

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Problems inherent in current election setup

Tuesday's *Dispatch* editorial did a good job of explaining some of the complexity of election reform in Florida. It charged the election vendors with not providing enough training to election staff and poll workers. While this is largely true, there is plenty of blame to go around.

Very few election vendors have a solid track record in selling voting machines. Since the 2000 election in Florida, a number of new companies have come on the scene, but most have had little success. The balance falls to four or five companies that, in some cases, have been in existence since the mid-1800s. For that reason, complacency and arrogance set in; they know the industry, and no one can give them any useful advice. After 2000, various industry experts in fields such as human ergonomics offered their services, but little has come of that.

Election vendors are saddled with the difficult task of supporting various counties on one or two days a year. They can't do this by hiring hundreds of support people who are idle the rest of the time (despite elections that may take place in other states at other times). So they often rely on outside technical help, much of it questionable and certainly not experienced in the business of elections.

Also, election vendors have to work cooperatively with

local elections offices. If the local office provides poll worker training, then the vendors need to make sure that the local office is training thoroughly in that system.

Finally, the public must keep in mind that poll workers are basically community volunteers. They come from all walks of life and have a wide range of skill levels. Many older Americans believe in public service and voting, and they do a fine job coming out to help. However, for the most part, this group is not as technically adept as younger Americans who don't participate civically. Furthermore, the poll workers one finds in one county may not have the skills and backgrounds found at another. Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet that can fix this situation.

Everyone involved with elections needs to step up to the plate and do a better job. That means vendors, citizens, the media and elections offices at both state and local levels all have to work together to understand and improve the process. The editorial was absolutely right: All the technology in the world won't fix this unless we address the human element, and that will take a joint effort.

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