

Senators, I am asking you to support the language in S. 107 that would only require us to count and report write-in votes if the person has declared their candidacy. I fully support the idea that voters should be able to choose anyone to represent them, but I believe the current system is being abused, and used to embarrass people. Elections are serious business and I don't have patience for people making a mockery of the system.

For those of you who have not counted votes, I will give you an overview of the process.

Before the election, we print tally sheets with the names of each candidate, and blank spaces for write-ins. In both tabulator and hand-count towns, a pair of election officials examines a group of ballots. One election official reads the name, and the other election official hand-writes the name on the tally sheet, with a mark next to that name for one vote. If the person gets a second vote in that stack of ballots, another mark is made next to the name.

When that batch of ballots is totaled, it is brought to the presiding officer, who then adds the name to the summary sheet, and records the number of votes for that person. The summary sheet may be paper or a computer spreadsheet, but the sheet has to be altered to add the new name. When the Official Return of Votes is prepared, the clerk adds each name again. This greatly increases our counting and reporting time, and could decrease accuracy when it is happening late at night at the end of a very long day. During the 2018 primary, we counted a total of 306 ballots. We reported a write-in name 100 times. The most votes counted for any name for a particular office was 4.

Decreased accuracy and increased time and effort alone would not be enough to make clerks ask for this language, if the process was being taken seriously, but in many cases it is not. We had votes for Bob Dylan and Jeff Beck. We had votes for Marvin Hagler, George Foreman, and Joe Frazier. When the Red Sox won the World Series in 2004, some of their players received votes. We had a vote for Richard Head. He may be a real person, but I doubt it. While this is funny and cute to some people, we are seeing another trend in Marshfield. During this most recent Primary, we had votes for "Pistol" Peter Brandt, "Red" David Mangan, "Lovely" Laura Mulligan, and "Bare Butt" Ben Banta. Two people wrote in these cute names. Peter, Laura, David, and Ben are real people. I can't tell if the nicknames are meant in jest or to embarrass them, as they are all members of the same church in our town and there are people in the community who openly distrust or dislike the church and its members.

I hope you will ask yourselves whether the current system is being misused, and if it would be more appropriate to allow us to only record names of serious candidates and report the others as "undeclared write-ins". With the elections management software that we use, it would not be difficult for the Secretary of State to inform us if someone filed their intention to be a candidate – we are using the software every day leading up to the election and we also get frequent bulletins from Will and his staff, so the infrastructure is there to notify us.

Bobbi Brimblecombe
Marshfield Town Clerk