It appears that the state is finally waking up to the fact that absentee ballots are being abused in Mississippi elections.

This comes as no surprise to anyone who's paying attention here in Yazoo County because the process is openly manipulated by some.

Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann's eyes have been opened by the fact that absentee ballots made up 10 percent or more of the total ballots cast in 20 of the state's 82 counties during the primary elections.

What's worse is that in many cases a single person signed as the witness for dozens of voters. In one case, a single person signed 75 different absentee ballots as a witness in one precinct in the 2010 congressional elections.

Does that sound familiar?

Anyone hanging around the City Hall during the last municipal elections or the Yazoo County Courthouse during Charles "Mickey" O'Reilly's failed bid for District 3 Supervisor four years ago would have seen numerous visits from Yazoo resident Clifton Davis bringing in people to vote by affidavit ballots.

Davis, who beclowned himself during Monday's city council meeting by referring to the apparent effects of a utility company's herbicide spraying on his nearby garden as a hate crime, campaigned heavily for three current city officials. One of his main contributions was bringing in residents to vote on paper ballots.

Mr. Davis isn't the only person doing this, just the most brazen and the most prolific.

Davis was rewarded for his efforts by the creation of a new job with a $30,000 salary and a city vehicle. At a time when the police department was understaffed and salaries had been cut, not one single member of our Mayor and Board of Aldermen voted against the creation of this new job.

It was clearly a reward for a job well done, and though many citizens and city employees were outraged it didn't make a bit of difference.

One reason why nothing could be done is that while it's clear that the system was manipulated, nothing was illegal about it. In fact there are other areas that make the folks abusing the system here in Yazoo County look like amateurs.

In Quitman County 29 percent or 1,040 of 3,580 votes were cast with absentee ballots.

In 19 other counties, Claiborne (18 percent), Grenada (18), Issaquena (15), Noxubee (15), Greene (14), Sharkey (14 percent), Humphreys (13), Carroll (12), Clay (12), Holmes (12),

Leflore (12), Tallahatchie (12), Benton (11), Jefferson (11), Alcorn (10), Franklin (10), Montgomery (10), Walthall (10) and Winston (10), absentee ballots accounted for between 10-18 percent of each county's total vote.

That’s enough to swing the vote in favor of a candidate who best knew how to manipulate the system rather than allow the election to be decided by candidates actually standing for something and letting the people decide which position is best.

Yazooans can take some comfort in knowing that we didn’t make the top 20. Maybe that means our current candidates have too much integrity to stoop to such tactics.

State officials were willing to ignore this problem when it was just affecting small town elections, but now that it’s gotten big enough to possibly affect their positions I wouldn’t be surprised to see some action.

It’s long overdue.