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Vote snafu: Some blame new equipment, others human error

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A Cook County commissioner says the board should consider revoking a multimillion-dollar contract awarded to a California company that provided the new voting machines blamed for Tuesday's troubled primary.

"For \$52 million, I expect to have better results here than in Baghdad," said Iony Peraica, who ran unopposed Tuesday as the Republican candidate for board president.

Also taking a shot was Commissioner Forrest Claypool, who conceded the Democratic race for board president almost 24 hours after polls closed, with votes still uncounted.

"The administration of this election was a train wreck," he said.

Thousands of votes in more than 500 precincts went uncounted Tuesday night in the county and in Chicago, which also uses the high-tech system provided by Sequoia Voting Systems. City and county election boards still hadn't tallied up all of the votes by Wednesday night.

The system uses optical scanners and touch-screen voting machines. Some of the delay was blamed on the difficulty of combining results from the two machines. Some polling places were unable to transmit results to election headquarters. There were also paper ballots that wouldn't scan properly and had to be taken downtown.

Minor breakdowns of some equipment exacerbated the problems, but Sequoia officials insisted Wednesday that the system "performed very well, overall."

Sequoia spokeswoman Michelle Shafer said "implementing two distinctly different technologies" was "a major undertaking" and conceded there were "isolated incidents."

'CAN'T SAY ANYTHING WENT WRONG'

"This was the first time going through all this for the city and county, so the goal, above all else, was accuracy," she said.

Last year, Cook County commissioners approved a contract with Sequoia for more than \$24 million for the new machines, which many anticipated would make the election smoother. The city paid more than \$26 million for new equipment.

Cook County Clerk David Orr and Chicago Board of Elections Chairman Langdon Neal stood by the equipment, saying many of the problems could be attributed to human error.

While the main computers couldn't read data cartridges from all of the polling sites, "that happens in every election," Neal said. Other than human error and mechanical problems that were fixed, he said he "really can't say anything went wrong."

"Was it perfect? No. Was I pleased with it? No," Neal said. "But will we get better? Yes, I promise you, we will."

Orr said the problems were highlighted only because some people "acted like something was wrong if they didn't get the results by the 10 o'clock news."

Election judges drew some of the blame. Some were described as unfamiliar with technology or uninformed on options for the machines. Some

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didn't get training before going into polls, and others didn't show up.

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