

EYE ON ELECTIONS



Mississippi Secretary of State's Office

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VOTING MACHINE PROCUREMENT UPDATE

Seventy-seven (77) of Mississippi's eighty-two (82) counties will have uniform voting machines next year. Desoto, Hinds, Lee, Rankin and Yalobusha county decided to opt out of the state plan.

"I am delighted that the vast majority of our counties have decided to take the new voting machines. They will produce the most accurate election results in the history of Mississippi." Clark said.

On July 6th, Secretary of State Eric Clark introduced new touch-screen voting machines that most Mississippians will use to cast ballots beginning in 2006.

"These voting machines will greatly improve the accuracy and integrity of every election in Mississippi," Clark said. "They are easy to use and are secure. Of all the machines we studied, they were the most 'user-friendly' and came at the lowest price. This purchase is another major step in making historic improvements to the elections process in our state."

Diebold Election Systems, which is providing statewide voting machines in Georgia, Maryland, Alaska, and Utah, was selected by a committee led by Clark involving local election officials and representatives of the

Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services (ITS). The selection was made after an extensive process that lasted nearly six months

The ITS Board unanimously approved the purchase, calling it one of the most thorough and careful in recent years. The cost of 5,164 new machines for the state is \$15 million and includes training, maintenance, voter education, and technical support for the next five years. \$15 million received in federal and state funds provided from the "Help America Vote Act" will be used to pay for the machines. In addition, voter verified paper trail units will be purchased for all machines. (See page 2).

Under federal law, all central scanner machines, lever machines, and punch-card machines must be replaced by January 1, 2006. More than 75 counties will be required by federal law to change to new, more accurate machines by that deadline. In addition, at least one device that is fully accessible to the disabled must be in every polling place. The touch-screen machines are the most disabled-accessible machines available.

The Secretary of State's Office will conduct extensive voter education efforts before

the machines are used in the June 2006 primary election. Secretary of State staff will travel to the 77 counties in the coming months to work with local officials and give voters the opportunity to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the new machines.

"By making a single, state-wide purchase, we get the best price per machine: what I call the 'Wal-Mart effect' of buying in bulk," Clark said. "A more unified system will also improve accuracy, reduce voter confusion, and simplify training for election workers. In addition, linking these machines to our new statewide voter registration system will allow our office to post unofficial statewide election returns on our website on election night."

Diebold's touch-screen machines (AccuVote-TSX) have been tested and certified by independent testing authorities, and approved by the National Association of State Election Directors. The machines meet all current standards for accuracy and security set by the Federal Election Commission and the Federal Election Assistance Commission.

Mississippi is moving forward with more election reforms under HAVA. If you have any questions about the voting machine project please contact our office at 800-829-6786.

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Photos provided by Diebold

STATE BUYS VOTER-VERIFIED PAPER AUDIT TRAIL

Secretary of State Eric Clark has signed an agreement with Diebold Election Systems to allow every voter to see a printed paper ballot on touch-screen machines provided by the state beginning in 2006.

“All Mississippians must have confidence that their votes are accurately counted,” Clark said. “These printers will give voters an additional level of comfort as they use the new, more accurate touch-screen machines.” Clark said.

A “voter-verified paper audit trail” allows a voter to see his or her vote as it is being cast. The paper ballot is displayed

with the voter’s choices printed on it. After a vote is cast, the printed ballot scrolls into a secure, locked canister kept inside the machine. In addition, the machine stores a photographic image of every ballot cast that can also be printed. The paper ballots may be used in the event of a recount, or to assure any citizen that all votes were accurately counted.

Mississippi contracted with Diebold in June to purchase up to 5,164 voting machines using \$15 million in federal and state funds provided under the federal “Help America Vote Act.” The initial contract specified a price of not more than \$425 to purchase and install external printers, or \$2.2 million for all

5,164 machines. Clark persuaded Diebold to drop the price in half to \$212.50 per printer, or \$1.1 million for 5,164 machines. This made it possible for Clark to make the purchase now with existing funds.

Mississippi law and federal law do not require a voter-verified paper trail for voting machines. It is required in 25 states, and the Federal Election Assistance Commission is expected to set guidelines January 2006, to be used by independent testing authorities in evaluating the devices. Mississippi printers will be required to meet all federal standards.

MISSISSIPPI ELECTION ACTION PLAN

Election day safety and security have a new meaning in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and recent natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. State and local election officials need to be prepared in the face of an emergency on or before Election Day.

We must strengthen security and take preventive action in order to address emergency situations by utilizing existing resources and programs; as well as continue to develop new and improved resour-



ces and programs to protect the integrity of the election process. Protection of human life must always be the primary goal on Election Day as we face terrorist threats and natural disasters.

The Secretary of State’s Office has compiled the “Mississippi Election Action Plan (MEAP). The plan includes three phases of emergency management. The written plan and video are available on our website at www.sos.state.ms.us/elections. Please call our office if you have any questions or would like additional information on the plan at 800-829-6786.

IMPORTANT DATES

NOVEMBER

8th REGULAR SPECIAL ELECTION DAY: County vacancies, county district, and district attorney elective offices; and school board trustee elections in some counties. (*Miss. Code Ann. § 23-15-833*)

22nd RUNOFF ELECTION: County vacancies, county district, and district attorney elective offices; and school board trustee elections in some counties. (*Miss. Code Ann. § 23-15-833*)



STATEWIDE ELECTIONS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SEMS)

The SEMS Project Team continues to make significant progress on the State-wide Elections Management System. The rollout phase is in progress and more than 30 counties are currently part of the SEMS System. With the exception of the coastal counties affected by Hurricane Katrina, all counties will be using SEMS by December 20, 2005.

