

VOTING REFORM IN THE ST. LOUIS REGION

An Overview of How the St. Louis Region is Preparing for the Help America Vote Act

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its most recent publication, *One Region*, RegionWise defines voting as an essential indicator of Americans' engagement in shared democracy. Voter registration rates, turnout rates, and unrecorded vote rates speak volumes about citizens' belief in their ability to influence the communities in which they live.

During the fall of 2003, RegionWise conducted research across the 16 county St. Louis Region¹ to determine how the area is preparing to comply with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). HAVA is an unprecedented federal election reform bill that calls for fundamental changes to how Americans vote. Created in the wake of the 2000 presidential election controversy, Congress passed HAVA in 2002 and appropriated approximately \$1.4 billion for the bill. Thus far, Illinois has received \$44 million in HAVA funding, and Missouri, \$17 million to update outdated punch card machines, establish a state-officiated, centralized voter database, expand voter education, make polling places accessible to disabled voters, and re-train or recruit new election judges. Across the region, county clerks and election commissioners are preparing their counties for HAVA compliance. HAVA requires that its mandates be in place by the presidential election 2004. However, both Illinois and Missouri have applied for an extension until January 2006. HAVA compliance is complex and costly. According to one county clerk it has become "the top item on my agenda almost every day."

The report that follows explains the HAVA mandates, details the results of a survey RegionWise conducted with election commissioners in the 16 county region, and presents results from the presidential election 2000 that will be the benchmark from which HAVA progress is evaluated. Overall, RegionWise found that the preparation for HAVA has yielded some positive outcomes that go beyond the specific mandates of the bill. These are:

Increased Dialogue and 'Peer Learning' between Counties. Faced with the same demands for converting from punch card machinery to new voter technologies, counties are learning from each other. For example, St. Louis County has made field trips to similar-sized counties to examine how their peers are implementing new voting machines. In September, East St. Louis hosted a conference of the Association of Election Commissioners of Illinois, a meeting that brought together county clerks to discuss their HAVA compliance plans. Finally, in southern Illinois, 21 smaller, rural counties have joined together to form a "counties coalition" that has collectively negotiated for better voting equipment prices from vendors.

¹ The St. Louis Region includes 16 counties in the metropolitan area. In Illinois, these are: Bond, Calhoun, Clinton, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair. In Missouri, the included counties are: Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, St. Charles, St. Louis County, Warren, Washington, and St. Louis City.

Invigorated Voter Education Efforts. As this report will detail, a majority of election commissioners reported that HAVA was serving as a "catalyst," "a trigger," and "launching pad" for counties' efforts to educate citizens about the process and power of voting. New school programs, customized outreach to seniors, and collaborations with community-based organizations are just some illustrations of what one commissioner called, "the new energy around voting" that HAVA has prompted.

Raised Much-needed Attention to Accessibility Issues. None of the counties are in full compliance of the HAVA requirements that mandate that every polling place be accessible to voters with disabilities and that grants them the right to cast a ballot in privacy. HAVA has galvanized the community of people with disabilities and has raised awareness among election commissioners of the work that is left to be done. Projects such as the Missouri Disability Vote Project have mobilized previously disparate grassroots organizations and given them the political access to become architects of reform.

RegionWise also found that common concerns were echoed by many county officials—from both large and small counties. They include:

Training Voters to Use New Technology. Over and over, county clerks expressed fear of losing voters—especially older adults—who might feel alienated by a whole new voting system.

Transferring Power. Under the HAVA bill, local governments will no longer exercise the same level of authority on voter registration oversight, voting machinery certification, and voting procedures. HAVA centralizes much of the authority at the state level. Many county clerks expressed reluctance to implementing this fundamental change.

Affording HAVA. One hundred percent of the election commissioners interviewed believed that HAVA federal funds would not cover the cost of bringing their county into compliance with the bill. County clerks reported that their counties' budgets were already strapped.

