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## **Starting Over On Voting-Machine Bids**

Susan Bysiewicz

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As the chief elections official for our state, my most important responsibility is to ensure the security and accessibility of our voting process. It is also my responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars allocated to our state are spent wisely.

When I announced on Jan. 4 that the state was stopping its procurement process for new voting technology because of an absence of qualified vendors, the presidents of the Connecticut Town Clerks Association and the Registrars of Voters Association of Connecticut joined me. The attorney general, members of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and members of the Council of Small Towns also stood with me that day.

We all stood together because this is an issue that affects each of us. At the local level, the town clerks and registrars are the ones who administer our elections, and CCM and COST must be able to tell their cities and towns how to plan for elections in November.

That same day, I also announced that until new machines could be purchased under a new procurement process, we would continue to use our current voting machines. This was not an easy decision to make. The central ideals of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 - allowing those with disabilities to vote privately and independently, and requiring a paper audit trail for all elections - can only be attained with new technology.

Two state restrictions - a new law requiring a paper receipt that a voter can view to verify his vote, and an antiquated provision requiring that all candidates and offices must be listed on the same page of a ballot - made it extremely difficult to find new machines. When it became clear during negotiations that the state had no qualified vendors, I had no other choice - despite our good-faith effort all the way - than to halt the process, to avoid wasting \$30 million in federal HAVA funds.

A new procurement process will begin soon, and we expect more vendors to come forward. Certain vendors have recently gained federal certification that they didn't have just a few months ago. In addition, a recent opinion from Attorney General Blumenthal indicates that there is no provision in state law for a full-faced ballot as part of voting machines. We are making every effort to comply with HAVA, and we are working to choose new technology as soon as possible. The federal government has acknowledged our efforts and said it wants to work cooperatively with Connecticut.

But procuring new voting technology is just the first step. It is equally important to work closely with each city and town to train our elections officials and poll workers in the use of new technology. As we have learned from the Ohio and Florida experience, proper training and education are critical.

Connecticut is a national leader in voting rights. We were among the first states to develop the centralized voter registration that protects the rights of voters and prevents fraud, which was required by HAVA.

For the first time in a state purchasing process, we sought the opinions of voters, and we worked closely with leading advocates for people with disabilities, including the state's Office of Protection and Advocacy and the American Association of People with Disabilities. The HAVA law, co-authored by Sen. Christopher Dodd, will allow those 200,000 disabled citizens to finally vote privately and independently.

No civil right is more precious than a person's right to vote. I will ensure that new voting technology is secure and accessible, and I will use our federal funds in a responsible manner. Our citizens deserve nothing less.

*Susan Bysiewicz is secretary of the state of Connecticut. A Democrat, she is running for re-election.*

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