

centralized list of registered voters that is frequently purged of duplicate registrations, the deceased, those who have moved out of the district and out of the state, felons, and legal or illegal aliens.

These regulations, even if followed to the letter, will be insufficient if (1) registrars and election offices are not staffed and funded adequately; (2) the statutes do not punish fraud severely — major felonies are required, not minor misdemeanors; (3) law enforcement authorities do not make voter fraud a priority and press for substantial legal penalties against those found violating the fraud statutes; and (4) the news media do not begin to look for evidence of voter fraud — a probable prerequisite to their finding it. ✓

*Larry J. Sabato is a professor of political science at the University of Virginia. Glenn R. Simpson is a reporter at The Wall Street Journal. This article's contents were excerpted from a book they recently co-authored, Dirty Little Secrets: The Persistence of Corruption in American Politics, published by Times Books.*

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Paul, and Smith grudgingly agrees that may have been the key. "Being linked to Clinton and higher taxes was the toughest thing we had to deal with."

Small wonder. Only 20,000 cast ballots in the runoff — about seven percent of all registered voters. In a Republican primary in a rural southern constituency, that translates into an electorate barely tolerant of government whatsoever. Unlike Laughlin, these people were not middling representatives of Texas or the 14th District. A better question than why he lost is: why was Greg Laughlin in this primary at all?

"These voters were just used to voting against Laughlin," contends reporter Robison. "Someone with a more conservative voting record would have had a better shot at holding on."

Even GOP consultant Smith is moved to concede: "If Greg Laughlin were still a Democrat, he'd be re-elected easily this year."

Moral: If you *can* beat 'em, don't join 'em. ✓

## THE POLITICAL PROFESSIONAL

by Bob Blaemire

# License to Steal

James Bond has a license to kill. People in my business have a license to steal. I refer to those of us who provide computer services to political campaigns. We have a license to steal from our clients and potential clients because they don't demand the high standards from us that they should. We are rarely compelled to provide the quality of data and services we know our clients expect.

If those of us who do this for a living want to elevate the process, moving high-tech to higher-tech, then we have to educate our client base — elected officials and candidates for election — to demand that the data, products and services we sell meet the standards they have every right to demand, but do not.

Computer technology has improved. The existence of computerized databases has grown enormously. The public awareness of computer techniques and familiarity with computers is generations ahead of where it was when I entered this business 14 years ago. So why am I complaining?

Many campaigns make decisions about the database they will use based on invalid information or no information at all. Or they will be dazzled with some hi-tech computer hardware or fast and flashy technology.

There are campaigns that invest a large portion of their limited budgets in voter contact and mail. Yet those same campaigns will choose a voter file vendor who offers them a database for free, never concerning themselves with the age or nature of the data. Has information like voter history been appended by the vendor? Has the file been updated by the National Change of Address (NCOA) process? How old is the data on the file as well as the file itself?

These are important questions. If NCOA hasn't been done, a campaign



**Bad voter lists that are either too old or incomplete can cost campaigns money and political opportunities.**

might be wasting five to 10 percent of their mail budget. Campaigns mail third class, which is not returned to the sender when undeliverable. In this case, what you don't know *can* hurt you.

If the campaign uses a database that costs a little more, and, as a result, is able to select voters based on voting frequency, those extra dollars spent on the data are easily offset by avoiding sending mail to non-voters.

Old data means the campaign cannot contact new registrants. It means spending money attempting to contact voters who should have been purged. Old phone matches mean a higher disconnect rate. These are costly problems politically as well as economically.

Most vendors want to do it right. But the customer is not always right and if he or she refuses to demand high quality databases, responsible consultants and vendors need to ensure that their clients ask the right questions and get the right answers. If the database is old, we need to say so. If voter history or other data is missing, the candidate ought to be told. If the opposition campaign shares equal access to the database, the campaign has a right to know it.

Our clients have to understand that shopping for political products and services should be no different than normal shopping practices. You want to get what you pay for. Let me use some well-worn clichés. "There is no free lunch." "You can't get something for nothing." "An educated consumer is our best customer."

Why should we have a license to steal?

*Bob Blaemire is president of Blaemire Communications, a Reston-Virginia-based political consulting firm that specializes in voter files, database management, and direct mail.*