The pilot counties conducted data migration reviews and worked on a mock election test in August. The project team continues to be indebted to the pilot county Circuit Clerks, Election Commissioners and staff that are assisting with the implementation. The pilot counties include Lauderdale, Harrison, Hinds, Holmes, Madison, Marshall, Oktibbeha, Pike, Sunflower, Tishomingo and Tunica. Their hard work and dedication to this process is helping to ensure that we de-

liver a system to exceed the needs and expectations of the county users. Thanks again to these counties!

The phased county schedule is listed below. We are currently working on Phase III implementation. Due to special elections, many counties have been moved to a fourth phase called special elections.

For those of you who have not gone through the implementation yet, the process is:

- Counties receive notifications of hardware delivery;
- If applicable, communications lines are installed;

- Training is scheduled;
- County reviews final data migration notice; and
- Counties go live on SEMS.

Due to Katrina, we are working with Jackson and Hancock counties to reschedule their implementations as soon as they are ready. Harrison county was a pilot site and is already live on the SEMS system. Please continue to remember these counties as they work to recover from this disaster.

Thank you for your continued support of the SEMS Project. If you have any questions on this project, please contact Madalan Lennep at 800-829-6786.

Pilot	Phase I July - Aug	Phase II Aug - Sept	Phase III Sept - Oct	Special Elections
Harrison	Bolivar	Alcorn	Chickasaw	Adams
Hinds	Carroll	Attala	Choctaw	Amite
Holmes	Claiborne	Benton	Coahoma	Clay
Lauderdale	Clarke	Calhoun	DeSoto	Franklin
Madison	Covington	Copiah	Lafayette	George
Marshall	Humphreys	Forrest	Neshoba	Greene
Oktibbeha	Jefferson	Grenada	Noxubee	Hancock
Pike	Panola	Issaquena	Perry	Jackson
Sunflower	Simpson	Itawamba	Pontotoc	Jasper
Tishomingo	Tallahatchie	Lee	Prentiss	Jefferson Davis
Tunica	Warren	Leflore	Tate	Jones
	Washington	Lincoln	Wayne	Kemper
		Lowndes	Winston	Lamar
		Marion	Yalobusha	Lawrence
		Montgomery		Leake
		Scott		Monroe
		Sharkey		Newton
		Smith		Pearl River
		Stone		Quitman
		Walthall		Rankin
		Yazoo		Tippah
				Union
				Webster
				Wilkinson

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Welcome to *Eye on Elections*, a publication of the Secretary of State's Office. This quarterly newsletter focuses on Mississippi election issues. This newsletter is also available on our website at www.sos.state.ms.us/elections/elections.asp.

We intend to provide a newsletter that meets your needs and we encourage your comments. To make suggestions or for additional information, please call, write, fax, or email us. We hope you find this newsletter useful. Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

ERIC CLARK
Secretary of State

A WORD FROM THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ELECTIONS

Great Changes In The Elections Division

The Elections Division has recently made some great changes. The division has a new Elections Training and Education unit. The unit is under the direction of Senior Attorney Linda Dixon Rigsby. The unit will focus on election officials' training and voter education/outreach.

The Secretary of State's Office will work with local election officials and representatives of advocacy and interest groups to develop a comprehensive, statewide voter outreach program. The goal of the voter outreach program is to reach all voting Mississippians and ensure they are comfortable and prepared to use new touchscreen voting machines by the June 2006 Primary Election and the November 2006 General Election.

Turn-out in elections is often below fifty percent (50%) of eligible voters. The program hopes to increase voter turnout. A state level voter education program will facilitate statewide educational and training projects, which will include regional and local voter education activities.

The key to success of the new voting machine program is voter education. Voter education will acquaint citizens with new equipment before they arrive at the precinct to vote. The Secretary of State's Office will travel the state conducting voting machine demonstrations.

If you have any requests or know of any events that would benefit from vot-

ing machine demonstrations, please contact the Training and Education unit at 800-829-6786. The Elections Division also has a new Director of Elections Administration, Willie Allen. Mr. Allen is a native of Tupelo, Mississippi. He replaced Michael Boyd and will be working diligently to ensure that our office continues to meet the needs of the people. Mr. Allen is a Mississippi College Law School graduate and is a member of the Mississippi State Bar Association.

We are very excited about these great changes and look forward to continuing to be the "most user-friendly agency in state government."

Jay Eads

DID YOU KNOW?

☛ Electronic voting is 100% confidential. Each unit has a separate privacy enclosure. All information related to the candidate selection is encrypted and immediately randomized as a vote is cast and stored in three redundant locations.

☛ The first regular election using touchscreen machines will be in June 2006.

☛ Optical scan ballots will continue to be used for absentee votes and an optical scan reader will count the absentee votes and include them in the final election tally.

☛ It is a felony to intimidate voters. Persons who violate the statute are subject to arrest. (Miss. Code Ann. § 97-13-21)

☛ A General Election may be dispensed with only if there are candidates unopposed for each office on the general election ballot. (Miss. Code Ann. § 23-15-361(6))

☛ Military and overseas voters who are on federal orders and are out of the country may vote by email/fax through uocava@sos.state.ms.us. Call us to help these citizens exercise their rights to vote.