

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



FROM: The Registrar of Voters

SUBMITTAL DATE:
June 9, 2011

SUBJECT: Registrar of Voters 90-day Report

RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the Board receive and file the overview of the first 90 days in office.

BACKGROUND: The Riverside County Executive Office requested the Registrar of Voters perform a 90 day top to bottom review of the Registrar of Voters operation. As the new Registrar of Voters, Kari Verjil requests to present her 90-day review to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, June 28, 2011. The report will address the following:

- Organizational Evaluation
- Voting System Review
- Equipment Evaluation
- Office Space Needs
- Election Night Processes
- Communication/Voter Education

Departmental Concurrence

Kari Verjil
KARI VERJIL
Registrar of Voters

FINANCIAL DATA	Current F.Y. Total Cost:	\$ N/A	In Current Year Budget:	N/A
	Current F.Y. Net County Cost:	\$ N/A	Budget Adjustment:	N/A
	Annual Net County Cost:	\$ N/A	For Fiscal Year:	10/11

SOURCE OF FUNDS:	Positions To Be Deleted Per A-30:	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Requires 4/5 Vote:	<input type="checkbox"/>

C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE
BY: *Stephanie Persi*
Stephanie Persi

County Executive Office Signature

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Per Exec. Ofc. | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy |

Dep't Recomm.:
Per Exec. Ofc.:

Prev. Agn. Ref.: | **District:** | **Agenda Number:**

ALL

2.16

June 9, 2011

To: Bill Luna, County Executive Officer

cc: Supervisor Bob Buster, Chairman, 1st District
Supervisor John Tavaglione, 2nd District
Supervisor Jeff Stone, 3rd District
Supervisor John Benoit, 4th District
Supervisor Marion Ashley, 5th District

From: Kari Verjil, Registrar of Voters

Subject: 90 Day Report

The following report is a 90 day top to bottom review of the Registrar of Voters operation. This report describes the current election situation, and provides my findings to date.

Executive Summary

During my first 90 days in office, I have met with City Clerks, Chairs of Political Parties, Grand Jury Members, and several elected officials to discuss and address concerns with past elections. The primary issues of concern brought to my attention involve communication issues and slow election night vote counting. Additionally, a thorough evaluation of election processes, and staffing levels was conducted. My review also evaluated the impact of state mandated voting system changes over the past ten years, which have slowed down election processes.

Restrictions placed on electronic voting by the Secretary of State continue to provide a challenging election situation for the Registrar of Voters. Improvements can be achieved by acquiring additional equipment and increasing office space. Increasing voter education and vote by mail participation are also areas that can improve election processes.

This report identifies, and addresses the current election situation, including:

- Organization Evaluation
- Voting System Review
- Equipment Evaluation
- Space Issues
- Election Night Processes
- Communication/Voter Education

Recommendations to improve election processes for the 2012 Presidential Election Cycle are provided below:

- Purchase additional Optech Scanners
- Increase office space at current location
- Lease or purchase mail sorting equipment
- Implement voter education campaign to promote voting by mail
- Continue evaluation of polling place procedures

Organizational Evaluation:

The primary function of the Registrar of Voters Department is to conduct elections as prescribed by law. To support this function, the department is responsible for registering voters, maintaining voter records, processing petitions, maintaining voting boundaries, recruiting, and training election officers.

The Registrar of Voters is organized into four sections: Administrative Services, Internal Operations, Precinct Management, and Services. Thirty-five permanent employees are supplemented by seasonal staff, and temporary assistance staff is utilized for major elections. It is common to hire 200-300 temporary staff in the months leading up to a Presidential Election. Permanent staffing levels are appropriate and comparable to other counties of the same size. Future organizational revisions will assist with improving work flow. Additional training for staff responsible for election night reporting is necessary.

Voting System Review:

Riverside County Voters were the first voters in California to cast ballots using legally certified touch screen voting units. Electronic voting allowed the Registrar of Voters to provide timely election night results. Electronic Voting was decertified in 2007 by Secretary of State Debra Bowen. The authority to decertify voting systems is granted to the Secretary of State pursuant to California Elections Code 19201.

