To: Steve Ward, please forward to COVAMEC (please include in preparation for next meeting)

You have published an "Assessment of Voting System Technology Report" with two additional spreadsheets reflecting both written and verbal answers from counties regarding some history and mostly future use of voting systems.

Assessment of Voting System Technology Report (PDF)

- Attachment A - UVS county written survey (XLS)
- Attachment B - UVS county telephone intervier survey (XLS)

These reports are anonymized to protect for whatever reason the identity of the county. This kind of secrecy has become familiar as the standard operating practice of the CCCA- a policy now apparently adopted by COVAMEC.

I am interested to know why the county of origin of the responses to the surveys has been made confidential.

I have recommended to election quality activists to comment on the report. What follows are my original comments.

On my first reading I noticed a huge emphasis on obsolescence of software as well as hardware. The presumption being made is that legacy operating systems are susceptible to newly discovered flaws that will not be remedied by the manufacturers. I agree that there would be a potential problem due to hardware obsolescence- but this is a problem substantially remedied by the surplussing of all the precinct count equipment from the many terminated precinct polling places.

Software on the other hand does not break due to age, and the legacy software systems (such as Windows 2K and Windows XP operating systems) are not being challenged by newly arrived code in these systems (as they would be in conventional uses) and hence are not notably subject to failure. SLI, the author of the report seems to have completely overlooked this fact in multiple places in the report and is projecting what I think is fear of a non-existent problem- new bugs appearing in Win2K or XP.

Also SLI presumes that DRE with VVPAT will be required but DRE (and the associated unauditble electronic ballot) is not specifically required by HAVA. SLI has focused a lot of attention on use of Ballot on Demand in any future voting system. I see no reason to make either of these assumptions other than the expectations drawn from past experience and existing equipment.

There is a bold presumption made that use of mail-in ballot will simply continue to increase. Half the counties surveyed seem to offer no
plan for precinct scanner at VSPC (meaning either no flat ballot voting, or flat ballots sent to central count.) The survey did not make a distinction.

SLI has listed particular voting systems but left out the projects of Clear Ballot, Open Count, Travis County (STAR), and Los Angeles County, as well as many others that are not yet major vendors. Perhaps some mention should be made of the reason for selection of the particular list.

SLI has uncovered expected huge inconsistencies in the methods counties envision for running the next few elections-- from all DRE at VSPCs to minimal use of DRE at VSPCs. Some counties apparently envision no need for stubs. It is not clear which counties plan to offer flat ballots and at least one does not know what it means. The spreadsheets demonstrate that as much as it may be desired, we will not have a uniform voting system even if the hardware to be purchased will be the same in each county.

There is substantial space given to consideration of timing of establishing a new voting system by either the June or November 2014 election but both targets seem unreasonably soon to me.

As far as I can tell there is no mention of voter privacy, ballot anonymity, election oversight, auditing or many other critical issues regarding the voting system. Little or no consideration is given to accuracy and other primary election system goals. Much space is however devoted to cost.

It would appear that the counties reported little or no experience of failure, when in fact my belief is that there have been many instances of unadvertised and unreported failure that have been successfully worked around but will have been opportunistically forgotten by election officials who would rather not revisit the stress of an election night.

Still there is much to be learned and commented upon in this report, and time is of the essence, since the SOS RFP is intended to go out on October 1 and we are told that public input into the RFP has closed.

Clearly the COVAMEC report and particularly its survey reports are of value to the UVS project and the SOS UVS RFP process should receive input from the contents of this survey, even if not as complete or informative as the survey I had proposed.

Please forward the survey data in as complete a form as possible to the UVS project (including Advisory Committee and PPP) for immediate consideration.

Thanks very much.

Harvie Branscomb
PPP Member