



This is for personal, noncommercial use only.

To search archives, visit  
[pressofatlanticcity.com/archives](http://pressofatlanticcity.com/archives)

## Republicans take issue with placement on Atlantic County mail-in ballot

By STEVEN LEMONGELLO Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, October 15, 2010

This year's Atlantic County mail-in ballot is taking some heat from Republicans for what they described as its "strange" layout, which they say could benefit Democrats - but the Democratic county clerk said it has been designed that way for years and the criticism is a pre-election cheap shot.

Independent political observers, however, said the layout could be considered unusual and could have an impact on the races.

At issue is the mail-in ballot sent to voters who apply in person or online to vote by mail in advance of Election Day. The form differs from both the voting machine layout and the sample ballots mailed to voters, which are laid out as what Montclair State University political science professor Brigid L. Harrison calls

Political experts said the layout was uncommon but differed as to whether it had any real impact.

"I can't say I've seen it before," said Sharon Schulman, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. "But I don't know if it's a big deal."

Harrison, however, said the layout was "unusual for a couple of reasons."

"Normally, an absentee ballot will mimic the machine ballot," Harrison said, using the old term for what are now called mail-in ballots. "I can't recall ever seeing an office block ballot instead of a party block ballot for absentees. The question is: Why did they do this?"

An office block ballot, she said, "usually benefits the least popular party, or a party that isn't doing so well, while a party block ballot benefits the stronger party. If you have a very strong incumbent on the top of the ballot, like (U.S. Rep.) Frank LoBiondo, it would appear the configuration of the ballot could be trying to negate the impact of his presence at the top of the ballot. (It could) eliminate his coattails, in other words."

McGettigan defended the mail-in ballot's layout, saying the Republicans' use of the term "absentee" ballots in a recent statement indicates they were confusing sample ballots, which match voting machines, with mail-in ballots - which only last year became available to anyone, not just those expected to be out of town on Election Day.

"Vote-by-mail ballots are in the exact same format they've been for at least 20 years," McGettigan said Wednesday. "It's definitely not a new thing. ... I've voted by mail many times, and anybody familiar with the vote-by-mail system would recognize (the format)."

The ballots were designed in the office block format so they could be tabulated by scanners on Election Day, having been designed in conjunction with the Sequoia Voting Systems machines used by the county, he said. The party listed first beneath each office title is determined by a draw, the same draw that determines which party is listed first by column in party block ballots in voting machines.

"There are Republican representatives on the Board of Elections," McGettigan said. "I don't know ineld bome"

"Let him prove it," he said.

McGettigan did not return a message left with his office Friday.

Acting Ocean County Clerk Scott M. Colabella, a Republican, said his county's mail-in ballots follow the same format as Atlantic County's - "as do a lot of counties, probably."

"You'll find very often that in the mail-in ballot format, probably more than likely it's office-driven," Colabella said. "It's driven by the size of the paper in the mail-in ballot. You're constrained by the size of the paper. There's more room on voting machines to accomodate columns."

Schulman, meanwhile, said her Camden County mail-in ballot was in party block format, resembling the voting machine layout.

Contact Steven Lemongello:

609-272-7275

SLemongello@pressofac.com

## Story Commenting Notice

PressofAtlanticCity.com is integrating Facebook into a new method for commenting on stories on the site. This feature allows you to easily share content and comments with your social network, and you will be able to see what your friends and other PressofAtlanticCity.com readers are responding to as well. Simply log into Facebook below to post your comment.

**If you wish to have your comment appear with this story but NOT shared on Facebook, be sure to UNCHECK the box to the left of the button labeled, "Post comment to my Facebook profile"**

**[View our full terms of service and privacy agreement](#)**

[Click here to report a comment as abusive.](#)

Daniel Carew Oct 18

If you're not smart enough to read & comprehend a ballot.....you're not smart enough to be voting.

---

**Wade Hale** Oct 17

This is what happens when the media rushes to print a story because there is controversy, and finds anyone to give them a quote without regard for whether or not they actually have any knowledge of the subject matter. A simple check would show that while Camden County does use a

---