



2002

THE ECA REPORTER

Election Commissioners' Association of the State of New York

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December 2002

Time For Action

By Robert C. Howe, President,
Election Commissioners' Association of the State of New York



Hello Fellow Voters, Welcome to the 21st Century! We are about to enter a new era in voting in the State of New York which we have never seen the likes of, and may never see again. Starting in 2003, there will be new electronic machines, mandated training

programs, centralization of machines by the counties, maybe a June Primary and a possible change in what the ballot will look like. This to be all in place by the 2004 Presidential Election if not sooner! Many interest groups will be at the table to support their agenda as to what they want done in New York State. It is our duty to the voters of the state, to be sure that the wishes made known are doable and practicable, The Association must take an affirmative role in the changes that are coming. If we fail to do so, we will be doomed to a system that is no better for us or our voters, than in years past.

The county legislators should be supporting their boards of elections with the new reforms coming. This is not the time to cut their budgets, especially the travel! I cannot think of a more

important time to go to conferences and regional meetings than at the present. Remember that to hold a public office you have to go through your local board. Does it make sense to cut a department that will be going through drastic changes? This will affect each and every one of you.

The state legislators will be affected also. You, as legislators, will be asked to make changes in election law, in a timely manner, not like you have done on previous state budgets. From where I see reform, you cannot delay your decisions. You will have to move like you never have before! What happens with this reform will affect you directly. Please listen to the NYS Board of Elections and your local boards. Time is of the essence!

"Ragged Old Flag"

By Johnny Cash

*I walked through a county courthouse square;
on a park bench an old man was sitting there. I said,
Your old courthouse is kinda run down. He said,
Naw, it'll do for our little town.*

*I said, Your flagpole has leaned a little bit, and
that's a Ragged Old Flag you got hanging on it. He
said, Have a seat, and I sat down. Is this the first time
you've been to our little town?*

*I said, I think it is. He said, I don't like to brag,
but we're kinda proud of that Ragged Old Flag. You
see, we got a little hole in that flag there when
Washington took it across the Delaware.*

*And it got a bad rip in New Orleans with
Packingham and Jackson tuggin' at its seams. And it
almost fell at the Alamo beside the Texas flag, but she
waved on through.*

*She got cut with a sword at Chancellorsville and
she got cut again at Shiloh Hill. There was Robert E.
Lee, Beauregard, and Bragg, and the south wind
blew hard on that Ragged Old Flag.*

*On Flanders Field in World War I she got a big
hole from a Bertha gun. She turned blood red in
World War II. She hung limp and low by the time it
was through.*

continued on Page 6...

CONFERENCE DATE

ECA Winter Conference
January 27, 28 & 29, 2003
Rochester, NY
Executive Meeting
on January 26th!

ECA Summer Conference
June 23, 24 & 25, 2003
Cooperstown, NY

Election Commissioners' Association Installs New Officers

By Sue Fries, Cattaraugus County

The New York Election Commissioners' Association (ECA) held its annual summer conference recently at the Riveredge Hotel & Conference Center, Alexandria Bay, NY, and installed new officers including President Robert C. Howe, who serves as Cortland County Republican Commissioner of Elections.

Howe has been Commissioner since 1995, and is the first commissioner from Cortland County to serve as an officer of the ECA.

"I look forward to a very exciting year with the election reform changes underway," Howe said. "I'm very proud to represent the Election Commissioners' Association in the State of New York and my home, Cortland County, as president."

Other officers elected are First Vice President Laurence Adamczyk, Democratic Commissioner, Erie County; Second Vice President Elizabeth Cree, Republican Commissioner, Tompkins County; Third Vice President Thomas Burke, Democratic Commissioner, Greene County and Secretary/Treasurer Sue Fries, Republican Commissioner, Cattaraugus County.

Awards of Distinguished Service, Appreciation and Professionalism, and Outstanding Service were presented respectively to former President Elect Susan Bahren, Democratic Commissioner, Orange

County; former Executive Committee Chairman, Edward J. Szczesniak, Democratic Commissioner, Onondaga County and former Legislative Committee Chairman, Dr. Anthony O. Scannapieco Jr., Republican Commissioner, Putnum County.

