

Voter fraud is no easy task

By CAROLINE PRICE

If you ever decide you want to cheat at the polling booth, you'd better have a lot of crooked friends to help you.

According to Jim Chapman, an election specialist with the Michigan Secretary of State elections division, there have been no known cases of successful voter fraud in Michigan for 25 years, but he concedes it might be possible.

"If the polling place still uses paper ballots, if you get yourself appointed an election inspector, if all the vote counters are in your employ and you are very lucky, you might get away with it," Chapman says.

"Or you could have special tools to tinker with a voting machine, he says, 'but first you have to get into the building where it's kept and have a key to operate it. Then, of course, you would have to make sure the machine didn't look tampered with."

But usually a conspiracy is dragged down by the number of people involved."

MOST INDIVIDUALS who attempt voter fraud end up canceling their own votes, Chapman says. "People have tried

to force down the pointers on an election machine, which usually incapacitates it. The next person to go in and vote is going to know the machine has been messed with, and the cheater's vote was probably jammed anyway," he says.

"And I'm sure a number of people thought they were getting away with something in the primary when they split their ballot at a polling place using paper ballots. That's illegal, and all they did was void their vote."

Chapman says says much of the voter fraud of the past was the result of homes requiring their employees to prove they voted a certain way.

"The voter would try to get an election inspector distracted, pick up two ballots from the stack and hide one. They would then put one in the ballot box and take the other to show their boss how they voted," he says.

Another trick was used by vote counters who would secretly a piece of lead under their fingernails and then discreetly mark places on a ballot that voters left blank.

"That's why an 'X' has to be marked on a paper ballot now instead of a line," Chapman explains.

A BILL recently sent to the U.S. House

of Representatives that would allow voter registration by postcard could add another facet to voter fraud, according to U.S. Rep. William Broomfield (R-Bloomfield Township).

"Because registration forms will be available in bulk, it will be easy for a person to register and vote numerous times. This can be done with little chance of detection by simply filing with various election boards. Pictitious names and names of the deceased can be sent by mail, and it is not likely to be checked for veracity before the election, particularly in populous areas," Broomfield says of the bill.

Chapman agrees. "We have not been comfortable with the concept of voter registration by postcard. Other states supporting such a bill are not as large as Michigan. Clerks would have to check every card to see if it's honest."

Despite what seems to be a fairly infallible system for keeping voters honest, Chapman concludes, "I don't want to give the impression that you can't beat the system. But in Michigan, people don't seem to want to. Most of our problems are with disgruntled people who fear out the pages of punchcard voters or with strong men, or maybe women, twisting the knobs of election machines."

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