

## **ATASCOSA COUNTY JUDGES REPORT**

Some people think that I am guilty of voter suppression because I recommended to Commissioners' Court to follow the state election code and close seven Voter Precincts that qualified to be called "stranded." I have worked tirelessly to build a system that makes it easier to vote anywhere in Atascosa County. I have expanded early voting from one location to four. At the last election nearly 70% of Atascosa County citizens who voted – voted early. As our voters learn this I expect (based on history from other counties) to see this to go above 80%. I have successfully pushed through county – wide voting which allows us to put as many polls as we want just about anywhere.

The voting precincts we have closed are ALL considered "stranded precincts" by the election code. This means they have fewer than 500 registered voters. This county has not been closing it's "stranded precincts". I have surveyed several other counties our size and NONE have more than 16 voter precincts. We had 24. We closed 7. It seems that this county has not, in recent memory, complied with shutting these "stranded precincts" down. This was a clean – up; pure and simple. Every precinct was merged in with another, so it was not lost. We just adjusted the voter precincts to reflect the size of the other voter precincts.

We tracked each one and there are so few voting on election day we cannot justify the logistical problems of keeping them. Cost is not the problem. It is people. Our political parties are unable to provide enough people to staff them (I am sure you know it takes at minimum 1 democrat and 1 republican). Also, for example, closing Campbellton, does not mean we cannot still put a voting location in Campbellton. We can because we are now an approved "countywide" county.

Starting with our primary next year, I have arranged for ART to take phone appointments to go by and pick up voters needing transportation and take them to the polls. This is to be county – wide. I am excited about that idea. I DO NOT CONSIDER THAT VOTER SUPPRESSION. I consider that voter inclusion or enabling. That is a watershed idea to encourage voting among those who need transportation. I announced this in commissioners court and both party chairs were there.

Some talk about a need for voters to be able to walk to the polls. That is an old, misguided idea. At the very best in the rural sections a few might have been able to but (except in the cities) there are no walkable polls (where everyone can walk) anywhere. The cry of "walk to the polls" is a current misuse of language just like the over used term – "voter suppression." I take offense at being linked to any tired cliches. My record is one of enabling voters, not suppressing them.

Thanks for listening. Let's keep Atascosa County moving forward!