

News Release

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Partisan Politics at Elections Board Risks Rights of Voters Says Civics

Governor Should Take Action to Ensure Best Voting System for New York

As the State Board of Elections deadlocked over the selection of new voting machines a coalition of civic groups called on the Governor and other statewide officials to end the partisan bickering at the Board and adopt a uniform optical scan voting system across the state.

“It’s time for our statewide officials to put a stop to this inane behavior,” said Neal Rosenstein of the New York Public Interest Research Group. “The Governor and Comptroller should refuse to fund machines that will disenfranchise voters and insist on a single statewide optical scan system to ensure equal treatment of voters across the state. The Attorney General should issue an opinion that counties purchasing touch screens will not enjoy the state’s support if they face legal action.”

The groups noted that the Board’s Republicans are insisting that computerized touch screen machines be offered for counties to purchase. However, the touch screens marketed in New York register undervotes – lost votes – at a rate that greatly exceeds that of optical scan systems.

"It's unconscionable and legally questionable for the Board of Elections to consider approving a voting system that is shown to cause more voters to fail to vote on races," said Larry Norden of the Brennan Center for Justice. He also noted that the touch screen machines being considered will make it impossible for many voters with disabilities to independently verify their votes, as required by state and federal law.

The groups called for the introduction of a statewide optical scan voting system with accessible ballot marking devices. “This proven technology is more open, transparent, auditable and secure than touch screens. What’s more, the optical scan systems being considered in New York also have far fewer lost votes than their touch screen counterparts,” said Bo Lipari of New Yorkers for Verified Voting.

Adding to the intrigue, today’s meeting also saw partisan maneuvering with the replacement of the Board’s Republican Co-Executive Director Peter Kosinski by Todd Valentine in a decision by Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno. The meeting began at 10 am and ended at 6 pm without any decision being made.

“This is no way to make decisions so central to our democracy,” said Barbara Bartoletti of the League of Women Voters of New York State. She noted that one of the Republican Commissioners mysteriously disappeared after lunch in what appeared to be an attempt to avoid fulfilling the Board’s quorum requirement and avoid a vote. The Board is expected to meet again tomorrow.

New York is in for tumultuous changes in the way we vote over the next two years. Federal law and a recent court decision have mandated that new accessible voting technologies must be introduced at poll sites for this fall’s elections and that our lever machines must be replaced in 2009. Counties must choose these new systems by February 8th according to a court-imposed timeline.