

NEWS

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County on Tuesday will be first to use voter-verified paper trail

The County of San Bernardino will blaze a new trail in electronic voting on Tuesday by becoming the first county in California to offer voters who use touch-screen machines a verifiable paper audit trail.

Sequoia Voting Systems this week announced that its voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) upgrade, which was successfully used in last month's Nevada primary election, has been approved by the California Secretary of State for use in a small pilot project in San Bernardino County during the November 2, 2004 presidential election.

Three of the machines with this added feature will be used at the Arroyo Verde Elementary School polling place in Highland. Representatives of the Secretary of State's office, the San Bernardino County Registrar of Voters, and Sequoia will monitor their performance and produce reports that the Secretary of State will use to determine whether to grant statewide certification to the new system.

"The County of San Bernardino wanted to provide a voter-verified paper trail when we first contemplated switching to touch-screen voting in December 2001, but the state at the time would not consider such a system," said San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Chairman Dennis Hansberger. "Now that the state has changed its mind and now plans to eventually require this for all electronic voting systems, our county is very pleased that they will be used here first."

Voter advocacy groups who were initially opposed to allowing electronic voting machines to produce a paper trail that voters could see are now demanding these systems as being key to maintaining voter trust in electronic voting.

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Electronic voting machines in San Bernardino County, unlike those in some other counties, have always produced a paper printout of votes cast. However, the paper trail cannot be reviewed or even seen by the voter. The VVPAT that will be used in Highland on Tuesday will produce a paper printout of each voter's choices that the voter can view under glass. The vote will not be finalized until the voter confirms that the printout matches the choices made on the electronic screen. This paper trail will be used to validate the results of the touch-screen system.

The three VeriVote machines will be used alongside a number of the county's AVC Edge voting machines at the Arroyo Verde Elementary School polling place. The county will use about 3,800 touch-screen machines at 410 polling places on Election Day.

Attached are news articles chronicling the success in Nevada of the system that will be used in San Bernardino County next week. A demonstration of the system can be viewed at <http://www.sequoiavote.com/demo.php?lang=vv>.

The polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day. Voters can cast ballots early at the Registrar of Voters office at 777 E. Rialto Ave., San Bernardino, on Saturday and Monday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Information on the election, including polling place locations and ballot information, can be found on the Registrar of Voters website at www.sbcrov.com or by calling the Registrar at (909) 387-8300, toll-free at 1-800-881-VOTE, or via TDD at (909) 387-2788.

September 18, 2004

They Said It Couldn't Be Done

Many computer scientists insist that electronic voting machines will be trustworthy only when they produce paper receipts that can be audited. But supporters of electronic voting have long argued that doing so would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Nevada proved the naysayers wrong this month, running the first statewide election in which electronic voting machines produced paper records of votes cast. Election officials across the country now have no excuse not to provide systems that voters can trust.

There is a growing body of evidence indicating that electronic voting machines are vulnerable to tampering and to software glitches that can skew the vote totals. The best safeguard is a voter-verifiable paper trail, receipts that are printed out during the voting process. Voters can view the receipts to check them against the choices they made on the computer screens. Each receipt remains under glass and, after the vote is cast, falls into a locked box. The receipts can be used in a recount or an audit to check the accuracy of the machine tallies.

The main argument against voter-verifiable paper trails is that they are impractical. At a May meeting of the federal Election Assistance Commission, and again at the National Association of State Election Directors' summer conference, local election officials denounced the campaign for voter-verifiable paper records. At both events, critics waved a receipt about three feet long, saying one that big would be needed for Los Angeles County's lengthy ballot.

But Nevada's secretary of state, Dean Heller, has always believed that paper records are practical, and this month he proved it. Primary voters across the state cast votes on machines that printed out paper records, and none of the nightmarish possibilities came to pass. The poll workers had no trouble with the technology. And election officials had spare machines and printers on hand in the few cases when printers jammed or had other mechanical problems.

