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Activists say voting issue a matter of suppression, not location

By:Tom Caprood , The Record

ALBANY - Activists and University at Albany students took a stand against Albany County Wednesday, claiming they are delaying student voter registrations.

Anton Konev, a UAlbany graduate and candidate for the county Legislature in the 32nd district, said the Albany County Board of Elections is preventing hundreds of students from registering to vote in the November election because they did not include their post office box numbers on registration applications.

"This manipulation of elections by political hacks will not be allowed to continue," said Konev, who believes it is a violation of students' constitutional rights.

The applications are being delayed by the Board of Elections because the addresses provided by applicants are incomplete.

"The issue is simply that students need to provide an address where they can receive their mail," said John Graziano, a Republican Board of Elections commissioner.

He said the board has had a deal with UAlbany since the '90s for students to include post office box numbers along with their addresses to ensure election material will be delivered in a timely manner and to determine the student's voting districts and the polling place where to vote.

"One of SUNY's quads is geographically divided into two separate voting districts, one in Guilderland and one in Albany. Without knowing their mailbox numbers and where they live, we can't give students the correct place to vote," said Graziano.

Albany Councilman Corey Ellis said the policy is wrong and should have been publicly announced.

"If they are doing this to students, imagine what they can do in other elections," said Ellis, adding no voters, regardless of race or creed, should be disenfranchised.

Brian Mascara, a UAlbany junior and student voting activist, questioned why these issues hadn't come up in the past.

"I've been able to vote on campus for the last two years without putting down my P.O. box," said Mascara.

Konev and other activists believe that the registration delay is a part of a plan to control elections and silence the voices of local students. "College students vote at consistently lower rates than other demographic groups, not because of apathy, but because of tactics like this," said Konev.

In an email reply to Konev, Diane Cardone, of the UAlbany services department, confirmed that mail could be delivered to students without their post office box numbers, but that it would take additional time for the office to track a student down.

Graziano explained that the agreement is in no way a plan to prevent students from registering.

"If the information we send out to voters gets delayed or returned, it becomes worthless to both the Board of Elections and voters," said Graziano, who explained that current applications would be processed once post office box numbers are received.

Guillermo Martinez, former vice president of the student association and editor of the Albany Student Press, said he and other activists would not let this continue.

"If the students' (applications) are not processed by next week, we will file for an injunction and stop the election in the 32nd district," said Martinez.

None of the students affected by the processing delay were present at the protest.

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