Straight-Ticket Voting

Election Protection has become aware of emails circulating regarding straight-ticket voting rules, with some claiming that voters must take certain actions to ensure that their votes will count. These emails may claim to have been “verified” through Snopes.com or other websites, but they leave out critical information and can confuse voters. An example of such an email is below.

Most importantly, the emails are not true for any state, although one part is relevant for voters in North Carolina. Voters in every other state should completely disregard these emails (see below for more information on straight-ticket voting in other states). On the other hand, North Carolina voters – and only North Carolina voters – need to be aware that voting a straight-ticket ballot does not register a vote in the Presidential election, so North Carolina voters casting straight-ticket ballots must also vote separately in the Presidential election for their vote in that race to count. At the same time, Texas voters must be aware that casting a vote in the Presidential election after selecting a straight-ticket ballot will cause the machine to register a no-vote in that election.

This is the critical information that voters receiving these emails need to be aware of. A further explanation of straight-ticket voting follows.

Straight-ticket voting is an option presented in some states allowing voters to fill in a single bubble or punch a single hole in order to vote for every candidate in a certain political party. Most states do not have a straight-ticket voting option, so most voters must register votes for each individual race on their ballots.

Thirteen states will allow straight-ticket voting for the November 2012 general election: Alabama, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia. In all of these states except North Carolina, a straight-ticket vote will register a vote for the Presidential candidate of that party. In Texas, casting a vote for President after selecting a straight-ticket will cause no vote to be registered in the Presidential election. In North Carolina, voters must register votes for President separately, or no vote will be counted for that election. According to The New York Times, this led to double the national average of Presidential election undervotes in North Carolina in 2000 and 2004. This was partially remedied in 2008 through an aggressive information campaign and instructions to poll workers to explain how the straight-ticket system worked.
It is important for North Carolina voters to understand that they must cast a separate vote for President in addition to selecting the straight-ticket option. It is equally important for voters in other states, especially Texas, not to be misled by emails that do not specify that this rule applies only in North Carolina.

Sample email:

Subject: FW: BEWARE WHEN VOTING STRAIGHT DEMOCRATIC TICKET IN NOVEMBER

I checked it out too! Check it out for yourself at http://www.snopes.com/politics/voter/staightticket.asp

ATTENTION! TO EVERYONE THAT'S VOTING IN THE NOVEMBER 2012 ELECTION!

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION HAS BEEN VERIFIED AS BEING "TRUE" THROUGH SNOPES.COM.

IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO VOTE A "STRAIGHT DEMOCRATIC TICKET" THIS NOVEMBER, BE SURE TO "PUNCH PRESIDENT OBAMA'S NAME "FIRST" ON THE CARD, THEN PROCEED TO PUNCH "STRAIGHT DEMOCRATIC TICKET". IF YOU DON'T PUNCH PRESIDENT OBAMA NAME FIRST ON THE TICKET, YOUR VOTE WILL BE VOIDED!!!!

PLEASE PASS THIS IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON TO ALL YOUR E-MAIL FRIENDS AND FAMILIES. I'M SURE THIS INFORMATION WILL NOT BE TOLD TO YOU AT THE POLLS THIS COMING NOVEMBER!!!!

GOD BLESS!