

4825 Bayfield Terrace
Madison, WI 53705
April 10, 2008

Dear Senator Fred Risser:

On April 7, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that staff of the Government Accountability Board is “considering forgoing federal certification of a new vote-counting device”. This risky action would be taking Wisconsin in the wrong direction. Instead, we should be standardizing on optical scan voting equipment.

Milwaukee, Madison, and many other municipalities do not have the problem described in the article, since they have standardized on optical scan both for their tabulator and their ballot marking device, which meets accessibility requirements. 80% of Wisconsin voters already use optical scan.

Please initiate legislation to require that all future purchase of voting systems be limited to optical scan systems. On April 9, 2008, the Democratic Party of Dane County passed a resolution that they “actively support legislation to require future purchases of voting systems be limited to optical scan systems.”

Such legislation should have the following features:

- All equipment purchases in the future must be optical scan.
- Existing equipment would be grandfathered, but when it comes time to replace it, optical scan must be the only system considered.
- The one allowed exception would be for municipalities that already have other equipment such as Direct Recording Equipment (DRE). If they are opening additional polling places, they may purchase additional DRE's for the new polling places. This exemption should expire in 2011.

The above restrictions would mean that no money is wasted, since all existing equipment would remain usable. However, by setting a future course for replacements, there would be significant benefits.

- Standardization would make government more efficient by making it easier for Wisconsin's election administrators to write and enforce rules and policies.
- Standardization would make it easier for voters. If they move to another municipality, they will still have the same type of system.
- Standardization would give vendors guidance as to what type of equipment to develop in the future. There would still be competition, as there are at least three major vendors of optical scan equipment.

Optical scan is being recognized as the best system, since it inherently produces a verified paper record filled out by the voter. Florida and Iowa have recently adopted legislation to mandate optical scan.

Here are some advantages of optical scan:

- Faster voting eliminates or minimizes long lines, since scanning paper ballots takes only seconds. With DRE's, voters have to wait for machines that fill out their ballots, and voting on a DRE takes minutes.
- If an optical scanner fails, voters can continue marking paper ballots, which can be collected securely and held for counting. When DRE equipment fails, there is a great delay while the problem is solved or emergency ballots are provided.
- The technology is cheaper, with only one scanner and one ballot marker (for persons with special needs) required per polling place.
- Recounts and audits are much easier to perform than with commercial voter verified paper record (VVPR) systems, which have often experienced paper jams that disrupt the printed record.
- It is easier to preserve privacy with optical scanners than with VVPR, because most VVPR solutions store the paper records sequentially.
- Durable paper is used for ballots marked by the voter to be counted in optical scanners.
- The operation is simpler and more transparent to voters.

Sincerely,

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