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News

New process will aid in the counting of votes

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Iowa Secretary of State Michael Mauro and Cerro Gordo County Auditor Ken Kline are traveling the state touting a new electronic program, developed in Iowa, that helps precinct officials properly administer elections.

Mauro and Kline's travels brought them Monday to a press conference at the Pottawattamie County Courthouse, where they spoke of how the Precinct Atlas helps make sure poll workers follow all steps to process each vote.

"This program is really going to enhance the election process in Iowa," Mauro said.

The system is free to election officials in the state, though each county must supply the laptop computers and label printers needed to run it. Usually that means two of each per precinct.

With the Precinct Atlas installed, a poll worker uses it to process all the voters who show up at the polling place.

The program walks the worker through the process, not allowing the worker to go to step 3 without first going through steps 1 and 2. That greatly lessens the possibility of mistakes.

"It allows us ... to process an election in a way that adds another layer of security to the process," Mauro said.

The program was developed in Cerro Gordo County. Kline said the need was apparent after new election laws, passed in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election difficulties in Florida, made life more complicated for local officials.

Precinct Atlas is scheduled to be used in 668 precincts in 46 Iowa counties in the November general election.

Counties in western Iowa that will use Precinct Atlas include Harrison, Sac, Montgomery, Monona, Page, Shelby and Greene.

Mauro said he hoped to have every precinct in the state using the program within the next three years.

Ten of Pottawattamie County's 41 precincts will use Precinct Atlas in the November election, said Marilyn Jo Drake, the county auditor and election commissioner.

Although the county has purchased enough laptops for all precincts, there wouldn't be a sufficient number of election workers trained to use the program by Election Day.

"We plan that between now and next September, we will be working on training all of the precincts," Drake said. "We are planning to give each person somewhere around four to five hours' worth of training."

- World-Herald News Service

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