

Synopsis of VoteRescue's Monitoring for Trouble Reports Travis County General Election, November 4, 2008 (Written November 9, 2008; Last Updated November 19, 2008)

On November 4th, 2008, thanks to the help of 37 volunteers, VoteRescue and its coalition, Texans for REAL Elections, executed a monitoring action for the general election which involved taking "trouble reports" from voters who had problems in the polling place using the Hart InterCivic eSlate voting machines, and obtaining signatures on a petition asking the Travis County Commissioners' Court to stop funding electronic voting machines and mandate a return to hand-counted paper ballot elections (with enhanced security procedures). Our volunteers covered 31 precincts in Travis County. The trouble reporting forms allowed the voter to report voting machine failures, problems with the electronic ballot, not being registered in their precinct, voting provisionally, rude poll workers, or any other kind of problem whatsoever.

Though "business was a little slow" in some areas, collectively, our volunteers took a total of 44 (updated number coming) trouble reports which turned up a very interesting mix of problems, with two types validating the voting experience we've now heard about from others in the community, listed as numbers one and two below in the list of types of problems reported:

1. Ballot style problems causing voter to miss voting on propositions: Two voters who voted a straight party ticket in the Austin city limits missed seeing the propositions that were available for voting on another screen further down the electronic ballot; one did not realize this, and hit the red "Cast Ballot" button on the machine, thereby losing their opportunity to vote on the propositions. The other did realize it, and found the propositions and got to vote on them. Proposition 2 was a hotly contested issue regarding whether or not the City should give \$65 million dollars as an incentive to the developer of a local shopping mall (while not giving any tax incentive to small business owners in the city). Many Austinites had devoted long hours for almost two years to defeat this proposition; it lost by four percentage points.

Since Election Day, we have heard of many others around Austin who are reporting the same experience. We are in the process of investigating, along with others who supported Proposition 2, if the numbers of "undervotes" on the propositions were inordinately high, or not, when someone voted a straight party ticket. An "undervote" indicates that someone voted the ballot but did not register a vote on a particular issue (such as the propositions.) **If we find a relatively high number of "undervotes" on the propositions with straight party ballots, that could indicate a problem with electronic ballot design, with the possible consequence of affecting the results of some or all of the proposition races.** The County Election office invited Karen, Abbe DeLozier and me in to review the Hart machine screens to see the progression through the voting process when one voted straight party. While the propositions showed up at the bottom of the "review screen" indicating "not voted", apparently this got missed by an as-yet unknown number of voters who went straight to the red "Cast Ballot" button and accidentally missed their opportunity to vote on the propositions. **More on this to come.**

2. Write-in votes for President not showing up in end-of-election totals: Two voters complained of problems with writing in a candidate for president; one who reviewed totals for their precinct at the end

of the evening and saw no votes for their candidate recorded. The other could not complete the inputting of their candidates' names because of lack of space in the write-in field.

Since Election Day, we have heard of several other voters who have had the experience of checking their precinct totals at the end of the evening and seeing zero votes for the write-in candidate they voted for. Now that the County has re-categorize their website totals as “official” as of November 14th, we are inviting all voters who complained of this potentially serious omission of their vote to go back and check the totals for their candidate for their precinct and let us know if there is still clear evidence that their vote was not counted..

3. **Machine failures:** Two reports in two different precincts of machines “going down” and either being “fixed” by county technicians or taken out of service (Precincts 113 and 262)

4. **Machine problems while voting :** Three reports – one who had to try three times to mechanically “check” the box in front of their selected candidate before the check mark finally registered; another noted that when they arrived at the “review screen” which is supposed to reflect all of their choices up until that point, about one third of the choices indicated “no selection” had been made. The voter had to go back and re-select their chosen candidates. The third voter was trying to change their vote for President and was having problems getting the machine to make the change (Precincts 347, 169, and 200)

5. **Not registered** – Eight reports of voters not being registered where they thought they should be voting. Of those, four voted on provisional ballots (which may or may not be counted.) In one case, the voter was not offered a provisional ballot and got one because our volunteer went into the polling place with the voter and insisted they get a provisional ballot. AND: A third party reported to one of our volunteers that 15 to 20 voters had shown up “not registered” at their precinct (105) but the third party had secured provisional ballots for “about half” of them.

6. **Not enough machines – long lines:** At Precinct 148, at the U. of Texas Campus, only four machines were provided for tens of thousands of voters. Lines took up to two hours for voters. **17 reports** complaining about this were taken by our volunteers. (Thanks to **Mary Krenek** and Sheila Dean!)

7. **Didn't get absentee ballot:** One voter complained that their Absentee Ballot never arrived in the mail. (Precinct 148)

8. **Rude poll workers:** Three voters complained of rude poll workers inside the polling place.

9. **Wanted return to paper-based voting:** Three voters wrote that they did not like the machines, and wanted a return to “paper ballots”.

Our wonderful volunteers also obtained **393 signatures on our Petition** to County Commissioners (many thanks to Katie Brewer, who single-handedly got about 228 of those!)

We owe our volunteers a huge debt of gratitude for donating their time to this very important cause. The types of problems that showed up, while not huge in number, reflected a microcosm of what was happening to others across the County. The first two issues, relating to the propositions and to lack of counting write-in presidential candidates, have the potential of carrying a lot of weight in the fight to eliminate the electronic voting machines in the future; all other problems reported are also extremely valuable as well; many of them reflect issues with the way machines “break down” and are then “fixed” by technicians who have unfettered access to them, raising huge questions as to what is really being done to the machines while being “repaired”; AND, what happens to votes already stored on a machine when it is taken out of service? Are those votes actually registered in the JBC computer that remains at the polling place –or not? And how do we know?

These problems will be sent out to data-aggregating organizations and will become a part of the growing record proving that electronic voting machines are wrought with insecurities, are not a transparent or citizen-friendly way to vote, and should be replaced by citizen-executed hand-counted paper ballot elections, (with enhanced security procedures.)

We also want to send out a HUGE THANK YOU to our videographers, Sueann Campbell, Erica Grignon, and Janet Jones, who all worked long hours, some of them all day and also into the evening, to make sure and capture videotape of precinct results posted at three of the four “substations” around town. We are looking for a volunteer to help us with the project of comparing Election Night totals of particular races as reflected by this video, to “official” results, to see if there may have been discrepancies. If you have an interest in helping us with this project, please contact me immediately.

Also, special thanks to VoteRescuer Gus Behr, who called in the problem with machine failures at Precinct 113 even though he was not able to volunteer that day!

Thanks again for all of your hard work and dedication, and more updates will follow!

Vickie Karp, PR Director; 512/775-3737

Karen Renick, Director; 512/496-7408

VoteRescue

www.voterescue.org