

Comparison of Operating Costs: Punch Card and Electronic Voting Machines in Sarasota County, Florida and Optical Scanners in Manatee County, Florida

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To the Commissioners of Sarasota County:

This is an analysis of the annual expenditures by the Supervisor of Elections Office of Sarasota County for the fiscal years 1999 through 2004. The goal is first to compare the expenditures of Sarasota's election office before the purchase of Direct Recording Electronic Voting Machines (DREs) with the expenditures after the machines were purchased in October or November 2001. This purchase was recommended to the commissioners by the Supervisor of Elections and the \$4,700,000 cost of these machines was paid by the commissioners' budget not by the Supervisor of Elections'.

This report also compares Sarasota County's election office expenditures with those of Manatee County. Manatee purchased Optical Scanners in 1997. Since Manatee's registered voting population is approximately 20% smaller than Sarasota's, one needs to take this fact into consideration when comparing the expenditures of each county's elections office. We added 25% to Manatee's annual costs to estimate what it might have cost Manatee if they had had 25% more voters. All data are given at the end of this paper.

The first fact that jumps out from the data is that after the purchase of the DREs there was an increase of over \$1,100,000 per year in the three year average annual expenses of Sarasota County Elections Office. It costs Sarasota Office of Elections an extra million dollars each year to maintain and operate the DREs in years without any major election. Sarasota's fiscal year ends September 30th and the 2004 presidential election was in November so the presidential election cost will be included in the fiscal 2005 expenses. Furthermore the costs to keep Sarasota's DREs is rising annually (\$90,000 per year). The data shows clearly that using DREs is much more expensive for Sarasota County than using punch cards.

Comparing the categorized expenses for Sarasota's three years pre DRE purchase to the three years post DRE purchase, an analysis of each of the three major expenditure categories shows that the three year average for Personal Services jumped \$544,630; the average for Operating Expenses jumped \$440,000 and the average for Capital Outlay doubled for the three years post DRE purchase. (The three year averages were used to smooth out the data for any extraordinary costs in any one year.)

It is useful to compare the election expenses of Sarasota after the purchase of the DREs to those of Manatee County whose Optical Scanners were used for all

its elections in the years we are considering. Sarasota does own two Optical Scanners but uses them only to count absentee ballots. For Manatee, the 2002 through 2004 average annual cost increased \$268,494 for their Optical Scanners versus 1999 through 2001. This is much less than the \$1,100,000 increase in Sarasota County's total costs comparing the same two periods.

Next we calculated what Manatee's Optical Scanner costs would have averaged in the last three years if Manatee had had Sarasota's voting population (i.e. adding 25%); the "adjusted data" is \$1,724,256. This three year estimated average yearly cost for optical scanners is \$1,159,402 less per year than it cost Sarasota County annually for DREs over the same period. The data show that the ES&S iVotronic machines purchased for Sarasota County in late 2001 cost probably \$1,100,000 more to maintain and operate annually than Sarasota would have had to spend for Optical Scanners based on the "adjusted Manatee data".

There would have been real savings if the Sarasota County Commissioners had decided to throw away the DREs in April 2004 and spent \$600,000 to buy Optical Scanners for the entire county as SAVE had suggested to the commissioners. The Supervisor of Elections said that paper ballots were expensive. Manatee bought their paper ballots for 20 cents each. For 100,000 voters this amounts to \$20,000, a trivial sum compared to the estimate of \$1,100,000 that the DREs annually cost Sarasota over Optical Scanners. It seems time for the County Commissioners to consider once again replacing the DREs with an Optical Scan System

The Sarasota data are taken from the yearly reports of independent certified public accountants for Sarasota County's Supervisor of Elections in their annual "Special Purpose General Fund Statement of Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balance". The Manatee annual data come from the Office of the Supervisor of Elections Total Expenditures.

<http://www.votersunite.org/info/costcomparison.asp>

Tables follow

Ms. Myerson is a retired psycholinguist. Her field of interest was child acquisition of language and adult language loss due to brain lesion. Her research focused on language and the brain. She was employed at the VA Hospital in Boston and the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center. She earned her Masters Degree at Harvard University Department of Linguistics and her Doctorate from Harvard University Department of Education. She now lives in Longboat Key Florida and first became concerned about the problems with electronic voting after reading the 2001 report from CalTech/MIT.

**Annual Expenses for Sarasota County
1999 through 2004**

	1999	2000	2001	average '99 through '01	2002	2003	2004	average '02 through '04
Personal Services	\$1,197,330	\$1,256,108	\$1,155,320	\$1,202,919	\$1,643,534	\$1,605,523	\$1,985,600	\$1,744,886
Operating Expense	\$450,384	\$449,369	\$423,065	\$440,939	\$882,091	\$767,428	\$931,668	\$860,396
Capital Outlay	\$176,836	\$16,052	\$205,743	\$132,877	\$266,510	\$509,924	\$58,697	\$278,377
Totals	\$1,824,550	\$1,721,529	\$1,784,128	\$1,776,735	\$2,792,135	\$2,882,875	\$2,975,965	\$2,883,659

**Annual Expenses for Manatee County
1999 through 2004**

	1999	2000	2001	average '99 through '01	2002	2003	2004	average '02 through '04
Actual Data	\$1,049,892	\$1,106,213	\$1,176,628	\$1,110,911	\$1,226,910	\$1,343,007	\$1,568,298	\$1,379,405
To correct for Manatee 20% smaller voting population, add 25% to Manatee data								
Adjusted Data	\$1,312,365	\$1,382,766	\$1,470,785	\$1,388,639	\$1,533,638	\$1,678,759	\$1,960,373	\$1,724,256