Election Problems? Blame These Five

By Terrence McCoy

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President Barack Obama had just trounced Mitt Romney, but he was still frustrated. You could hear it. "I want to thank every American who participated in this election, whether you voted for the very first time or waited in a line for a very long time." Pause. "By the way, we have to fix that."

Voting in South Florida couldn't have been more messed up. Worse still, the problems were the most sweeping right here in Broward County.

Um, surprise?

There were problems before Election Day (four-hour-long lines for early voting, lawsuits, and harrumphs), during Election Day (six-hour lines), and afterward (missing ballots.) So who's to blame? In no particular order, New Times presents "The Guilty":

**Brenda Snipes, County Supervisor of Elections**

The electoral process slipped out of her control. Office printers wouldn't work, some absentee ballots didn't arrive on time, and then nearly 1,000 ballots went missing.

Oh, you know how those silly things are: Just can't keep track of 'em! This sort of thing happens all the time, Snipes' people said. So, everyone, STOP WORRYING. Missing ballots are most definitely not a problem.

At the end, however, Snipes' biggest problem wasn't missing ballots but her lethargy. As lines and frustration mounted, Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties allowed people to enter absentee ballots the weekend before Election Day, but Broward did the same only on Monday afternoon — after two days had been lost.

"Supervisors have some flexibility," said Mitch Ceasar, Broward County Democrats' chair.

But Snipes didn't exercise it.

**Snipes' spokespeople**
We're not sure if Mary Cooney and Evelyn Perez-Verdia were absolutely terrible at their jobs or totally spectacular. Even in the face of all the problems — lines, ballots going missing — they somehow maintained that everything was grand.

This was confusing and could not have been further from the truth: Lines stretched for hours, and anger pervaded. But this was never communicated as a concern.

And then things got weird. Nearly 1,000 ballots suddenly turned up days after the election — inside a warehouse, no less — but Perez-Verdia said, oh, no. They weren't missing. "They were creatively put somewhere else."

¿Que?

Rick Scott

Was this ever a doozy. Here's what Rick Scott and his Republican cronies did: They pushed through policies they knew would screw everything up — shrinking early voting from 14 to eight days, battering voters with a Byzantine ten-page ballot — and then had the temerity to ask why everything became so screwed up. This was like downing the football every down, then asking why you lost the game.

Last week, Rick Scott dispatched Secretary of State Ken Detzner to find out why there were four-hour lines, and let's hope Detzner slowly held up a mirror and backed away.

The governor's administration had only this to say: "Detzner will be meeting with supervisors, especially those in the counties that experienced lines of four hours or more, to discuss possible improvements."

Scott declined to discuss the apparent disconnect between making the electoral process more difficult and then lamenting voters' difficulties.

Let's reelect this guy immediately!

The Democrats

We asked Perez-Verdia what triggered the apparent apoplexy, and she had an interesting answer: It was partly the Democrats and the lawsuit they unleashed early the Sunday before the election in a brazen attempt to extend early voting.

It injected a measure of panic into an already-stressed office. "We had a lot of different things, but one of them was the lawsuit — and it was placed on us."

Not to mention, the Democrats exhibited a trace of hypocrisy in the litigation, framing it as a defense of democracy, though that wasn't entirely true. This was about politics, not morality.
"It's always been a political issue," said Kevin Wagner, a political scientist at Florida Atlantic University. "Both parties are in the business of winning elections, and the Democratic Party doesn't have necessarily clean hands on this."

**Theresa LePore, former Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections**

Palm Beach County's infamous butterfly ballot made Florida the laughingstock of the world in 2000. Even though more than a decade has passed, every single voting problem that occurs in Florida — no matter how inconsequential or insignificant — reminds us of LePore and elicits the exaggeration and panic of that time.