Recruiting New Election Judges. The majority of election poll workers are older adults. In St. Louis City, for example, the average age of a poll worker in the last election was 72 years old. Election officials expressed concerns about recruiting poll workers from the older adult population to learn the new technology. Many counties are aggressively recruiting a new generation of poll workers, targeting high school and college students.

RegionWise's goal in its research has been not only to provide a snapshot of the region's status in preparing for HAVA mandates, but also to present an overview that might foster collective solutions and innovations amongst election officials.

INTRODUCTION

The simple act of voting speaks volumes about the status of shared democracy. Voting enables citizens to exercise their individual right to choose leaders and influence change. It is the essential measure of citizens' participation – and faith in our government.

In its most recent publication, *One Region*, RegionWise defined voting registration, turnout, and unrecorded vote rates as vital indicators of the health of the community. If people are voting, that means they are taking a positive and empowered role in shaping their communities. If their votes are accurately counted, our government is honoring their rights.

How is the St. Louis region faring? At first glance, St. Louis has respectable results when compared to national and statewide averages. Below is a table that compares the region's voter registration, voter turnout, and unrecorded vote rates to Illinois, Missouri, and national rates. RegionWise has also established target goals for 2010.

**Table 1: Voter Registration, Turnout, and Valid Vote Rates
Presidential Election, 2000²**

	St. Louis Region³	State of Illinois	State of Missouri	National Average	RegionWise Target Rate for 2010
Voter Registration⁴	84.7%	77.7%	92.6%	75.1%	94%
Voter Turnout	69.4%	60.7%	61.1%	67.1%	75%
Recorded Vote Rate	97.7%	96.1%	98.1%	98.2%	99%

Source: Data compiled by RegionWise.

For county level information, please see Appendix A.

Table Notes: What is an unrecorded vote? In the context of this report, the number of unrecorded votes is the difference between the total number of voters who go to the polls and the number of recorded votes cast for the president in 2000. There are myriad reasons why votes go unrecorded. They include: overvotes (too many candidates marked on a ballot), undervotes

² Throughout this report, RegionWise election data is from the most recent presidential election (November 2000).

³ The St. Louis region includes 16 counties in the metropolitan area. In Illinois, these are: Bond, Calhoun, Clinton, Jersey, Macoupin, Madison, Monroe and St. Clair. In Missouri, the included counties are: Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, St. Charles, St. Louis County, Warren, Washington, and St. Louis City.

⁴ The difference between the region's voter registration rate presented in this report and the rate reported in *One Region* is due to variation in timing of data collection.

(incomplete ballots, which can be intentional if a voter chooses not to vote for a candidate in certain races), and damaged ballots (hanging or dimpled chads).

The unrecorded vote rate (3.9%) in Illinois is nearly twice that of Missouri (1.9%). One reason for this difference might be that in the 2000 presidential election, Missouri still had a straight party punch, meaning that a voter could vote for every candidate in a specific party with just one punch. Illinois did not have a straight party ballot card, which meant voters would have to choose a candidate for every race, a process voters might not complete accurately, thus increasing the chance for errors.

While the overall region averages are in line with national averages, discrepancies persist in the St. Louis region. For example, while some precincts in the region boast near perfect rates (less than 1%) of unrecorded votes, other precincts have some of the nation's highest unrecorded vote rates. In the St. Louis region, about 10% of the precincts had an unrecorded vote rate greater than 5%. (These precincts are in Bond, Clinton, Jersey, Macoupin, Monroe, and St. Clair Counties in Illinois and Franklin, St. Charles, St. Louis County, and St. Louis City in Missouri.) In East St. Louis, 42 out of 44 precincts had unrecorded vote rates over 5% and 18 of the 44 precincts had unrecorded vote rates over 12%. The outcome of these high rates means that over 1,400 votes went unrecorded in East St. Louis.⁵ In St. Louis City, 59 of 374 precincts reported unrecorded vote rates over 5%, and over 4,000 votes went unrecorded city-wide.⁶

A Move for Reform – The Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

The St. Louis region is not alone in facing election problems that warrant reform.

