

NOVEMBER 2006 POLL WATCH PROJECT

League of Women Voters of Nashville December 4, 2006

Introduction/Background

The League of Women Voters of Nashville conducted a Poll Watch Project on Election Day for the November 7, 2006 general election. The primary goal of poll watching is to monitor the conduct of an election to ensure that voters encounter no obstacles to casting their ballot. In addition, the poll watcher has an excellent opportunity to learn about the voting process. Of particular interest in this election was the voting equipment because it was only the second election in which the county's new ES&S iVotronic DRE touch screen, paperless voting systems have been used.

The November Poll Watching Project builds on poll watching done for the August 3, 2006 election when nine (9) League volunteers observed at a total of 19 polling places. In November, eight (8) LWV members volunteered to observe at 23 locations in 28 of 171 precincts. Deborah Narrigan acted as project coordinator in November. All poll watchers used a one page survey form to report their findings from each polling place visited. The survey forms are the basis for this report. A copy of the survey is found on page 3 of this report.

What we accomplished

The average amount of time spent in a polling place was about 2 hours, with maximum about 4 hours or longer particularly for those who stayed to observe the poll closing process that did not take place until after 9 pm in several locations. In summary, some of the observation points of interest include:

- Range of the number of registered voters in a precinct: 3-5730 (these numbers are taken from the Davidson County Election Commission's record of the total of registered voters in a precinct as of 9/1/06.)
- Number of voting machines in a location: range 2-10.
- Average waiting time for a voter to vote: no wait, to 1.5 hours
- Longest waiting time observed by poll watchers: 3 hours
- Number of problems with voting equipment: 6 of the approximately 115 machines

The attached table provides more detailed information.

Additional findings

As well as completing the 13-item survey form, poll watchers were invited to add their own comments. These comments captured the qualities of the poll worker/polling place functionality which to a large extent determines the voting experience. Of note in the poll watchers' narrative notes were the following:

1. Five of the 23 polling places/teams were characterized as well run, efficient, courteous, and responsive to voter needs. For example, in one the workers offered chairs to elderly voters needing to wait in line.

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2. The “failsafe” process was, without question, the most consistently noted problem. “Failsafe” in the context of voting is described in the *Davidson Co Election Commission Officer of Elections & Failsafe Official Training* manual p 39 as “A process for accessing the DCEC database from a precinct by phone to either verify voter eligibility or verify the voter is in the correct precinct. Failsafe is done when a voter has moved or is listed as inactive on the poll book.” The biggest failsafe problem was that the phone line to the “central” bank of election commission staff who must assist with these issues was persistently busy. The net result of the apparently inadequate phone availability was that voters whose eligibility was not clear waited long times first to clear failsafe, and then they had to join the line waiting to vote.

- One observer noted that in one precinct after 7 pm, the failsafe officer had several people needing this process, but he never got through on the phone.
- In two (2) other locations, voters needing failsafe processing were sent to either Howard School or the assigned satellite precinct because the phones were busy.
- In one satellite location, the failsafe officer was observed to hang up the phone rather than answer it.
- It is also of interest that two (2) poll watchers noted that in two (2) polling places with failsafe process problems, the overall conduct of voting still appeared to remain positive.

3. Unfortunately, in a few locations, the League poll watchers noted poll work teams that did not succeed in making the voting experience a positive one.

- For example, one poll official appeared totally overwhelmed by that role’s responsibilities, and also had a machine operator who competed with the poll officer for being a spokesperson and leader.
- In another location the poll watcher noted there was “no teamwork”, while in a third location the poll watcher noted “tension among the poll workers”.

4. While the vast majority of the 115 voting machines spread over the 28 precincts functioned adequately, six reports of problems in six locations were submitted as follows:

- One machine was “down from 7am-8pm”; the specific problem was not identified by the poll watcher.
- The polling place had an electrical outlet that did not work; this required locating a new working plug, delaying the opening of the precinct by 20 minutes.
- One of the Personal Electronic Ballot cartridges (PEB) did not work all day; this precinct thus had 2 instead of 3 cartridges to use for activating 5 machines.
- One machine was “buzzing” during the morning; a technician came and repaired it.
- One machine would not “open”; after waiting 2 hours, the technician arrived and fixed it in 5 minutes

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- After 7 pm, machines must be re-programmed for each voter; in one location the wrong PEB was used on one machine and it then did not work. When the machine was closed out, it would not show the vote totals. The flashcard had to be removed and taken to the Commission headquarters.

Conclusions

The League of Women Voters of Nashville Poll Watch Project revealed strengths and problems in the conduct of the November 2006 election. No overt voter intimidation was seen, poll workers in the majority of locations carried out their roles admirably, resulting in a reasonable or positive experience for most voters. The single most persistent problem documented was the “failsafe” process. The commission administrator would do a great service to Davidson County voters to examine the entire failsafe process and make corrections that will make it smoother and less time-consuming. We hope it is feasible to arrange for a substantially larger number of phone lines. The League of Women Voters of Nashville looks forward to continuing, and hopefully expanding, our poll watching project in coming elections.

