

From Bill Richardson, Governor of New Mexico

Dear Colleagues,

The hallmark of American democracy is one person, one vote. The reason refugees and immigrants, students and professionals from around the world continue to flock toward our shores is because we fundamentally believe in the worth of each person. We believe "all men and all women are created equal." We believe that regardless of gender, race, class or creed – all voices deserve respect; all voices deserve to be heard. And when it comes to elections, all votes deserve to be counted. But is our democracy, is our hallmark principle of one person, one vote, on solid ground? Recent elections would suggest that democracy, the greatest system of government in the world, can be broken. As the world witnessed in 2000, the sanctity of the ballot box and the integrity of our government are vulnerable. The people of the United States lost faith in the electoral process, and the covenant between citizens and elected officials deteriorated. Those national officials scrambled to pass legislation to restore voter confidence, but in 2004, inaccurate exit polls raised further doubts about electronic voting machines without a verifiable paper record. In New Mexico, a coalition of concerned citizens demanded action. Working together with these citizens and the state legislature, I signed several laws which guarantee that every ballot is counted. New Mexico improved and standardized training for poll workers. We established statewide standards for provisional ballots to ensure that voters in low-income areas will not disenfranchised. We made absentee voting fair, simple, and uniform. And we took one more critical step to ensure one person, one vote.

On March 2, 2006, I will sign a bill that will transition New Mexico to an all paper-ballot system using optical scanners to count the vote. Paper ballots are the least expensive, most secure form of voting available. Having marked their votes with pen and paper, voters will walk out of the booth and know their voices have been heard. Optical scanners will quickly and accurately provide results, while in the event of a recount, the ballots themselves will be a permanent, verifiable record of the people's directions to their government. Some believe that computer touch screen machines are the future of electoral systems, but the technology simply fails to pass the test of reliability. As anyone who uses one can attest, computers break down, get viruses, lose information, and corrupt data. We know this to be the case, and so we back-up our files to ensure nothing important is lost. Paper ballots serve as the ultimate back-up for our elections, providing

secure and permanent verification of the will of the people. New Mexico has chosen paper ballots as the best system to secure our election process. With the new system in place, future elections will be secure, honest, and verifiable. Every vote will count and the citizens of our state will know that their government belongs to them.

One person, one vote is in jeopardy if we do not act boldly and immediately. American citizens once took for granted that every vote mattered, but no longer. It is time that we, the elected state officials, work to restore American's confidence in our electoral systems and undertake reform that moves to eliminate skepticism and uncertainty.

When a vote is cast, a vote should be counted. With paper ballots we will have a record. With paper ballots the fundamental principle of one person, one vote is safe.

Sincerely,  
Bill Richardson,  
Governor of New Mexico