

**REPORT TO
THE CUYAHOGA COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
ON**

POLL WORKER TRAINING

Revised 7/14/06

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is important to note that the problems in our voting system have to do, not only with the technology of the new electronic machines, but also with human systems at all levels: legislated voter registration rules and procedures, voter participation and education, and poll worker training and skill development, among other things. *The purpose of this report is to focus on and highlight ways the training of poll workers can be improved in order to help guarantee safe and secure elections.* This report and its recommendations draw primarily on two sources of data-based information: the observation of poll worker trainings prior to the May 2, 2006 primary election and data from exit polls conducted in the opening and closing hours of the May primary. Specific problems and recommendations begin on page 5.

INTRODUCTION

The adequate training of poll workers in Cuyahoga County is a long-standing, not a new, problem. The experiences of the May 2, 2006 primary election only serve to underscore this problem. While many, and perhaps most, voters had a good experience using the new technology, poll workers, on the other hand, experienced many problems. As the forums held by Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones demonstrated and observation of trainings and the exit poll reveal, there were significant problems in the system – problems that must be solved before November, 2006 if we are to have secure and honest elections. These problems disproportionately affect minorities and especially low-income voters, who move a lot, as the report by the Coalition’s research team, headed by Dr. Norman Robbins, clearly shows.

Poll workers are often political appointees, chosen by political figures, for their loyalty to their party. This is simply how the system works. Others are recruited “at large” from the general population, including a special outreach to recruit high school students. Some poll workers are computer literate; others are less comfortable with computers. While some of the issues raised here may not affect all poll workers, they are indications of serious systemic concerns that need to be addressed.

POLL WORKER TRAININGS

Members of the Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition observed four separate poll-worker training sessions in preparation for the May 2nd election. Observation sites included the Shaker Heights Public Library, Bedford Public Library, Nottingham branch of the Cleveland Public Library and the Sachsenheim Hall. Four of the five Coalition members also met on May 12, 2006 to discuss their experiences. All poll workers were

required to attend a 3 hour training session to learn how to set up the new machines, assist voters in their use, make sure the voters' votes were secure, transmit the voting data accurately, and close down the machines at the end of the voting day. For many would-be poll workers, this was a challenge. Many did not show up on election day, for reasons yet to be analyzed.

Major Observations

1. In all cases, the three-hour training focused on the physical set-up and operation of the new touch-screen equipment that was being used in Ohio for the first time. Time at the end of the training was compressed and rushed, with little instructional time spent on the final steps of changing the paper supply canister, use of the supervisor card, tallying the results, shutting down the machines, or securing the canisters and memory cards.
2. The training was very much "Do this", "now do that", "now do this" through a complicated set of steps for the machine, the memory cards and the procedure. It was simply impossible to learn this set of steps except for simple things (e.g. pulling out the legs of the machine stand), so one would have to watch the DVD or read the manual thoroughly afterward, on their own time and without pay, in order to really understand this.
3. Only two trainings provided ANY information poll workers needed to know when interacting with a voter during what might be called "the intake process." With the emphasis on the machine technology, the other important issues and decisions that poll workers will need to make -- deciding when to ask for ID and the criteria for acceptable ID, when to issue a provisional ballot, VVPAT, how to be sure the provisional ballot form is complete and how to handle the votes of such a voter, how to be sure a voter is directed to the correct precinct, etc. -- were either not mentioned or compressed into the 10-15 minutes not devoted to machine set-up. The trainer sometimes breezed through some of these topics and told the poll workers just to read the manual. As these issues were *major failings* in many precincts in the earlier November 2004 election, there was an expectation by the observers that these problems would have been addressed and corrected in the current election. They were not.
4. Two trainings did instruct voters how to see and review the paper print-out of their choices. In our later experience monitoring the polls on Election Day, however, NO actual polling places we observed either instructed the voters or made the paper roll visible to voters. Voters could hear something scrolling, but never knew they could (and should) see the actual printed record. At one polling place, one voter, who had attended the training, insisted that the technician call headquarters for clarification about this and it was confirmed that voters should be told to review their written results. When this was reported to the Presiding Judge, she agreed to inform and enforce the rule, but later voters at that same polling place reported that this was not done. The Coalition Exit poll confirmed that many voters did not understand either the purpose or how to use the paper trail printout.
5. Because of the amount of material and time pressure, there was no opportunity for "testing" and evaluating the trainees' skills. There was barely enough time to cover the material in the time available.
6. Trainees were overwhelmed with the amount of information presented and were not confident they could perform the duties required. Many trainees were clearly inexperienced with computer technology and overwhelmed by the amount of unfamiliar terms and tasks. As the "no-shows" of Election Day proved, many were unqualified and overwhelmed by the task.

