

Some Local Access Voting Stories

Last night I got a call from a livid Alameda County voter who called me about 6:30 PM, after he was told that he couldn't vote on the Sequoia DRE unless they could find four other people to vote on the system. Note, our Sec. of State requires that five or more must vote voluntarily on the conditionally certified DREs. Completely oblivious to my friend's embarrassment, the pollworker actually went down the line of voters asking for volunteers to vote and saying something like, "so that blind guy can vote on the voting machine". No one was willing to vote on the DRE! The pollworker finally grumbled that my friend could go ahead and vote on the Sequoia machine, but they would have to keep trying to find four more DRE voters. To top it off, the pollworker wasn't able to get the keypad and audio output working on the Sequoia, so my friend had to have someone else operate the Sequoia touch screen and select his votes for him. My friend walked away from the polls upset and convinced that his vote was not going to be counted. He was pretty sure the pollworkers wouldn't be able to find four more DRE voters and were not going to count his vote unless they did.

It seems that about the only way this privacy protection requirement of at least five voters is going to work is if pollworkers will be responsible about working all day long to talk voters into volunteering to vote on the DRE. Ya ya, sure...good luck!

How many voters with disabilities will be pressured to not use the voting machine (or just told it doesn't work), so that pollworkers will not have to go through the trouble of figuring how to set it up or to find four more voters willing to use the machine. Almost all of the pollworkers I've met would not stoop to such practices, but unfortunately, we've seen a few who have.

In Santa Cruz, pollworkers were not able to get the Sequoia Edge II working for another of my friends, because they couldn't find the "OK" button when prompted by a startup message. The only button they could find was the reset button, which, as you can imagine, didn't work as an OK response. Finally the voter saved the day by suggesting that the "OK" key might be the Select key on the remote keypad the pollworkers were ignoring.

Another Santa Cruz friend was trying to vote on a Sequoia Edge II, but the machine's keypad was not working. Fortunately, this friend was a computer techy and remembered that a mutual friend told him that I had warned her that the Sequoia Edge had a problem because it had two jacks that fit the keypad cable plug. He talked the pollworkers into switching the keypad plug to the proper jack and the system finally started working for him.

In Berkeley, a previous customer who bought her first talking computer from me was told (at about 6 in the evening) that she couldn't vote on the voting machine because it was delivered without paper for the VVPAT. She was forced to go to another polling place that had a "working" voting machine. After much discussion and consulting with central elections officials, they concluded that it would be possible for the blind voter to vote provisionally on their electronic voting

machine. Unfortunately, when the pollworkers got that machine running for her, its ballot was missing the presidential race, and required her to start over again, after they managed to load the ballot properly in the machine. After more than two hours at the machines, she was finally able to cast her vote. Of course, at that late hour, near to close of polls, the pollworkers were not likely to be able to assure that a minimum of five people voted on that machine.

In Santa Clara County, two other friends had to sit and wait until a field representative was called and came to their polling place to fix their Sequoia Edge II machine that had not yet been set up properly even though it was the middle of the afternoon.

In San Francisco, another friend spent over 2 hours at the Sequoia machine, waiting for it to be fixed so she could vote. Initially, the problem was that her voting machine kept rejecting the voter ID card. After that problem was fixed, they had a problem that prevented the audio from working properly and required waiting for a second field representative to be called to the polling place. Clearly the first field rep. should not have left until they had confirmed that the voting machine was working properly. This voter was particularly frustrated because the week before she made a special trip down town to get an opportunity to familiarize herself with the new voting machine, so she wouldn't have any problems at the polling place on elections day.

I don't mean to indicate that the Sequoia systems were the only voting machines having problems, as these are just the reports I've heard from our local area, which happens to be dominated by Sequoia Edge II systems. Eventually, I expect to hear from other voters with disabilities who can report positive voting experiences, but so far, every voter I've heard from has had significant problems with these voting systems on February fifth.