Conditions in Nevada favored success. The turnout was light, and the ballot was short enough that the receipt was only about five inches long. But there is no reason to believe that paper trails could not work in any election. Alfred Charles, a vice president of Sequoia Voting Systems, which made the machines used in Nevada, says that if the receipts are done properly, listing only the candidates and referendum choices that the voter actually selects, length should not be a problem, and it is unlikely that even Los Angeles County would require anything like three-foot-long paper receipts.

Even if Nevada's approach - attaching printers to touch-screen machines - had failed, there would still be other ways to provide a paper record. Probably the best solution is the optical scan system used now in many jurisdictions, where voters mark paper ballots that are then read by computers.

In optical scan systems, the paper ballots the voters fill out can be retained and used as a check against the machines' tallies.

Nevada has taken the lead on paper trails not only in its own elections, but also in Congress. Its senators - John Ensign, a Republican, and Harry Reid, a Democrat - have co-sponsored the bipartisan Voting Integrity and Verification Act, one of a number of pending bills that would require that all electronic voting machines produce voter-verifiable paper trails. Congress should pass such legislation right away so all Americans can have the same confidence in their elections as Nevadans now have.



September 8, 2004

Nevada conducts smooth election on computers that keep paper records

RACHEL KONRAD

AP Technology Writer

CARSON CITY, Nev. - Nevada residents became the first in the nation to vote on computers that printed paper records of their electronic ballots in Tuesday's primary, which was generally free of problems that have cast doubt upon electronic voting systems in other states.

Nevada's \$9.3 million voting system - which includes more than 2,600 computers and printers deployed in every county - could become a model for other states. California, Washington and Illinois recently passed laws requiring a paper trail for electronic ballots, and at least 20 others are considering similar legislation.

A delegation of federal election officials monitored the equipment's debut in the state capital, as voters cast ballots for congressional candidates, state legislators, school officials and judges. Results for the primary _ which included some three dozen legislative races _ matched expectations and in most counties began filtering in shortly after polls closed at 7 p.m.

"Knock on wood, so far things have been working flawlessly," said Secretary of State Dean Heller, who purchased the system in December, after holding town hall meetings with voters who were concerned about the security of paperless voting systems.

Heller said the system represents a "huge leap forward" for Nevada, where seven of 17 counties used old-fashioned punch card machines in the previous election. One poor, isolated county in eastern Nevada, White Pine, had to rent storage space for the newfangled gizmos because it kept its old punch card machines in a cave.

The printers, developed by Oakland, Calif.-based Sequoia Voting Systems Inc., address some concerns of computer scientists and voting activists. Critics say paperless touchscreens _ which as many as 50 million Americans will use in the November presidential election _ cannot be properly audited or recounted, and votes can be altered or deleted.

"From what I've seen, voters seem to enjoy the experience," said DeForest B. Soaries Jr., chairman of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, who traveled through four Nevada counties Tuesday with out-of-state voter registrars and other federal officials. "There hasn't been frustration or confusion."

Voter advocates praised Nevada's system, which requires county registrars to randomly select a small percentage of machines _ from 1 percent to 3 percent of a county's total _ and compare printed records with the vote totals taken from computers' memory cartridges after polls close. The paper records _

which voters can see through a plastic window but cannot touch or take home __ will be kept in county election offices for 22 months and used in case of a recount.

``It's no panacea, but it's a huge improvement over paperless systems because there will be a paper record of every electronic ballot," said Kim Alexander, president of Davis, Calif.-based California Voter Foundation.

Pershing and Washoe counties reported delays in vote totals because election officials were unfamiliar with the equipment. Every county except Clark County used the computers for the first time, and poll workers' training was limited to one three-hour class.

But Nevada precincts were devoid of widespread problems that plagued other states. In some precincts, dozens of poll workers __ mainly retirees who flock to Nevada's sunshine and low cost of living __ waited eagerly for a trickle of voters.

