

Please see below my statement to Secretary of State Debra Bowen, re: her hearing on 2/8/2010 on the Future of Voting in California: the People, the Equipment, the Costs.

Best regards,

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Thanks to Secretary of State Debra Bowen for holding this hearing on the future of voting in California: the people, the equipment, the costs.

And thanks to Secretary Bowen for the good work she has done to investigate and publicize the problems inherent in some of the proprietary electronic systems and to restrict use of some of the most egregious.

Much of the equipment used by California's counties to count our ballots is proprietary. The process, therefore, is not transparent. Recounts require prohibitive costs to be borne by candidates or citizen groups; few will be willing to risk mortgaging their home (as Jerry McNerney did) in order to secure the large amount of money required in a short amount of time. Our elections are not audited. The 1% manual tally is done with a wide range of uneven quality; even at best, the 1% manual tally does not audit the election results but serves only as a spot check of a few precincts with no provisions for extending the tally when anomalies are found.

In this time of tight budgets, one county in California has taken a big step to make the vote count more transparent and potentially to make it possible for any person who has the energy and interest to conduct an initial hand count. Humboldt County's County Clerk/ Recorder/Registrar of Voters Carolyn Crnich and a group of citizen volunteers worked together as the Humboldt Election Transparency Project to scan all the ballots and post their images on a publicly available website. The Transparency Project conducted its own analysis, which found an error in the reported election results which had been produced by Humboldt's electronic counting technology.

Carolyn Crnich and Humboldt County prove that even in these tight budget times, where there's a will, there's a way. The Transparency Project involved purchase of a relatively low cost off-the-shelf scanner and the work of volunteer programmers, who have made their software freely available to anyone who wants to use it.

Contrary to the myth of huge costs involved in any efforts to monitor our elections, the Humboldt Election Transparency Project shows that transparency is possible and affordable within current budgets. What a boon to the candidate who is concerned about the election in his/her district but who would be required to pay huge costs up front for a recount--costs which are inflated by the need first to sort out the relatively small number of ballots in his district. With the Transparency Project, the candidate's supporters could go on line and analyze the votes from the relevant district and determine whether or not it would be worth the monetary risk to finance an official recount.

People who trust only hand counts could download the ballot images and hand count them, comparing their results with the electronic results that had been announced. People who have written their own programs to analyze the vote count could come to their own conclusions and report any anomalies to the county or state officials.

I hope steps will be taken to promote adoption of Transparency Projects in all counties in California. I hope other county Clerks/ Registrars will contact Humboldt County's people to learn how to apply the work they have done and are willing to share. I hope the Secretary of State will do whatever she can to encourage cooperation in promoting transparency in a timely fashion, so that anomalies can be found before the results are certified and people are sworn into office who may not have been elected by the voters.

Certainly the Transparency Project is not a substitute for real audits of our elections. We need routine audits of all steps of the election process, statistically based hand counts of each race with escalations of the number of ballots hand counted when anomalies are found. All this needs to be done in a timely fashion in order to assure that any mistakes are corrected before a final result is certified and people sworn in to office.

Until we have timely audits of our elections, the Humboldt Election Transparency Project demonstrates that transparency is possible and affordable now. I congratulate and thank Carolyn Crnich and the citizen volunteers of Humboldt County and look forward to a spread of election transparency throughout the state.