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IOWA's RESIDUAL VOTES OFFER A LESSON: CHOOSE PAPER FOR VOTING
Paper Ballots Better at Registering Votes than Electronic Voting Machines

North Liberty, IA – November 6, 2007 – Voters in today's elections have a good reason to choose paper ballots over touch screen voting machines if they have the option.

A review of all statewide races in Iowa's 2006 General Election shows that voter-marked paper ballots read by optical scanners had the lowest rate of residual votes, and that use of touch screen electronic voting machines correlated with a higher residual vote rate.

Experts use the residual vote rate to judge the effectiveness of a voting system. Residual votes are the difference the total number of ballots cast and the number of valid votes for a given race. Many residual votes are intentional, particularly undervotes in races for lower, "down-ballot" offices, about which many voters may not be as informed or have a true preference. But if residuals correlate with a type of voting equipment, that equipment may not be as user-friendly or as reliable as other technologies.

Last year a report by the Brennan Center for Justice observed that many voting experts view the residual vote rate as "the single best measure of the effectiveness of a voting system." [1]

Members of Iowans for Voting Integrity looked at all three statewide races that were competitive last year: the Governorship, the Secretary of State's race, and the Secretary of Agriculture's race.

In all three races, the same pattern emerged: the counties that used only optically scanned paper ballots had the lowest residual vote. Counties that used mostly optical scan but also put one touch screen in each polling place had the second-lowest residual vote, and counties that used only touch screens in the polling place had the highest residual vote.

Even more striking, in the "blended" counties that had both scanned paper ballots and touch screens, the rate of touch screen use varied considerably, and there was a strong correlation between the residual vote and the rate of touch screen use.

"It's hard to call it a coincidence when you see the same pattern in all three races," said Iowans for Voting Integrity co-chair Sean Flaherty.

The cause for the pattern could well be mundane. "Usability is as likely a cause as any for the higher residual vote,' said Flaherty. "These touch screen machines bring needless complexity to the voting process, and can confuse many voters."

Ironically, the new generation of touch screens have been touted for providing warnings to voters when they don't cast a vote for a race.

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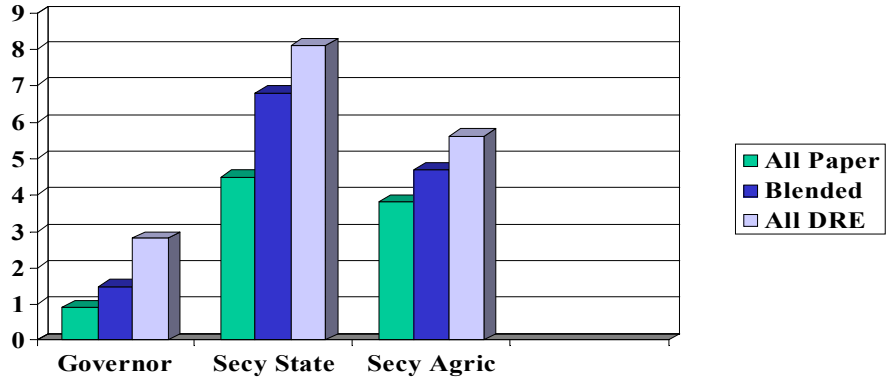
1 "The Machinery of Democracy: Usability of Voting Systems." Report of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School, p.1. Published on the Internet at: http://www.brennancenter.org/dynamic/subpages/download_file_38889.pdf

"The residual vote can be decisive in close elections, so we should pay attention" said Flaherty "What if we have another very close Presidential election next year?"

Under legislation signed by Governor Culver this year, Iowa joins Florida and Maryland in deciding to move away this year from touch screens and toward a statewide optical scan system. Currently, 16 entire states use only voter-marked paper ballots in their elections.

The speed of Iowa's transition depends on funding. In order to convert to 100% optical scan, the blended counties must purchase ballot-marking devices to serve voters with disabilities, and the touch screen counties must purchase both scanners and ballot-marking devices. To make grants to counties for the purchase, the state could have to spend as much as $8 million. "Considering Iowa's budget, $8 million is a good price for counting the votes."

Residual Votes as a Function of County Voting System*



* All DRE= All Touch Screen

Residual Votes as a Function of Touch Screen Use in Blended System Counties