

Proposing a LWVSC Task Force  
to consider alternatives to our current voting system

At the September 22, 2010, meeting of the State Election Commission, Executive Director Marci Andino was asked about the possibility of adding voter-verified paper audit trails to our current voting machines. She replied "spending money to update a system that is **nearing the end of its life cycle** would not be fiscally responsible."

One of the LWVSC's current voter access action priorities is ensuring that all voters can cast ballots and have their votes counted accurately. Reports from the November 2010 election indicate problems with the voting technology in Colleton County (more votes than voters) and Lancaster County (totals done manually). These problems were attributed to human error, but the Colleton County problem resulted in incorrect total votes being certified. Such problems may cause the State Election Commission to consider a replacement technology sooner than anticipated.

What technology should replace the iVotronics? LWVSC does not have a definitive answer.

The LWVUS position supports only voting systems that are designed so that:

- they employ a voter-verified paper ballot or other paper record, said paper being the official record of the voter's intent; and
- the voter can verify, either by eye or with the aid of suitable devices for those who have impaired vision, that the paper ballot/record accurately reflects his or her intent; and
- such verification takes place while the voter is still in the process of voting; and
- the paper ballot/record is used for audits and recounts; and
- the vote totals can be verified by an independent hand count of the paper ballot/record; and
- routine audits of the paper ballot/record in randomly selected precincts can be conducted in every election, and the results published by the jurisdiction.

Transparency of the election process has been added to these requirements. A two-year study by LWVSC (2005-2007) concluded that our current voting machines fail to meet LWVUS criteria. Positions adopted as a result of this study are the basis for efforts to educate the public, with our goal being replacement of the current system by a system that allows votes to be meaningfully recounted and audited. The positions reached by LWVUS and LWVSC specify conditions that must be met, but do not specify technologies that meet these specifications. Among currently available election technologies that do meet LWV criteria are: vote-by-mail (VBM); paper ballots with precinct-based scanners; and paper ballots with centrally located scanners (such as at county election headquarters).

South Carolina currently makes limited use of VBM (the absentee ballot). The state of New York uses paper ballots with optical scan at the precinct to detect overvotes. Oregon uses VBM. Reports from a task force would include:

- A survey of voting technologies currently available
- Benefits/deficiencies of each technology
- Cost comparisons of technologies
- Any other information the task force considers helpful

Other state leagues and computer scientists have studied alternative voting technologies, so a great deal of information is available. Specifications for adoption of a task force:

- Time frame of two years (Convention 2011 through the biennium);
- Membership will consist of all league members wishing to participate;
- Will communicate primarily by email;
- Will examine the existing literature and periodically share collected information with the membership of LWVSC, utilizing the *SC Voter* and statewide meetings such as League Leaders' Day and State Council;
- Will report to the State Board at least quarterly; and
- May receive additional instructions from the State Board.

*Submitted by Duncan Buell and Eleanor Hare*