



DEBRA BOWEN | SECRETARY OF STATE | STATE OF CALIFORNIA
1500 11th Street, 6th Floor | Sacramento, CA 95814 | Tel (916) 653-7244 | Fax (916) 653-4620 | www.sos.ca.gov

March 22, 2007

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Elections, Committee on House Administration
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6157

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren:

I first want to applaud you and the subcommittee for taking on this important challenge and for inviting me to appear before the subcommittee on Friday.

I think we would all agree that it's time to solve and move past the "process" issues associated with voting by giving voters the confidence of knowing that their ballots were counted as they were cast. Once that is in place, then voters can focus solely on the policy choices presented to them on Election Day.

I am strongly supportive of changing the current system to improve the integrity of and the public confidence in our electoral process. On Friday, it's my intention to focus my testimony primarily on two main practical concerns – timing and funding.

Timing

In California, the length of time it's taken to select a new voting system has varied greatly between counties. For example, Placer County, which has 176,000 registered voters, appears to have taken about two months to select a system and negotiate a contract with the vendor. Yolo County, which has 91,000 registered voters, took approximately nine months to award a contract. San Francisco County, which has 418,000 registered voters, originally forecast an eight-month procurement process that is now entering its second year due to concerns about the type of system that was proposed to be deployed.

The length of time it takes to develop a competitive bid package, solicit and review bids, provide for public input, negotiate a contract, and buy and deploy a system will vary by state and, in California's case, by county, since each of the 58 counties buys its own voting system. That procurement process is affected by a number of things outside of the control of the elections official – namely, the amount of public input that is required, demanded and provided, the cooperation of the vendor, and the relationship between the county elections official and the county governing body.

As you're well aware, the public interest in the voting systems used across the country has exploded in recent years. That means any procurement process needs to build in time for the public to review and comment on the proposals, and for the procurement itself to change based on those comments.

The last thing any of us want is to truncate public review of any system, rushing through approval under the presumption that any solution is better than the current system, only to find ourselves back here in two or three years, having this same discussion all over again.

Funding

This is an issue I know the committee is acutely aware of, but I raise it to make three points.

First, California's counties spent at least \$162 million and probably closer to \$250 million buying voting systems to comply with the Help America Vote Act by January 1, 2006. Considering that California has approximately 10% of the total number of registered voters in the country, the cost for making significant changes in our voting systems could be over \$1 billion.

Second, I'm concerned from a financial, logistical, and voter acceptance standpoint, about requiring certain changes by 2008 that may be made obsolete by other changes that could be required by 2010. I don't think any of us want to require counties and states to buy a system that may only be used for one election cycle.

Third, in states that are required to make another change, I don't think it's unreasonable to ask the subcommittee to consider the inclusion of per capita payments for poll worker training and voter education.

Following the last two elections, I read many news articles where it was stated that the equipment performed fine, and any problems were solely a result of "human error." If poll workers and voters don't know how to operate the machines, it's simply not possible to have an election without a large segment of the population being disenfranchised. That's why I'm so committed to ensuring that whatever changes are made, we include the time and money needed to make sure elections officials, poll workers, and voters can use the machines for their intended purpose – to take part in our democratic process.

I look forward to discussing these and other issues in greater detail when I appear before the committee on Friday and thank you once again for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,



Debra Bowen
Secretary of State

DB:elg:lf