



NEWS RELEASE

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NYPIRG Calls on Governor-elect Spitzer to Support Replacing Lever Voting Machines with Optical Scan System

Paper Ballots Better than Storing Votes on Computer Chip says NYPIRG

Albany, NY - As one-third of US voters used new electronic voting machines for the first time and precincts across the country faced Election Day glitches, one of New York's leading civic organizations called for Governor-Elect Eliot Spitzer to support the replacement of the state's lever voting machines with an Optical Scan system. The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) noted that optical scan systems are more secure, enjoy greater public confidence and have lower rates of lost votes than computerized voting machines.

"Governor-elect Spitzer should make it clear the state won't waste any money on highly suspect computerized voting machines," said Neal Rosenstein of NYPIRG. "Optical scan is a more reliable technology that enhances open and transparent elections unlike computerized machines that count and store votes on some microchip," he added.

As a candidate, Spitzer voiced some support for optical scan. NYPIRG called on the Governor-elect to follow through by proposing legislation that would endorse optical scan as the state's sole choice for replacing lever machines and to mandate poll site procedures that would ensure maximum independence for voters with disabilities using optical scan systems. Recent experience with computerized voting machines in this year's elections highlighted problems with the technology across the country, including in Florida, Indiana, Ohio and Virginia.

New York's decades old 20,000 lever machines are an endangered species. The 2002 federal Help America Vote Act requires they be replaced and provides New York with at least \$140 million for that purpose. However, additional state funds may be required to buy new systems across the entire state. County boards of elections are expected to make purchase decisions for voting systems early next year.

While acknowledging that none of the new voting systems are perfect, NYPIRG noted additional advantages to optical scan systems, including the reduced role of private for-profit vendors in the running and counting of elections and their ease of use.

NYPIRG called for an optical scan system that gives each voter the choice of filling out their ballot by hand or utilizing a ballot marker at their own Election District (ED) table. Ballot markers would work like an ATM and offer a wide range of accessibility features for voters with disabilities, but only print out a ballot, and not count votes. Completed ballots would then be tallied by a scanner or counted by hand. The group noted that voters with disabilities, or who are entitled to have their ballot in an alternative language, shouldn't be made to stand on a separate line for a single ballot marker at the site or vote differently than other voters. NYPIRG called for a one to one replacement of lever machines with the new systems.