

Lack of vote center angers UIS students

By **PETE SHERMAN**
STAFF WRITER
pete.sherman@sj-r.com

Some students at the University of Illinois Springfield are fuming after being left out of a pilot program to place early-voting and grace-period registration centers on state university campuses this fall.

The state law enacting the program refers to voting centers being placed at the "main campus of each public university."

But there appears to be confusion over the definition of "main campus."

The law's sponsor in the state Senate, as well as officials at the Sangamon County clerk's election office and the Illinois State Board of Elections, said the intent of the pilot program was to limit it to the state's nine "main" public university campuses — excluding UIS and other non-flagship sites.

"That is the reason we are not having (a voting center) out there," said Stacey Kern, director of

FIRST IN PRINT

■ Steve Brown, spokesman for House Speaker Michael Madigan, says of UIS being left out, "What is the University of Illinois at Springfield? A trailer park? It's a pretty substantial facility out there."

See **UIS** on page 4

UIS

■ From page 1

elections for the Sangamon County clerk's office. "We did not think the law applied to (UIS)."

At least one of the sponsors of the law, signed in July by Gov. Pat Quinn, agreed.

"That's what we intended," said state Sen. Terry Link, a Democrat from Lake Bluff and the legislation's chief sponsor in the upper chamber. "I'm not a lawyer, but I think the intent was just the major campuses."

UI Chicago has one

However, the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners established a registration and voting center at the University of Illinois at Chicago based on the pilot legislation.

"We're excited about it. We're doing everything we can to make it work," the Chicago board's spokesman, Jim Allen, said of the pilot program. "We consider this a great opportunity. Not just for the students, but for anybody who missed the voter-registration deadline."

"The way we read the (pilot program) legislation is that it was supposed to be offered at each of the main campuses. That includes the

University of Illinois at Chicago."

"The whole idea was to increase the college turnout for college elections," said UIS junior David Ballard, a Student Government Association parliamentarian and president of UIS's College Democrats.

Ballard says UIS should be included in the program, which covers only this election year and will expire next March, because UIS is considered its own campus, not a satellite of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Link was sympathetic to the UIS students. He said the initial goal was for the program to cast a wider net.

"Initially, we also wanted to do it at community colleges and so forth," Link said. "But we were getting resistance from the other side of the aisle and compromised."

UIS a trailer park?

"I would say it's unfair that, of schools that receive direct state funding, (some) are left out," said SGA president Matt Van Vossen, a UIS senior and past president of UIS's College Democrats.

"I would like to see it be a permanent program, maybe at schools with over 5,000 students, to try to get people to vote," he said.

There's yet another definition of "main campus" that supports the UIS students' view.

Attorney and lobbyist Dan Johnson-Weinberger, president of Chicago-based Progressive Public Affairs, drafted the initial legislation. He said the intention was to include all four-year colleges and that "main campus" refers to a central location within each four-year university.

Johnson-Weinberger said Link was correct in that community colleges were initially considered. But he said they were dropped because the need for late-registration or early-voting services isn't as great at community colleges.

Messages left with three sponsors of the pilot program in the Illinois House were not returned Wednesday.

But Steve Brown, spokesman for House Speaker Michael Madigan, D-Chicago, said the pilot program should be interpreted in favor of increasing, not decreasing, voters.

"The law sounds like it might not state place by place by place. But why not make voting easier? You either want to make voting easier or you don't," Brown said. "If you don't, you say this (legislation) didn't tell me what to do. What is the University of Illinois at Springfield? A trailer park? It's a pretty substantial facility out there."

Pete Sherman can be reached at 788-1539.