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## EDITORIAL

## Absentee ballots raise fraud issue

When a reporter for the *Tuscaloosa News* looked into why there were so many absentee votes cast in the Aug. 24 city election in Greensboro, he found so many questionable ballots that state officials should mount an immediate investigation into the possibility of voter fraud.

The newspaper reported Sunday that 19.5 percent of the ballots cast in Greensboro were absentee, which is in sharp contrast to the usual 3 to 5 percent in most cities and towns.

But it wasn't just the questionable number of absentee ballots that should pique the interest of the state attorney general's office. The reporter found:

- An 83-year-old nursing home resident who said a woman brought her a free dinner and then cast an absentee ballot in her name. The nursing home resident did not know the woman's name.
- "She came up here and got it and told me who we were voting for," the woman said. "She was telling me, but she wasn't showing me."
- At least 40 people applied for absentee ballots who claimed they live on one block filled with several small mobile homes.
- Eight people claimed on absentee ballot applications to live at one address on that block, although voter registration records show only three registered voters at that address.
- Two absentee ballots listed an address where the reporter found only an abandoned mobile home.
- There were instances where two absentee ballots appeared to have been requested for the same person.

• The chairwoman of the Board of Registrars claimed there was an unusually large number of change of address applications in the weeks leading up to the election in which people claimed to have moved from the county into the city.

Does any of this prove voter fraud? Not at all. But it does raise more than enough questions that Alabama Attorney General Troy King should mount an intensive investigation into the election process in Greensboro.

While he is at it, he should look into some of the other communities with unusually large absentee vote totals, such as Uniontown with 26 percent.

Absentee votes have been used in voter fraud in the past in Alabama. They are almost ready-made for someone who wants to cheat, since there is no official



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looking on when the ballots are filled out.

Hale County Probate Judge Leland Avery has called for an investigation by the attorney general's office, saying: "There's just so much illegal being done in the city elections I don't know how they can ignore it."

He's right. It should not be ignored by authorities.

In a democracy, voter fraud cannot be tolerated. The entire democratic process depends upon the public believing in the sanctity of the ballot.

There are already too many nonvoters who claim they don't take part in the process because their vote doesn't mean anything. Imagine how their numbers would swell if a majority of the public thought that fraud was rampant.

There is no more important task for Attorney General Troy King today than to organize a thorough investigation into voting in Greensboro.

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