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Op Ed: Connecticut, Ready to Vote in the 21st Century
By: Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz
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This September 11th for the first time, many voters across Connecticut will, cast their ballot using our state's new optical scan voting machines. This event marks not the beginning but the culmination of a long and thorough process to ensure that all of Connecticut's voters are ready and able to vote in the 21st century.

In the last year, my office has conducted 140 public voting machine demonstrations and at every one someone asks the question: "Why do we have to stop using the old lever voting machines? I've been using them all my life and I'm comfortable with them, so why do we have to switch to optical scan technology?" The answer is pretty simple. The federal Help America Vote Act requires that all voting systems produce a permanent paper record with a manual audit capacity. Connecticut's lever machines do not meet this requirement, and therefore, are no longer suitable for elections in this state.

While many of us have voted our entire lives using lever machines, I urge voters to embrace this change. This technology is safe, reliable and secure. Most important, the new optical scan technology provides a paper trail for every vote cast. This is a very significant safeguard for voters because it provides every voter with the opportunity to review and change their ballot before it is cast and the assurance that their vote is counted properly because ballots can and will be audited after every election in Connecticut.

My office, in collaboration with Registrars of Voters and other election officials, has been preparing the state for this change for well over a year. We have delivered voting equipment to every city and town in Connecticut. My office implemented an aggressive training program and in the past six weeks almost 2,500 election officials and poll workers have received comprehensive training in over 200 sessions held in more than 30 regional training centers across the state. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Registrars of Voters across the state who have come to these trainings with their staffs and workers. In addition to the 140 public demonstrations we have conducted, local Registrars and the League of Women Voters are also conducting voter outreach and education. As a result of these combined efforts, Connecticut residents are ready to vote in the 21st century.

While other states like California struggle with touch screen voting machines that lack verifiable paper trails, Connecticut has chosen a system with a proven track record. Optical scan voting is the most common form of voting technology in America today, with a majority of counties nationwide voting on optical scan machines. During the 2006 general election, optical scan technology was used in 1,752 counties nationwide and we join our New England neighbors Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island in using this technology.

In Connecticut, a number of towns already used optical scan technology. Twenty-five (25) towns successfully used the optical scan machines in the November 2006 elections. In May of this year, 13 more towns held their elections using the new voting machines.

Voting with this new technology is simple. Voters check in at the polling place and receive a paper ballot. They make their selections by filling in the oval next to a candidate's name and then put the ballot through a scanner where the votes are tabulated. The paper ballot then drops into a locked ballot box where it can be used to verify election results.

As Connecticut makes the transition to new optical scan voting machines, it is imperative that voters have confidence that their vote will be recorded securely and accurately. This past legislative session, my office pushed hard for and succeeded in the passage of Public Act 07-194, An Act Concerning the Integrity and Security of the Voting Process. This law requires Connecticut to conduct random audits of 10% of all polling districts. This means that ballots will be hand counted and compared with machine totals.

To ensure the security and integrity of our election, my office has forged a truly unique partnership with the University of Connecticut's computer science and engineering department. A team led by Dr. Alan Shvartsman was instrumental in the selection of optical scan technology and has been invaluable in assisting my office in the development of tight physical custody and other security measures. The result is that Connecticut is now nationwide leader in ensuring that elections are secure and accurate.