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2006 PRIMARY SERVES AS A TRANSITION TO MORE MODERN ELECTIONS

SPRINGFIELD, IL, March 16, 2006 – Most Illinois voters who go to the polls for the March 21 primary election will utilize new technology in their precinct polling places.

In addition, a new state law permits registered voters to cast an early ballot so voters face an array of changes this year.

“This election year marks the transition to modern, electronic voting,” said Daniel W. White, executive director of the State Board of Elections. “Punch-card voting in Illinois is a thing of the past. For the first time in Illinois, a majority of voters will mark paper ballots that will be counted by optical-scan equipment or vote on touch-screen equipment.”

“Coupled with the state’s new early voting law, the upgrades in election equipment means that election authorities are administering more changes this election year than they have in decades.”

Board officials advise voters to allow for additional time in going to the polls Tuesday to familiarize themselves with new equipment being used for the first time.

“With any new technology,” White said, “there is a learning curve.”

Preliminary reports indicate that there were very few early voting problems across the state and the new procedures were well received by voters, White said.

White noted that in non-Presidential election years Illinois is the second state to hold a primary election, so election authorities across the state are under more time pressure than almost anywhere else to have new equipment up and running. Texas held the first primary on March 7, two weeks before Illinois.

Chicago and suburban Cook County have replaced a punch-card system with touch-screen equipment that resembles an ATM machine and an optical scanner that counts paper ballots. Since a plastic card is used to activate a touch-screen machine for a voter, some election officials are humorously simplifying the new options by asking a question frequently used at grocery store checkout lanes: "Paper or plastic?"

There are 110 election authorities in Illinois and 11,647 precincts.

Every county in Illinois has purchased some type of voting equipment that is accessible to persons with disabilities. The State Board of Elections, after months of testing, has certified that the new equipment meets the standards of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). For the most part, election authorities in each county are reimbursed for the cost of the machines with HAVA grants.

The Illinois State Board of Elections is an independent state constitutional agency charged with the responsibility of having general supervision over the administration of election laws of the State. The Board works closely with election authorities in all regions of the State.

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