Other committee members elected: Executive Committee - Chairman, Robert Brehm, Democratic Commissioner, Schenectady County; Vice-Chairman, Ruth Same, Democratic Commissioner, Seneca County; Edward Szczesniak, Democratic Commissioner, Onondaga County; Timothy Hill, Democratic Commissioner, Sullivan County, Harry Castiglione, Democratic Commissioner, Ulster County; Susan Bahren, Democratic Commissioner, Orange County; Carolee Sunderland, Republican Commissioner, Westchester County; Helen Kiggins, Republican Commissioner, Onondaga County; Thomas Turco, Republican Committee, Ulster County; Ralph Mohr, Republican Committee, Erie County; Jerry Smith, Republican Committee, Livingston County and Douglas Hamilton, Republican Committee, Otsego County.

Legislative Committee - Chairman, David Gamache, Republican Committee, Dutchess County; Vice-Chairman, Lou Sanders, Republican Commissioner, Essex

County; Marty Smith, Republican Commissioner, Herkimer County; Mary Beth Casey, Republican Commissioner, Warren County; Larry Bugbee, Republican Commissioner, Rensselaer County; Sandra Lufkin, Republican Commissioner, Washington County; Daniel DeFrancesco, Executive Director, New York City; Lois Montfort, Democratic Commissioner, Warren County; William Egan, Democratic Commissioner, Dutchess County; Cathleen Rogers, Democratic Commissioner, Hamilton County; William Scriber, Democratic Commissioner, Oswego County and Norman Green, Democratic Commissioner, Chautauqua County.

Caucus Chairman - Anthony Scannapieco, Republican Commissioner, Putnum County and Edward Szczesniak, Democratic Commissioner, Onondaga County.

**Important Dates for 2003
Please put on your calendar.**

**Winter Conference
Rochester, NY- January 27, 28 & 29
Executive Committee Meeting
on January 26th!**

**Summer Conference
Cooperstown, NY- June 23, 24 & 25**

Funny Things Inspectors Do

On Primary Day, in a particular NYS County, two of four inspectors who were working at a local firehouse discovered a long table lying flat on the floor, up against a far wall. Feeling that the table was of some sort of threat to them, they made a decision to pick the table up and put it against the wall. In the process something happened and they ended up falling on top of one another. These two seasoned inspectors fell to the floor with one breaking her wrist and the other hurting her back. Unfortunately the one with the broken wrist ended up having an operation to put a pin in the wrist.

Both are reportedly doing fine and it is our understanding that they will not be attempting this feat again.

Commissioners Introduce New Voting Technology At County Fair

Voters Test New Equipment, Electronic Technology, Improved Accessibility

LITTLE VALLEY, August 12, 2002 - Commissioners Sue A. Fries and Richard O. Stevenson of the Cattaraugus County Board of Elections conducted a demonstration of a new electronic voting machine during the recent 160th annual Cattaraugus County Fair. Volunteer election workers assisted the board with its first public display in the county.

"Sequoia Voting Systems is an elections company that provides a full range of voting systems solutions," Commissioner Stevenson said. "A 100% direct recording, electronic voting machine, the AVC Advantage is easy to use and offers the highest level of accuracy and security." The AVC Advantage voting machine features an electronic full-face ballot touch button system, which has already been introduced in New York State. Voters had the opportunity to test the machine and describe what they did and did not like about it. Election workers also demonstrated its accessibility for seniors and voters with disabilities.

The Governor's bi-partisan Task Force on Election Modernization has recommended the State create an Election Modernization Capital Fund to upgrade New York's voting system. The Capital Fund will provide matching grants for local boards of elections' capital expenditures such as machine purchases. Commissioner Stevenson concluded "While the mechanical lever machines that all Cattaraugus County votes on work fairly well, they need to be upgraded because the technology doesn't provide full accessibility to all voters including persons with disabilities."

"Another day of truth, justice and the American way,"

By Norm Green, Chautauqua County

"Another day of truth, justice and the American way," I yell to my wife Tina as I run out the door. She gives me that roll of her eyes she does when I'm being what she calls "silly."

As the Chautauqua County Democratic election commissioner, I lead tours of Boy Scouts and prospective student interns through the Board of Elections. Quite proudly I inform them that the board is the guardian of Democracy in Chautauqua County. "Without the Board of Elections," I mouth while driving my five-minute commute to the county courthouse, "Without the Board of Elections there wouldn't be Democracy in our county. No elected city mayors, no elected town supervisors, no town justices." Sheriff's Sgt. Vincent Gerace pulls next to my car and waves as he passes. I feel a little embarrassed and hope Vince didn't see me wave my arm in my Democracy pronouncement. I wave a hi back to Vince.

