

## **Going Home Again**

by Paul R. Edwards



Some months before the 2008 election, I watched *Stealing America Vote by Vote*, a documentary. After reading a recent news report, "Vote Flipping and Vote Fraud in 9 States," I decided to return to my home state of Missouri where I could use my law license to serve as a "lawyer poll-watcher."

Obama's campaign organized a Counsel for Change there because Missouri was a swing state—a battleground state. They wanted to make sure everyone had the opportunity to vote. I volunteered to join 1,500 other Missouri attorneys to spend a day at the polls.

The Sunday before the election I attended an orientation in a room packed full with lawyers of every age. The goal of the Obama campaign, we were told, was the same as that of the election officials—for the system to work.

We were instructed not to challenge any Republican voters. When voters asked for our help, we were not to ask about their party affiliation.

What impressed me most about these messages was that the Obama campaign was clearly about more than winning the election. He was running a campaign to assure he would not further the legacy of bitterness left by recent elections. He was doing what he could to create a climate that would allow him to govern.

I applied to work at a Kansas City precinct. I had managed many campaigns—including a race for mayor—when we lived there. But I was assigned to Lee's Summit, a suburb in Jackson County where five precincts were voting at one location.

Over a hundred people stood in line, waiting to cast their ballots at 6AM. They were all ages, colors and sizes. Everyone was civil throughout the thirteen-hour day. Watching this, I marveled that, despite the impassioned rhetoric of campaigns, we still enjoy a basically safe and orderly society, in contrast with so much of the world.

There were no incidents at this polling place. I told a friend, another lawyer, that I felt under-utilized. But he told me that the presence of all this legal skill might have helped to prevent the problems of the last two presidential elections. Apparently he was correct because the state Voting Rights organization reported that "fewer provisional ballots were cast last Tuesday than in any other federal election cycle since they were introduced in Missouri."

During the day I chatted with the wife of the incumbent state representative, a Republican. She was working this polling place because it was the second largest

concentration of Republican votes in the district; her husband was working the largest.

Turnout was strong in the morning, so everyone expected an equally large turnout from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. But, to our surprise, these were the lightest two hours of the day, resulting in a smaller than expected overall turnout. It seemed a significant number of Republicans were staying at home.

In the end, Missouri didn't go for Obama, but the vote was close. Out of almost three million votes cast, McCain won by 3902 votes. I credit Missouri's loss to that all-time spoiler, Ralph Nader, who got 17,813 Missouri votes. Fortunately, this time Nader spoiled only one state, though I suspect it will be costly if as a result future national campaigns won't target Missouri as a bellwether state.

Returning to Kansas City gave me the opportunity to renew and deepen relationships that meant a lot to me there. It was an honor to participate in and to celebrate this historic election with them.