Florida Ten Years After the 2000 Election: Lots of Reforms In Place; Floridians' Wish? "Please, No Repeat!"

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A Brief Look Back at Problems in the 2000 Election

Election 2000 put Florida into the national spotlight in a less-than-flattering way. By the end of the 36 days of post-election chaos, the whole world knew of Florida’s problems with punch card ballots and their chads, Palm Beach County’s oddly-formatted butterfly ballot, spoiled ballots disproportionately cast by uneducated and first time voters, the difficulties of determining voter intent, the lack of a uniform standard for recounts, registration and absentee ballot fraud, the consequences of actions by poorly-trained poll workers, and controversies surrounding the counting of military and overseas voters’ absentee ballots. It was clear that the crisis was not merely a function of a close election (a 537-vote, 0.009 percent margin of victory for George W. Bush), but also of antiquated and inadequate election laws and flawed voting equipment.

An Irate Citizenry Demanded Changes

Floridians were irate, to put it mildly, by the time the U.S. Supreme Court made its final ruling in Bush v. Gore, awarding Florida’s Electoral College votes (and the election) to Bush. They clearly wanted the election system reformed as soon as possible. The results of a statewide public opinion survey were released just as the 2001 Florida legislative session was drawing to a close...

What reforms did Floridians want? The 2001 survey showed that first and foremost they wanted standardization and uniformity—of voting machines, ballot layout and design, recounting rules (for close elections and for absentee ballots), rules for counting overseas absentee ballots, and poll closing times. There was also significant support for the creation of a statewide voter registration list to help reduce fraudulent voting by ineligible persons, better voter education, better training of poll workers, and an improved voter registration system. Well over half also favored outlawing punch-card voting machines.

A Decade of Election Reforms

Florida has been a leader in election reform since 2000. It had to be! While many changes have been made to our election system over the past 10 years, some of the most significant improvements have been:

- **More uniformity**. Laws have been passed that ensure uniformity across the 67 counties with regard to recount procedures, determination of voter intent, ballot design, poll worker training...testing of equipment...and counting of absentee ballots for overseas and military voters.

- **New voting equipment**. The state has abandoned two voting systems. Touch screens, which replaced the much maligned punch cards, were, in turn, replaced by optical scan systems...
**Early (convenience) voting** -- absentee ballot or in-person at selected locations...

**More effective voter education.** County supervisors of elections are now required to prepare and use a Voter Guide and make it available on his or her website and at a variety of locations and events....

**Centralized voter registration system** (Florida Voter Registration System—FVRS). The federal Help America Vote Act required all states to create an official, uniform and nondiscriminatory statewide computerized voter registration list that is centralized and interactive by January 2006, which Florida did...

**Better protection against disenfranchisement at the polls.** The Voter’s Bill of Rights and Responsibilities must be posted at each polling place and at the county supervisor’s office during the early voting period and on Election Day. Voters who cast provisional ballots at a polling place must receive a written notice of their rights... To make sure that poll workers properly implement election procedures and laws, a Polling Place Procedures Manual must be made available.

**A better system for protecting the voting rights of military and overseas civilian voters** who need to vote absentee...

**A better system for checking voter ineligibility due to mental incapacity or a felony conviction.**