

# **Public Hearing Testimony: Ion Sancho, Supervisor of Elections, Leon County, Florida - 06/03/04**

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## **Testimony of Ion Sancho to the Election Assistance Commission**

**June 3, 2004**

**Subject: Implementation of Optical Scan Voting System**

The decision in 1991 to use optical scan voting technology in Leon County Florida in many ways parallels the experience of many Florida counties making the switch to new technology following the infamous Florida election of 2000, with one important difference, time.

On September 2, 1986, Leon County experience it's first and only election debacle. One research company later estimated that approximately six percent of the registered voters attempting to vote that day were disenfranchised. As a candidate for a county commission seat, that experience became the defining moment of my life, ultimately shaping the choices I would make as the new Supervisor of Elections, for I ran for that position and won, elected in November of 1988.

In the two years that preceded that election I became a student of the elections process. I devoted myself to find out all I could about the way elections were conducted in America. Leon County had used the Automatic Voting Machine (AVM), a lever voting machine, invented in the late 1800's, with the last one rolling out of their Jamestown, New York, factory in 1947. It was clear to me that new technology was my first priority, with my parameters shaped by the botched election of 1986.

My first priority was accuracy. Secondly, the system must provide for re-countability or accountability. The technology must be able to allow for a complete recount of the vote, independent of technology. The second was simplicity, to both the voters who were casting their ballots, and to the staff that had to set up, maintain, and use the system at the precinct level. Equally important was the ability of the technology prevent common voters' errors. Cost also was a factor. Finally, such a system had to meet every legal requirement Florida's laws imposed.

My research took the better part of a year. I attended national election conferences, an uncommon practice for most Florida election officials, and found the Federal Elections Commission National Clearinghouse on Election Administration a particularly useful resource. The International Association of Clerks Records Election Officials and Treasurers, and the newly established Election Center were other groups that served as excellent resources.

Optical Scan technology was my choice, for all the reasons I mentioned, but the more important decisions focused upon how to make the transition to the new technology. No new law or legal deadline was forcing this decision, so I chose to phase-in the new voting technology. This allowed me to study the impact of new technology on the voters and

staff activities and devise an implementation schedule suited to our voters and our staffing levels.

Voter education programs developed out of interviews we conducted with voters using the optical scan technology and training materials for our staff and election workers also were developed in the same manner. One year was the education and training timetable our office adopted.

In creating a plan for educating the citizens about the voting technology it became apparent to me that much of Florida's requirements for voter education in general was deficient. As I had discovered during Leon County's own experience with election problems, most people, including election administrators, took our voting process for granted. What had worked in the past was presumed to work in the future. We had to create our own policies on voter education and many of my best ideas to design our voter education programs were borrowed from other states.

Direct mail emerged as an important element of our plan. Attractive and professionally designed mailings were repeatedly sent to all our voters explaining how to vote on the new technology. Mailing sample ballots to every voting household before every election, no matter how small, became our policy at this time, and will continue as long as I am Supervisor of Elections.

Our organization structure was dramatically changed, creating a permanent voter outreach position. Election workers training was completely altered, requiring each Clerk, the administrator of the precinct on election day, to be attend classes, and be certified with our office before they could serve in that capacity in an election.

Voter education programs were aimed at high volume sites such as malls, shopping centers, schools, fairs, art openings, concerts, churches. Radio and television interviews were conducted, and newspaper stories were particularly helpful. The fact that we were not rushed in this process was important.

The 1992 debut of the new voting system was a success. The November general election set a modern record for voter turnout in Leon County, eighty-four percent, with a residual vote of just three thousandths of one percent! The rest is history.