



DUTCHESS COUNTY
BOARD OF ELECTIONS
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**DEMOCRATIC
COMMISSIONER
Frances A. Knapp**

June 8, 2010

To the Editor,

In response to Tony Leo's column on May 19th (Big Brother Will Be Watching) I would like to correct some of the misinformation and provide some background information on the changes coming this year for voters in Dutchess County.

In 2002, the federal government passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) which essentially established a program to provide funds to States to replace punch card voting and lever voting machines. It also established minimum election administration standards for States and units of local government charged with responsibility for the administration of federal elections.


New York's approach to selecting a new voting system was careful and methodical so Councilman Ray Dezendorf's outrage is misplaced. New York is the last state to implement a new voting system taking several years to fully investigate all available voting technology. The State Board of Elections has created the strictest standards in the nation to certify machines. As a result of HAVA and the lack of uniform elections standards in NYS, the state legislature correctly realized that our town-level election officials were not up to the huge task of implementing an entirely new voting system and standards. The State Legislature passed the Election Consolidation and Improvement Act in 2005 which provided for the ownership, maintenance and transportation of voting machines by county boards of elections, rather than by towns and cities, and required boards of elections to pay and train election workers. Also passed was the NYS Election Reform and Modernization Act which required annual training for poll workers, increasing their pay for those training sessions and requiring a public campaign to educate voters on the new voting machines and other changes affecting voters at the polls on Election Day.

The claim in Tony Leo's column that "more up-to-date" types of voting machines will be scrapped to make way for a "rudimentary" form of balloting is also untrue. The new optical scan voting systems have better security than lever machines: a paper ballot record of every vote allows a complete audit of a given election while maintaining voters' anonymity. These new machines are state of the art technology. These optical scanners will read each vote just like the Scantron systems used for standardized testing in the school system and tally the results. These machines have passed the most rigorous certification process in our country. The new systems are also tested extensively throughout the year to ensure they are functioning perfectly.

Finally, the most troubling, outrageous and misleading claim in the article concerns voter privacy. These new machines will absolutely guard the secret ballot and any attempt to convince voters otherwise by County Legislator Surman or Tony Leo has no grounding in reality. D.C. Legislator Alan Surman is correct when noting that each of the paper ballots upon which you intend to cast your vote will have a stub bearing its own identification number. However, once these stubs are detached from the ballot, there is no way to match up the cast ballot with the corresponding stub. This means that there is no way to track which ballot was cast by any specific voter. Stubs are used because every ballot must be accounted for on Election Day to prevent ballot stuffing.

NYS is currently under a federal court order by Judge Sharpe to roll out the new voting system for 2010 elections. It is time that we update our system for casting votes in New York State as has been done by the rest of the United States. The Dutchess County Board of Elections will be ready to roll out a brand new voting system for our statewide elections this year. Inspectors will be trained and voters educated to prepare for these changes. The kind of misinformation spread in the column by Tony Leo will only scare voters and perpetuate distrust in our electoral process. For more information on the new voting machines and processes or to get a schedule of upcoming regional demonstrations, please contact the Dutchess County Board of Elections at 845-486-2473 or visit our website at www.dutchesselections.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frances A. Knapp".

Fran Knapp
Democratic Elections Commissioner