Still juiced, as my daughter Elizabeth would say, I immediately call for a staff meeting as I rush into the elections offices. Judy, David and Roberta come right in. "Where is Sherri?" I question. The three shrug their shoulders. "Sherri?" I bellow out from the stiff chair behind my desk. She's right around the corner and answers, "Yes Norm?" She's on the phone to her mother. "We're having a staff meeting in here," I state. She responds, "Oh, I didn't know you wanted me, too." Damn, of course I wanted her, too. This is the answer she always gives me when I call a staff meeting. "Gosh darn it," I retort to the three punctual Dems. "Ain't government grand." It doesn't get a rise out of them, because they've heard me say it before, and the morning office staff meeting scene is all too familiar to them. A couple of minutes pass and I ask, "Where the hell is Sherri?" "She's getting coffee," Judy tells me.

Not that Judy knows for a fact that Sherri is getting coffee; she just knows Sherri. Moments later Sherri Moore comes around the corner and joins the meeting. I really shouldn't be annoyed, as I'm just having a meeting to unveil my newest brilliant idea. I write this meeting off to a morale-building session. "I've got an idea," I tell the assembled four Democratic staff members.

"We really have an exciting job," I begin. "And I've thought long and hard

about this. I believe that we have the basis... the idea for a situation comedy." Looking around the small office, not even the hint of a smile is on anyone's face. Obviously they don't see the humor of our everyday office life.

"Law and Order had an episode last year about a politician in New York City who fixed an election," Roberta Valentine relates. "I think the politician murdered his wife, too," she adds. Roberta is the mother of a cop. An elected town councilwoman, she is a no-nonsense serious worker at the board. She spends many of her hours assigning new registrants to election districts and capturing new registrant signatures for the Election Day poll books. Serious work for a serious person.

"This is a comedy, Roberta." I respond.

"Did you know that the reason the voter registration cards are called buff cards is because they used to be buff in color," Sherri offers. She is the detail one, a person who has a hundred things going at once. Sherri knows all aspects of the office, and while laid back, is a real office workhorse.

"The point?" I ask rhetorically.

Dr. David Lelsz sits stoically fanning himself with the steno pad he totes around to take notes with. The most intelligent of the office staff and the possessor of a Ph.D., I hired him more than a year ago and shortly after named him deputy election commissioner. I could very well have passed over his application as being over qualified, but jumped at the chance to bring his skills into the office. It was my great decision.

David is a native of Texas, and while he has become a western New Yorker in every way, we still see hints of his southwest persona when the situation fits. "Well I think," David says temporarily using his Texas drawl and rotating his cross-legged cowboy boot in small circles, "We should do an episode about the ongoing conflicts of Pubs vs. Dems in this office. You know, we can be pretty ridiculous sometimes."

"Hey, great idea," Finally someone's juices are flowing, I think to myself.

"Thank you Norman," responds the doctor, as he is affectionately known.

"I've got an idea too," chimes Judy. "It's time that the people in this office start following the election law and do their job the way it should be done." Judy Carison is the traffic cop of the office. Judy makes it

her daily job to ensure we follow all the rules and let us know when the legal deadlines approach. No good office could survive without a Judy Carlson. I shake my head in agreement. However I'm unsure that this idea has much interest to the general public.

A knock on the door startles us. "Come in," I call out. Seasonal part-timer Helen Sischo enters. "Reporting for work, sir," she tells with a mock salute. I urge her to take a seat. Quickly I bring her up to date on the details of the idea of a television comedy series. Helen is a long time union activist always concerned about the rights of workers and the plight of her fellow human beings. Today, however, she rolls her eyes and blows a long deep breath across her face forcing her hair to gently waive in disgust. "Haven't you got something better to do with your time," she questions? "Let's get real here. We've got an election to run!" And with that we all head back to work.

ELECTION COMMISSIONERS' ASSOCIATION
OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK



2002 - 2003

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A Brief History of Voting in New York

By Commissioner Douglas A. Kellner, New York City, Manhattan

Voting was very different when the founding fathers wrote the state and federal constitutions. The evolution is remarkable.

