

July 27, 2004

“UNDERVOTE” FACT SHEET

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002 requires every county in the United States to provide at least one touchscreen voting machine or other voting system that accommodates visually impaired and disabled voters in every precinct no later than January 1, 2006. Fifteen Florida counties, and half of all registered voters, currently use touchscreen voting systems. Touchscreen voting systems are easy to use and provide a high level of accuracy and security.

Florida’s voting system is highly reliable and worked flawlessly in the 2002 elections. Supervisors of Elections have delivered hundreds of successful elections since 2002.

Today, Florida’s “undervote” rate is at the lowest level in our history. The touchscreen machines ensure “undervotes” are intentional on the voter’s part by prompting a voter multiple times to cast a vote. Touchscreen machines do not allow voters to cast more than one vote for the same candidate, known as an overvote.

Additionally, a study conducted by Daniel P. Tokaji, assistant professor of law at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, points to the fact that contemporary touchscreen systems already have multiple levels of secure, redundant backup and that most jurisdictions have strenuous security procedures - including logic and accuracy testing which is open to the public and performed on touch screens, absentee ballot tabulating equipment, and reporting software prior to each election - to ensure the machines work as intended.

All voting systems in use in the State of Florida have met rigorous state certification standards and independent testing at the federal level. In fact, Florida performs logic and accuracy testing on all touchscreen and opticscan machines, currently the only elections systems certified for use in Florida.

Q. Why do “undervotes” occur?

A. “Undervotes” occur when voters exercise their right to withhold their vote and often do for a number of reasons that include: maintaining a perfect voting record, as a protest vote, or for reasons known only to the voter. An undervote is **not** a “lost vote” or “error”, and is not evidence that one voting system “didn’t perform as well” as another or that there are “flaws in voting by touch-screen,” as has been reported in various media accounts. In fact, almost every Supervisor has received, particularly in a single race ballot, blank absentee ballots.

Q. How will a voter who chooses not to vote for a particular race or issue know the touchscreen machine has accepted his or her choice?

A. The touchscreen system is designed to ask the voter multiple times if they are purposely choosing not to vote. Additionally, a study conducted by Professor Tokaji, shows that in presidential elections from 1980-2000, between .3 and 1.3 percent of voters report such “intentional undervoting.” Even where there is only one item on the ballot, some voters may show up at the polls out of an admirable sense of civic obligation but choose not to cast a vote – perhaps because they are dissatisfied with the available candidates. He also adds that electronic voting is a huge improvement over the "hanging chad" punch card, which had a 4 percent non-vote rate in Florida's 2000 election.

Q. How do “undervotes” compare between touch screen and optiscan equipment?

A. Any small difference in “undervote” rates would occur because optiscan machines are programmed to reject blank ballots. On the other hand, a touchscreen system gives voters multiple chances before recording a non vote.

Q. Is an audit conducted on touchscreen machines prior to an election?

A. Each, individual machine must be certified by the state and is subjected to rigorous logic and accuracy testing by local Supervisors of Elections and their staff before every election. The public is invited to attend and witness this testing to assure public confidence. Once the logic and accuracy testing is completed, all of the machines are secured for the election.

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