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## Mailers attempt to 'embarrass people into voting' by revealing voting history to neighbors

SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer May 14, 2018

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Date: 05/09/2018



East Earl, PA 17519-

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

**WHAT IF YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR NEIGHBORS, AND YOUR COMMUNITY KNEW WHETHER YOU VOTED?**

Why do so many people fail to vote? We've been talking about the problem for years, but it only seems to get worse. This year, we're taking a new approach. We're sending this mailing to you, your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues at work, and your community members to publicize who does and does not vote.

This chart shows the names of people you know and their voting histories. After the May 15th election, we intend to mail an updated chart. You and your friends, your neighbors, and other people you know will all know who voted and who did not vote.

**DO YOUR CIVIC DUTY - VOTE!**

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE VOTER REPORT**

Name	Address	Nov 2014	Mar 2016	Nov 2016	May 15, 2018
_____	_____	VOTED	VOTED	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	VOTED	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	VOTED	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	VOTED	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	X	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	X	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	VOTED	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	VOTED	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	X	VOTED	?
_____	_____	VOTED	X	VOTED	?

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An apparent effort to pressure Pennsylvanians into voting in **Tuesday's primary** is raising red flags in Lancaster County and across the state as polls prepare to open Tuesday morning.

In mailed letters and emails, a group calling itself the “Pennsylvania State Voter Program” is targeting specific voters with publicly available information showing whether they and their neighbors voted in three recent elections — and then indicating it will send an updated list after the May 15 primary.

"What if your friends, your neighbors, and your community knew whether you voted?" the letter starts.

Titled "Pennsylvania State Voter Report," the letter does not indicate who specifically is behind the effort.

It features a symbol that could lead some people to believe it's coming from an official government office, though it's not from any county or state office.

The envelopes, marked that they're from a post office box in Harrisburg, contain a giant red arrow pointing to the line, “Important taxpayer information enclosed.”

"Why do so many people fail to vote?" the letter continues. "We've been talking about the problem for years, but it only seems to get worse. This year, we're taking a new approach. We're sending this mailing to you, your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues at work, and your community members to publicize who does and does not vote."

The letter then shows a chart starting with the targeted voter and continuing with nine of his or her neighbors. It reveals the voter's address and whether he or she voted in the 2016 primary and the 2016 and 2014 general elections.

A final column with the May 15, 2018 date has a question mark.

The information — not including which candidates the voters chose — is public record, perhaps to the surprise of many voters.

Available from the Pennsylvania Department of State for \$20, anyone can purchase the registry that includes each voter's address, birth date, voter registration date, party affiliation and history of voting.

Candidates and political parties frequently use the information to target their voter outreach efforts.

But that doesn't mean voters want their neighbors and colleagues to know when they go to the polls.

“I just feel uncomfortable with the whole thing,” said Elaine Swords, who, along with her husband Robert, received the letters at their Elizabeth Township home on Saturday.

Swords said she was aware that there was a record of her voting because she has to sign in when she goes to her polling place, “but as far as having it sent in the mail like this, I don’t think that’s right.”

Part of her concern is that the information isn’t actually correct. There are inconsistencies between the two letters, and some of the “neighbors” listed are actually from distant towns, she said.

And for the 2016 primary, the letter says it was in March when it was actually April 26.

Lancaster County’s elections office was “inundated” with calls Monday after first getting emails about it over the weekend, said chief elections clerk Randall Wenger.

They’ve also surfaced in at least six other counties — Carbon, Columbia, Lehigh, Luzerne, Montour and Northampton, according to Wenger.

The group is not a political action committee registered with the Lancaster County or the state, and Wenger said he has no information about who is behind it.

The Pennsylvania Department of State is looking into the letters after learning that they were sent in several regions of the state, according to a statement. Voters in other states recently received nearly identical letters, indicating it may be a national effort, according to the department.

Wenger said his response to incoming calls includes, “You are not alone in your feelings that it is an unsavory tactic ... It appears to be a political mailing designed to encourage voter turnout, perhaps on behalf of a candidate, as May 15 is a primary election.”

Political observers say it’s unclear which kind of candidate this would benefit in a primary, when Republicans and Democrats can only vote for their respective party’s candidates.

The mailers include voters on both sides of the aisle, according to ones viewed by LNP.

“It’s really hard to say what their objective is,” said Kyle Kopko, an Elizabethtown College political science professor. “It could be to boost turnout overall, or target voters who might be sympathetic to a certain type of candidate, or something else altogether.

G. Terry Madonna, director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College, said the anonymity is “not healthy and it’s not appropriate.”

“It’s very unusual to try to embarrass people into voting,” Madonna said. “Not that they shouldn’t be encouraged to vote. But there’s a difference in mailings encouraging people to vote and efforts to embarrass people into voting by sharing that information with their neighbors.”

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