

As early voting continues, remember Saturday, May 30

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The first week of early in-person voting for the June 9 General Primary, Presidential Preference Primary and Nonpartisan General Elections went off without a hitch, with 392 people casting votes at the Union County Courthouse through May 22.

Early voting began May 18, and though participation was down due to COVID-19, the Registrar's Office said it was still a pretty good turnout considering 6,476 of 18,000 active registered voters had requested absentee ballots by press time, with 3,463 having been returned.

Poll workers are wearing masks during early voting, and voters are still being encouraged to wear facial coverings to vote, though masks are not required.

Early voting for the June 9 elections runs weekdays between now and Friday, June 5, at the Union County Courthouse from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., even during lunchtime.

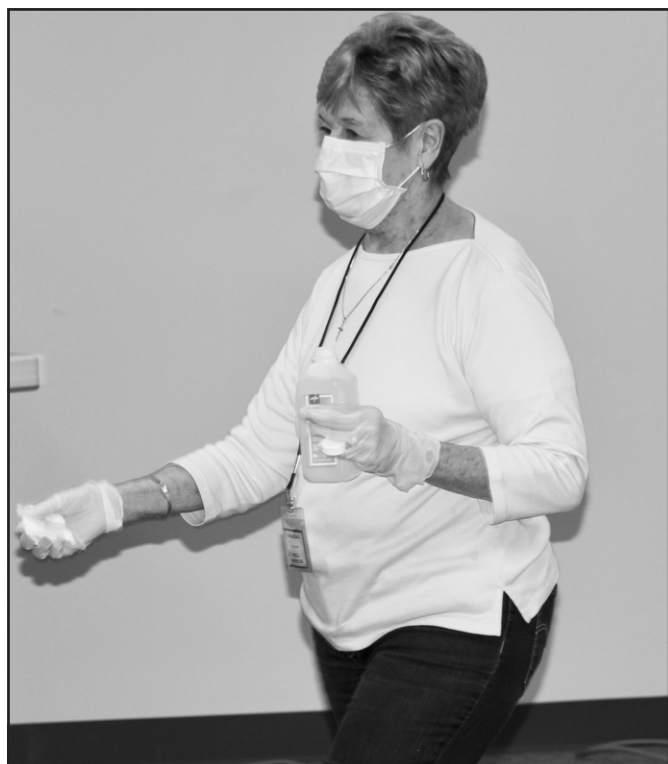
Voting is taking place inside the Jury Assembly Room on the courthouse's bottom floor, which is accessible via a clearly marked entrance around the corner from the lower main entrance to the courthouse.

This Saturday, May 30, will serve as the single weekend day of voting during the early voting period, with the courthouse accepting voters every hour between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Election Day voting is set for Tuesday, June 9, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Union County's 11 voter precincts, and absentee ballots are due back to the Elections Board by 7 p.m. at the latest that same day.

Hand sanitizer is being provided by the Union County Government, and all election equipment is being regularly cleaned by employees of the Registrar's Office and poll workers.

For the General Primary, voters are selecting candidates for various local, state and federal offices to lead their party



Judy Loper was one of several poll workers cleaning election equipment during early in-person voting at the courthouse last week.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

of choice in the Nov. 3 General Election, and winners of the Nonpartisan Election will be sworn into office in 2021.

Sample ballots listing all candidates in the June 9 election can be found at mvp.sos.ga.gov.

It should be noted that the Special Election to fill the remaining term of retired U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson will occur in November. As such, people will not see this race on their General Primary Election ballots.

Since this is a primary, voters must declare a political party to receive a ballot.

Those who voted early for the Presidential Preference Primary will receive a ballot without presidential candidates, while people who didn't get to vote in that election will receive a ballot with presidential candidates.

As a recap, registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though May 11 was the registration deadline for voters

looking to participate in the June 9 election.

Absentee Ballots marked for the May 19, 2020, General Primary Election are good for the June 9, 2020, election. The election date was changed after the ballots were printed.

If people want to fill out their absentee ballot applications/ballots and drop them off in person during early voting, they can do so using a specially marked box affixed outside the upper entrance to the courthouse.

For more information on absentee ballots, visit the Secretary of State's Office website at sos.ga.gov, call the Registrar's Office at 706-439-6016, or swing by the office at 65 Courthouse Street.

Voters can access mvp.sos.ga.gov ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

National Guard...from Page 1A

"In addition to rapidly increasing testing capacity, we have also seen a steady decline in the percentage of patients testing positive for COVID-19. This is a key data point and a real testament to hardworking Georgians everywhere who are following the guidance, wearing masks and social distancing."

