

**From the Durango Herald March 8, 2008:**

## **Counties fear cost of voting upgrades**

### **Electronic machines require new software**

**By Colleen Slevin**

Associated Press Writer

DENVER – Nearly 40 small Colorado counties can't afford the new software they need to use their electronic voting equipment under restrictions set by the secretary of state, county clerks said Friday.

The clerks estimated it would cost the 38 counties a combined \$ 1.9 million. Clerks in La Plata and Montezuma counties say they don't think it will be costly for them because the counties already use paper ballots.

It's the latest obstacle to arise as Colorado prepares for the 2008 elections.

In December, Secretary of State Mike Coffman decertified most of the electronic election equipment used in Colorado, citing accuracy and security concerns. He has since recertified it after more tests and consultations, but he imposed new conditions.

County clerks have objected to some of the conditions. Coffman is expected to decide next week whether to change any of them.

While Coffman and county officials wrestle over making the equipment usable, state lawmakers and Gov. Bill Ritter are pushing ahead with plans to conduct this year's elections mainly by paper ballot.

Under their tentative plan, electronic voting machines would be made available only to voters who ask to use them. Lawmakers and Ritter are concerned voters may not trust the electronic equipment. They also fear activists could sue to stop the widespread use of the machines.

Coffman recertified Hart InterCivic voting machines used by 47 counties, including the 38 small ones, but only if they use new software that allows county officials to set up their own ballot layouts.

The ballot layouts determine how votes are tallied. The larger counties set their own layouts, but the smaller ones rely on Hart to do it.

The new software would also let county officials set their own passwords to gain access to the layout.

Currently, small counties and the manufacturers share the password.

At a hearing Friday, Douglas County clerk Jack Arrowsmith suggested Hart still be allowed to program the ballot layouts but give copies to a third party before the election. He said they could be checked later if there was any suspicion that they had been changed