

SUPPORT THE ELECTION ADMINISTRATOR, SUPPORT THE VOTER



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The New Organizing Institute is a community of organizers. We are committed to solving the biggest challenges that stand in the way of change. Our basic belief is simple: if people have the skills to engage others, the tools to build powerful movements, and a community of practice to help them learn and grow, they can win real change, make measurable improvements in people's lives, and restore faith in our government and our democracy.

Public Comment to the Presidential Commission on Election Administration September 4, 2013

Good afternoon. My name is Whitney May and I work for the New Organizing Institute, a non-profit based in Washington, DC. Our Election Administration team is tickled to be here today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, Chairmen and Commissioners. I appreciate the professional paths that have brought each of you to the PCEA. Thank you for your comprehensive research and your attention to public commentary on election administration. I look forward to seeing what y'all produce to make elections better in our country.

I joined the election administration team at NOI in February of 2012. Prior to DC, I was a certified election administrator in Durham County North Carolina. I came to election work in 2007 by way of a goat farm, your standard career path. For the public record, a day on a goat farm and a day in an election office are not terribly different (manure is only part of that story).

Robin Carnahan, former Missouri Secretary of State, has a brilliant framework that allows us to consider the complexity of delivering elections as a service, wherein, as an election administrator:

- You work year round, but your shop is only open a few days per year.
- You prepare for all of your customers to show up on one day.
- Your front-line employees are paid minimum wage, work a 16-18 hour shift, and, on average, are over 70 years old.
- Your customers expect their experience to be a perfect 30 minutes or less.

The peaceful transition of power in our country, as a result of an election, is a modern miracle. Local election administrators are responsible for implementing election legislation, educating voters, designing materials, recruiting and training poll workers -- our nation's largest one-day workforce -- and properly equipping polling locations for all sorts of contingencies.

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As an election administrator in Durham, I was responsible for managing the budget as well as recruiting and training poll workers. I was 27, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, and determined to do a stellar job for my community. However, I did not have a degree in election administration. I learned by boldly doing, like so many local election administrators, and often at the expense of efficiency and grace.

Election administrators across the country face common challenges, but little, if any, infrastructure currently exists to help overcome those challenges. At this precise moment, no one is successfully facilitating connections between administrators to share solutions. As a result jurisdictions are expending already limited resources spinning and reinventing the wheel.

The existence alone of this commission is legitimizing the work of election administrators everywhere. Election administration has never been sexier. But elections are too important to stop here. Earlier this year at IACREOT we launched a knowledge network of local election administrators across our country. We are calling this network ELECTricity; a network that thrives on peer learning, that raises the professional standard of election administration, and that promotes continuing education. A network of, by, and for local election administrators. It is our hope that you, as a Commission, will encourage election administrators to engage with us.

Elections are profoundly human. It's no surprise that election administration is people-powered. ELECTricity believes the most effective way to dignify election legislation and the most effective way to dignify the taxpayers' purchase of voting systems is by investing in the professional development of the people who conduct elections. We believe that by championing election administrators' smart practices we will see better-educated voters; fewer problems at the polls; increased confidence in elections; and ultimately, increased voter participation.

We believe that by supporting the election administrator, you are supporting the voter.

Thank you for your service. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

