

Michigan's Costly Voting Machines: the Chronology of a Windfall

1. The Help America Vote Act of 2002 recommended, but did not mandate, that each state standardize on a single voting technology. The Act provided that states would receive grants to purchase equipment, etc. Because of the Election 2000 events in Florida, replacement of punch card systems was strongly encouraged, even though in many states there had never been problems with them.¹
2. The Michigan Legislature then passed a law (PA 91 of 2002) that mandated a single technology and gave the SOS the sole authority to decide what that would be.
3. SOS Land decided we would all have to use optical scan, because supposedly, that was already the most widely used method in the state. (Note: optical scan devices, which are seriously overpriced, cost \$5,000 each, versus \$1000 or less for the punch card devices at a typical precinct.)
4. SOS Land went even further and required each county to standardize on a single brand of optical scan, a policy with no rational basis.² The Dept. of Mgt. and Budget purchasing office had qualified three vendors for master contracts, so the volume deals would come through the state, not counties. ES&S' M100, Diebold's Accu-Vote, and Sequoia's Optech were the only choices available. The State's purchasing office admitted that voting data security was not a criterion in the qualifying process.
5. In Washtenaw County, the majority of precincts already used optical scan, and the two largest cities were satisfied users of Sequoia's Optech. At a meeting of clerks in January, 2004, the majority of precincts voted for Optech, even without the City of Ypsilanti which had no clerk in office and was not present to vote its 10 Optech precincts. Without any further communication to local clerks, then-County Clerk Haines went against this vote and decided on Diebold's more primitive Accu-Vote. In August, she told the Co. Bd. of Commissioners this would be an improvement (the minutes reflect that the city's commissioners questioned the decision) and the Board passed a state-required resolution endorsing the decision. Accu-Votes were immediately ordered and funded by the state for Ypsi Twp., which was replacing punch cards.
6. Pittsfield Twp. through its attorney protested the decision to the SOS. In November, new County Clerk-Elect Kestenbaum inquired about reversing it, but the SOS maintained that it was too late, that the county had to stay on a track to the monolithic Accu-Vote purchase.
7. In 2005, all Washtenaw governments were ordered to sign grant contracts to purchase Accu-Vote machines through the State, or else--the threat was that the whole county would be denied equipment. The Accu-Votes delivered are exactly the same model as ones bought ten years ago. They are very primitive electronic technology, comprising a scanner, a 70's era chip and circuit board, a magnetic memory card that is programmed to accumulate votes for a particular election ballot, and a slow dot-matrix printer that uses obsolete Epson ribbons. The Optech machines are superior in durability, voter

convenience, printing speed, and security, but Ann Arbor and Ypsi City were forced to mothball their machines. Pittsfield started with 13 Accu-Votes and then got 14 more--all identical.

8. The needless replacement of machines in Washtenaw has wasted at least \$500,000 of federal funds. Statewide, the waste is estimated at \$24 million.

9. Most of the negative national publicity about Diebold has focused on the touch-screen model, also known as a DRE or direct recording electronic device. Less well known is the research showing that the Diebold Accu-Vote OS memory card can be easily hacked to change vote totals, and that the hacking can be done—even prior to the start of voting—so that it is totally undetected. For that reason, activists in Washtenaw are working to develop an off the shelf, "parallel election" audit system that will compensate for this weakness in the Diebold model. (Research on the vulnerability of the Diebold Accu-Vote to hacking can be seen at <http://www.bbvforums.org/forums/messages/1954/5921.html> and www.ecotalk.org/urosevichbrothers.htm .

10. Some counties in Michigan made better decisions. You can see which county is using which brand of optical scan at <http://www.sos.state.mi.us/election/votesys/region.html>

¹ Punch card voting has been reliable in Michigan because local clerks remember to clean out the paper chads from the chamber under the punch, preventing the accumulation that caused Florida punches to fail to go completely through. Michigan officials also don't print butterfly ballots.

² The excuse given by the SOS for handing out so much federal money to election supply cronies would have made Karl Rove proud: "It's so voters who move within the county will be familiar with how to vote." The truth is that there is very little difference among the three brands in how you vote.