Sample Script for Talking About Voting System Choices

The script seems to go in this way with people who are new to the issue. We often walk toward them with the colored flyer in hand and ask the following questions:

- At large events we often started with people we do not know by saying, “Do you vote in [your county]?” Follow this up with:
- Ask – “Did you know that the county has to replace the lever machines and we will have a new voting system?”

Often this gets their interest. Sometimes those who have not ever heard this before will be angry with you because they want the old system. Show sympathy and go on:

Yes, the federal Help America Vote Act (2002) has given us until 2006 to replace our old machines—because they are not accessible to the disabled—and are wearing out. Federal funding will cover something like 95% of the initial costs, but the county will have the storage and maintenance to pay for and manage.

- Did you know that the state legislature has given county Boards of Election and Boards of Supervisors the power to decide between two basic voting systems?

- We are encouraging voters on our county to tell our election commissioners and officials that we want what has been proven to be the most reliable system: hand-marked paper ballots counted by an optical scanner.

- Have one of the flyers with pictures handy and point to the pictures, stressing that:
  Each voter marks his/her own ballot in a privacy booth. The ballot is at least as large as the page you are looking at. It’s like marking a lottery ticket or test for scanning.

  Disabled voters use a wonderful marking device equipped with earphones, font enlargement, Braille-marked keypad, sip-and-puff capacity for those with mobility problems. Before casting their vote, they can re-insert the ballot and their votes will be read back to them through earphones. Then it is carried to the scanner and counted with the others.

- The hand-marked ballot is then carried to the scanner in a privacy sleeve. The scanner gives feedback if you have overvoted or undervoted or made stray marks that would cause a problem. Usually there is no problem and the scanner counts your votes instantaneously.
• The same ballot you have marked then drops down into a locked ballot box and is retained in case recounts are needed—or for the mandatory 3% audit required by New York State’s new laws. (People find this a very convincing point.)

• Encourage them to sign the petition or take the information about county officials. Urge calls to their own supervisors and election commissioners. If the officials answer that we have to wait to see what machines are certified, tell them that we need to tell the vendors what kind of machines we want. We are worried that they will seek certification only for the more expensive and less reliable DREs.

• We don’t want the vendors to tell us how to vote!

• If they ask why we don’t want electronic voting, answer that the very top computer scientists in the country are leading the movement for a paper-ballot based system (see the David Dill testimony). These experts know that electronic voting lacks transparency. You can never know, even with a paper printout, what the electronic coding inside the machine is doing. Trust in our democracy requires that we can trust our voting system.

• There are too many opportunities for accidental or malicious coding to take place—during not just the manufacture and installation of the machines, but during regular maintenance and service. Each machine has to be programmed for each election. Batteries have to be re-charged several times a year. There are too many opportunities for mistakes or fraud.

• Yes, the scanners also have to be programmed to count the ballots for each election. But the difference is that with optical scan ballot counters we have the hand-marked ballots available if any arise, or if recounts are required by law.

• There are transparent ways to test the programming before the election. A test deck of ballots can be prepared and counted publicly, run through the scanner, and then counted again to compare with the scanner’s count.

• With electronic touchscreen/pushbutton voting machines (DREs), the machine must be programmed for three tasks: voting, counting, and printing verification. DREs also have the programming for disabled-accessibility on the same machine. The software and its operations cannot be observed. In addition, even those who advocate DREs admit that there is no guarantee that the print-out corresponds to the electronic record.

• Refer to the Miami-Dade County mess—recently, recurrent miscoding in different elections caused hundreds of votes to be lost or miscounted. After spending 24.5 million for DREs, they are ready to replace them with the PBOS system— In addition, they found the maintenance costs were much higher than predicted for the DREs.