

Texas Rep. Lon Burnam submits bill for Hand Counted Paper Ballots in Texas!

Who: Rep. Lon Burnam, District 90, Tarrant County (Fort Worth), Texas

What: Submission of HB 3894, The Texas Hand Counted Paper Ballot Bill of 2007

When: Friday, March 9, 2007

Where: State Capitol, Austin, Texas

Why: With the acknowledgement and validation from computer experts, government reports and university studies nationwide that electronic voting systems, including optical scan counters, are vulnerable to easy hacking and manipulation without detection, the need for drastic change in our voting systems has become evident. Well-intentioned legislators at both the federal and state levels have presented the costly "solution" of adding printers to electronic voting machines for a "voter verifiable paper audit trail".

Rep. Burnam, House District 90, recognizes that adding printers to fraudulent voting systems will simply mask further fraud, while giving the public a false sense of security that the problem has been solved. He also recognizes that the bill will help all counties throughout the state save tremendous amounts of taxpayer money by eliminating the budget-breaking costs of machine maintenance, storage and replacement, as well as, the costs of training, programming, yearly software license fees, support services, and transportation.

Rep. Burnam therefore filed the Texas Hand-Counted Paper Ballot Bill of 2007, H.B. 3894, to eliminate the use of any voting machine whatsoever in the state of Texas and to allow all Texas voters to cast their vote on a paper ballot that is hand counted by their fellow citizens at the precinct level. The bill allows the use of ballot-marking-only machines for the disabled to vote privately and independently for compliance with the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Non-electronic ballot-marking methods that also comply with HAVA, such as the Vote-PAD and the Equalivote, are also allowed under this bill.

"We know that most voters in Texas will welcome the news of Representative Burnam's bill, H.B. 3894, and will immediately contact their own representatives and senators in the Texas Legislature to tell them to vote for the passage of the Texas Hand-Counted Paper Ballot Bill of 2007," said Karen Renick, the Director of Vote Rescue, the non-partisan coalition of Texas voters who are for elections that are fair and 100% transparent with citizen access, involvement and oversight.

VoteRescue members from Austin and Fort Worth worked diligently to educate members of the Texas House Elections Committee about electronic voting fraud and the enormous costs now borne by all Texas counties to run their elections. Vote Rescue is currently conducting a comparative cost study of elections using either electronic voting systems, including optical scan counters, or hand-counted paper ballots. The Vote Rescue study will be completed before the end of March.

What does H.B. 3894, the Texas Hand-counted Paper Ballot Bill of 2007, do?

1. Repeals the use of any electronic "voting system" from the Texas State Election Code and leaves hand-counted paper ballots as the only voting method allowed by code in Texas.
2. Permits any interested citizen to observe the counting of Election Day and Early Voting ballots.
3. Makes the citizens of Texas the first to know the precinct results by instructing the precinct presiding judge to post them on the front door of the precinct's polling place.
4. Makes it a felony to remove, tear, deface or in any way alter the posted precinct results for 24 hours after they are publicly posted on the polling place door.
5. Permits a video recording device to record an unobstructed view of the ballots and ballot boxes from the time the polls open for voting until the final precinct totals are posted on the front door of the precinct's polling place. The video records are stored with the original paper ballots.
6. Reduces the maximum number of registered voters per precinct from 5,000 to 2,000.
7. Allows county election commissions to consider implementing alternate hand-counted paper ballot voting materials and methods to reduce counting times.