The decertification order required counties using Sequoia's Touch Screen Voting System to change from an electronic system to a paper ballot voting system that was never intended to be used at polling places. Paper ballots are large 11" x 17" optical scan ballots which cause election night vote counting time to exceed 16 hours for major elections. Riverside County, San Bernardino County and Santa Clara County use Sequoia's Optical Scan Paper Ballots and continue to be among the last counties in the state to finalize election night results. Orange County, San Diego County, and Los Angeles County use different voting systems and typically finish election night counting earlier.

The 2008 Presidential Election and 2010 Gubernatorial Elections have been completed using the optical scan paper ballot system. Complaints regarding slow election night vote counting continue to be a concern.

Over the past decade, each Secretary of State has mandated costly changes to voting systems. Because the Secretary of State has the authority to decertify voting systems, careful planning and consideration is necessary before purchasing a new voting system.

Following is a summary of voting system revisions over the past decade:

State Mandated Voting System Revisions 2002-Present:

- 2002 - Secretary of State Bill Jones decertifies punch card voting. Riverside County is ahead of the curve and is first California County to implement touch screen voting at polling places.
- 2004 - Secretary of State Kevin Shelley requires paper ballots at the polls, in addition to touch screen voting.
- 2006 - Secretary of State Bruce McPherson permits Electronic Voting, but requires counties to implement Verifiable Voting Paper Audit Trail Units; which must be attached to each electronic voting machine.
- 2007 - Secretary of State Debra Bowen decertifies electronic voting months before the Presidential Primary Election. Counties using Sequoia's Voting System must switch to optical scan paper ballots.
- 2010 - Secretary of State Debra Bowen re-elected until 2014 – No position change. Paper ballots continue.
- 2014 – New Secretary of State to be elected.

Equipment Evaluation:

Optech Scanners

The Registrar of Voters uses six Sequoia Optech 400C central count scanners to tally all paper ballots. Ballot counting may be improved by purchasing additional Optech ballot scanners. The department's current inventory of six ballot scanners is not comparable to other counties of the same size, using the same system. For example, San Bernardino and Santa Clara Counties have an inventory of 14 Optech ballot scanners.

Additional vote counting scanners will assist with processing vote by mail ballots and will assist with expediting election night vote counting. The current inventory of six scanners does not provide sufficient back-up in the event of machine failure during the vote by mail counting period or on Election Night. Due to the high volume ballot processing on election night, machine failure on election night is common and can cause further delays.

The vendor no longer produces Optech scanners, but can build them at a substantial cost. The vendor is researching the availability of used scanners, which are less expensive.

Funds are available in the department's budget to purchase additional Optech scanners. Funds were allocated to the department after the June 8, 2010 Statewide Primary Election. The department did not have sufficient time to expend the funds prior to the November 2, 2010 Gubernatorial General Election. Therefore, I recommend purchasing four Optech Scanners to assist with ballot processes for the 2012 Presidential Election Cycle.

Optech Scanners (Continued)

It is important to be aware additional ballot scanners will *not* solve election night vote counting challenges. The large geographical size of the county, ballot length, and polling place closing procedures contribute to prolonged election night vote counting. I have reviewed election night finishing times from past major elections which revealed large counties using Sequoia's Optech ballot scanners are among the last finish tabulating ballots on election night.

Mail Sorter

Approximately one half of Riverside County Voters prefer to vote by mail. The dramatic increase in vote by mail participation is likely the result of the decertification of electronic voting. Because the law requires election results to be reported by precinct, vote by mail envelopes are sorted by precinct before counting. Typically, 1,200 precincts require sorting for major elections. Currently, the Registrar of Voters pays the U.S. Post Office to sort envelopes into precinct order. All large Southern California Counties use in house mail sorting equipment rather than relying on the U.S. Post Office for sorting services. An on site mail sorter will increase efficiency and provide greater control over incoming mail ballots.

The Registrar of Voters recommends obtaining mail sorting equipment, and is researching the availability of leasing used mail sorting equipment. Purchasing new equipment will only be considered if used equipment is not available.