Colonial Era Meetings. In colonial times, eligible voters gathered in town or ward meetings to elect local officials. Methods of voting varied. Voice votes, show of hands or lining up before tellers were all used by local custom. With limited transportation options, many eligible voters could not take the time to make the trip to the town hall to attend the election meeting. In county-wide elections for members of the assembly, town clerks often reported a unit vote regardless of the actual number of voters at the meeting. In other words, if there were fifty men eligible to vote, the town would report all fifty votes for the candidate who received the most votes at the town meeting even if some were absent or voted for other candidates.

1777 Massachusetts Ballot. The first New York State Constitution, adopted in 1777, authorized the Legislature to provide for election of the governor and lieutenant governor by written ballot, the procedure used in colonial Massachusetts elections. By 1800, written ballots were used for the election of all state officials including members of the Legislature. By requiring written ballots, town and ward clerks were required to report the actual votes cast and to retain the ballots for subsequent verification. As a result, it became possible to extend the hours for voting and to open multiple polling stations throughout the town to make it more convenient to vote.

The government did not print ballots, but voters were expected to write out their own choices for each office to be elected. Political parties began printing ballots with their slates listed. Partisans passed out these "tickets" at the entrance to the polls. (This is the origin of today's palm cards.) The pre-printed ticket ballot saved the voter a great deal of time and allowed the voter to choose candidates personally unknown to the voter based on the party identification. Indeed, such tickets were invaluable for voters who had only marginal literacy skills. Partisans printed their tickets in unique colors. By the 1840's the

Tammany ticket was always green. Of course, the use of colored tickets made it impossible to vote by secret ballot.

Counterfeiting the ticket became common. The counterfeit ticket would list a few of the party's prominent candidates. Just enough to fool the unwary with the rest of the names coming from a rival slate. Another drawback was that nominations could be made on the eve of the election depriving the public of any means to become familiar with the candidates.

1880 Australian Ballot. One of the responses to the Tweed scandals of the 1870's was the advocacy by Henry George and other "good government" leaders of the "Australian" ballot. The government printed the ballot in advance of the election with lists of candidates nominated by political parties, and the ballot would be marked in secret by the voter.

Once the government undertook to print the names of candidates on the ballots, it needed a procedure to obtain a listing on the ballot. For the first time, the law recognized political parties, which were allowed to nominate their candidates to be listed on the ballot. In addition, others could obtain a place on the ballot by submitting nominating petitions.

Therefore, it became critical to obtain the party's nomination in order to appear on the ballot. Everyone paid increased attention to the party's procedures for obtaining the nomination. The political party leadership played a critical role in determining the nominations by ruling who would be eligible to vote for the members of the general committee, who in turn would vote to make the nominations. These preliminary procedures leading to the nomination of the party candidates were called the "primaries." The primaries were completely within the control of the political party.

1890 Primary Election Law. Because of abuses perceived in the conduct of party primaries, and the very substantial expense to the political parties, the Legislature adopted the Primary Election Law in 1890. For the first time, the government would conduct the election of party officials at government expense. Voters would indicate their party enrollment at the time the

voter registered each year. Enrolled party members would then be entitled to vote at the official primary election that would select party officials. The party officials elected in the primary would then meet to nominate the party's candidates for the general election. Independent candidates and groups could still obtain a place on the general election ballot by petition. Several "good government" groups (Citizens Union was the most successful) made highly publicized efforts to organize petition drives to place their candidates on the ballot during this era.

1911 Direct Primary Election. As the populist movement swept the country, New York County Democratic Leader Charles Murphy urged the adoption of a direct primary election to nominate the party's candidates for local offices. In 1911, when New York voted to ratify the 17th Amendment to the federal Constitution to provide for the direct election of United States Senators, New York provided for the direct primary election of members of Congress, the legislature and most local offices.

In 1913, the direct primary election was extended to all statewide offices, an experiment that was abolished in 1921 when the convention system was restored for statewide offices and for Supreme Court nominations.

Voting Machines. The first voting machine, invented by Thomas Edison, was used in Lockport, New York in 1892. By the early 1920's voting machines were required in New York City for all general elections and in the 1950's the Legislature required voting machines to be used in all primary elections in New York City. After the 1961 municipal elections, the Legislature required that the ballot layout for New York City primaries be changed to prevent the alignment of slates in the primary election. New York City was required to purchase new voting machines to accommodate the new ballot format.

The evolution continues. It is conceivable that the Legislature will adopt an entirely new system of electronic voting that will forever change how we think about voting.

