

Cuttino Mobley
Clippers force
Game 7 with
a 118-106 win
over Phoenix.

See Sports, Page C-1



THE CALIFORNIAN

AN EDITION OF THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES



Visit us online @
californian.com

May 19, 2006

VOL. 122, No. 139 NEWS FROM TEMECULA, MURRIETA, LAKE ELSINORE, WILDOMAR, CANYON LAKE, MENIFEE, SUN CITY AND FRENCH VALLEY

25 CENTS TAX INCLUDED

Election results won't be posted at polls

CHRIS BAGLEY
STAFF WRITER

Watchdogs decry end of practice, still required by law

Riverside County elections officials say they will not post tallies of the votes cast at individual precincts until several weeks after the June 6 primary elections, a departure from state regulations that has become common in recent years, but which nonetheless provokes dismay

among election watchdogs. When paper ballots were used, poll workers would count them at each of the hundreds of sites around the county where voters had punched them and deposited them into boxes. The poll workers would then post each precinct's totals at or near the polling place.

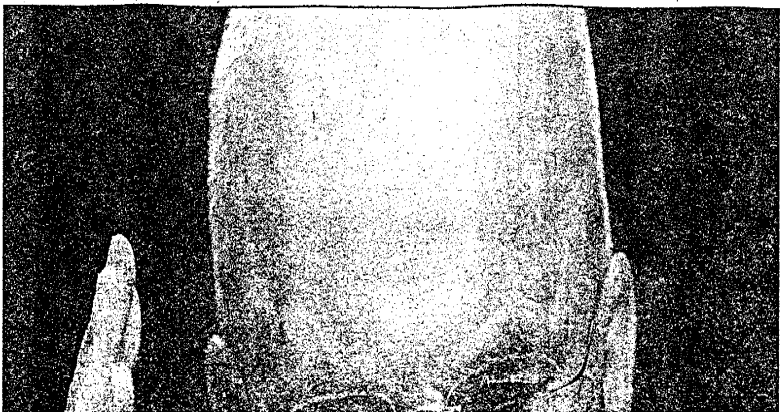
That changed by 2000, when Riverside County began using touch-screen voting machines in all its precincts. Since then, the votes from each of the thousand-plus machines around the county have been sent to a central facility in Riverside where they are counted electronically. State elections law re-

quires each precinct to post preliminary results on election night. The law dates from 1961, long before the advent of touch-screen machines and even before the advent of the punch-card systems that touch-screens replaced. This week, Riverside County Registrar of Voters Barbara Dunmore said she will ask the

Secretary of State's office for a waiver exempting the county from the requirement in the primary, although she also said the county may comply with the requirement in the November general election. Riverside and other counties that use touch-screens

► RESULTS, A-8

IN THE HOT SEAT



Bush visits border, urges Senate to act

rise
not in
e
tifies
Scarlett still
nightmares
election with
attack

JOHN HALL
STAFF WRITER

FRENCH VALLEY —
Scarlett thought about
Norman Larson
when she
heard him
call her
name the af-
ternoon of
Christmas

48 FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2006

▶ RESULTS

Continued from A-1

have obtained similar waivers in elections since 2000. San Bernardino County, which uses touch-screen machines that are nearly identical to Riverside County's, also expects to be exempt from the posting requirement next month, an assistant to that county's registrar said Wednesday.

Officials with the Secretary of State's office were not immediately able to say how many counties statewide will be officially exempt from the requirement, or to describe how exemptions are granted.

Privacy, security compromised?

For some people who monitor the security and accuracy of elections, the exemption is worrisome because they say it creates an opportunity to fiddle with the vote tallies. As long as each precinct posts its own results on election night, a central tabulation would set off red flags if error or fraud causes it to depart widely from an independent summation of the individual precincts' tallies, the watchdog groups say.

But posting a tally at each individual precinct would create numerous problems of its own, including one that could compromise voters' privacy, Dunmore said.

Polling sites next month will each have about five of the Sequoia Edge II touch-screen machines. Each of the 587 polling sites is meant to accommodate 1,000 voters in the course of the day. On average, each machine might have as many as 200 voters, but that number could vary widely, elections officials say.