Indeed, memories of the Florida 2000 election debacle and more recent news of the California recall debate demonstrate that election reform is a pressing national issue.

In October 2002, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). HAVA is the nation's first federally funded mandate to upgrade election procedures in the country. With the bill's passage, Congress appropriated approximately \$1.4 billion to help states make improvements. The bill also dramatically redefines how elections are conducted by shifting governmental power from local to state and federal levels.

⁵ It is important to note that in East St. Louis, an area that has a high number of low-income and minority voters, voters may have purposefully chosen not to vote for specific candidates since they did not feel the candidates represented their concerns. For more information, see articles such as: "Harris, Jamie and Zipp, John, "Black Candidates, Roll-Off, and the Black Vote," *Urban Affairs Review* 34: 489-498.

⁶ See Appendix B and Appendix C for detailed presentation of election results on county and precinct-by-precinct levels. Sources: Illinois and Missouri county election boards.

Missouri has received \$17 million in federal funding for HAVA, while Illinois has received approximately \$44 million. Both states are in the planning phases for allocating these funds to counties. The funding is intended primarily to aid states in replacing outdated punch card and lever voting equipment, establish state-officiated voter registration databases, make polling places ADA compliant, increase voter education and information efforts, and improve poll worker training. The general consensus among officials is that the federal aid, while unprecedented, will not cover the cost states and counties will incur to meet HAVA requirements.

“If you look at any other industrialized nation in the world, you are likely to find far more sophisticated voting systems than our antiquated, decentralized system,” notes David Kimball, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Missouri – St. Louis, and coauthor of *Why Americans Split their Ticket*. Kimball has been tracking how HAVA will impact Missouri and Illinois. In the St. Louis region, counties are just beginning to grapple with how they will update their systems to comply with HAVA. In September 2003, both the Illinois and the Missouri Secretaries of State required county clerks to participate in HAVA-related training. They returned with a sober outlook of the formidable work that is ahead of them.

RegionWise Survey.

During September and October 2003, RegionWise conducted surveys with 16 St. Louis region county election commissioners to explore how HAVA was impacting their operations. The survey included questions about how counties planned to convert punch card machinery, become ADA compliant, coordinate with the state on voter registration, expand voter education, fund mandates, and train new poll workers. The election officials who participated in the RegionWise survey are listed below.

Table 2: Participating Election Officials in RegionWise HAVA Survey, 2003

Jurisdiction	Election Official
<i>In Illinois</i>	
Bond	Randy Reitz, County Clerk
Calhoun	Lucille Kress, County Clerk
Clinton	Sharon Holscher, Chief Election Deputy
Jersey	Linda Crotchett, County Clerk
Macoupin	Michelle Zippay, County Clerk
Madison	Mark Von Nida, Director of Elections
Monroe	Dennis Knobloch, County Clerk
St. Clair	Bob Delaney, County Clerk
East St. Louis	James Lewis, Executive Director, Election Board

<i>In Missouri</i>	
Franklin	Debbie Door, County Clerk
Jefferson	Jeannie Goff, Chief Deputy of Elections
Lincoln	Elaine Luck, County Clerk
St. Charles	Rich Chrismer, Director of Elections
St. Louis County	David Welch, Director of Elections, Republican Appointee
St. Louis City	James O'Toole, Director of Elections, Democrat Appointee
Warren	Barbara Daly, County Clerk
Washington	Janet Adams, County Clerk

In addition, RegionWise compiled election results as baseline data from the most recent presidential election (November 2000). RegionWise collected information for each county regarding voter registration numbers and turnout rates. In addition, RegionWise mapped – precinct-by-precinct – the rate of unrecorded votes in each county. To view maps and correlating data, please refer to Appendices B and C.

Results and discussion of RegionWise's research follows.

HOW IS THE ST. LOUIS REGION PREPARING FOR HAVA?

The narrative below discusses how counties in the St. Louis region are addressing key requirements within the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

A) ESTABLISH A STATE PLAN.

