

10A FRIDAY, JUNE 30, 2000

## EDITORIALS

# Good progress on student vote

**F**ewer forms, more choices. It could be the Dutchess County Board of Elections' mantra, now that former Republican Commissioner William Paroli Sr. is unable to wield his political power to keep college students from voting here.

Paroli did this under the pretext that most college students have no roots here and shouldn't be allowed to vote in Dutchess — even though most of them live in the county for nine months out of the year, some longer. In contrast, a non-student of voting age can move to the area, claim residency in 30 days and be given the right to cast a ballot in a local election.

This discriminatory policy against college students hasn't been lost on the new Republican elections commissioner, David Gamache, who took the advice of a Dutchess County legislative task force and pitched out a lengthy questionnaire students were required to fill out under the Paroli regime.

That was an appropriate decision.

The questionnaire was intrusive — making inquiries about such personal information as a student's bank account — and was most likely unconstitutional; it placed a higher threshold before students than it did anyone else seeking the fundamental right to vote.

It certainly was telling that, of all the counties in New York that host college campuses, only Dutchess used such a questionnaire; other county boards of elections across the state allow students attending colleges in their counties to vote in local elections.

Gamache said each voter application will be taken individually, and he will consider both state and federal law in determining who is eligible to vote as a county resident. Good for him — and for Democratic Elections Commissioner William Egan, who also has signed off on the new policy. As a result, about 20 students from Bard and Vassar colleges already have been given the right to vote in local elections, despite having been turned down previously by Paroli.

In all likelihood, the commissioners' decision will convince the students — under their organization Student Activists For voting Equality (SAFE) — not to take the matter to court. That's good news for the board of elections, since students have typically won such cases when they have sued in other counties. For example, a mid-1980s court ruling involving State University of New York at New Paltz students forced Ulster County to let the students vote as long as they had lived at their current address for at least 30 days.

It's encouraging that Gamache recognized the folly of the situation in Dutchess and took steps to change it.

## GE deal a good start



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By Jill Au

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