

Forum Verbal Statement for May 7 2008 County Forum 05 07 08

I have two points I wish to make tonight:

1. The Relative costs for the two systems over the next decade or so:

We do not have reasonable estimates for the total costs for the present machines and system; costs including purchase, annual maintenance and programming costs, poll-worker training costs, secure storage costs, security costs, distribution costs, replacement costs in 5 or so years, etc.. Nor do we have the corresponding cost estimates for optical scan machines and system; all over the next decade or so.

The Elections Office reports that the County currently has 300 machines for regular voters plus 92 for disabled voters. We may have to buy additional machines to support the huge increase in newly registered voters before November. (Data from our Precinct 26, to be presented later, clearly support the need for additional machines.) We would need only 92 optical scan machines for regular voters (plus 92 for disabled voters) – one for each of the 89 precincts plus a few extras – . It should be easy to see that costs for the support of a 400-machine system will be much greater than for a 200-machine system.

There are data from other states that do look at total costs of DRE systems versus Optical Scan systems. One example is an analysis for Maryland. “Most Maryland counties that previously used optical scan voting systems saw their voting equipment costs rise dramatically when they switched to touch-screen voting machines – an average increase of 179% (almost triple) in the cost per voter –EVEN THOUGH THE STATE OF MARYLAND NOW PAYS HALF THE COST OF THE VOTING EQUIPMENT.” The same report also states and depicts “A 2005 study of Florida’s election costs after implementing the HelpAmericaVoteAct showed that counties that had switched to touch-screen voting systems had AVERAGE COST INCREASES 3 TO 5 TIMES HIGHER than those that kept or switched to optical scan systems.”

<http://www.saveourvotes.org/legislation/packet/08-costs-mdvotingsystem.pdf>)

If we look at the total costs for the two different systems over the next decade, or so, I believe Centre County would save a great deal of money by switching to the optical-scan

system as soon as possible. That would translate to lower taxes for the citizens of Centre County

2. Required audits, based on machine-independent ballots, are crucial:

Unofficial “check” ballots printed by DRE machines are totally without value for the voter in checking for what was recorded electronically. There is no current defense against the machine “recording” one thing and “printing out” another. AND, what will be the procedure if a voter insists that the printout does not agree with the votes that he/she entered into the machine?

A recent news article is of particular relevance and interest:

“...the team that audited California's voting systems during the state's review of electronic (DRE) voting, (found) problems (that) affect counties across the U.S.”. “In testing, (the) team found that they could introduce a computer virus to any of the three California systems, which would then spread throughout the county and ultimately skew the vote count.

This year most California voters will use paper ballots, which give officials a way to audit their machine-counted tallies for irregularities. The ability to check whether your voting system has been hacked is of paramount importance. “Security is not the most important thing, ... What's more important for elections is auditability.”

Even the Central Tabulators (in Bellefonte for us), not just machines in the Precincts, are subject to the same sorts of weaknesses in terms of hacking and unreliability.

Independent Audits are crucial!!!

(http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/144431/us_presidential_election_can_be_hacked.html) or (http://www.infoworld.com/article/08/04/11/Presidential-election-can-be-hacked_1.html)

And, the ability to do a machine-independent recount is also vital.

Let's make our voting system simple, reliable, cheaper, and auditable.

I'll send an email with more complete text, references, etc. Robert Seibel, rxs@psu.edu

[The following was NOT read at the Forum]:

For New York state there are four counties with registered voter numbers close to ours. The average “Additional Cost of (purchasing) DREs” rather than Optical Scan systems for these counties is almost \$850,000, or an additional 96%-97%, just in the purchase costs. The same report compares the average annual operating costs for 2002 thru 2004 for two comparable counties in Florida, one with a DRE system and the other with an Optical Scan system. The DRE operating costs were 67% greater than those for the Optical Scan system. Throwing out the DRE system and purchasing an Optical Scan system would have more than paid for itself in just a few years.