In order to be eligible to receive federal HAVA funding, all states are required to draft and submit comprehensive state plans that articulate how each state will meet the mandates of the HAVA bill.

Both Missouri and Illinois built bipartisan state planning committees that included a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives from the communities of people with disabilities and from groups that have been historically disenfranchised from the voting process.

Missouri completed and submitted its plan in June 2003. It is available on the Internet at: www.sos.mo.gov/elections/hava.

Illinois completed its plan in August 2003, and is available at: <http://www.elections.state.il.us/voteinfo/pages/HAVA.html>.

B) REPLACE PUNCH CARD AND LEVER VOTING SYSTEMS.

According to the HAVA bill, all punch card and lever election equipment must be replaced by November 2004. A large allocation of the bill's funds (\$325 million) was designated to assist states in this monumental change. Both Missouri and Illinois are planning to participate in HAVA's "buy out", but have applied for extension waivers that grant them until January 2006 to achieve full conversion from punch cards to either optical scan or touchscreen voting technology.

Punch card voting is more common in Missouri and Illinois than in any other part of the country. In the St. Louis metropolitan region, 13 of the 16 counties currently use punch card systems, including St. Louis County and St. Louis City. Only one county, Madison County, Il, has an optical scan system with a precinct counter that fully satisfies regulations outlined in HAVA.

Following is a chart that shows which system each county is currently using, and provides a description of these technologies.

Table 3: Voting Technologies in the St. Louis Region, 2003

VOTING TECHNOLOGY	JURISDICTION	DESCRIPTION
<i>Punch Card</i>	Bond, IL	Punch card is inserted behind booklet with ballot choices. Voters use stylus to punch out holes in card. Ballots are counted by a card reading machine.
	Calhoun, IL	
	Clinton, IL	
	Jersey, IL	
	Macoupin, IL	
	Monroe, IL	
	St. Clair, IL	
	Franklin, MO	
	Jefferson, MO	
	St. Charles, MO	
	St. Louis County, MO	
	St. Louis City, MO	
	Warren, MO	
<i>Optical Scan with Central Counter</i>	East St. Louis, IL	Voters darken an oval or arrow next to chosen candidate on a paper ballot. Ballots are counted by a computer scanner at a central location.
	Washington, MO	
	Lincoln, MO	
<i>Optical Scan with Precinct Counter</i>	Madison, IL	Voters darken an oval or arrow next to chosen candidate on a paper ballot. Ballots are counted by a computer scanner at the precinct, allowing voter to identify and fix mistakes.

Why Replace the Punch Cards?

The 2000 presidential election controversy—with its dimpled chads and hanging butterflies—cast a national spotlight on the validity of punch card machines. The more recent upheaval regarding California’s 2002 gubernatorial race also raised serious questions about the accuracy of punch card machines.

Substantial research documents that punch card machines are unreliable. In his research, David Kimball, Ph.D. found that “punch card systems produce a higher rate of unrecorded votes than any other voting method.”⁷ Results from both California and Florida have shown that precincts with dense populations of high minority and low-income voters are most adversely impacted by ill-functioning punch card systems. In 2002, the U.S. House of Representatives published a report which concluded that, across the country, “Voters in low-income, high minority districts had a significantly higher rates of discarded ballots on older technologies like punch card and

⁷ Kimball, David. “Voting Technologies in the St. Louis Region.” 2001.

lever machines,” and “better technology significantly reduced the disparity in uncounted votes between low income and high minority districts and affluent, low-minority districts.”⁸

RegionWise found that, overall, the St. Louis region’s rate of unrecorded votes using punch card machines was below the national average. The region’s rate of unrecorded votes from punch card machines in the 2000 presidential election was 1.9%, compared to the national average of 2.8%.⁹ However, problems do exist with punch card systems in the region. For example, 59 of the 374 precincts in St. Louis City have unrecorded vote rates of 5% or more. Over 4,000 votes cast in St. Louis City were unrecorded. Following is a table which details the unrecorded vote rates in the St. Louis region according to voting technology.

