

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/custom/newsroom/chi-060321votercomplaints,0,1876830.story?coll=chi-newsroomoverline-411

Your problems at the polls

Voters weigh in on new machines

By Charlie Madigan
 Tribune senior correspondent

March 21, 2006, 3:29 PM CST

We asked you to tell us about your experiences at the precincts on this primary Election Day and the reports have started to roll in.

I had my own. When I tried to vote in Evanston, the touch screens were down, had been down since 6 a.m. and the election people were having no success getting help. I stopped by a second precinct just to check and found the same problem. "The memory thingie doesn't work," said an election official.

The Election Board's official Web site was down, too.

The voting complaints continue streaming in, topped by this one from an official from an independent voters interest group:

"Already today we are seeing numerous problems with election procedures—old and new. I can only imagine how horrendous the count will be. All across the city, activators for the touch screen machines are not working (or judges are unable to use them?).

From the 5th ward, at 10 a.m. this morning, election judges still didn't have lists of early voters, creating the opportunity for people to vote twice.

From the 35th ward, election judges standing at the ballot counter, viewing the ballots as they are being fed into the counter. From the 46th ward, a voter who over voted was denied a new ballot and had to cast her spoiled ballot, denying her a vote in at least one contest. From the 6th & 48th wards, election judges demanding to see photo identification from voters.

One of the voters this happened to is a candidate and a former Cook County judge. All of this is indicative of poorly trained judges and inadequate communication between the polling places and election officials. A common complaint—from election judges and voters—was inability to get through to the help lines. That, at least, should have been anticipated for an election with new equipment and prevented by adding additional phone lines and tech support. What a mess."

Aviva Miriam Patt , Executive Director, Independent Voters of Illinois - Independent Precinct Organization (312) 939-5105.

Another story from Oak Park:

"I went to Gwendolyn Brooks School on Washington as usual to vote. There are three precincts that vote there; the area is pretty densely populated. I signed in and got a plastic card, with no explanation of what to do with it. There were no directions of any kind posted at the polling place.

There were 5 of the old machines set up, but no paper ballots. There was one of the new electronic machines to serve all three precincts. I waited about 10 minutes to vote; one person was at the machine the whole time, probably trying to figure it out. I had to go to work, so I simply left the card with the election judges. Anyone who wanted could use it, I suspect."

"Thank you for printing some of the problems voters have been having today. I thought I would add one to the mix: at 12:30 p.m. I went to vote in my Chicago precinct at Jones High School, took a Democratic ballot and was given the choice of paper or touch screen. I chose touch screen.

Advertisement

WHAT KIND
 OF PERSON
 IS JUST AS
 INTERESTED
 IN JEWELRY ADS
 AS POLITICAL NEWS?



NEWSPAPER
 ADVERTISING

A DESTINATION
 NOT A DISTRACTION



As I went down the ballot casting my votes, I came upon the candidates for State Senate and State Representative. The names on the ballot were wrong which means that all those voting before me voted for someone who does not represent them in Springfield."

"Well, I INTENDED to vote this morning but ... OK, so I don't know all the 'voting rules.' I declared non-partisan because I pick and choose by person, not party and those I choose is mixed. Well, that's not good enough, you must declare yourself one way or another or you don't get to vote at all!

Why can't the chosen 'person' win—not the party? I judge them by their views and if I feel they'd be best for the job, not if they're an elephant or a mule. For heaven's sakes—no wonder people don't care anymore. Thanks for 'listening.'

"The new paper format for voting removes a level of privacy that I as a voter expect. When I went to vote today the official gave me a paper ballot and instructed me to go to the booth to vote.

Once I got to the booth, but before filling out the ballot, I asked about confidentiality. I was unsure whether I would have to give the completed ballot to the judge ... who would then be able to see my votes. I was informed that once the ballot was completed I would have a privacy shield to cover the ballot and I could cast the ballot in the machine.

I thought this resolved my privacy concern. Not until after I filled out my ballot and received the privacy shield did I realize that it only covers one side of the ballot. I doubt if anyone in the polling place was looking at my votes, but since the shield only covers one side of a two-sided ballot, that opportunity exists.

