

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA  
SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS COMMENTS  
6/28/13

I want to thank the Presidential Commission on Election Administration for coming to the State of Florida and for allowing some of the election officials to speak with you. It is an honor to participate today.

I am fairly new, having been elected in 2008. As the Supervisor of Elections for Palm Beach County, our office is probably one of the most scrutinized in the country when it comes to elections. We had 842 precincts, 448 voting locations and 870,182 eligible voters for the 2012 General Election. 605,268 total votes were counted or 69.56%.

During the 2012 General Election, we did not experience lines at polling locations on Election Day. In fact, the majority of our polling locations were closed prior to about 8:30 p.m. on November 6, 2012, and we reported our precinct results before midnight. However, because the legislature decreased Early Voting days to almost half, Early Voting was a tremendous challenge.

From the time Early Voting began in Florida, Palm Beach County has always experienced long lines during General Elections in Presidential Election years. Because of the law only allowing constrained facilities – public libraries, city halls and supervisor’s offices, there was never enough space or electrical power to have large Early Voting locations with more than two printers without blowing breakers.

Our longest lines were on the final Saturday of Early Voting, with the legislature having eliminated the final Sunday that has always been popular to have a program called “Souls to the Polls” on First Sunday in many of our black churches. The last person who got in line at our Lantana Library site at 7:00 p.m. voted after 2:00 a.m. in the morning. The line was that long and the voters were determined to stay in line and vote, having been told by both political parties that their votes would be challenged at their polling place on Election Day. That did not happen.

Another delay was our long 6 page ballot with 11 constitutional amendments, one of which was 664 words long. We are also required by Federal law to provide Spanish on the same ballot. The voters who brought their Sample Ballots with them voted faster than those who did not because they could just transfer their votes from their Sample Ballots; however, it took longer than usual to vote with all of the ballot questions.

As you know, the legislature amended some of the laws this year that will now bring back a maximum of 14 Early Voting days, including the final Sunday, with allowance to move Early Voting to larger locations and for a maximum of 12 hours a day at the discretion of the supervisor. It may be wise in the future to provide for uniform laws within the state so there is equity in the hours and days for Early Voting in every county.

Palm Beach County is also working on creating electronic poll books using off-the-shelf technology – mini ipads that can take a picture of the QR code on the back of your driver's license and populate your registration information. We know this will go a long way in moving our voters more quickly. We have not had electronic poll books in the past, mostly because of the large expense and the difficulty of the large components that have been available. This is a great example of moving election equipment forward using current technology.

Absentee or Vote by Mail ballots are also very popular in our state. We mailed over 157,000 ballots, 170 to military overseas and almost 2,600 to civilians overseas. 131,124 ballots were returned and processed and 128,256 were accepted. Over 44,700 absentee ballots were received in the last three days of the General Election. The manual process to verify signatures, physically open the envelopes and then sort into precincts and count the ballots goes beyond the close of Election Day. We also had a larger than usual number of Provisional Ballots, due to a law change that required voters who had not changed their address from another county to ours prior to Election Day to vote by Provisional

Ballot. The manual process for Provisional Ballots is more detailed and time consuming than absentee ballots.

We worked almost around the clock and we reported our unofficial election results before noon, Saturday, November 10, 2012, well within the 4 day time frame allowed by law. Our official results also met the legal timeframe of noon on the 12<sup>th</sup> day following a General Election, as did all of the supervisors in the state.

We also experienced a printing error that required us to duplicate 25,000 absentee ballots that would not read in our tabulators. This was the third printer that we have used in four years, with little success in total accuracy. We need to work on quality controls with the vendors who print ballots.

The laws in Florida allow us to send ballots to military and overseas by e-mail; however, because of the size of the ballot, if the voter did not have an e-mail that would accept the large ballot, many of the e-mails were returned to us or sent to the voter's junk mail. We had a team of people working to contact these voters so we could get them their ballots. I believe we need to work with the military to provide additional voter education about e-mail addresses and we need to have shorter ballots.

We also experienced many difficulties with the United States Post Office. Our voters experienced long delays or in some cases never received their ballot or a duplicate ballot that was mailed to them. We are upgrading to the IMB bar code on the ballot envelope, which will allow us to track mailed ballots in the future. We need additional cooperation and coordination with the Post Office in the future.

In reference to voting equipment, Palm Beach County experienced a substantial software failure last year during a municipal election that caused us to call the wrong winners until we discovered the error during our post election audit. Apparently our vendor was aware of the potential failure; however, it was not caught during the state's testing

and certification, nor did the vendor reveal the information until after our failure. The legislature passed a requirement this year that will require voting system vendors to disclose deficiencies known to them within 30 days or face a potential fine. This is language similar to the State of California. I believe it would be beneficial to implement this type of requirement nationally and perhaps review and update Voting System Standards to require more stringent testing, review and disclosure.

We are all watching Los Angeles County who has proposed creating their own voting system. I believe it is time and I am hopeful that future voting systems will use more current technology that contains off-the-shelf items, at decreased costs, that allows for improved administration of elections. Our state only has two vendors and the equipment offered in my opinion uses antiquated technology. I know our Secretary and his team will work hard to bring additional options to Florida before we are required to replace our current equipment.

Finely, to quote a recently departed senior Senator from Massachusetts, “The work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die” we are hard working supervisors from the great State of Florida and we will always work together to bring ease and access to all of our voters during elections.

Thank you very much for the opportunity today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully Submitted by: Susan Bucher, Supervisor of Elections  
Palm Beach County, Florida  
(561) 656-6200  
susanbucher@pbcelectons.org