

## Ehrlich Wants Paper Ballots For Nov. Vote

State Election Chief Says Staff Toiling to Fix Electronic Glitches

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A week after the primary election was plagued by human error and technical glitches, Maryland Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) called yesterday for the state to scrap its \$106 million electronic voting apparatus and revert to a paper ballot system for the November election.

"When in doubt, go paper, go low-tech," he said.

Linda H. Lamone, the administrator of the Maryland State Board of Elections, quickly denounced the plan to swap voting systems just seven weeks before the general election as "crazy." And Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. (D-Calvert) said it "cannot happen. It will not happen."

Ehrlich said that, if necessary, he would call a special session of the Maryland General Assembly to change the law to allow paper ballots. But Miller and House Speaker Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel) dismissed the idea of a special session, saying elections officials should focus instead on fixing the current system.

"We paid millions. These are state-of-the-art machines," said Miller, who called Ehrlich's announcement a political ploy to energize his Republican supporters.

In Montgomery and Prince George's counties yesterday, election officials continued to count the thousands of paper provisional ballots that could determine the outcome of the 4th Congressional District Democratic primary race between incumbent U.S. Rep. Albert R. Wynn and challenger Donna Edwards. Prince George's officials cracked opened 26 machines yesterday and retrieved votes that had not been counted.

The problems playing out in Maryland have created unease elsewhere in the nation, where more than 80 percent of voters will use electronic voting machines in the Nov. 7 election and a third of all precincts are using them for the first time.

Ehrlich's statement came after a State Board of Public Works hearing at which Lamone said her staff would "work around the clock" to correct the problems that plagued the primary. She vowed that her office would help local election boards retrain judges, recruit new ones and force Diebold Election Systems to fix the problems that caused some of its machines to malfunction.

The idea of switching systems now worried local election officials who said testing new equipment and educating election judges and voters about a new system would be a daunting -- if not impossible -- task.

"There isn't a lot of time," said Marjorie Roher, a spokeswoman for the Montgomery Board of Elections.

Henry Fawell, a spokesman for Ehrlich, said the governor's top priority is to replace the electronic poll books, used to check in voters. But he said Ehrlich "is also interested in moving voters to a paper ballot for this year's general election."

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"He realizes it's a tall order," Fawell said. But moving to paper ballots would "eliminate the chronic problems that electronic voting machines demonstrated [Sept. 12] with respect to crashing and susceptibility to tampering."

In the spring, Ehrlich advocated leasing optical scan machines that use paper ballots, a proposal that won unanimous support in the House of Delegates but was rejected by the Senate.

Many of the problems that marred this month's primary resulted from human error. Election judges in Baltimore failed to show up, meaning the polls opened late. In Montgomery, voting at nearly all 238 precincts was delayed because officials forgot to distribute plastic cards needed to operate voting machines.

In Prince George's, election officials struggled to transmit data electronically from polling places to a central office on election night, delaying the counting process for hours. In the days since, they have also discovered that dozens of memory cards were not counted after the election; some remained locked in voting machines for days.

Yesterday, county election officials began opening selected machines to locate the missing cards and capture the voting information contained on them.

Also yesterday, Gene Raynor, the Baltimore election director, resigned, saying Lamone and the General Assembly "have set dangerous precedents that, in my opinion, threaten the integrity of November's elections." Raynor previously sat on the State Board of Elections, where he had joined members in trying to oust Lamone two years ago.

There were also technical problems during the primary, mainly with the electronic poll books that were used in the state for the first time. They replaced the paper printouts of the voter registration rolls, allowing election judges to check in voters electronically.

Some crashed and needed to be rebooted, election judges reported. Others failed to transmit the name of a checked-in voter to the other machines in the same polling place. That meant, theoretically, that a voter could cast more than one ballot. Officials said they had no evidence of any voter fraud.

Lamone said the electronic poll books, purchased from Diebold in June and July, were tested in the days before the election. But those tests did not reveal any problems.

Mark Radke, a Diebold spokesman, said many of the poll books crashed because software created exclusively for Maryland caused the machines' memories to fill up after about 40 people had checked in to vote.

He said the company was investigating the synchronization problems.

But Ehrlich said he wasn't willing to risk the possibility that such glitches would remain for the November election, in which he is seeking a second term.

"I'm not sure we can afford another experiment," Ehrlich said after the Board of Public Works hearing. "I want to play it safe."

His position was supported in the hearing by Avi Rubin, a Johns Hopkins University computer scientist who worked as an elections judge during the primary and has long been critical of the touch-screen voting machines.

Gilles W. Burger, chairman of the State Board of Elections, said his panel has requested that Diebold officials appear at its meeting Tuesday.

"Their feet are going to be held to the fire," Burger said.

Maryland's election law leaves it to the State Elections Board to pick a voting system and certify its reliability and security. Mark Davis, the assistant attorney general who represents the board, said it has already performed required tests on the touch-screen machines.

"The board feels it would be catastrophic to try to do that for another system between now and the general election," he said. "It just doesn't make any sense."

*Staff writer Rosalind S. Helderman contributed to this report.*

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