



ILLINOIS BALLOT INTEGRITY PROJECT

NEWS RELEASE

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CHICAGO AND COOK COUNTY VOTERS URGED TO CHECK BALLOTS CAREFULLY

New optical scanners don't warn of undervotes

Evanston, February 25, 2006. Early voting in Illinois begins Monday, February 27th, and voters in Chicago and Cook County will mark their choices on a paper ballot that is read by new optical scanners. But these new scanners lack an important feature, they can't detect undervotes which occur when voters fail to select a candidate or proposition on the ballot. "We urge Chicago and Cook County voters to carefully check their ballots to make sure that they have voted for every candidate or proposition because there's no 'second chance' anymore," warns Claire Tobin, chairperson of the Chicago Chapter of the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project.

City and County voters will use new voting equipment purchased at a cost of about \$50 million, primarily with money appropriated under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) which provides funds to replace outdated outmoded voting systems like some punch card and lever machines. More than half of that amount, \$25.5 million in taxpayer dollars was used to purchase about 5,600 Optech Insight precinct optical scanners from Sequoia Voting Systems, which unlike the system they replace don't give undervote warnings.

Nearly 120,000 undervotes for president occurred in Chicago and Cook County in the November, 2000 General Election. Officials blamed the Illinois Legislature for failing to amend the election Code to allow them to use the undervote detection capability on the new voting machines. According to Lance Gough, executive director of the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, "These ballot screening procedures have been in place since [2000], and have significantly improved voter accuracy and voter confidence."

"The 2000 presidential election, when Chicago had 72,000 undervotes - more than 7% - proved that giving an undervote warning is important in ensuring that every voter's intent is expressed at the polls," said Patrick O'Hara, vice chairperson of the Chicago Chapter of IBIP.

When Chicago and Cook County began the process of acquiring new voting equipment in 2004, officials described the voting system purchased in 1999 as "unique," saying Chicago and Cook County ". . . use a system that scans a ballot for overvotes and undervotes, giving voters a "second chance" to ensure their ballot reflects their intentions."

“Any proposed system must include a mechanism for alerting a voter that he or she has failed to cast a vote for one or more offices or propositions before the vote is finally cast, and to provide an opportunity to correct the undervote,” said the specifications the City and County gave to vendors.

More importantly, the 2002 U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Voting Systems Standards require, “In addition to the above requirements, all paper-based precinct count systems shall provide feedback to the voter that identifies specific contests or ballot issues for which an overvote or undervote is detected,” and “allow the voter, at the voter’s choice, to vote a new ballot or submit the ballot ‘as is’ without correction.” But when the proposal from Sequoia was submitted, there was no mention of detecting undervotes and the final contract doesn’t require the Optech Insight scanner to be able to do this, despite the original specifications and HAVA standards.

In addition to the optical scanners, the City and County will buy about 6,000 Sequoia AVC Edge touch-screen voting machines for over \$21 million. Cook County Clerk, David Orr, has made no secret of his endorsement of touch-screen voting and would like to implement touch-screens for all voters when more funds become available. Some have questioned spending \$25 million to replace the ES&S machines with Sequoia scanners that have an apparently limited life span, including Bob Wilson, chairperson of the Suburban Cook County Chapter of IBIP. “We find it interesting that the undervote detection capability was so prized by Chicago and Cook County that they asked Sequoia to develop specifications for a ‘blended’ system which would continue to use the ES&S equipment. Now they no longer consider detecting undervotes a priority,” said Wilson.

“From the documentation submitted by Sequoia, it certainly appears that they thought it was feasible to reprogram the firmware for the ES&S, thus eliminating the need for the Optech Insight scanner,” added Roy Lipscomb, director of technology for IBIP.

In fact, Sequoia’s vice president of sales, Howard Cramer, wrote to Lance Gough on March 7, 2005: “. . . it seems clear that both jurisdictions have been pleased with the functionality of the [ES&S] PBC-2100, including the precinct ballot tally . . . and the undervote and overvote warnings incorporated into the system.” In his cover e-mail to the letter, Cramer says, “The blended system concept that has really caught fire here is the use of the PBC 2100 to read the Edge cartridges. This seems like the simplest and most cost effective way to accomplish our goals with the least procedural impact on the pollworkers.”

“Our best estimate is that the City and County could have saved over \$24 million using a blended system,” said Wilson. “Certainly some of those funds could have been used to purchase more technologically advanced systems for accessibility, privacy and independent voting for disabled voters in

Cook County and the City of Chicago,” he continued, saying, “Instead, voters have been forced to give up an important benefit of the current system and are paying a steep price for doing so.”

“We hope City and County election officials will emphasize the importance of telling voters to check their ballots carefully during early voting and on March 21st, said Beverley Walter, vice chair of the IBIP’s Suburban Cook County Chapter. “It’s also imperative that election judge training includes giving a reminder to every voter that once he or she puts a ballot into the scanner, the vote is cast and there’s no opportunity to correct an error,” she concluded.

The **Illinois Ballot Integrity Project** is a not-for-profit, non-partisan civic organization dedicated to the correction of election system deficiencies and ensuring fair, accurate, and completely transparent elections. IBIP believes that fundamental to election integrity is the inscribing of all votes (whether by hand or by machine) on durable paper ballots which are easily handled and verified by the individual voter. The voter’s paper ballot should be the only official ballot for purposes of casting, tallying, counting, audit and recount.

The **Mission** of the **Illinois Ballot Integrity Project** is to inform and educate the public, media and government officials about important election integrity issues and to promote the adoption of legislation and policies designed to secure the democratic process.

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