Joint Oversight Hearing – The Colorado Model of Elections

May 27, 2015

Presention by Jill LaVine, Sacramento County Registrar of Voters

Ballot on Demand

In the quest for "there has to be a better way", Sacramento County implemented Ballot on Demand (BOD).

In 2008, if you went into our ballot room, you would see shelves and shelves full of ballots. If a voter came into our office to request a ballot, since we did not know what ballot type a voter would require it was necessary to stock all ballot types and all parties if it was a primary election. It was always a guess at making sure you had enough ballots and the right ballot types for the 29 days of voting.

After an election is over we are required to destroy all the unvoted ballots. Using our numbers from the Primary and General elections of 2008 we destroyed 799,000 unused ballots at a cost of $391, 510.

Our office began the process to find a Ballot on Demand system that would fit our needs.

We started small, and after we were certified as a ballot printer, we used the BOD for our military voters and overseas voters, so we could get the ballots out timely. With the short turn around time of completing the ballot layout and the deadline to get the ballots mailed out we could run in to problems. Once we were able to print our own military ballots, and not rely on the print vendor getting the ballots out was no longer a problem.

We also printed the ballot types with only a few voters, saving set-up costs at the printer. Our BOD also gave us the peace of mind, just in case there was a new subdivision with voters, or a hot contest and everyone decided to turn out, we could print more ballots as needed. We were using our BOD as more of a back-up system at this point. It was awkward to use this version of the BOD since we would need to use our EMS to get the voters ballot type, move to the BOD computer, enter the ballot type in to the printer and complete logs. It was slow. However there was more potential for this system.

The goal was for a smooth process - to have the voter come to our front counter, request a ballot, we enter the voter's information once, and their ballot prints. We give the voter the correct ballot for them to vote.

In order to accomplish this "goal" it took a year working with the SOS, our County IT dept, our Election Management vendor and the ballot printing vendor to get all connections approved. By April of 2010 SOS certified our vendor to connect with our registration system. By this time our vendor had new and faster printers.

This is the system I envisioned. We now have two BOD printers that we use to print ballots for those voters that come to our front counter. We also have three additional printers to do our batch or daily requests ballot printing.

Using numbers from June 2014 we printed 2,077 ballots for our Military and overseas voters. We were able to mail all military ballots out before the 45 day deadline.

We now print our own test decks, and header cards – allowing us to start our Logic and Accuracy Testing sooner, and not to be as vendor dependent. Adding in those voters that came to our counter to vote, all total in June 2014, we printed 30,956 ballot cards. In November we printed 49,211 ballot cards.

In June of 2014 we also tried our first off site, early voting using the ballot on demand. We chose the Sacramento County Administration Building knowing we would have the required security. What I didn't plan on was the low turnout in June. We were open 7 days, and had 33 voters. We did have 231 voters drop off their voted ballots. Lessons learned from this experience are that you need to advertise! And educate. And have an election that voters are interested in.

The benefits of BOD are many:

- Cost effective, only print the ballot you need,
- No stocking of shelves
- No ballots on the shelves the wrong locations/or wrong ballots given to a voter
- No destruction of unused ballots

- Never run out of ballots – Precincts where voters dropped by to vote because they saw the Vote Here sign
- The Green thing to do.
- The ability to take the ballot printing out of the office to a location close to the voter

The Presidential Commission on Election Administration in its report after the 2012 election recommended that states should expand opportunities to vote before Election Day. Testimony received by the Commission reflected the view that Americans want and expect choices in when and how they can vote prior to Election Day. Enabling voters to cast their ballot when it is convenient for them is the reason behind allowing voting before Election Day.

At this time, if a voter wants or needs to vote early their choices are to request a ballot be mailed to them, or to come to our office. Our office is not centrally located in the county. I would like to expand the opportunity for voters, and with my current optical scan system, I can using Ballot on Demand.

Currently it is awkward to move the large printer to an offsite location, but the vendors are responding to this need and two vendors have been in my office this last month showing us their new systems for offsite voting, or possible vote centers. These systems have smaller printers with new technology, they are cheaper, they come in a travel box that allows easier transporting, the ability to lock up the printer and even have a drawer for a laptop built in. They are truly an all in one system made to travel.

I appreciate the proposed changes in certification of ballot on demand printers in SB 439 by Senator Allen. These changes in code will help make this vision of a more opportunities for voters possible.