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League of Women Voters -- Davidson Co Poll Watching Survey

Nov 7 2006 Election

Please complete 1 survey for each precinct you visit. Mail to D Narrigan, 4003 Auburn La, Nashville 37215 **by Nov 11, or attach it to an email: dnarrigan@worldnet.att.net** THANKS FOR BEING AN ELECTION ACTIVIST!

Precinct name _____ Precinct # _____ Observation from _____ am/pm to _____ am/pm
Pollwatcher initials _____

1. Did you observe any electioneering **within** 100 ft. of the polling place? Yes ___
No ___
2. Were all entrances to the polling place clearly posted? Yes ___ No ___
3. Were the voting machines arranged to ensure the voter's privacy? Yes ___ No ___
Comments: _____

4. Did machine operators offer instructions to the voter about the use of equipment?
Yes ___ No ___

5. If voters request assistance, poll workers from both parties should provide the assistance. If a voter requested assistance, did a poll worker from each party respond?
Yes ___ No ___

6. Voting should take less than ten minutes. Please estimate the longest time you observed for a voter to cast a ballot ___ min Estimate average time needed to vote ___ min

7. After people vote, please ask voters how long they waited to vote. How many people did you interview? ___ What was the average wait time? _____ What was the longest wait time? _____

8. Did the poll workers need technical assistance? Yes ___ No ___ If Yes, indicate the type of assistance:

Setting up equipment ___ Opening the polls ___ Shutting down the voting equipment ___
Other _____

9. Was technical assistance received from the election authority or vendor representative in a timely fashion?

Yes ___ No ___

Comments _____

10. Were there any equipment problems or failures? No ___ Yes ___

Describe: _____

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11. Were voters treated fairly and respectfully inside the polling place? Yes___ No___
Describe

12. Did you observe any voter harassment or intimidation outside of the polling place as the voter approached the building? Yes___ No___

13. If you were present when the polls closed, please provide the following:
(a) Time last voter finished: ___pm
(b) Did any problems occur in the counting? Yes__ No___

Please use the back of this page for additional comments.

Thank you for your participation

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Precinct name	Precinct number	# Reg voters*	# Mach	Av wait	Longest wait	Mach problems	Comments
Bordeaux Library	1-5-1	1131	2	0	0	n	110 voters by 1 pm
Cathedral Praise	1-6-1	4347	5?	15-25 min	45 min	n	540 voters 3 pm; well run
Madison Library	4-2-1,	2289	3 total	?	3 hr	n	failsafe overwhelmed
	9-2-1	1261	xxx				
Cleveland Pk Com	5-2-1	2732	4	45 min	1 h	n; + 2 3 pm	520 voters by 4 pm; failsafe busy
Shelby Com Cent	6-2-1	2666	4	1 hr	2.5	n	
Stratford HS	7-1-1	2383	4	20 min	?	n	55 in line 4 pm; half wait applic
Cornelia Fort Air Pk	7-4-1	1397	3	20-30 min	?		
Aldergate Meth Chur	7-5-1	748	2	15-20 min	?		
Old Hickory Com Cen	11-1-1	3339	5	1 hr	?		seating for elderly
Andrew Jackson Sch	11-3-1	4952	7 total	45 min	1.5		
	11-3-2	31	xxx				
2 Rivers School	15-1-1	3132	5	?	2 hr at 7 pm	y x1 mach	peb prob; flashcard removed several people left; no failsafe phone ans after 7 pm
			xxx				failsafe busy all day
Woodbine Bapt Ch	16-5-1	3259	5	55min	2 hr	N	
St Bernard's Academy	18-1-1, 2-1,	1982+3	10 total	1 h 10	1.5 hr	y x1 all day	precinct 1-1
	2-2, 3-1	128+420 9	xxx	10-25min	50 min		chaotic -4 precincts
Watkins Comm Center	19-3-1	2795	5	15	?	N	dysfunctional team; errors
Edgehill Estates	19-4-1	2594	4	0	0	N	215 voters by 12 n; inattentive
Hadley Pk Com	21-1-1	4359	6	<10	35-40 min	N	well run

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Precinct name	Precinct number	# Reg voters*	# Mach	Av wait	Longest wait	Mach problems	Comments
Center							
Pearl Cohen HS	21-3-1	1182	2	0	0	Yx1 fixed	200 6pm ; highest ever
Bellevue Ch Christ	22-2-1	4064	6	1.5 hr	1.75 hr	N	need chairs elder/handicap
Bellevue Mid School	22-3-1	5730	5 (or 6)	15	30	y elec prob	no privacy; no teamwork
Brook Hollow Bapt	23-1-1	3835	6	40	45	N	
Nash State Tech	24-2-1	3511	5	30	50	Yx1 peb	busy failsafe; well run
Boy Scout HQ	25-2-1	4158	4	25	35	N	failsafe poorly run
Woodson Chapel	31-1-1,1-2	142,5778	No info	?	?		
	2-1,	6151	No info	?	?		
Harpeth Valley Sch	35-3-1	5462	6	30-40	1 hr	y; 2hr to fix	well run

* # Reg voters is the total of active and inactive voters according to the Davidson County Election Commission Table "Precinct Location & Active Voter Analysis Report", 9/8/06