Testing for active infections remains free for all Georgians through the Department of Public Health, with or without symptoms. Interested residents should call their local Health Department to set up a testing appointment.

Kemp was happy to report that Georgia had reached an "important milestone" last week, that fewer than 1,000 people were being hospitalized for COVID-19 in the state.

According to the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, that number fell below 850 patients over the weekend, which Kemp said was a more than "40 percent drop in this statistic since May 1."

"As a reminder, Georgia's health systems are ready to serve patients for elective procedures and routine appointments," Kemp said. "We strongly encourage everyone to get important check-ups on their calendar."

"In the past few days, we've seen reports that some of our largest, most successful hospital systems are having to furlough staff in the midst of a pandemic. Please go to the doctor for a check-up if you're due for one, schedule time for routine procedures – like dental cleanings and eye exams – and prioritize your health."

On the testing front, Kemp and the Department of Public Health accepted public criticism last week following the revelation that the state has been mixing data regarding active infection tests and antibody tests.

Some 15 percent of tests included in the total test count

are actually antibody tests, which has likely resulted in an artificial lowering of the figure representing the positive case rate for active infections.

"The Georgia Department of Public Health has received reports of antibody tests since early April and, following current Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention methodology, has included the tests received in the 'Total Tests' number currently listed on the DPH COVID-19 Daily Status Report," DPH Communications Director Nancy Nydam said.

"DPH staff is currently working diligently to provide greater transparency in the molecular and serologic testing data displayed on the Daily Status Report," Nydam continued. "One of our top priorities is to provide accurate and timely data to the public, and we will continue to make every effort to do so."

"The number of serology tests reported to DPH is 57,000, and we will continue to get new reports so that number will change daily. Serology tests are useful in determining the prevalence of the disease in the population and have been authorized by the FDA for use in COVID-19. We have added language to the website to indicate that the number of 'Total Tests' include both serology and PCR tests."

Serology tests look for antibodies in the blood that demonstrate built-up immunity, which shows past infection and a decreased likelihood of infectiousness.

PCR tests look for active infections, meaning someone is currently infected and still in the process of fighting off the virus, making them likely to be highly contagious and in need of isolation.

In interviews with Channel 2 Action News last week, Dr. Kathleen Toomey, who heads up the department, said she had been unaware that

the reporting for the two types of test were being mixed in this way, and Kemp said antibody tests "shouldn't have been in the count."

This was another misstep in a series of data reporting gaffes for the department, causing many residents to wonder if the state's data is trustworthy, which is especially important since the governor has said on numerous occasions that his decision to reopen Georgia in phases has been based on the state's data.

Kemp and Toomey, both of whom have pledged to maintain transparency, said the state is working to unmix the data on its website to give people a more accurate picture of active infections in Georgia.

The state said its COVID-19 Daily Status Report "will be updated to provide specific counts of each type of test as soon as possible."

As a reminder, "medically fragile and elderly Georgians" are still required to follow shelter-in-place guidance through June 12, per a past executive order issued by Kemp, and all Georgians are being asked to follow COVID-19 best hygiene practices to keep everyone safe.

Also last week, Kemp said the state had tested 59.7 percent of all nursing home residents as of May 22, and that testing in long-term care facilities would continue ramping up.

Furthermore, the CDC issued new guidance recommending mass testing of residents and health care professionals inside nursing homes should a positive test turn up in a resident and/or health care professional of a nursing home. Previously, mass COVID-19 testing was not recommended.

On the vaccine front, Reuters reported Friday that the U.S. is currently planning a "massive testing effort involving more than 100,000 volunteers and a half dozen or so of the most promising vaccine candidates in an effort to deliver a safe and effective one by the end of 2020."

Reuters continued, "The project will compress what is typically 10 years of vaccine development and testing into a matter of months, testimony to the urgency to halt a pandemic that has infected more than five million people, killed over 335,000 and battered economies worldwide."

Lake clean up volunteers needed

"Friends of the Nottely and Toccoa" are looking for volunteer kayakers and canoeists for a lake clean up at Meeks Park II Canoe Launch June 27 from 8-11 a.m.

Trash bags will be provided. Please bring a hat, sunscreen, bottle of water, close-toed shoes, life jacket and a trash picker if you have one. Don't forget your kayak or canoe. River's Alive will be

sponsoring this event along with Keep Union County Beautiful. T-shirts for the first 40 volunteers donated by River's Alive.

For more information please contact Amber Jensen at 770-403-5975 or join "Friends of the Nottely and Toccoa" Facebook page.

Thank you for volunteering to help keep Union County beautiful. NIMay27Z11JCA