

washingtonpost.com

## Machine Woes Slow Vote-Counting in Illinois

By Kari Lydersen and Zachary A. Goldfarb  
Washington Post Staff Writers  
Thursday, March 23, 2006; A04

CHICAGO, March 22 -- Election officials here resumed counting ballots Wednesday after problems with new electronic voting machines around Cook County forced them to halt the count in a key local race in Tuesday's primary that also had voters casting ballots for governor and Congress.

The election was one of the first major tests of how well states and localities, seeking to comply with new federal law, have replaced outdated voting machines with modern, more accurate technology that is more accessible to disabled people.

The problems Tuesday night did not significantly affect tabulations for one of the nation's key congressional primaries. Late tallies showed that Iraq war veteran Tammy Duckworth narrowly won the Democratic nomination for Illinois's 6th District, where Republican Rep. Henry J. Hyde is retiring. But results for an important local race, the Democratic nomination for the Cook County Board president, were delayed until Wednesday.

Illinois has received more than \$144 million in federal grants to comply with the Help America Vote Act, which Congress passed in 2002 in response to the controversy over the disputed election in South Florida in 2000. Some of that grant went to pay for a \$50 million new system of optical-scan and touch-screen machines in Cook County, manufactured by Sequoia Voting Systems of Oakland, Calif.

"It didn't work as well as we would have liked, but it did work," said Chicago Board of Election Commissioners spokesman Tom Leach.

Election reform advocates have been raising concerns for months about the security and implementation of new voting technology. But some officials said Wednesday that the technology generally worked well and the problems that occurred here were not surprising, given the thousands of poll workers who had to learn the new system, one of the most complex in the nation.

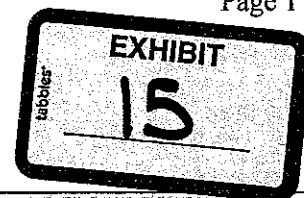
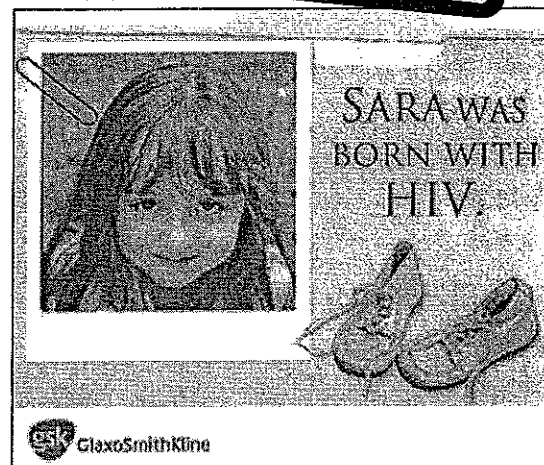
Paul S. DeGregorio, chairman of the federal Election Assistance Commission who was in Chicago to observe the election, characterized the problems as "growing pains." He said that as states hold primaries in coming months, "there will be complicating issues with new equipment, but we'll work through them," with the goal of having the kinks worked out by the November general elections.

The biggest hurdle Tuesday appeared to be that poll workers at 365 of the more than 3,000 sites had trouble electronically transmitting final tabulations to the main elections office downtown. Officials stopped counting and ordered elections judges to bring ballots and memory cartridges to the office.

The judges started to arrive at 1 p.m. Wednesday. About 40 judges there received lengthy instructions on tabulating and, if necessary, recounting the ballots.

Cheryl Kawa, a veteran Democratic election judge, said: "It's reminding me of the day of the chads. It's

Advertisement



overwhelming "

She wasn't disappointed in election officials or the system, though. "They're all human; they're doing the best they can."

Despite the problems, Leach was confident that all votes would be counted, and he pledged to get to the bottom of the problem. "We'll go back to every one of those 365 precincts and find out: Was it human error or was it mechanical error?" he said. "Not one voter was sent away, and not one voter was disenfranchised."

*Goldfarb, a political researcher, reported from Washington*

© 2006 The Washington Post Company

**Ads by Google**

**Max for Governor**

Max Linn for Governor of Florida  
www.MaxLinn.com

**Vote No WI Death Penalty**

Should the death penalty be made legal in Wisconsin?  
nodeathpenaltywi.org

**Coffee Exposed**

A shocking secret coffee co's don't want you to know.  
www.coffeefool.com