Quotes from poll workers at the observed trainings:

"I'll never remember all of this in 2 weeks."

“We were taught, step by step, how to set up the machine, how to link the machines to each other, how to program the encoder card for the voter, how to vote, how to transmit the data from our machine to the central machine that was collecting data from all of the other machines, and how to shut the machine down at the end of the day. We were told to consult the EDT if we needed to change the tape in the canister.”

“The Election Day Technician had 3 assistants. One was unable to help me and began to thumb through the 71 page manual to try to answer my question. I told him “never mind,” and asked one of the other assistants for help. I got the help I needed, and didn’t ask the first person any more questions.”

“We were all given a VHS review tape or a DVD, and urged to review it before Election Day. We were also told that the video differed from what we were taught in class in several places and that when the video said Press “No” we should press “Yes” instead. This was said so fast that it was impossible to write it down without missing what came next. We were also told to write down some machine ID number “someplace.” Anyplace. Just somewhere. We were never told what to do with that number.”

“The instructor walked us through all of the steps and, most of the time, waited till everyone had completed each step before moving on. However, as the amount of time left to complete everything became shorter, the instructor began to rush more.”

“Election day was going to be a very long day, for such a little bit of money.”

One election day technician who was instructing poll workers said, *“I thought of bringing an extension cord ‘just in case.’ I wondered at the time whether someone had thought of doing this, on their own, at each polling location.”*

Additional Observations

- The Booth Official Training Manual has a number of factual and typographical errors. Obviously, it was not tested and proof-read adequately.
- While the handbook did provide detailed instructions (though not always accurate), we observed that many of the trainees were probably not accustomed to studying and learning from printed texts.
- It was not uncommon for some people to repeatedly ask the same questions and express discomfort with their inability to grasp the procedures. Trainers would patiently demonstrate the correct procedure, but not wait to see the person him/herself actually perform the procedure.
- Trainees expressed doubts that either the video/DVD or instruction book would be useful in teaching them or making them feel comfortable in their obligations. A lack of confidence in being able to grasp skills from a written text was fairly common; others voiced resentment about needing to put in additional, unpaid time to learn the skills they expected to be taught.
- The trainers also assumed everyone had access to a VCR or DVD player.
- In some cases, even the “professional” technician was unable to answer questions and had to search through the manual for answers. Technicians freely admitted the lack of planning, skilled personnel, and short timeframes to program the machines at the warehouse immediately before the election.

- E-mails were sent to local colleges *the night before the election* begging for student assistance.
- There was no discussion of the potential for electronic failures or contingency plan such as the provision of paper ballots to be used in emergency conditions or how to secure any paper ballots used. While one would like to think everything would run smoothly the first time (or any time), the lack of alternate means seemed unreasonably optimistic.
- Little or no attention was given to the extreme importance and sensitivity of the Supervisor's card or the critical need to know where all the memory cards were.

EXIT POLL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition completed exit surveys of 1553 voters at 49 polling places in Cuyahoga County on May 2, 2006, either from 6:30-9:30 a.m. or from 4:30-7:30 p.m. Volunteers were randomly assigned either to "problem" polling places with known reported problems in 2004, or to "random" polling places chosen at random across the county. Problem polling places were of lower income and higher percent African American population than the random places. (See the full report of methodology, findings, and recommendations from the Voter Coalition for improved Poll Worker training, on pages 15-16 of the report to the Election Panel, June 9, 2006, at: http://urban.csuohio.edu/cei/GCVC_Report_to_Election_Comm_revised.doc)

Major Findings:

