

NEWS

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For more information, contact
David Wert, Public Information Officer
(909) 387-5412
dwert@sbcounty.gov

Supervisors make plans for 2007 and 2008 elections

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors today agreed to comply with an order by the California Secretary of State to replace the county's reliable, popular, and problem-free touch-screen voting system with an optical-scan paper ballot system.

The county will spend \$1.5 million on paper ballots, voting booths, ballot boxes, and a voter education program for the November 2007 and February 2008 elections. The system will replace a \$16 million touch-screen voting system the county purchased after being told by state and federal officials in 2001 that electronic voting would be the only approved method of voting at polling places.

The current Secretary of State decertified San Bernardino County's touch-screen voting system on Aug. 3, nine minutes before a deadline set to give counties enough time to properly prepare for the Feb. 5, 2008 presidential primary election.

The decertification occurred after the Secretary of State staged a "top-to-bottom review" in which computer experts she supplied with top-secret security codes were given unfettered, unsupervised, and unlimited access to voting machines and were reportedly able to compromise the devices. County election officials have challenged the results, pointing out that the conditions under which the Secretary of State tested the machines could never occur in real life.

The current Secretary of State is California's fourth in less than five years. Her predecessors assumed an array of positions on electronic voting, ranging from insisting that counties switch to touch-screen voting, banning touch-screen voting, and allowing touch-screen voting as long as certain security measures were followed.

"The County of San Bernardino supports any and all efforts to make voting as secure as possible, but clearly the Secretary of State's decision was a step in the wrong direction that needlessly shook voter confidence in a perfectly good election system," said Board of Supervisors Vice Chairman Gary Ovitt.

"However, the law gives the Secretary of State absolute authority to arbitrarily demand which voting systems are permitted for use," Vice Chairman Ovitt said. "Therefore, the county has little choice but to set aside a perfectly good system in which the voters have a great deal of confidence and replace it with an older system that will most likely cause tremendous delays in the reporting of election results."