If only one voter uses a machine during the day, an observer at the polls would know how he or she voted after that machine prints out its totals, Dunmore said. For machines that handled two, three or four voters, it would be more difficult but still possible to determine how any one person voted, she said.

"I have a couple of challenges before me," Dunmore said. "One is the posting at the polls; the other is to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the votes. I have made a decision for the greater good."

Dunmore said her office will post results of all the races on its Web site as the counting progresses in the hours after 8 p.m., when the polls close. Detailed vote counts — including each precinct's tallies — will be posted a month later when Dunmore certifies the results, she said. But even then, results won't be published for precincts with extremely low turnout, Dunmore said, citing the same privacy concerns.

Election watchdogs demand — and the law suggests — that the first count should come out of each individual machine, which isn't supposed to share data with the four next to it. Poll workers would then be expected to use calculators or spreadsheet computer programs to add up the five machines' totals for each of the dozens of candidates on the ballot. Multiply that times each of the seventy-plus ballots, or times the 587 polling sites, Dunmore said, and the result is mass chaos and disgruntled poll workers.

'Malarkey'

Flavia Krieg, an Aguanga attorney who's advising an elections watchdog group in Southwest County, disputed the decision to forgo the posting.

"Malarkey," Krieg said. "That's the only way to ensure that the central tabulator conforms to the results from the precincts."

Save R Vote, the 30-member group that Krieg is advising, is a project of the Temecula Valley chapter of Democracy for America, the national organization spawned by the 2004 presidential candidacy of Howard Dean. Members of the local group say they have tried to push Dunmore and her predecessor, Mischelle Townsend, to post precinct results in the past.

Earlier this week, Dunmore sent a letter to members of the group, offering to discuss ways to post the tallies in future elections. But on Wednesday, she said it might be difficult: Of the 587 polling sites, 45 are private homes; convincing a resident to let strangers hang out in the garage until 10 or 11 p.m. could be a tough sell, Dunmore said.

Dunmore said school principals in Riverside and elsewhere have already expressed concern to her about hundreds of extra adults on campuses during polling. If hundreds more end up traipsing around

looking for the posted elections results, she said, administrators could begin to deny use of their schools, which will account for 138 of the 587 polling places next month.

Elections officials haven't recently asked schools in the Temecula Valley Unified School District to post results or to allow poll workers to remain later at night, according to Debra Staylor, the district official who signs off on such requests before forwarding them to principals. At least eight schools in the district will host polls next month, Staylor said.

At the Murrieta Valley Unified School District, where 10 schools will serve as polling sites June 6, officials said they were unaware of any such requests in the last 13 years, roughly double the time that touch-screens have been used, according to Karen Parris, a spokeswoman for the district.

The way of paper ballots

The practice of posting each precinct's results seems to have become less common in the 1990s. As more counties scrapped paper ballots in the first half of the current decade,

the last of them did away with the practice, elections experts said.

But in the last year, more watchdog groups are demanding that the practice be resumed, said Kim Alexander, president of the California Voter Foundation, one such nonprofit group.

Responding to developments in technology, the California Legislature performed massive overhauls of the state's elections code in 1994 and 1996. But Section 19384 of the state elections code, which requires each precinct to post its

own results, remains alongside several requirements that appeared to refer to procedures for using and emptying the thousand-pound mechanical voting machines that were common in the 1950s and 1960s.

"There are a lot of requirements that are murky at this point or have not been enforced for whatever reason," Alexander said. "There was this attitude that the same rules didn't apply, even though the same problems needed to be addressed."

One of those challenges, Alexander said, is ensuring

THE CALIFORNIAN

that votes don't disappear en route to or inside the central tabulator. A new law requires each touch-screen voting machine to print a paper record of a voter's choices that he or she can check before leaving the poll. That's a good but imperfect safeguard, Alexander said.

"In the meantime, there's no reason not to follow the existing statute," she said.

Contact staff writer **Chris Bagley** at (951) 676-4315, Ext. 2615, or cbagley@californian.com. To comment on this article, go to www.californian.com.