

From the Durango Herald 2/27/2008:

Lawmakers present paper-ballot bill La Plata County clerk worries state could be 'laughingstock'

By Joe Hanel

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DENVER – Most Colorado voters will use paper ballots this fall, if high-ranking legislators get their way.

Lawmakers announced a bill Tuesday requiring a mostly paper- ballot election, to the dismay of many county clerks who had wanted either an all-mail ballot of greater use of electronic voting machines.

"We're not relying on computers as much as we were in the past," said Sen. Ken Gordon, D- Denver. " It's low- tech, but we think low- tech means there's less likelihood there will be problems."

The bill will not require any changes in La Plata County, said County Clerk Linda Daley.

But larger counties will have to re-do their whole systems, Daley said, and it's getting too late in the year for such major changes.

"It makes (county clerks') jobs a lot harder, and I do not want Colorado to be a laughingstock. It could turn out that way," Daley said.

The Legislature plans to offer \$3.5 million to help counties that face costly changes. Gordon said it should be enough money, but Daley doubts it.

Gov. Bill Ritter sent a letter Tuesday to county clerks, voicing his support for the bill and expressing his hope that the \$3.5 million will "significantly, if not entirely" pay for any changes clerks may need to make.

The bill requires county clerks to print enough paper ballots for every voter they expect in November. Voters will be able to use an electronic voting machine if they specifically request one. Federal law requires an electronic machine at each voting location so disabled people can vote.

The bill had not been introduced when the Senate adjourned Tuesday, but Gordon said the bill was finished and would be introduced at the first opportunity.

Gordon is sponsoring the bill with the other party leaders in the House and Senate, Democratic Rep. Alice Madden and Republican Sen. Andy McElhany and Rep. Mike May.

The changes might cause delays in counting votes, but it's more important to make sure every voter gets a chance to vote, and every vote is counted, May said. Gordon urged voters to cast their ballots early, either by mail or in person when clerks open their offices for early voting.

Daley agreed that early voting will help, but she said it would be better if the whole election were done by mail. "Whatever happens, the county clerks will do the best we can," she said.

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