

My name is Jim Bognet. I live in Hazle Township in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. I was the Republican nominee for Congress in 2022 in Pennsylvania's 8th Congressional District. Luzerne County is the largest county in the district.

The general election in 2020 and the primary election in 2021 each had problems and issues, which resulted in several public hearings by the Luzerne County Election Board. The Election Board promised that they would rectify past problems and make sure that the general election in 2022 was conducted fairly and professionally. Our campaign and many voters were concerned in light of the recent pattern of problems, but hopeful that the general election in 2022 would be competently administered.

This was not to be the case.

The general election which took place in Luzerne County on November 8th, 2022, was a disaster. The gross incompetence of the election bureau brought national shame on Luzerne County. The most common statement heard from voters and the press was "How do you run out of paper at the polls". Most importantly, many Luzerne County voters were disenfranchised through no fault of their own, and some voters still don't know if their votes were counted.

The problems began early on election morning as we received calls saying that polling places across the county had run out of paper on which votes were recorded from the voting machines and fed by voters into the tabulators to complete the submission of each vote. Voters were being turned away from the polls and told to come back later, or asked to submit provisional or alternative ballots, which many voters refused to do. Some voters got out of line and left in disgust, and it is impossible to calculate how many left the polls. Others were asked to leave their phone numbers and told that they would be called when the county workers provided more paper.

We heard from at least a dozen polling places that voters were being turned away and denied their right to vote. The paper shortage was widespread. The county election bureau had a giant whiteboard filled with the names of many precincts where paper ran out or other issues occurred.

In the Harvey's Lake precinct of Luzerne County, many hundreds of voters were turned away due to the paper shortage, and one of the local news reporters for WNEP-TV, Chelsea Strub, put up a Facebook Live video where she recounted the paper shortage there and the inability to vote by regular means and the need to use provisional or alternative ballots.

Throughout election day, we kept hearing more precincts were dangerously low of paper or running out. The procedures of what to instruct voters to do that each precinct was following were ad hoc. Some precincts were turning people away and asking them to come back. Some were forced to vote on provisional ballots. We heard others were using "Alternative Ballots", and telling people to write who they wanted to vote for on a piece of paper. Still other precincts were making photocopies of one ballot and asking all voters to use this copy of a ballot, each copy of which had the same ballot # on them.

By early afternoon, it was clear that in many polling places across Luzerne County, the polls were closed on election day for hours at a time.

Luzerne County took the extraordinary step of going to the court and asking a judge to order that the voting period be extended from 8pm to 10pm across Luzerne County due to the unprecedented closing of the polls. Our campaign agreed to support this because we wanted to make sure every lawful voter had a chance to vote.

Stop for a minute to consider how extraordinary this is: On election day, with a Governor, Senate, and two Congressional races, as well as many local races occurring, Luzerne County had to walk into court and admit that many polling places were effectively closed and had no paper to record votes on. In Luzerne County, the polls were closed on election day, disenfranchising voters.

As votes began to be counted election night and the day after, two things became clear immediately. As predicted, Democrat candidates won mail in voting by huge margins, and Republican candidates won the election day vote by large margins. I won election day votes handily, with the final numbers showing a more than 22% margin from voters who cast their ballots in person. Therefore, voters being disenfranchised from voting on election day ballots would disproportionately hurt Republican candidates.

The precincts that ran out of paper were mainly rural, where Republican candidates tended to win large majorities. Our campaign estimated that in precincts that ran out of paper I won 68% of the election day vote. This raised serious questions as to how the unprecedented closing of the polls in mostly GOP areas affected the results of the election.

In the aftermath of the election day fiasco, Luzerne County tried to cover up the incredible mistakes that were made.

Rather than take responsibility for what had happened, County Manager Randy Robertson announced that evening that he was resigning for “personal reasons”.

At an open canvassing hearing the day after the election, the acting head of the Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, Beth McBride, refused to answer questions from the press or public. No explanation was provided for the paper shortage.

Denise Williams, the head of the election board, allowed public comment at hearings, but flatly refused to answer any questions voters put to her. In fact, Ms. Williams admonished voters for directing questions toward the Board, and refused to provide any information about the paper shortage.

The Luzerne County Administration has done everything in their power to deny responsibility and evade accountability for the disastrous election they administered.

Many voters attended an Election Board meeting on Monday, Nov. 14 to express their outrage. There were so many voters there that most were not allowed to sit in the Board meeting room, and many elderly voters had to sit on the floor and steps of the courthouse atrium and watch the proceedings on a big TV screen until they were summoned to give comment.

Citizens were not provided with any answers as to who was responsible for ordering the paper for the polling places. Election Bureau head Beth McBride was present and asked many times whose responsibility it was to order ballot paper, but she refused to answer questions.

We are left with one of two inescapable conclusions: Either the Luzerne County election administrators forgot to order paper and provide it to all the polling locations, or the Luzerne County election administrators purposely did not provide enough paper to over 40 polling locations.

No one can present here today can answer which one of those two things happened, for only County Elections Director Beth McBride, her subordinates, and County Board of Elections Chair Denise Williams can provide these answers.

Both of these public officials refused your committee's request to appear today to testify. As they have refused to answer any questions publicly throughout the entire post-election period, and still continue to refuse to answer, we are left to ponder how voters came to be disenfranchised on election day.

Voters across Luzerne County have called me and expressed their outrage that there has been no accountability or responsibility taken 4.5 months after the election, and officials still will not answer questions. Miss McBride and Miss Williams are now going to administer the May 2023 municipal election, which is outrageous in light of their incompetence in the November 2022 election.

My goal in testifying today is to ask that all the facts be brought to light and the responsible officials be compelled to testify in public under oath as to what occurred, and we make whatever changes are necessary to ensure this never happens again. Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and the conduct of elections in Luzerne County needs to be cleaned up completely.

Our right to vote is sacred. My maternal grandmother and grandfather fought for our country in WWII to defend our freedom and right to vote. My paternal grandfather was an Italian immigrant who came through Ellis Island, and told me that he never missed an election in Luzerne County.

We must restore faith in fair elections among voters of all parties. I believe this can only be done by having a thorough Congressional investigation of the paper shortage and resulting widespread poll closures in Luzerne County.

Thank you.