

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

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ELECTRONIC VOTING TO DEBUT IN NOVEMBER
Eight towns to test new voting machines at local elections

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz unveiled four different types of electronic voting machines that will be used in eight towns on Election Day, November 4. **Cromwell, Griswold, Hartford, Middletown, Sharon, Southington, West Hartford and Wilton** were selected by lottery earlier this summer from municipalities that volunteered to be part of the state test of new voting technologies.

Bysiewicz proposed the test, which was approved by the Legislature this year, to determine how best to serve Connecticut voters in the future.

“We are proceeding cautiously by testing a variety of voting systems in a small number of towns before we even consider any purchase of new machines,” said Bysiewicz at a State Capitol news conference. “I am looking forward to hearing from voters about their experience with each of the technologies.”

Mechanical lever voting machines have been used almost exclusively in the state for over 50 years, but the federal “Help America Vote Act” (HAVA), which was authored by Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd and signed into law by President Bush last year, requires all states to upgrade their voting systems by 2006.

“Following the trouble-plagued elections of 2000, it became abundantly clear that something needed to be done to ensure that everyone not only has the right to vote on election day, but the confidence that his or her vote will be counted,” said Dodd. “Secretary Bysiewicz is to be commended for her efforts. I am encouraged by this pilot project and proud that Connecticut is serving as a national model in the fight to improve our voting system and protect the central premise of our democracy—the sovereignty of our citizens.”

Bysiewicz has already secured \$5 million in federal funds under HAVA, which was proposed as a result of the voting debacle in Florida during the 2000 presidential election. She expects to eventually receive up to \$30 million from the federal government over the next few years to comply with the new election reforms. Much of these funds could be earmarked for new voting machines.

“Connecticut has always been a leader in assuring the right to vote and the State Legislature wants to keep it that way,” state Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin B.

Sullivan (D-West Hartford). "I am pleased that towns have come forward to move forward with new voter-friendly technology and appreciate the efforts of Senator Dodd in Washington and Secretary of the State Bysiewicz in Hartford."

Testing of new voting systems will be done at no cost to taxpayers with private vendors loaning equipment and staff support free of charge. Avante International Technology of New Jersey, Danaher Controls of Simsbury, LHS Associates of Massachusetts, and Sequoia Voting Systems of California are the companies providing electronic voting machines and technical support.

"As Chair of the Elections Committee, I recognized the importance of testing new voting technology and moving ahead now to improve our election system," said Jim O'Rourke (D-Cromwell), House Chair of the Legislature's Election's Committee. "I am very proud that Cromwell, my hometown, will be one of the test towns as we look to determine what voting will be like in the future."

One requirement of the new federal HAVA law is that voting systems provide persons with disabilities the opportunity to vote privately and independently.

"For voters with disabilities, the technology being tested in these pilots promises to remove barriers and greatly improve access to the polls," James D. McGaughey Executive Director of the state Office of Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, which estimates over 200,000 Connecticut residents with disabilities may not vote. "It is important that people get to try out the different types of equipment to see what works best."

The League of Women Voters in conjunction with the Center for Survey Research & Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut will conduct an exit poll survey of voters that cast ballots on the electronic machines.

"The 2000 election debacle was a painful lesson in the shortcomings of voting technology in our country," said CSRA Director Dr. Kenneth Dautrich. "The Florida debacle demands that states reexamine the voting process and modernize voting systems. Connecticut is seeking to ensure that every vote counts in a measured way designed to increase efficiency and accuracy. We are pleased to have the opportunity to study and report voters' evaluations of these new systems."