RECRUITMENT OF INSPECTORS

“CAN’T LIVE WITH THEM, CAN’T LIVE WITHOUT THEM”

By Elizabeth Cree, 2nd Vice President, Tompkins County

Only someone in our profession will truly understand this article. First I must explain that it is very difficult in finding inspectors year after year. Thus, some of the problems we encounter are definitely unusual. This is your assignment year after year:

Mission: Find election inspectors that are enrolled only in the Republican or Democratic Parties.

Recruitment: (The Sales Pitch): We need you to work at the polls as an election inspector. Your duty is to provide your community with fair and accessible elections. It is a truly rewarding experience.

Inspector: Sounds interesting. What is involved?

BOE: (hesitation in voice, but answering truthfully) Well, you need to arrive at the polls at 5:30 a.m. and work until 10:00 p.m. (most of them decline immediately at this point) The pay is below minimum wage. (another 50% decline) You must take a two-hour course and a separate machine course before you work. *(Under no circumstances, do you mention the fact that a test is required at the end of class for certification. Most inspectors feel threatened with the possibility of a test.)

-The pay for this course is between five to ten dollars, no matter the length of time.

Inspector: So this is really a volunteer position.

BOE: But, you are providing a service to your community.

At class we then have to tell them that their responsibilities are to maintain order at the polling sites. Remember the average age of

an inspector is 62 years old in our county. We also tell them how the average voter views them as “the Board of Elections” and that their actions at the polls reflect on our office.

Now it is 4 days before election: We are now replacing everyone who has signed up for election and has either had an illness, a family emergency or some other commitment suddenly occur. We are frantically trying to place brand new inspectors with experienced inspectors. (Number of vacancies and shortness of time makes this nearly impossible.) (New inspector quits after first election because other inspectors are not experienced enough and they do not feel comfortable with the process.)

Other deterrents: rude voters, voters that are not registered, polling place congestion (very few places are available for sites), indoor temperature control, the amount of knowledge needed to actually conduct the election and the occasional inspectors that battle within their group (ie: food, breaks, assignments, personality conflicts, etc.).

As experienced Election Commissioners, which is the following reason given for not working the polls 4 days before the election?

I can’t work Tuesday because:

- (a) I have the flu
- (b) I have a family emergency, and must leave town immediately
- (c) I didn’t realize you needed me
- (d) My dog is due to have puppies that day.

All of these excuses have been given before, but (d) is the answer for this last Primary Election. Only in elections. *Note: Who did not report their election results to us, because they decided to go home to do it at their convenience? Why, of course, it was our veteran inspector of 20 years!

Otsego County Board of Elections applies for a SARA grant

By Sheila Ross & Cindy Jarvis, Otsego County

The Otsego County Board of Elections applied for a SARA grant at the beginning of the year to facilitate the purchase of equipment for full document imaging. Sheila and Cindy, together with the county planning department, put the proposal together in approximately two months’ time. Sheila did the numbers end of it, Cindy the narrative. The planning department did a great job of taking photographs and putting together a “Needs Assessment.”

We wish to thank Richard and Sue from Cattaraugus County for all of their help. Having been through the process, their insight and suggestions were greatly appreciated. Thank you also to Bob Brehm for his helpful suggestions now that we are in the “prep” phase of the conversion. Bob, we are still hoping to get up to Schenectady to see you.

The Challenges Ahead

By Dave Gamache, Chair.

Legislative Committee – Dutches Elections Commissioner

President George W. Bush recently signed into law the “Ney-Dodd-Hoyer-McConnell Help America Vote Act of 2002.” For many, the President’s signature on the bipartisan federal legislation was the culmination of national election reform activity that commenced following the 2000 Presidential Election. However, for elections professionals, state legislators, state elections administrators, County Boards of Elections and many others, this is just the start of a complex, difficult and unprecedented endeavor.

The one comment I consistently hear is “Now what do we do?” The federal legislation commits significant funding to accomplishing the laudable goals of the legislation. It is imperative that all Elections Commissioners understand the tremendous impacts of the legislation and develop an action plan for local enactment.

But we are ahead of ourselves. Before a plan can be developed at the local level, a serious review of the legislation must be commenced. The state legislature must draft and enact appropriate legislation in order to codify the federal requirements into the State Election Law. And the State Board of Elections must enact necessary amendments to its rules and regulations.

