

**Some independent voters having trouble at the polls – 4/30/08**  
**By Scott Finn**

**Studio lead:** This is the first year independent voters can cast a ballot in the Democratic primary, and thanks to the heated race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, a lot of independents want to. But some are finding out too late they can't vote in the Democratic primary – because they didn't ask for the right type of ballot. Scott Finn reports.

**Finn:** Officially, they're not even called "independent" voters in WV – they're "unaffiliated," and there's about 156,000 of them this year – a new record. Early voting has begun for the May 13<sup>th</sup> primary, and some independents are having trouble voting the way they want too. That's because independents have to ask for a Democratic or Republican ballot, or else they'll only be able to vote for, like, school board members. Dan Dial found that out too late. Dial is a 50-something business manager for the Times-Record newspaper in Spencer.

**Dial:** So I went in, told them I was an independent, I fill out the card and signed it and put it in the slot and I went into the voting booth. So I went into the booth and I had never been in a booth like that before, so the woman is there, and she pushes that non-aligned button. And the only thing that came up on the screen, the only thing I could vote for, was the school board election. So I push Yes to accept the vote, and it said, thank you for voting, this is it. So I'm still standing in the booth and I say wait, there's some mistake here.

**Finn:** But it was too late to go back, he was told.

**Dial:** So I said to her, I didn't get a chance to vote for anything except for the school board election. And they said, that's the only thing you can vote for. And I said, I wanted to vote in the Democratic primary. Well, you needed to tell us that before hand. We're not allowed to tell you what the options are. You have to request to do that.

**Finn:** Dial isn't the only independent voter with this problem. Tamara Chavies, a Marshall University student who's campaigned for Obama, said the same thing happened to her.

Deputy Secretary of State Sarah Bailey sympathizes with voters like Chavies and Dial. Some have suggested that independent voters be told of their options – but Bailey says that's not legal.

**Bailey:** State law requires that independents must request the ballots of their choice. Poll workers aren't allowed to influence voters in any way by suggesting a ballot.

**Finn:** In the future, county clerks might be able to post signs informing independents of their options. But it's too late for this year.

**Bailey:** In terms of signage, that would be a possibility, but that's not an option now. Early voting has begun, and absentee voters would be receiving a different message than those showing up at the polls, because they would not have the benefits of the signage.

**Finn:** Dial says he's embarrassed he didn't know what to do, and he hopes other independent voters will become educated before they go to the polls.

**Dial:** I was pretty upset in a sense, but I also felt ashamed at my own ignorance. I'm 50-something, and I'm a fairly intelligent person, and I didn't do it right.

**Finn:** For West Virginia Public Broadcasting, I'm Scott Finn in Charleston.