

A letter to the editor or interested public.

My name is Ben Steines. I am elected by the residents of Winneshiek County to serve as the County Auditor. One of my duties is to be the Commissioner of Elections here in Winneshiek County. I have and always will exercise this responsibility with honesty, integrity, and in an efficient manner. I write this letter not in an effort to demean any candidate or party; but to inform the residents of the County, who are my constituents, as to a couple of programs that I perceive as inefficient use of County property tax dollars. Both of these programs have their place, and I strongly encourage the use of them where appropriate. My complaint is that whether by ignorance or disregard; national campaigns, political parties, and other advocacy groups use these programs without considering the expense that is incurred by the local tax payers.

1. Absentee Ballots by mail. I would like to reiterate that this process is definitely beneficial to some of the people who use it. Whether it is for a person who is traveling out of state between now and the elections, a person who has a mobility issue that limits their ability to get to the Courthouse or their polling place, a service member who is serving overseas, or any other such circumstance; this is a very appropriate procedure to cast their ballot. My staff and I are happy and willing to mail any voter a ballot, if that is the way they wish to receive it. Our office will have absentee ballots available starting September 27th through November 5th during normal business hours and also the two Saturdays immediately before the election. If a voters would stop and vote in our office or go to the polls on Election Day, that would save the County about \$3 per ballot due to postage and envelope costs. It has become quite common for political groups to encourage voters to vote by mail. I would encourage voters to consider this additional expense before signing the request form.

2. Satellite Absentee Voting Stations. I do not wish to argue the merits of whether this is an appropriate practice. Iowa Law provides for this procedure by requiring the County Auditor to provide a Satellite Station at any location if at least 100 eligible electors sign a petition requesting it. In the past such a petition has been submitted for the Student Union at Luther College. The Luther Student Senate organized a petition drive and submitted to have a Satellite Station at the Union again this year. That is not the issue that I want to highlight for the residents of Winneshiek County. After the Luther Student Senate's petition, I received two additional petitions from one of the Presidential Campaigns for two other buildings on the Luther Campus, the Center for the Arts and Brandt Hall. So now, at the expense of Winneshiek County taxpayers, I must organize and staff THREE Satellite Absentee Voting Stations, all within a few hundred feet of each other, on the campus of Luther College. I believe with Absentee ballots available in my office for forty days, through the mail, or ballots on elections day; three satellite voting locations is excessive and inefficient.

Again I want to reiterate that these programs have a place and are necessary under certain circumstances. I do not wish to discourage anyone from voting or to make it more difficult for anyone to exercise this right. Feel free to contact me at any time with questions or concerns regarding voting procedures.

Thank you,
Benjamin D. Steines
Winneshiek County Auditor and Commissioner of Elections