

Lever Voting Machines - Democracy, Integrity, Saving Money

Public Hearing, Elections Committee, New York State Senate
Yonkers City Hall, Council Chambers, 4th Floor, October 5, 2009, 10:00 - 1:00

As citizen of these United States, resident of New York State and Educator of 35 years, I am present before you this morning to speak of democracy and the vital importance of maintaining it. As you know, in order for a democracy to BE a democracy, there must be fair, transparent and honest elections. The lever voting machine has been shown to be the most reliable, transparent and tamper-proof voting mechanism we have.

Integrity of the vote means that every vote is counted as the voter intended. Citizen oversight of elections needs to be facilitated by the voting technology itself, as well as the procedures with the vote. As one who has worked several elections as an inspector, I can assure you that with our lever voting machines, ordinary people can meaningfully - with checks and counter-checks - witness, manage, count, record and deliver the results of the election to protective custody who deliver it to the Board of Elections.

So why am I here today concerned about our democracy? New York State plans to replace these dependable voting machines with voter-marked paper ballots and precinct-based optical scanners as of 2010. About one third of upstate counties began using this new technology as of this year's September primary. This is a problem for our democracy because no one can meaningfully observe the handling, storage or counting of votes.

Scanners are computers and computers have to be "audited." In all other applications - outside of elections - every computerized step is verified, such as in the ATM where one's transaction is verified at least 3 to 5 times. New York State law requires only 3% spot-check of the scanner's recording, which is not enough to ensure that the correct winners were found. It means we will have 97% invisible vote-count.

Another problem with this voting system is that the resultant voted ballots are out of observers' view for up to 15 days, offering the opportunity for tampering and public suspicion; and there won't be any way of knowing if tampering took place or not. This is not the way of democracy that conducts its business in complete public view.

In addition to the lever voting machines preserving our democracy, we already own them. Millions of dollars will not have to be spent on something that does not work as well as what we already have - and levers were built to last over 120 years. We still have decades left on them! Maintenance is easy and inexpensive. We can save the money. I urge you to **preserve our democratic process by keeping our lever voting machines!** Thank you.

Respectfully and in PEACE,

Catherine Skopic, New York, NY