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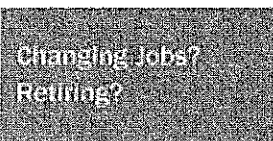
Elections 2006



Our Bay Section



Tuesday's Capital



Ehrlich says scrap electronic voting for general election

*May call special
session to change
law*

By TOM STUCKEY, Associated
Press Writer

Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. proposed Wednesday that Maryland scrap a new electronic system for checking registration of voters at the polls and return to the old paper system for the Nov. 7 general election to give Marylanders more confidence in the accuracy of election results.

The new machines, used for the first time last week, were blamed for some of the myriad problems that marred the Sept. 12 primary election.

It was unclear whether current law would allow the use of the old system _ printouts of names of registered voters at each polling place and cards voters have to sign before casting ballots.

Linda Lamone, state elections administrator, said after a meeting of the Board of Public Works that the law mandates use of the new e-poll book system.

Ehrlich raised the possibility of calling the legislature into special session to amend the law to dispense with the electronic machines.

"I'm not sure we can afford another experiment with e-poll books at this time," he said.

The governor's suggestion was not well received by legislators.

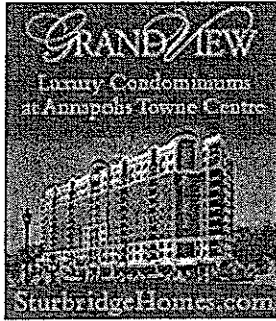


Photos by Matt Houston - Associated Press

Photo by Matt Houston - Associated Press

Maryland Elections Administrator Linda Lamone pauses while speaking on the voting mishap in the September state primary elections Wednesday. A meeting of the Maryland Board of Public Works was called by Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. in order to find out what went wrong when people experienced delays in voting in the state primaries.





leaders.

"I don't think there's going to be a special session," Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller, D-Calvert, said. All that is needed is to have a paper backup in place and to make sure poll workers know how to use the machines, he said.

House Speaker Michael Busch said he would not object to using paper records if Lamone and local election officials think that can be done under current law and in time for the general election. But he said officials would have to sure they know what they are doing before calling a special session to change the law.



"You'd better have answers that don't create more confusion and problems in the election," he said.

The e-poll books, used for the first time last week, are supposed to guard against voters casting more than one ballot. Once a voter has been issued a card, that fact should show up if he tries to get another voter card at another machine.



But Avi Rubin, a Johns Hopkins University computer science professor who worked at a polling place on election day, said the three machines in his precinct did not always communicate with each other. He said after he logged in one voter, he checked another machine 20 minutes later and it did not show that the man had already cast his ballot.



"I don't see a solution to the e-poll book (problem)," Rubin said.



Lamone said the failure of machines to communicate with each other in some cases was a problem along with the fact that machines shut down and rebooted after every 40 names were inserted, a problem that caught election judges by surprise, causing many to think the machines had crashed.



"These glitches are intolerable," Lamone said. She said Diebold Inc., manufacturer of the machines, has been ordered to come up with a way to correct the problems by Friday.



Fallout from election day continued Wednesday as Gene Raynor, administrator of the Baltimore Board of Elections, submitted his resignation. At a hearing Tuesday, where Baltimore City Council members expressed great displeasure with the way the election was conducted in the city, Raynor said his authority to run the election was undermined by the five-member city election board.



Lamone disclosed a potential new problem in Prince George's County at the Board of Public Works meeting, saying she had just learned that some votes might not have been counted.

Democrat Donna Edwards, who trails Rep. Albert Wynn by a few thousand votes in the 4th Congressional District race, said electronic voting machines from 26 precincts still had the electronic cards in them that record the votes, making it unclear whether they were



included in the final precinct tallies.

Robert J. Antonetti, interim elections director for Prince George's, did not return a phone call seeking comment.

At the Board of Public Works meeting, Lamone said there were no problems with the electronic voting machines, which also are made by Diebold and were first used in Maryland four years ago.

"Random parallel testing showed that the count was 100 percent correct," she said.

The biggest human error was in Montgomery County, where election officials forgot to send to the polling places the cards that voters use to activate the machines and voting was extended for one hour by court order.

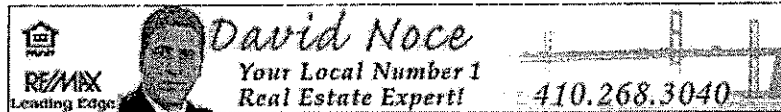
Pressed for reasons why the state had more problems than any other election in memory, Lamone said, "I'm not here to assess blame "

"Who messed up?" Comptroller William Donald Schaefer asked. "Nobody's at fault. Don't want to point fingers "

Ehrlich said the board was told that the electronic poll books would work well, but those assurances, "simply happened to be incorrect."

- No Jumps-

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