Office Space Issues:

Several factors have contributed to the Registrar of Voters space issues. Voter registration and voting by mail has increased over 30% since the Registrar of Voters moved to its current location in 1997. The primary contributing factor to the desperate need for additional space is due to the requirement to use paper ballots. The current office space was not designed for processing paper ballots. Processes are crowded into hallways, small rooms, and the lobby. Election law requires all processes to be open for observation. The current space does not provide an open secure environment for major elections.

The Facilities Management Department provided an estimate of \$1.5 to \$4 million to move the Registrar of Voters operation. A major move is currently cost prohibitive and not likely to occur before the 2012 Presidential Primary Election.

The Registrar of Voters has identified space in the current location which is currently occupied by the Assessor's office. This space would provide approximately 3,000 sq. ft. for ballot sorting equipment, vote by mail processes, and assist with election night processes.

The Registrar and the Executive Office are working on a solution to obtain additional space at the current location.

Election Night Processes:

State restrictions placed on electronic voting provide few options for improving election night ballot counting. The following areas require further evaluation and may assist with expediting election night ballot processing:

Polling Place Procedures

A review of poll worker procedures reveals closing procedures are much more complex than other counties. Statistics from the November 2010 Gubernatorial Election indicate the average polling place closing procedures exceed 1.5 hours. The Registrar of Voters will continue to evaluate methods to improve poll worker procedures to expedite processes. Current procedures and processes exceed legal requirements.

Remote Counting of Paper Ballots

Desert communities provide an added challenge to election night vote counting processes. Because of the distance from the central counting center in Riverside, election night ballots from the desert are usually the last ballots counted on election night. Prior to the 2007 decertification of electronic voting, remote ballot counting was permitted and resulted in timely election night results for the desert area.

Under the current law, a remote counting center would require at least two Optech ballot scanners. The scanners are not portable, so a permanent location would need to be located and provide the same level of security that is provided at the Registrar of Voters office. Staffing the remote counting would provide another challenge. Due to the complexity of the ballot counting system, experienced Registrar of Voters staff would need to be assigned to the remote counting site.

At this time, the Registrar of Voters does not have additional experienced permanent staff available for oversight of a remote counting center. Another area of concern with operating a remote counting center is the complexity of combining desert results with results from the main counting center in Riverside. Although a remote counting center is possible, extensive testing is necessary. Further evaluation must be conducted before moving forward with remote counting.

The estimated cost for a remote counting center is substantial. In the interim, The Registrar of Voters will continue to utilize Relay Transport Teams.

Relay Transport Teams:

Relay transport teams drive a vehicle from the collection center to the central counting center. Relay teams help expedite election night ballot counting, and should continue for all elections. Of course, the distance from the desert area will continue to cause challenges.

Communication/Voter Education:

One of the prevailing concerns brought to my attention during meetings with city clerks, and elected officials involved communication issues. Communication and Voter Education are crucial for conducting successful elections. Voter registration and voter turnout increase during Presidential Elections. The Registrar of Voters must increase communication and voter education efforts.

Constant communication must continue until the recount period has ceased. The Registrar of Voters is already working on website improvements, increasing public speaking opportunities, and is building media relationships.

Voter Education can assist the Registrar of Voters increase vote by mail participation. Currently 50% of Riverside County Voters prefer to vote by mail. Increasing this percentage can assist with complaints about slow election night vote counting. In order to be effective, voter education must focus on returning ballots early and informing voters of the benefits to having their vote included in the initial results posted on election night. Santa Clara County's First In, First Counted voter education campaign increased their vote by mail participation to 70%. I recommend a similar voter education campaign be implemented in Riverside County.

Complexities of the June 2012 include the new Top Two Primary Act and changes caused by redistricting also require a strong voter education campaign.

In closing, restrictions placed on Riverside County's voting system by the Secretary of State, along with the geographical challenges of the size of Riverside County will continue to impede election night ballot counting. However, I am confident the Registrar of Voters team will continue to provide accurate results in accordance with election law.