**Table 4: Unrecorded Vote Rates According to Voting Technology
St. Louis Region & United States**

Voting Technology	Unrecorded Vote Rate St. Louis Region	Unrecorded Vote Rate United States
Punch Card	1.9%	2.8%
Optical Scan-Central Count	4.6%	1.8%
Optical Scan-Precinct Count	0.6%	0.9%

For maps of unrecorded vote rates in each country in the St. Louis region by precincts, see Appendix B.

RegionWise Survey Results and Observations.

RegionWise’s survey revealed that county clerks and election directors across the region are very satisfied with the punch card system. The idea of changing systems was greeted with a clear degree of resistance by many county clerks. Some comments from the commissioners include:

- *“Punch card is a system that works for us; we have no desire to change.”*
- *“We don’t have the problems Florida had. They needed a better paper vendor. We have no hanging chads. We have had five recounts without any problems.”*
- *“The bill is forcing us to revise a successful system.”*

⁸ *Income and Racial Disparities in the Undercount in the 2000 Presidential Election.* (July 9, 2001). Washington D. C.: Minority Staff Special Investigations Division Committee on Government Reform U.S. House of Representatives.

⁹ Based on data compiled by RegionWise from Illinois and Missouri election officials and David Kimball, Ph.D. University of Missouri – St. Louis.

- *“I consider HAVA a four-letter word.”*
- *“The issue is not the machine; it is voter education.”*
- *“We have gone to great measures to maintain our punch card system, and it has worked perfectly for us.”*

However, some election commissioners acknowledged the need to keep current, and make changes. Some comments that illustrate this point include:

- *“Even though we have not had major problems with our system, it does not mean we should not move ahead. HAVA is making us reassess and think about ways to reach out to voters.”*
- *“No transition is easy, but moving to an electronic system will have many benefits for our voters.”*
- *“It is good to get modernized. Although we maintained our machines, they were old. We have not had major problems, but you cannot rely on old machines.”*

Voting System Choices for the Region.

If the HAVA program is fully funded by the federal government, each county with punch card systems that accepts the buy out may receive up to \$4,000 per precinct to convert its machinery. Broadly speaking, there are two types of voting systems that counties are considering. They are:

Optical Scan Voting. In optical scan systems, voters use a pencil or pen to darken a circle next to the candidate’s name on a paper ballot, and then the ballot is fed into a scanning machine to be counted. Two types of counters are available. **Central counters** are located at one central location in the county where all the ballots are brought to be counted. With this system, there is no way for voters to know at the polling place whether or not their ballots are valid. Thus, they do not get a “second chance” to verify/correct their ballots. Second chance voting is a requirement of HAVA. In order to comply, counties will need to consider **precinct counters**. Precinct counters are present at every polling place, and voters know immediately whether or not they have completed their ballots correctly. If they have over or under voted and wish to change their ballots, they are granted “second chance” voting. Costs for the optical scan machine range from approximately \$1,000 to \$1,500 per machine.

In the St. Louis region, there are three voting areas--East St. Louis, IL; Washington County, MO; and Lincoln County, MO--which already have optical scan systems, but not precinct counters. Madison County, IL has both optical scan and precinct counters.

Electronic or Touch Screen Voting. Electronic voting machines are relatively new in the United States, and resemble automated teller machines on which voters cast their votes on a computer screen. The newest form of electronic voting machine has a touchscreen interface and a scrolling layout, in which the computer screen scrolls through the ballot, one contest at a time. Electronic voting machines are usually programmed not to accept ballot errors. Thus, the “second chance” to correct mistakes or verify choices is an automatic feature. Generally, electronic machines cost about \$4,000 to \$5,000 per system (depending on the make/model used). The electronic systems are also referred to as DREs, which stands for Direct Recording Electronic voting systems.

RegionWise Survey Results and Observations.

