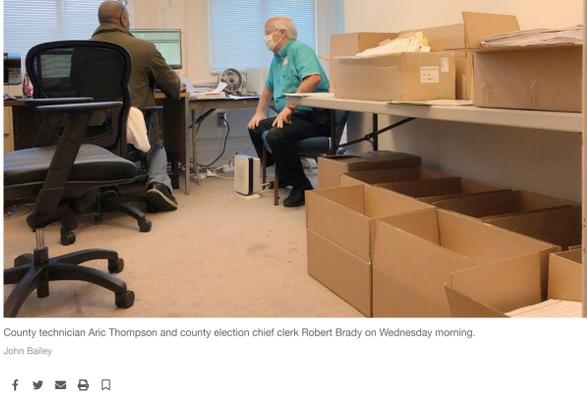




# Why Floyd County had to wait so long for Election Day results

By John Bailey J.Bailey@RN-T.com Nov 4, 2020



County technician Eric Thompson and county election chief clerk Robert Brady on Wednesday morning. John Bailey

While the number of write in ballots was statistically insignificant, it presented an unforeseen problem when publishing election results on Tuesday night, Floyd County officials said.

To get to the issue, there are a few things you need to know first.

The new voting system instituted by Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger treats results differently than the old system. In years past, the county would release precinct by precinct results first and then a countywide total — often having results out and published by 9 or 10 p.m.

The new system pulls all the votes into one pool and then, once they're accepted, parcels them out into precinct by precinct totals.



The issue Tuesday night was that, when the system encountered an unresolved write in, it would not move forward until that write in was resolved. What local elections workers said they didn't know on election night is that partial results could be published if elections workers temporarily removed those unresolved write ins.

They learned that fact after midnight, they said. However, Chief Elections Clerk Robert Brady told the Rome News-Tribune on Monday that write-ins would be an issue and would cause the machine to stop tallying ballots.

"In order for that ballot to be counted we have to go through and eliminate that (issue)," Elections Board Chair Tom Rees said early Wednesday morning.

"We don't get (results) by precincts, we get them in the form of raw votes," Brady said. "When you enter a ballot in the system for adjudication you can't get results. It took us way longer."

Candidates, election watchers and local officials expressed frustration via social media and at campaign gatherings throughout the night.

"We had the numbers about ten (minutes) after 7 p.m. We just didn't have them in a presentable form until much later," Brady said.

In this case there were 93 unresolved write in ballots in the presidential race and multiple in several other races — especially in uncontested races.

"There were a bunch for Kanye West, baby Yoda, the new version of Donald Duck ... I think it's a Sponge Bob Square Pants and on and on," Brady said.

There were 381 write in votes in the 14th Congressional District race, many for Dr. John Cowan who lost in the Republican primary runoff to Marjorie Taylor Greene.

In the uncontested race for Rome Circuit district attorney, there were 792 write in ballots cast. Similarly there were hundreds of write ins cast in the race for sheriff, tax commissioner, coroner and the three Floyd County Board of Education posts.

None of the write ins for any of the contested races would come close to influencing the outcome, but it did hold up results.

Especially confusing was the 21-person U.S. Senate race which is going to a January runoff by Republican Sen. Kelly Loeffler and Democrat Rev. Raphael Warnock.

Rees said some people voted for five or six candidates in that race — there were a total of 48 unresolved write ins in that race.

"The tragedy is that none of those votes count," Rees said.

On election night City Commissioner Wendy Davis called into question that Brady had processed a number of absentee ballots outside the presence of Democratic Party representatives on a vote review panel.



Davis, who is a member of the Democratic National Committee, wanted to know who ran ballots, when they were run and who was checking any ballot abnormalities. After some serious discussions consulting County Attorney Virginia Harman, the process was permitted to continue.

## One of the last counties in

Looking at a graphic of counties on the Secretary of State's website late Tuesday — Floyd County was one of the final counties grayed out, meaning no results had yet been reported.

At midnight, Floyd was one of just 12 counties in the state with only partial results sent to the secretary of state's office. One of Georgia's 159 counties, Hancock, had no results posted.

Brady argued that many metro Atlanta counties still didn't have all their results in as of Wednesday morning. As of Wednesday afternoon, Cobb County still had 16,000 ballots left to be counted and many other metro area counties reported similar numbers on Wednesday afternoon.

He wouldn't elaborate but said he had concerns with the numbers he was seeing when tabulated and wanted to make sure they were correct before sending them.

"It didn't look right to me so I didn't send it," Brady said. "We reported the information when we had it available."

He said the color-coded map of counties on the secretary of state's website was misleading. Even though several counties — like Gwinnett and Chatham — showed they were fully reported there were still votes being counted.

"From our perspective we're not last," he said.

The prevailing opinion among Floyd County political circles Tuesday night and Wednesday morning didn't agree with Brady's assertion.

An issue was the number of field service technicians to be sent by Dominion Voting Systems, the company that provides the voting software for the state.

"We were supposed to get a field service technician for each polling place," Brady said.

The state bought voting equipment for more than \$100 million last year from Dominion, including touch screen voting machines that print paper ballots for voters to insert into scanners, which read a barcode to record and tally the votes.

"They were supposed to be there and (Dominion) promised to us they would be on call," Brady said. The day before Election Day, the local elections office was told the company would instead send five technicians.

"It did not happen," he said.

On Tuesday, his normal contact with Dominion didn't return his calls. At some point, they realized the company had sent one technician and she was at Armuchee Baptist Church.

"We didn't know where she was until about noon yesterday, and she didn't know we were looking for her," Brady said.

Some of those issues were caused by last minute software updates, Rees said, adding that there was another update just before Election Day.

## Smooth process, slow delivery

The process of voting itself went smoothly for Floyd County this time, although there was a long turnout to vote in person on Tuesday.

With 10,321 Floyd County residents casting a ballot on Tuesday alongside 19,689 advanced votes and 8,114 absentee ballots, the voter turnout was just under 63%.

There were numerous issues reported here during the June primary and August GOP runoff, but Rees said they're beginning to feel like they've got the system worked out.

"Sometimes it can be catastrophic like it was in June," Rees said. "But after three tries we've about got this worked out."

But the question remains why other counties didn't have the same issue.

Gordon County election chair Shae Hicks said early Wednesday all their ballots were accepted without issue, even those with write-ins. Gordon County had their numbers in and finalized by 11 p.m.

Other counties in the area, including Bartow, Chattooga and Polk also had election returns submitted in a similar timeframe.

"I don't know why Polk County was able to figure this out before we were," Brady said.

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