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**Linda Daley, La Plata County Clerk & Recorder**

## **Election Day could pose challenges for state's county clerks**

This year is shaping up to be one of the busiest and most challenging election years ever experienced by Colorado election officials.

County clerks throughout the state are still anxiously awaiting the Legislature's decision on how this election will be conducted.

Whatever the decision, county clerks will do everything within their power to conduct successful elections this year.

Paper ballots have always been used in La Plata County and will continue to be used here. In 2006, the federal government required that one electronic voting machine per election precinct be purchased. These machines give disabled voters the opportunity to cast their ballot in private and unassisted if they wish to do so. The equipment was well-received by members of the disability community and some, for the first time in their lives, cast a secret ballot – the right of every citizen.

I made the decision to give voters here a choice of casting a paper ballot or using the electronic machines, which also provide a verifiable paper trail. In 2006, no one was required to use the electronic machines to cast their ballot, and in 2008, the voters will have the same choice. All voting equipment used in La Plata County is certified by the federal government and the state of Colorado.

However, I did support the request made by the county clerks across Colorado to conduct this upcoming election as a paper ballot delivered by mail to all voters.

There are two very serious matters that must be considered before deciding the appropriate method for conducting the 2008 primary and general elections: the decertification of equipment used by a majority of the population in Colorado, and implementing a new, untested statewide voter registration system that is still in development.

Although the equipment used by La Plata County was not decertified, much of the equipment used in Colorado was. If this equipment is allowed to be retested, there is still no guarantee it will succeed if it is not certified. County clerks will not know until it is too late, and until some change in law is made, they cannot purchase any equipment. Even with a change in the law, at this late date vote tallying equipment may become impossible to get.

The secretary of state tested the equipment without any county clerks or staff present to demonstrate real Election Day activities; instead testers used activities that election judges would never allow to take place during an actual election. I heard stories of smearing ketchup and/or mayonnaise on the ballot, or stapling a ballot, and then seeing if votes would count correctly.

The second major election problem is the statewide voter-registration system, required as part of the Help America Vote Act, to be implemented this year.

Colorado has made several attempts at implementing such a system, the last such effort abandoned in 2005.

Another vendor was chosen in 2006 to develop the "SCORE II" system.

There are many unresolved issues with this new system. The secretary of state's office and the vendor are doing everything they can, but the system is not ready for prime time. The system was tested in 2007 as seven pilot counties conducted an all-mail election. The counties found many short-term fixes were needed and work-arounds were used to make the test a success. These fixes are now part of the SCORE II system; we know a mail ballot election will work. But there has been no testing of a polling place election with the whole state on the new system.

If we are to conduct polling place elections with paper ballots statewide, this system will have to be operating at 100 percent when every Colorado county is accessing voter information at the same time. Plus, voters will begin voting two weeks before Election Day – at the same time, an ever increasing number of absentee ballot requests are being processed and mailed to voters. SCORE II must work perfectly in all 64 counties, as every voter has to be given marked immediately as having voted. This activity will take place in every county for two weeks before Election Day.

On Election Day, we will need SCORE II to perform perfectly to handle the largest voter population turnout.

Legislation passed in January implementing a permanent mail ballot status for voters who apply. The application forms are available on La Plata County's Web site and the Secretary of State's Web site, or applications are available at the election office in the courthouse.

I support delivering a paper ballot by mail to every voter this year because it is the method that presents the least amount of risk. It also provides a paper backup for auditing purposes.

This scenario is not a new process for La Plata County: In odd-numbered years, we always vote by mail, with provisions for voters who have moved or did not vote in the last election – they can still come into the election office until 7 p.m. Election Day and vote.

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