

Op-Ed: Registrars are continually working to improve elections system

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In recent weeks, there has been a lot of press, both in print and on television, about problems associated with voting in the 2012 presidential election.

The word "archaic" has been bandied about, along with censure of the long lines voters faced in West Hartford, Hartford and Manchester. In many of these stories, the registrars of voters across the state are taking the brunt of this criticism.

It is unfortunate that the "other side" of the story is not being told. In the vast majority of polling places in the vast majority of towns, the election went smoothly, with fast moving lines, cheerful service to the voters on the part of the poll workers, and swift reporting of results at the end of the night. Large cities such as Bridgeport, Stamford and Norwalk handled the large turnout of voters with no major problems.

It is also unfortunate that the "archaic" system is being blamed on the registrars and their poll workers. The Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut (ROVAC) educates registrars all over the state, both at statewide conferences held twice a year, and in county meetings held three to four times a year. Consider some of the improvements that registrars are currently using and developing in their towns: the use of Skype to communicate with various polling places in the cities, leaving phone lines open for the public; the use and development of electronic check-in books, where a voter is checked in not on a paper list of many pages, but with several clicks of a mouse on a laptop, or the scanning of a barcode next to a voter's name; and a post-election audit system that uses high-speed scanners rather than teams of people hand inspecting and counting ballots.

ROVAC also supports the use of technology that is already available for our current tabulator system to report results: using either the ports on the back of our tabulators to send results to the secretary of the state's office instantly, or placing the memory cards that each tabulator houses into an "ender machine" that will read the information on the card and send it electronically to the secretary of the state.

Such use of this technology, which is used in other states without problems, would speed up the reporting of the election results tremendously, while virtually eliminating the mistakes that come from bleary-eyed election workers attempting to read and accurately record numbers by hand onto a Head Moderator's Return, which then gets faxed to the secretary of the state's office.

You may wonder why you haven't seen these innovations implemented statewide. Part of it is that state statutes have not caught up with technology, and part of it is a lack of priority within the

secretary of the state's office. ROVAC brings forward legislative initiatives every year, many of them dealing with reforming the state statutes to allow for technology to improve our system, but often our bills are just not a high priority for our lawmakers.

The large majority of registrars are eager to embrace new technologies and new educational opportunities. We eagerly await the certification program that the secretary of the state's office is by state statute required to implement, and look forward to the continual improvement of our elections system statewide.

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