As good as the cooperation is between the State Board and the County Boards, this cooperation and mutual assistance must increase even more. The County Boards already face

impossible conditions imposed by strapped County Legislatures. With very few exceptions, County Legislators and County Executives treat their County’s Board of Elections as a stepchild that will “find a way” to accomplish its mission. We all know the “magic” County Boards of Elections accomplish with budgets that are severely underfunded. The increased responsibilities will require significant additional resources from the local county governments – “magic” only goes so far.

With the additional responsibilities being imposed on County Boards of Elections, the County Boards will need to become advocates for each other. Elections Commissioners should consider going to other Counties to assist their fellow Elections Commissioners in their quests for adequate resources. And the Elections Commissioners will need the State Board to advocate on their behalf as the County Boards seek the support of their local County governments.

The Legislative Committee will be spending the coming weeks and months working with the Association to develop and monitor state election law legislation. The Legislative Committee will actively advocate for the adoption of legislation supported by our Association and will actively oppose legislation that is opposed by our Association. The most important thing, at this point, is to make sure that the federal funding finds its way to the

local county boards of election.

All Elections Commissioners face a daunting task: executing the requirements of new federal and state legislation, complying with the rules and regulations of the state board of elections, conducting all special, primary and general elections, successfully managing ballot access for candidates, creating the ballots, registering voters, properly holding the financial filings of candidates and committees, canvassing the votes from the elections, fighting for adequate funding from the state and county governments, and listening to the complaints and demands of elected officials, party officials, candidates and the public.

And don’t hit anyone when they ask you “What do you do the other 364 days a year?”

continued from Front Cover.

She was in Korea and Vietnam. She went where she was sent by her Uncle Sam. She waved from our ships upon the briny foam, and now they’ve about quit waving her back here at home.

In her own good land she’s been abused – She’s been burned, dishonored, denied and refused. And the government for which she stands is scandalized throughout the land.

And she’s getting threadbare and wearing thin, but she’s in good shape for the shape she’s in. ‘Cause she’s been through the fire before and I believe she can take a whole lot more.

So we raise her up every morning, take her down every night. We don’t let her touch the ground and we fold her up right. On second thought I DO like to brag, ‘cause I’m mighty proud of that Ragged Old Flag.



Help America Vote

Robert A. Brehm, Executive Committee Chair

Schenectady: With the November 2002 General Election behind us, our attention turns toward 2003 and implementation of the new “Help America Vote Act”! The federal government’s response to the failed 2000 Presidential S-Election in Florida, the Act will provide payments to states for election administration improvements and replacement of outdated voting machines. Congress now needs to fund this new legislation.

Members of the Election Commissioners’ Association have been working with our colleagues at the New York State Board of Elections and with the New York State Task Force on Election Modernization to help identify programs and services that could be improved here in New York State.

One of the biggest questions facing

New York is what voting machine(s) will be selected that, first, meet the Act’s requirement for accessibility and, second, complies with New York’s requirement for full ballot-face display. In the months to come, our Association will actively join the discussion to select a voting machine system to replace the AVM style currently in use. One of the hot-button issues—changing the full-face ballot requirement—will certainly be included in that discussion.

The AVM style lever voting machine has had a truly great track record of reliable service. When kept in top maintenance, the AVM outdistances many other voting systems. However, drawbacks in the area of accessibility make it necessary now for them to be replaced.

While waiting for New York to adopt a

plan, local boards can start to identify changes that they will need to implement in their respective communities. As an example, if the voting machines are changed, a significant amount of effort will be needed to re-tool and re-train existing election inspectors, coordinators and voting machine technicians. Likewise, we will need to develop new Voter Education programs to ensure that all of the citizens living in our communities know how to use the new voting equipment. Working to find the *re\$ource\$* to carry out these new requirements will certainly challenge each of us.

Many individuals have voiced a strong concern over the amount of change needed to implement *Help America Vote*. By working together, I’m sure that the members of our Association are up to the challenge.

A Message from the Editor

By Carolee Sunderland,
Editor



Let us talk about “ELECTION NIGHT REPORTING” – and if we do, we must include “UNOFFICIAL RESULTS” and “RE-CANVASSING.” They all go hand in hand in regard to elections.