In Carson City, which has 24,000 registered, active voters, the downtown community center hosted 42 poll workers, eight assistant team leaders, and one team leader. Voters who experienced a printer jam or frozen screen were swarmed by poll workers, team leaders, and even the county clerk himself.

About half of roughly 200,000 voters were expected to cast early or absentee ballots in the primary. Turnout was roughly 25 percent of registered voters. In November, turnout could reach 70 percent __ but the state won't be able to train more poll workers.

``I'm sorry that people didn't come out and vote in the primary," said Carson City Clerk-Recorder Alan Glover. ``But it sure made it easier for our poll workers. This almost feels like a test run."

Federal officials said it would be difficult for densely populated counties on the coasts to conduct an election as smoothly as Nevada's. When counties in Florida and California experienced problems with touchscreen machines, strapped poll workers turned voters away or asked them to fill out paper ballots.

In California's March primary, 573 of 1,038 polling places in San Diego County failed to open on time because of computer malfunctions. Poll workers asked voters to go to other precincts or come back later, and the problem disenfranchised an unknown number of would-be voters.

``There's no such thing as a glitch-free election," Soaries said Tuesday. ``When a voter card gets stuck in the machine here, they had low turnout and people could help out. It wasn't as disruptive as it could have been somewhere else."

At the Carson City community center, voter Robert Thomasson's encoder card became jammed in a machine. ``The voter card is stuck," the computer monitor flashed until a team leader __ accompanied by backup poll workers __ pried it loose, and the monitor said his votes were recorded. In other counties, printers jammed and computers crashed, but poll workers quickly replaced them.

``The machine told me the vote was counted, so I'm happy about that," Thomasson said.

On the Net: Demo of the Nevada equipment: <http://sos.state.nv.us/sequoiaverivotedemo.swf>



September 15, 2004

E-vote success in Nevada may be model

Printers, training credited with relatively problem-free vote

CARSON CITY, Nevada (AP) -- Alarmed by software glitches, security threats and computer crashes with ATM-like voting machines, officials from Washington, D.C., to California are considering an alternative from an unlikely place: Nevada.

Silver State voters cast electronic ballots Tuesday on a \$9.3 million voting system with more than 2,600 computers and printers in every county. The primary was free of serious problems that have embarrassed registrars in Florida, California, Maryland and other states with touchscreen machines.

"They were incredibly organized," said Marc Carrel, assistant secretary of state in California, where several counties are preparing to install similar equipment next year. "I think California could pull off a similar election if we had adequate training and education programs for poll workers and voters."

Credit the training in Nevada, and credit the printers -- which give computer scientists and voter-rights advocates assurances that elections can be fully audited. As many as 50 million Americans elsewhere will use paperless touchscreens this November, and critics say hacking, malfunctioning and other problems in only a few counties could have huge implications in a tight presidential contest.

On Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein co-sponsored legislation that would force hundreds of counties using touchscreens to install printers by requiring all voting machines to produce a paper trail by July 2006. An aide to the California Democrat said Nevada's election marked a turning point in the contentious debate over touchscreens.

"The Nevada election demonstrates that you can have efficient electronic voting machines yet at the same time have a paper trail so voters can be assured they've voted accurately and their vote is being recorded accurately," Feinstein spokesman Howard Gantman said.

Many registrars oppose paper ballots, insisting that printers -- which cost about \$800 each -- are prone to jamming and too complicated for poll workers. They require counties to purchase ink and paper, negating key cost advantages of paperless systems.

Kathy Rogers, the Georgia elections director who monitored voting in Las Vegas, said printers are not a panacea and could have unintended consequences: Unethical poll workers could use the printed ballots to determine how individuals voted.

"We seem to have traded a secret ballot for this piece of paper," said Rogers, whose state has no plans to abandon paperless touchscreens. "In a small precinct, it would be easy to sit and observe what order people voted in."

Few would have predicted that Nevada would become a flash point for voting technology. Seven of 17 counties used old-fashioned punch card machines in the previous election.