

for newer technologies "could lower the incidence of [residual voting] substantially," though the importance of training both the voter and the election official on how to use the latest equipment should not be underestimated.⁷³

North Carolina election officials are somewhat skeptical of the Voting Project Report. They indicate that the credibility of the report was damaged by the intent of the study sponsors to create their own voting machine and the necessity of proving existing systems flawed to justify the creation of this new product. And, Bartlett notes that new voting technology is not a cure-all—a fact that was underscored when new voting equipment designed to address previous problems failed across Florida in September 2002 primary elections.⁷⁴ Closer to home in North Carolina, Robeson County officials found their optical scan vote tabulating equipment was not programmed properly and did not get it repaired in time for the election. County elections officials had to count ballots by hand.

Nonetheless, the margins of error and rate of residual votes for each voting system are critical in any election, especially one as close as the 2000

presidential election. An advantage of DREs is that they could be programmed to allow second-chance voting when a voter votes for too many or too few candidates for a given office.⁷⁵ Equipping counties with the most accurate technologies available and teaching voters how to use the systems should be a goal of the state's election officials, because, as Kimball Brace of the Election Data Systems emphatically states, "Nobody wants to be the next Palm Beach."⁷⁶

Voting System Standards and Testing

In 1990, the U.S. Congress charged the Federal Election Commission with devising national voting system standards. The call for standards came after Congress received pressure from a 1975 General Accounting Office report and a 1988 National Bureau of Standards project, both recommending closer regulation of computerized election equipment.

While voluntary, the guidelines laid down specific procedures to deal with both the accuracy and security of the nation's computerized voting

New Federal Law May Provide Additional Dollars for Voting Reforms

Congress has passed a new law aimed at avoiding a repeat of the 2000 election debacle in Florida. Called the Help America Vote Act of 2002, the law authorizes up to \$3.9 billion for such purposes as purchase of new voting equipment by the states, upgrading computer systems, and improving election administration.

The legislation creates a range of requirements for state voting systems used in federal elections. The systems must allow voters to: verify votes before a ballot is cast; make changes or corrections before casting a ballot; produce a permanent paper record of a vote with a manual audit capacity; be accessible to individuals with disabilities so that they have the same opportunity to participate as other voters; and provide access to voting in other languages where necessary.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates

that it will cost the state and local governments \$1.7 to \$3.5 billion dollars over the next five years to comply with the legislation. If the full authorization were appropriated, North Carolina would be in line to receive \$88.3 million. The state is expected to receive some \$31 million already appropriated by Congress for the current federal fiscal year.

Besides mandating changes in the voting process, the law requires states to implement a statewide database that contains registration information about every voter in the state. North Carolina has its State Election Information Management System (SEIMS), but the system will need to be upgraded to comply with the new law.

—Mike McLaughlin

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