The Internet is a great piece of tech-

nology, at least to most people, for learning within a few hours on election night who is winning at that place in time. However, when “ELECTION NIGHT” numbers appear on the screens for the candidates, their staff members, reporters or just interested individuals to see, they must remember that these are “UNOFFICIAL RESULTS.” This means there can be and probably are some errors in the reporting. These numbers, in most cases, are being reported by humans, written down by humans, inputted by humans. Because of this, for all elections in every year, all Boards of Elections in New York State must complete a “RECANVASS” of all the votes. The public, which includes humans, usually takes this for the final results.

It should be remembered that the “RECANVASS” could and does, in most instances, take days to complete. Then too, Boards must, by New York State Election Law, still wait up until seven days after the election to receive any absentee ballots returned to the Boards that have been post-

marked on time – by midnight the night before the election.

Let us not forget one very important thing, humans are involved throughout this process. Keeping all this in prospective, let me remind everyone that “ELECTION NIGHT RESULTS” translated means *incomplete*. The “UNOFFICIAL RESULTS” translated means *incomplete*. After the “RECANVASSING” is totaled, which includes the timely absentees and valid affidavits and emergencies, the process of proofing the numbers begins. The “ELECTION NIGHT REPORTING” of the “UNOFFICIAL RESULTS” becomes *complete*.

This process is otherwise known to candidates, their staff members, reporters and just interested individuals as the “CERTIFICATION OF THE ELECTION” by the Board of Elections and does not happen overnight or in a few days.

Please humans, remember the above for next year! HAPPY 2003!

“Commissioners, we have a problem.”

By Larry Adamczyk, Erie County

“Commissioners, we have a problem.” These were the words uttered by our Printing Clerks, once they’d finally laid out the ballot for the September 10, 2002 primary election. In a number of cases, there were simply too many candidates running in too many contests for all of them to fit on the machine face; in Erie County, we had hundreds of Democratic County Committee races with nearly two hundred of them in the city of Buffalo alone. The question of the day became how to solve this problem. Doubling up machines would cause massive confusion—with twice the setup time and the space constraints at some of our polling sites, not to mention that we didn’t have enough spare machines for such a huge undertaking anyway. So as a solution, it was quickly ruled out. That left one alternative, paper ballots.

In the past, our board had used paper ballots in a similar situation, but found the canvassing of the ballots to be an incredibly time-consuming chore. There had to be a better way. What we finally decided on was to use our absentee ballot scanning system so that we could optically scan what was deemed the “official” ballots. “If this technique proved to be successful, then the task of canvassing the ballots would take far less time and be much more efficient.

To program the system so that it would perform this function, demanded a thorough knowledge of its software along with an innovative approach to organizing election vote tabulation. This burden fell upon Democratic Deputy Commissioner, Alonzo Thompson. Fortunately, Deputy Commissioner Thompson had already been working with Jim Alexander from Sequoia Pacific on an upgrade for their absentee ballot scanning software that proved to be invaluable in helping him accomplish the task of scanning the official ballots. This upgrade allowed the contest master from the election night module of our voter registration database manager to be loaded directly into the optical scanning system. This new feature eliminated four to five days of data entry that the Sequoia system would have needed to identify the hundreds of contests along with their candidates in order to create its own contest master. This was a great time-saver.

Additionally, Deputy Commissioner Thompson decided to organize the election districts which were using the official ballots, these totaled more than six hundred, into assembly districts. By creating an election for each assembly district, he was able to take advantage of other timesaving features of the scanning software. For example, in the

Sequoia system each ballot and all of the contests that it contains must be defined. This would mean that in the case of the 141st assembly district, all twenty-seven judicial delegate candidates would have to be defined for each ballot. Since each ballot would also contain the democratic county committee race as well, there would have to be one unique ballot for each of the one hundred and sixty-one election districts of this A.D. To complicate things even more, there were three other assembly districts that would have to be handled this way as well. This would take a tremendous amount of data entry. But by creating an election for each A.D., Deputy Commissioner Thompson was able to label the judicial delegate contests as “county wide.” By so doing, all he had to do was to define such a contest and its candidates just once after which it would automatically appear on all one hundred and sixty-one ballot faces.

In all, more than forty thousand ballots were counted using the optical scanning system. Deputy Commissioner Thompson and all of those who worked with him are to be commended for a job well done. They did not have much time, and they were charting new waters, but through hard work and discipline they were able to accomplish their task on behalf of the voters of Erie County.

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