

LARSON CALLS FOR COMMITTEE ON VOTING METHODS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 16, 2000
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WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today announced that he will be joining U.S. Rep. William Delahunt (MA-10) in introducing legislation which calls for the formation of an independent committee on the security and accuracy of the American voting process. It would be a committee of election experts appointed by members from both the House and Senate, those members who decide who will serve on the committee will be equally divided between Democrats and Republicans.

The committee would conduct hearings on the methods that current votes are cast, whether through paper ballot, hand-written, through machine, electronically or by mail, and examine which method is the most accurate, least problematic and most easily understood by the voter. The committee will also examine what technology is available, or will soon be available, to modernize the American voting process to ensure that each vote is easily cast, accurately counted, and completely free from the possibility of fraud or misunderstanding, by both the voter and in how it is counted. Based on their findings, the committee will make recommendations to the states on the uses of this election technology in their own voting process. The legislation will also call for a matching grant program for states to use to implement the recommendations of the commission.

The committee will likely examine alternative voting methods including voting by mail (which is currently used in Oregon), as well as the use of computer voting at polling places, which would provide faster tallies of election results and reduce voter confusion. The committee may also study the prospect of voting through the Internet outside of regular polling places, as well as the expansion of the hours in which people can vote to cut down on long lines and encourage greater turnout. The committee may also look closely at the Electoral College system and possibly make recommendations as to how it could be improved or adjusted.

"Nothing is more fundamental to Democracy than the integrity of the vote," said Larson. "Our election results must be more accurate, and steps need to be taken by the states to bring the process of casting a vote into the 21st century by modernizing voting facilities and examining alternative methods of voting. The technology is out there, and is in some instances already being used, that will help guarantee that each vote is accurately counted, and that each ballot is understood by the voters. To cast a vote is the truest expression of a free citizen, and the United States must ensure that every available step is being taken to utilize technology to advance and safeguard this process."

In 1992, roughly 39 percent of voters used a punch-card system, about 28 percent used a lever machine, three percent used a paper ballot, 18 percent used an optical scan or electronic method, and roughly 10 percent used a mixed system.

Larson pointed to a 1988 report from the U.S. Department of Commerce entitled "Accuracy, Integrity, and Security in Computerized Vote-Tallying," to show that certain methods of voting are out-dated and less accurate than others, and that the process must be modernized.

"I believe that the current confusion in Palm Beach County, which used a certain form of punch card ballots, is among the best examples that certain methods of voting need to be closely examined," said Larson.

The 1988 report specifically recommended the elimination of pre-scored punch card ballots, which are similar to those used in Palm Beach County, Florida that are currently in question: "The use of pre-scored punch cards contributes to the inaccuracy and to the lack of confidence. It is generally not possible to exactly duplicate a count obtained on the pre-scored punch cards, given the inherent physical characteristics of these ballots and the variability in the ballot-punching performance of real voters."

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