1. Problems were probably due to perpetuation of poorly-trained poll-workers from one election to the next. Problem polling places (those with reported problems in 2004) experienced three times as many problems on May 2 2006 compared to Random polling places, even though electronic voting machines were not at issue in 2004. When a.m. results of both Problem and Random polling places were pooled, the incidence of problems was clearly related to low income in the neighborhoods of these polling places. Problem polling place neighborhoods also had a significantly higher percentage of African Americans. Yet in the afternoon, the percent of problems reported by voters was statistically the same in Problem and Random polling places, so that the demographic characteristics of the voters did not necessarily determine the percent of problems: rather these problems were probably due to perpetuation of poorly-trained poll-workers from one election to the next – an unacceptable inequitable situation.
2. In the morning of May 2, a large percentage of voters surveyed (23% at Problem polls, 8% at Random polls) reported problems voting with the new machines, in part, because they did not function properly, and, in part, from lack of adequate poll worker guidance. Later in the day, only 4% of voters at Problem polls and 2% of voters at Random polls reported problems voting, presumably because technical problems were fixed and because poll workers had received "on the job training" during the day.
3. Our results suggest that other poll worker inadequacies, such as excess issuing of provisional ballots or requests for ID's, occur at the same problem polling places where voters had problems with the new electronic machines.
4. Many voters were uninformed as to the operation and significance of the printed paper trail.

5. Some of the groups criticized poll workers for being disorganized, while others noted that many had supplied assistance. These comments probably resulted from exposure to a mixture of well- and poorly-trained poll workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLL WORKER TRAINING

PROBLEM 1: Poll workers should be responsible only for intake procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1-1 Address the long-term impact of an aging population of poll workers; the need for a combination of technical, interpersonal, and logistical skills; long work shifts; minimal pay and minimal education; and political patronage among the pool of election day workers.
- 1-2 Separate and clarify responsibilities between poll workers, mechanical set-up, and technical roles.
- 1-3 Training must include all aspects of voting – not simply use of the new electronic machines. This includes: signing in voters, ID requirements, provisional ballots, absentee ballots, candidate offices and issues on the ballot in any given election, determining correct voting location, use of the equipment, etc.
- 1-4 Identify essential machine-related issues such as programming of the voter cards, insertion into the machines, and procedure to check the paper trail and train for these selected mechanical topics only.
- 1-5 Assign one person to an exclusive role to be sure that everyone who exits the polls has turned in their memory card.
- 1-6 All other specialized technical work related to setting up, programming, replacing paper rolls, taking down the machines and trouble-shooting should be assigned to well-trained, experienced technical experts.

PROBLEM 2: Poll workers are not required to demonstrate appropriate skill levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2-1 More time must be allocated for testing and hands-on performance during the training. It is not enough to simply watch someone else do the steps: each poll worker must go through the process by themselves under supervision.
- 2-2 All potential poll workers should be required, in addition to current mandatory training, to pass a written test and hands-on demonstration to demonstrate they have mastered the required steps.
- 2-3 If they do not pass the test, they should be given an opportunity to repeat the training and test. If they still do not pass the test, they should not be hired.

2-4 Since more problems were experienced in low-income areas, testing of poll workers should begin in low-income and high percent African American communities, so that high quality replacements can be made as necessary.

2-5 Minimize the negative consequences of political patronage as a “perk” to working on the polls.

PROBLEM 3: Secure an adequate number of poll workers

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3-1 Training sessions should be offered year-round to ensure an adequate supply of skilled people.

3-2 Paid refresher courses must be required shortly before any given election.

3-3 Pay must be increased to at least the level of the Cleveland living wage, and should be adjusted annually for inflation, as is the living wage.

3-4 There should be two shifts of poll workers, eliminating an impossibly long work day, with a one hour cross-over period so that the second shift is fully aware of any special problems or arrangements encountered by the first shift.

3-5 There must be an experienced technical expert at every polling place to solve problems, with immediate phone access to other, even-more experienced technical experts, in case of unexpected problems.

3-6 Teams of poll workers must be assembled, combining those who are computer comfortable with those who are less so, as well as requiring mixed party affiliation, as is presently done, until a certain ‘learning curve’ with the new technology has been achieved.

PROBLEM 4: Poll workers direct voter to wrong precinct or do not check voter’s provisional ballot form for trivial errors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

4-1 More preventive training of poll workers on these problems.

4-2 Make poll workers responsible for voter omissions.

4-3 When a provisional ballot is offered, also provide graphic, low-literacy sensitive flyer explaining how to avoid most common voter errors.