Currently, the 13 counties in the St. Louis region that use punch card systems, will be eligible to participate in the HAVA buy out and receive federal funding to replace their punch card systems. The RegionWise survey found that many counties had begun to research and consider conversion options. In the survey, counties articulated their preferences. These were:

Optical Scan:	6 of 13
Touch Screen:	2 of 13
No Change:	1 of 13
Still Researching:	4 of 13

Generally, there is a split between urban and rural counties in preferences for voting equipment. Smaller, rural counties tended to prefer optical scan systems because of the lower up-front costs. Large, urban counties prefer the electronic voting machines that can better handle long ballots.

In addition, there is some confusion on the issue of conversion. States must take the lead in certifying systems, and neither Missouri nor Illinois has completed its official list of certified systems. Thus, comments such as “Nothing is cast in stone yet,” or “It is a trickle-down scenario; we have to wait to see what the state will approve,” were common.

Peer-learning has Proved Helpful.

“HAVA has given us the chance to get out and see what other counties our size are doing,” explained one elections commissioner as he recounted how his county was deciding on new

technology. A number of county clerks reported that they had conducted site visits and interviews with other counties to determine what system would work best for them. In southern Illinois, a group of small rural counties have banded together to collaborate on a range of issues, from testing new machines to developing training materials for poll workers.

Cost is a Decisive Issue.

Cost is the defining issue for all of the counties. While the approximately \$4,000 provided per precinct by federal funding will cover some of the costs, not one of the election commissioners believed that this level of federal funding would cover the total cost of conversion.

Commissioners had serious concerns regarding how they would fund their counties' compliance efforts.

- *“Our voters were not complaining about the old system. Now they may have their taxes raised for a whole new system.”*
- *“We know that the federal reimbursement will not cover everything. The county’s general fund will have to be tapped.”*
- *“We have bridges to fix in the county that we cannot afford to replace. How we will accomplish purchasing new machines is a real unknown.”*
- *“Our first choice would be to purchase the touch screens, but that would take millions of dollars. With the federal buy out money, we may be able to buy the optical scans.”*
- *“Our county does not have the budget to begin or sustain this effort. It has to be federally funded, or it will not happen here.”*

Bigger Counties may have the Advantage.

Larger counties in the area may secure better contracts with vendors. For example, St. Louis County is considering purchasing up to 6,000 new electronic voting machines. With numbers like that, “the vendors are coming to us,” noted David Welch, the co-director of elections. Smaller, more rural counties may fare worse. “We are not big enough to attract the vendors. With everybody needing attention at the same time, we may get lost in the shuffle,” said an election commissioner from a rural county in Illinois. Likewise, another official explained, “We saw a lot of touch screen technology we were impressed with, but it is not feasible for us to purchase. Maybe in ten years, small rural counties like ours will be able to afford touch screens.”

In southern Illinois, 21 counties came together to form “counties coalition” which is approaching vendors as one big customer instead of disparate, competing customers. As one entity, they have the leverage to negotiate better contracts and explore ways to reduce shipping costs.

Cutting Precincts may be How Counties Cut Costs.

According to the RegionWise survey, five counties predict that they will most likely cluster or consolidate polling places and/or precincts in an attempt to meet the HAVA regulations and reduce conversion costs. Another five counties report that they are considering that possibility. The idea is one made with reservations, as the comments below manifest.

- *“We do not want to lower the number of precincts; the lines will be too long.”*
- *“If we reduce the number of polling places, some of our residents will have to drive 30 to 40 minutes to vote. That could affect turnout.”*
- *“I think consolidation is going to happen all over the state—really, all over the nation. A key reason for this is the ADA requirements. But, also, there are real issues with recruiting election officials.”*
- *“If we consolidate polling locations, people will be up in arms.”*

C) *PROVIDE AT LEAST ONE DISABILITY- ACCESSIBLE VOTING MACHINE PER PRECINCT.*

According to the American Association of People with Disabilities, people with disabilities comprise the largest American minority population, at 20% of society. Yet disabled adults vote at a rate that is typically 25% to 35% below that of the general population. The reasons for this are myriad, but a major obstacle is that people with disabilities do not have access to polling places or private, ADA compliant voting machines.¹⁰

HAVA requires that every polling place in every county offer voting systems that are accessible for individuals with disabilities. This is considered a significant and large-scale victory for people with disabilities. Both the states of Illinois and Missouri must address the need to make polling places physically accessible, and to ensure that counties obtain appropriate and ample ADA compliant voting machines.

