

Agencies, lawmakers prep to deal with 'motor voter'

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Election board officials and Albany lawmakers are gearing up to implement federal election reforms signed into law by President Bill Clinton.

The State Board of Elections(SBE) has recommended appointees to an Ad Hoc Advisory Task Force on the National Voter Registration Act. Those selected represent both small and large election boards, affected agencies, and advocacy groups across the state.

This task force, working closely with the Federal Elections Commission, will assist the governor and the Legislature in implementing "Motor Voter," which enables people who have business with state agencies to register to vote at locations throughout New York.

This year, the two houses have clashed since the Assembly majority shot its reform package through on the first day of session.

However, both agree New York will find adjustment easier than most.

Spokesman Justin McCarthy said Senate Election Committee Chair Michael Nozzolio, RC-Seneca Falls, believes New York is ahead of the curve, "even though the Assembly Democrats would have you believe otherwise."

McCarthy said several of the provisions in "Motor Voter" were passed last year in "the most comprehensive election reform package in this state in 20 years(Chapter 79)."

Spokesman for the Assembly Election Law Committee, A. Joshua Ehrlich, said, "I think we are ahead of the game," but he disputed the success of Chapter 79.

"The federal law will be pro-active, whereas the current law is passive."

According to Ehrlich, agency-based registration was implemented in a disorganized fashion, with agency employees prohibited from providing assistance.

GOP opposition to several components of "Motor Voter" centered around the possibility of fraud.

McCarthy said Nozzolio and the committee will be concentrating on preventing fraud and "work to protect the integrity of the process."

Ehrlich called the fraud argument a "red herring."

There's nothing that's going to change," said Ehrlich, pointing out that warnings are clearly written in "big bold plain English."

SBE spokesman David Flanagan said the first meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for July.

Flanagan expects full implementation of "Motor Voter" by 1996.