

New voting rules set to be released

By Hazel Trice Edney

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — New voting machine standards to be released this week are designed to prevent a recurrence of Election 2000-like debacles in congressional and senatorial races next year. However, activists and rights advocates say they more concerned about the new machines that are supposed to correct the problem than old ones with proven flaws.

"On the average, people do not feel comfortable with automated voting without having some kind of a verified way of knowing that their vote was actually the vote that they cast and the fact that they don't know if it's been counted. That concern is very high and across all demographics," says Melanie Campbell, executive director and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation. "When it comes to the machines, you've got a lot of new equipment. There are a lot of concerns still out there in the community, so the work continues. We need to just educate the community to make sure that they are involved and that they are a part of the process."

Gracia Hillman, chair of the four-member bi-partisan U. S. Election Assistance Commission, has announced hearings to allow people to comment on the new standards. Her agency seeks to assure election officials and the public that new voting systems being installed around the country will work accurately and reliably. The 90-day period during which public comments will be accepted begins June 10. The first hearing is set for New York City. Another hearing will be announced later, Hillman says.

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA), passed by Congress in 2002, established the EAC to oversee the distribution of \$3 billion by the General Services Administration for new voting machines and election improvements as well as to establish the federal standards for voting machines.

The HAVA technical guidelines mandate that state voting machines must be use optical scan, electronic touch screen or paper ballots. All lever voting machines and the punch card ballots that caused errors like the infamous "hanging chads" that brought the headache to

"[The new guidelines] could be very daunting for people who are not used to reading them."

— Garcia Hillman
U.S. Election Assistance Commission



Florida and across the country in 2000 will be outlawed as of January 2006.

Optical Scan allows voters to fill in an oval next to the candidate's name with a pencil or pen and then insert it through a scanner. If the form isn't correctly filled out, the scanner ejects it on the spot. Electronic touch screen machines allow voters to touch their choices on the screen and provide an option to change their choice before moving on. Paper balloting, still used in many small communities, involves checking the choice candidate on a piece of paper and dropping it through a slot in a box.

Hillman agrees that new standards, which will result in new machines in an undetermined number of states, may make votes easier to count, but often more difficult to navigate.

"The mystery needs to be taken out. There really needs to be transparency in the process," says Hillman, former executive of the Coalition, the League of Women Voters, and the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. "It's not complicated, but it's complex."

She praises officials in Florida, Nevada and Georgia that have allowed the public to practice on machines before election time.

Hillman says the extensive set of standards, developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology under the Department of Commerce, cover more than just machines. Also beginning in January, states must have at least one voting system that is accessible for disabled and blind voters at each polling place; and all states must have a statewide centralized voter registration database to quickly resolve registration disputes while the prospective voter waits.

Hillman, a Democrat, replaces DeForest B. Soaries, Jr., a Republican. Last fall, Soaries expressed disappointment in the slow process in getting the old ma-

chines replaced. He attributed that to a late start by Congress in choosing commissioners and getting them cleared by the FBI.

During November's presidential election, approximately 75 percent of voting machines were the same ones used in Election 2000, when an estimated 4 million to 6 million votes were lost because of voting foul-ups, including antiquated voting machines, according to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

In Florida alone, nearly 200,000 votes in Florida were lost because of malfunctioning voting machines and ballots, voter intimidation and confused poll workers, according to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights. The commission also reported that Black voters in Florida were nearly 10 times more likely than non-Black voters to have their ballots rejected. Florida has since replaced its punch card ballots, with either touch screen or

optical scan.

Campbell says the Coalition is constantly exploring ways to hold the voting process accountable for fairness to everyone. That included an Election Protection effort with voter hotlines and poll watchers around the country in 2004.

Hillman met with the Coalition during a retreat last week and says community groups will be the key to helping voters understand the new standards and debate them if necessary.

She says the document, which was unfinished during this NNPA interview, could already fill a three-inch binder. "They could be very daunting for people who are not used to reading them," she says.

The new guidelines will be printed first in the Federal Register, then made available on the EAC website (www.eac.gov), where viewers will also be able to submit comments. People can also email comments to havainfo@eac.gov.

The distrust of the computerized machines may grow as a key issue as the Coalition and other groups continue to receive concerns.

"A lot of people are concerned that there's no paper record of their vote and that there's a lot of abuse," says Bill Lann Lee, chairman of the National Commission on the Voting Rights Act, established by the Lawyers Com- (See Voting, Page 13)

Capitol Hill comes out for ACLU leader

By James Wright
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — A large crowd of former employees, congressman, senators, family and friends held a "Thank You" celebration for Laura Murphy, who recently stepped down as the Washington director of the American Civil Liberties Union Legislative Office. Murphy was cited as a "leader" and "an activist who loved the constitution."

Murphy was selected to lead the ACLU's Washington office in 1993 and made history as the first woman and the first Black in that position. Before that appointment, she served in the offices of U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.), worked as a lobbyist for the ACLU, was the chief of staff for California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown and led the D.C. tourism office under former Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly. Compliments were in abundance for Murphy.

"We are all gathered here to thank you, Laura Murphy, for all that you have done," U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) said. "You made it very clear where the ACLU stood on a great many issues."

"Whether it has been on censoring rappers or the right of the KKK to hold a rally, you have been insistent that the Constitution be respected and followed."

Waters noted that Murphy's ability to build unusual coalitions on certain issues had her and political and ideological foe, former Congressman Bob Barr (R-Ga.), working on privacy issues together.

"Me and Bob Barr working together was quite something," Waters said.

Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Mel Watt (D-N.C.) said Murphy's contributions were awesome. "I can't think of enough adjectives — that are positive — to say about Laura Murphy," Watt said. "She has been a wonderful ally of the Congressional Black Caucus."

"She is so persistent on the issues that she cares about, (See Murphy, Page 13)



LAURA MURPHY

Law Firm of Timothy C. Williams

ATTORNEY AT LAW



TIMOTHY C. WILLIAMS

Timothy Williams is a member of the Nevada & Illinois State Bar, practicing primarily in personal injury cases.

EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL INJURY CASES

- Automobile Accidents
- Motorcycle Accidents
- Wrongful Death
- Dog Bites
- Pedestrian & Other Bodily Injuries

892-0000

844 E. Sahara Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada

Neither the State Bar of Nevada nor any agency of the State Bar has certified any lawyer identified here as a specialist or expert. Anyone considering a lawyer should independently investigate the lawyer's credentials and ability.