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Voters assured of count remedy

By [Kimberly Miller](#)

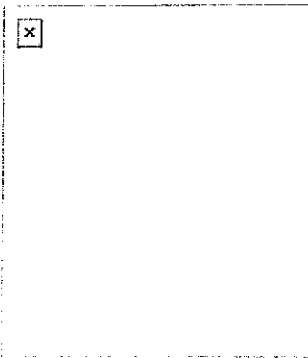
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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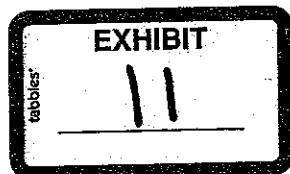
Palm Beach County Elections Supervisor Arthur Anderson pledged Thursday to deliver quicker vote results and a running tally of precinct reports in November's general election.

The promise came after Anderson endured two days of criticism over his failure to list precinct totals as Tuesday's votes were counted. The omission, which Anderson attributed Thursday to a computer glitch, blocked candidates and the public from tracking the progress of races.

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Other counties that use the same voting machines and computer software, including Indian River and Hillsborough, were able to report precinct numbers on election night. Anderson said his office is talking with those counties to find out how they did it.

The primary was Anderson's first countywide election. He acknowledged a need to streamline the delivery of results before Nov. 7.


"We want to give a more timely progress report throughout the day for the purposes of people watching their campaign," said Anderson, whose office began using new computer software three months ago. "We are working through the remedies and we feel confident it won't be a problem in the future."

The county's canvassing board finished reviewing provisional ballots Thursday, and Anderson expected precinct-by-precinct breakdowns to be on his Web site late Thursday or early this morning. The 16,700 absentee ballots were not included in the Web site totals until Wednesday afternoon.

That turnaround wasn't good enough for some candidates.

"I would like to express my concern as to how the delay in



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getting that information will have a critical effect upon each of the campaigns and how they proceed with their campaigns for the general election," state Rep. Susan Bucher, D-West Palm Beach, said in a letter to Anderson

"In addition, each of the communities that worked so hard to make sure that their voters came to vote... deserve to evaluate the results that pertain to their community so they may be able to plan how to generate additional voters for the general election."

Anderson said a new law requiring each absentee ballot to be counted in the precinct in which the voter lives and new computer software complicated the release of results. Also, the day his office was scheduled to work on the absentee ballot issue, it had to close because of Tropical Storm Ernesto, he said.

"The interruption of the storm didn't help us any," Anderson said

On election night, no one seemed to have a clear answer as to why precinct numbers weren't being reported.

Anderson said Wednesday it would have been misleading to report precinct numbers without the absentee ballots counted. But Indian River and Hillsborough counties, which use the same Sequoia voting machines and SOE software, were able to input their absentee ballots and provide the number of precincts reporting as results came in Tuesday night.

Kay Clem, supervisor of elections for Indian River County, said she understood Anderson's reluctance to post precinct data without the absentee ballots. Although it was "laborious" to process the absentee ballots with the regular votes, she said, her office was able to do it.

Clem said elections office employees wrote precinct numbers on absentee ballots and fed them into the computer in groups after all other votes were counted.

"I wanted them to know where we were during the night," said Clem, whose county had only 2,700 absentee ballots. "Candidates want to know that and I want to provide it."

Another way to count the absentee ballots with the Sequoia machines and SOE software is to order them with precinct numbers that the computer can read.

When Hillsborough County fed absentee ballots into the computer at 7 p.m. Tuesday, it had vote counts within a few minutes. But the computer also was reading 100 percent of the precincts reporting with just the absentee ballots recorded.

Jim Reed, Hillsborough's assistant supervisor of elections, said the problem was recognized immediately and Sequoia officials were called in Denver. Sequoia was able to fix the problem on election night.

"It took us about an hour to change the function on election night," Reed said. "We had to slow things down for a bit, but (Elections Supervisor Buddy) Johnson said it was in the best interests of the viewer not to mislead them."

Palm Beach County's absentee ballots weren't completely counted until early Wednesday morning and weren't posted on the Web site until after 2 p.m.

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Anderson, elected in 2004 with no elections experience, replaced former supervisor Theresa LePore, who was unpopular with voters for producing the infamous "butterfly ballot" that began the 2000 presidential election fiasco.

Before Tuesday's primary, Anderson compared the election to "the day of the big game," knowing people would be watching his office closely.

On Thursday, he said people were unfairly focusing on one problem instead of the overall election.

"People are allowing one little area of difficulty to overshadow the fact that we had a very successful election day," Anderson said.

County Judge Barry Cohen, who also serves on the canvassing board, agreed, defending Anderson's handling of the election.

"I really think people need to stop with this business of needing it immediately," Cohen said of the election results. "I think Theresa (LePore) did a good job and I think Arthur is doing a good job."

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