When I mentioned my privacy concern (that I voiced BEFORE filling out the paper ballot), I was told that I could have used the electronic machine. Based on an article I read today, the electronic voting machines cost less than the paper machines. My suggestion is to install more electronic."

"FYI, some pretty significant voting irregularities were reported at a polling place in Summit. From 6 a.m. until 12:30 p.m., Democrats were unable to vote and turned away from that polling place because they had no Democratic ballots and an inoperable touch screen.

My office (The League of Women Voters. Ed.) and the voter who reported the problems, made multiple calls to the county clerk, IL board of elections, and the state's attorney to get the problem fixed and unfortunately the polling place was never shut down during all this, and Democratic voters were definitely turned away.

As the League is doing our poll watching initiative, looking for irregularities just like this, this story is significant to us. I thought you might also be interested in this problem. The polling place is precinct 63 at 7240 57th Street in Summit."

"I received 3 defective ballots. The fourth one finally went through. Each time the ballot was deemed defective, I had to get in line again. Good thing there weren't many people at the polling place this morning at 7:30 am!"

"Please look into the problems with the new voting machines.

This morning at 7:00 I tried to vote at my polling place. It is the Hawthorne School in the 44th Ward, 10th precinct.

I am blind and was looking forward to voting independently for the first time with the audio ballot. However, they could not get the audio ballot to work at my polling place, although two sighted people had voted using the touch screen.

The election judges referred to a manual, but this did not offer any guidance.

An investigator from the Chicago Board of Elections was at the polling place at the time. He could not enable the audio ballot either. I asked him to call downtown for a technician. He just shrugged his shoulders and said that people are being placed a half an hour on hold when they call in just to report a problem, let alone receive technical support with the machines.

The woman from my alderman's office did call in and began the holding pattern. They said that it could take hours for a technician to come. I said I would come back after work to vote independently rather than vote using an election judge or someone at the polling place.

It is a shame that tens of millions have been spent and the technology hasn't delivered on its promises."

"No wonder so many don't bother with the primaries.

In my district (I vote at St. Sylvester school at Palmer and Humboldt), one of my neighbors went to vote at 6:05 a.m. and there were no machines, no judges, no ballots. Great for working people, huh?

I went at 8:05 am and someone was leaving who was the first able to vote today. The judges seemed illiterate and voters had to explain the ballots to them. Truly pathetic. If we can't get our act together, what example are we supposed to be setting for Iraq, among others?"

"For whoever is accumulating such things, at the Barrie Park polling station in Oak Park (back after I-forget-how-many-years at Rehm Park), the machines weren't working when the polls opened.

I got there about 6:05, stood around till about 6:15 a.m. Paper ballots were handed out. I left about 6:25.

No one was upset except the poor tech guy, who was forced to seek help via cell phone."

"I couldn't manage to vote this morning, due to the new touch sensor machine in precinct 53 in Chicago Heights.

I asked to vote as a nonpartisan, and although I waited for quite a while, no one could get the touch sensor machine to work.

The election officials made numerous phone calls to ask for advice, but either got a busy signal or no answer at all.

Apparently at least two other neighboring precincts had repairmen out to fix the same problem, in Thornton and Calumet City.

I wasn't willing to be forced by circumstances into declaring a party, and couldn't afford to get to work any later than I already was, so I had to leave after a 50-minute wait. And I can't get out of work tonight in time to get back before the polls close, so I will simply not be able to vote at all due to this problem.

I did call the Cook County number furnished on the voter information brochure I received in the mail to report this.

Someone there told me he would add my report to similar ones that were being received in some number. When I asked what it would mean to the integrity of the election, to have a number of people unable to vote as they wished, he had no definite answer.

I do know, for a fact, while I was waiting, two other people who wanted to vote as either nonpartisan or other, decided to declare a party when told by the election officials that there was a problem with the new machine and there would be a wait while attempts were made."

Copyright © 2006, Chicago Tribune