

MEETING THE CHALLENGE TOGETHER



The November 2000 elections in the United States prompted the largest movement for electoral reform in this country in more than a decade, resulting in the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and a considerable amount of secondary state-level legislation to bring local jurisdictions in line with new federal guidelines. At the individual level, HAVA brings

change to the procedures and technologies that American voters encounter when they head to the polls. To date, voters have experienced a patchwork of voting systems scattered about the country, involving punch-card, lever, optical-scan and touch-screen technologies; disjointed voter registries; and varying standards for accessible ballots, provisional balloting and multiple language capacity.

These variations have generated nationwide inconsistencies as different systems have meshed and clashed with one another. Bringing them together and in line within discernable standards is laudable but poses the greatest challenge in election administration in American history. The challenge has been exacerbated by delays in the creation of the new Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and in the disbursement of funds associated with mandated changes. Additional time will have to be allocated for research, public procurement, testing, training, public education, distribution and installation of equipment, and contingency planning. These slipping timetables place increasing pressure on election administrators who are required to meet HAVA-specified deadlines. The electorate, while demanding reform, remains skeptical of a polling process that has proven to be complex and inconsistent.

It now falls to election administrators to prepare for the impact of this legislation through collaboration and leadership. While the EAC will provide guidance and standards, in the final analysis implementation will depend on practitioners at the state and local levels working together to raise issues and apply solutions. There are numerous professional

associations dedicated to providing election administrators with assistance and opportunities for networking and mutual support—The Election Center; the National Association of County Recorders, Election Officials and Clerks; the National Association of State Election Directors; the National Association of Secretaries of State; and the International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers, among others—through which we can share questions, ideas and solutions.

This issue of *Elections Today* presents a snapshot of a complex, multidimensional and fluid process. We are particularly indebted to Cameron Quinn, former Secretary of the Virginia State Board of Elections and now a HAVA consultant at IFES, for conceptualizing the themes and working with our featured authors, all experienced and respected voices on the U.S. electoral scene. Their contributions address such questions as: How far have we come since the passage of HAVA one year ago? What are some of the priorities for implementation leading up to next year's election season? What are some of the potential legal challenges on the horizon? What are the issues surrounding security and voter verification of ballots when using direct recording electronic (DRE) machines?

Our interview feature sheds light on the EAC, its structure, priorities and members. We also highlight some of the HAVA-related tools and resources available from IFES, including profiles of our technical assistance projects in states and localities across the country and our new election technology survey, which provides a valuable pre-HAVA baseline to measure the technological impact of the legislation in the months and years ahead.

Finally, we are extremely grateful to Sen. Christopher Dodd and Rep. Bob Ney for their personal perspective on the enormous importance and value of this endeavor, however difficult the march and uneven the terrain. The health of our American democracy rides on our collective efforts, and we can be sure that our fellow citizens and millions of others around the world will be watching the outcome closely. **ET**

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