

Task force: Let collegians vote

By Anthony Farmer
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College students in Dutchess County should be encouraged to vote and not be subjected to barriers that prevent them from voting in the county just because they live on a college campus.

That's the crux of a report from a county Legislature task force, formed to look into student complaints that the county Board of Elections was systematically denying students the right to vote in Dutchess.

A group of students from Bard and Vassar colleges praised the report.

"The intent of the report is to have students registered to vote and remove the barriers of the questionnaire," said Michael Chameides, a Bard student and member of Student Activists for Voting Equality. "The more pertinent question is: Is the report going to be followed?"

The answer remains to be seen.

Right to vote was denied

Former Republican elections Commissioner William Paroli Sr. often denied college students the right to vote in the county. When students expressed their desire to register to vote in Dutchess, he sent them a lengthy questionnaire. The answers provided on the questionnaires were used to argue that the students weren't really Dutchess residents.

The questionnaire asked

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The Dutchess County Republican Committee is scheduled to meet Thursday to nominate an elections commissioner. The county Legislature is expected to appoint a commissioner on March 27.

students how many months out of the year they spent in Dutchess, where they lived when school was not in session and where their bank accounts were — as well as other questions.

Democratic elections Commissioner William Egan has long supported the students' right to vote, but both commissioners must consent in order for a voter to be registered in the county.

Now that Paroli has resigned the post, following a guilty plea to one count of conspiracy to commit extortion, students feel the time is right to get a new GOP elections commissioner who supports their voting rights.

The county Republican Committee meets Thursday to select a nominee, and the county Legislature will meet March 27 to appoint a new elections commissioner.

Egan said the law clearly provides for allowing the stu-

dents to register as voters in Dutchess.

"It fits them in if you accept the law on the basis of what it says in regard to being over 18 and a U.S. citizen and (living) in the community 30 days," he said.

The task force — which included Woody Klose, R-Red Hook, Kristen Jemiolo, D-Town of Poughkeepsie, and Marc Molinaro, R-Red Hook — concurred with Egan on that three-part test.

While rejecting the widespread use of the questionnaire to determine eligibility, the lawmakers said the only pertinent question should be whether the applicant is already registered elsewhere.

Report up for approval

Klose said he expects whoever the new elections commissioner is to respect the Legislature's opinion on the matter. The report will be submitted for approval by the full Legislature in April, he said.

The students still plan to move ahead with a federal lawsuit against the county over the issue, while working to make sure the next Republican commissioner favors their position, Chameides said.

Klose said the specter of a lawsuit had nothing to do with the task force's conclusions.

"Nobody every really said if we don't, they're going to," he said. "I never felt threatened, but I do know we are going to lose if they sue."