knows."

Poll inspectors, the commissioners noted, have been fully trained and as part of that, have been instructed on how to handle things such as electioneering and exit polling. To assist in that effort, this year new large, red markers, as opposed to the smaller, black and white markers of the past, will instruct everyone when they are within 100 feet of a polling place.

"Poll inspector training," said Commissioners Miller-Simmons and Estribou, "was all about common unity. That we need each other. Both parties need to respect each other and have a positive attitude, so if anything does happen, you have your team there to work together to solve it."

"We are very busy," they added, "but everything is running very smoothly here."

The county Board of Elections can be contacted at 518-828-3115 or via email at elections@columbiacountyny.gov

The website is located at <https://sites.google.com/a/columbiacountyny.com/elections>