4-4 Have an on-line polling-place finder for registered voters, with advice to voters who have changed address and have not filed a change-of-address form (and therefore will have to vote a provisional ballot from their new correct polling place)

4-5 Because of new and very complex HB3 rules on the use of provisional ballots, give MANDATORY extra training on situations requiring and not requiring provisional ballots to BOE staff, especially those who train or supervise poll workers or who answer inquiries from the public, in addition to all presiding judges (see 4-6 and Problem 6, Recommendation 6-1).

- 4-6 Provide a “criteria checklist” to poll workers during training and on election day so they can quickly and accurately determine whether an individual is eligible to vote a regular ballot, or must use a provisional ballot, and any additional conditions which must be met. If a provisional ballot is anticipated, the voter should be referred to the presiding judge, who will review the criteria according to approved, legal, written guidelines, explain the reasons to the voter, and assist with all paper work required for casting a ballot.

PROBLEM 5: Long lines, with about 15,500 voters denied their vote occurred in 2004. (See Voter Coalition report to Election Reform Panel).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 5-1 Identify problem polling places (long lines in 2004, large number of difficulties in 2004 and primary 2006, large number of poll worker problem reports) and assign more poll workers than the usual number and specifically, highly trained poll workers, to those polling places.
- 5-2 Conduct focus groups with poll workers at polling places which had long lines in 2004, to determine what factors caused the most delay.
- 5-3 Provide extra training on poll worker tasks that could delay voters: finding correct precinct, checking ID, issuing provisional ballots, getting rapid assistance if voting machines malfunction.

PROBLEM 6: Poll workers may not fully understand the acceptable ID's or the most usable alternatives for voters who come without acceptable ID, namely, a provisional ballot in which they supply date of birth and the last 4 digits of their social security number (R.C. 3505.18 (A)(2) or that failing, sign an affirmation they are a registered voter (R.C. 3505.18 (A)(4).

RECOMMENDATION:

- 6-1 Provide accurate, detailed information in a step-by-step, easy-to-follow procedure. See also Recommendations 4-5 and 4-6.

PROBLEM 7: Continuing problems in specific localities

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 7-1 Based on past history and the findings of the exit poll survey, low-income (regardless of racial status) polling places must be targeted with highly trained technicians and poll workers assigned to such polling places as a priority of the BOE. *Because of the huge disparity in problems, this targeting must begin immediately, so it is in place for the November 2006 elections.*
- 7-2 Data identifying specific problem locations may be found in the report of Election Science Institute (ESI), if that organization is asked to present data comparing performance between polling places, as was done in the Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition Exit Poll.
- 7-3 Henceforth, “problem polling places” should be designated on the basis of problematic data (e.g. bad reconciliations, loss of memory cards, voting machine issues, citizen surveys or complaints, or long lines)

- 7-4 In order to avoid repetition of poll worker problems that appear to occur regularly at certain polling places, such problem polling places should be assigned either specially trained or extra highly qualified poll workers.
- 7-5 The BOE should institute a quantitative accounting system with each election to track whether improved technician and poll worker targeting and training has eliminated income or racial disparities between polling places. Factors such as average voter waiting time, number of voters turned away (rather than offered a provisional ballot) for lack of proper ID, average usage time of voting machines, etc. could be used as indicators.

PROBLEM 8: Training materials are not pre-tested for accuracy and effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 8-1 Both the new training procedures and the revised training manual should be pre-tested and discussed afterwards by representative “focus” groups of poll workers before the final version is adopted. The absence of such pre-testing could explain a great deal of poll worker confusion in the past.
- 8-2 Groups such as The Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition should be consulted during the formulation of revised poll worker administration and training, so that citizen suggestions and revisions are incorporated before final procedures are established.

Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition

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July 17, 2006

Michael Vu, Director
Cuyahoga County Board of Elections
2925 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115-2497

Dear Director Vu,

As Co-Conveners of the Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition, we are sending you a report of our summarized observations, data and recommendations for improving future poll worker trainings and usage. Many people have been involved in the data collection and presentation of this report and we hope that it is useful to you.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Samples
Co-Convener

Roslyn Talerico
Co-Convener

cc: Commissioners Dimora, Hagan, and Jones