

From: "Brady Dennis" [REDACTED]
Date: Thu, 01 Jun 2006 16:29:31 -0400
To: "Heleni Thayre"
Subject: RE: Vote-PAD letter

It was my distinct pleasure to have the opportunity to test out the Votepad system which should enable blind or visually impaired registered voters to vote independently in an election. Both the Congress and the Federal courts have recognized that persons having disabilities have the same right to cast their votes in complete secrecy as does anyone else who votes. Congress made disability access a mandated requirement when independent voting for disabled individuals was included in the Help America Vote Act of 2002, hereinafter referred to as HAVA-02.

For too long, blind or visually impaired individuals have had to rely on the assistance of others to cast their ballots. This assistance either came from trusted friends or other persons who presumably were honest enough not to attempt to influence the person's vote, or it came from precinct or other polling officials. In that situation, most states required 2 persons, (one from each party or side) to accompany the individual and assist him or her with the voting. After the vote was completed, the individual may have had to sign an affidavit acknowledging that such assistance was used.

The great thing about the votepad system is that it leaves a paper trail that election and other officials can follow to ensure that the vote will be cast in the manner that was intended by the individual. In this case, a pen is used to mark the intended selection, and a verification method allows the individual to confirm that choice. The verification method in this system consists of a wand device that vibrates when placed on the marked choice. The verification process can be performed as you go, (as I did), or can be performed when all voting is completed. Instructions can be provided on tape or in braille if requested, and the ballot used is the actual ballot that is used by anyone else. A sleeve device is used to cover the ballot so that privacy rights can be protected.

To the best of my knowledge, there's only one other proposed voting method that leaves a suitable paper trail that insures the ballot's authenticity and correctness. The machine methods being examined for independent voting purposes don't leave a paper trail which has raised concerns from election officials, and it is my understanding that many of the machine methods that have been tried have frequent breakdowns, and other mechanical problems.

Some have suggested that some kind of telephonic method using a touchtone phone could be used for voting purposes. That is unacceptable, because barring some very serious condition that would prevent a person from going to a polling facility, (assuming that it is accessible), it is expected that the voting will be done IN PERSON at a designated place. The absentee ballot can be used in situations where a voter will be unavoidably absent on the day of election, and there is no suitable mail-in option available.

Accordingly, it appears that the votepad can be used to satisfy the requirements set forth in HAVA-02 which mandates that by January 2007, a suitable method of independent voting is to be set up for persons with disabilities, especially if the device is to be paid for in part by the newly established Federal Election Assistance Commission. Once again, it was a pleasure working with you.

Brady Dennis