¹⁰ Interview with Kelly Anthony, Director, Missouri Disability Vote Project, September 2003.

In Missouri, the Missouri Disability Vote Project has been an active advocate in ensuring that the needs of people with disabilities were addressed in Missouri's state plan. The coalition helped to shape the Secretary of State's multi-step plan, which includes completing a comprehensive audit of current polling places to determine their architectural accessibility; development of a plan for barrier removal and funding needed to achieve 100% polling place accessibility; and establishment of an oversight committee composed of individuals with disabilities.

Illinois' state plan also states that none of the counties currently meet the HAVA requirements for accessibility, and the plan projects that by 2006, provided federal funding is available, polling places will be accessible. Accessible voting systems will also be available at every polling place.

RegionWise Survey Results and Observations.

According to the RegionWise survey, all 16 counties will need to make substantial changes in order to comply with the new ruling. Currently, it seems that each county has developed ways to enable people with disabilities to vote. However, many of these customs may not be compliant with HAVA. Descriptions follow.

- *“It is our tradition to do curbside voting for people who cannot make it into the precinct. We send a team (one Democrat, one Republican) out to peoples' cars, and they fill out a paper ballot there.”*
- *“This bill has a major impact on how we enable people with disabilities to vote—an issue that is likely to become bigger as our population ages.”*
- *“Right now, people with disabilities come to our courthouse—which has a ramp—to fill out an absentee ballot. If they show up at the polls, I make sure an election official is there to aid them.”*
- *“I have polling places that are not ADA accessible. I have small sheds in little townships that have no amenities. How am I going to get them accessible?”*
- *“We have a unique program for voters with disabilities. I send special teams (one Democrat, one Republican) to nursing homes and door-to-door to administer paper ballots. People really appreciate the personal service.”*

D) STATE MUST IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN A CENTRALIZED OFFICIAL VOTER REGISTRATION LIST.

A joint California Institute of Technology/Massachusetts of Technology study found that “somewhere around three million votes were potentially lost in the 2000 election because of registration problems.”¹¹ In response to the need for reform, HAVA is mandating that every state create and maintain a centralized, official voter registration database. The database is to be interactive with all local election officials, as well as key departments like the Department of Revenue, the Department of Health (for death certificates) and the Department of Corrections (for felony records). The state-officiated centralized database is intended to resolve a host of common problems, including: losing people’s names from lists, double registering people in more than one county, identifying fraudulent applications, preventing voters who have committed crimes in neighboring counties from voting, and keeping people who have died or relocated off the list.

The shift in power and process will be significant. Currently, each county maintains its own list, and while it submits a list to the state, the county’s list is considered the official list. County clerks and elections commissioners spoke with pride regarding the accuracy of their lists. They predicted that the transition from their “stand alone” databases to one common database would be rough. No counties currently interface with the state. Every county has its own computer system, software, and hardware. The challenge will be to make everything compatible.

“This is a huge job for the state,” commented an elections director from one of the larger counties. In September, the Missouri Secretary of State office issued a Request for Proposal inviting vendors to create voter registration database software.

In Illinois, progress has already been made on a statewide voter registration system. According to Illinois State Board of Elections, the state—with funding from HAVA—will be able to complete its system and implement it in spring 2004.

While they will ultimately coordinate their efforts with the state, some counties have already begun to refine and tighten the way they maintain and update voter lists. “In an ideal world, the state list would be able to deliver us the information we need, but that is really four or five years away. In St. Louis City, we cannot wait that long, so we have begun to adopt new measures to ensure that voter fraud does not take place. We have to go through every entry with an extremely fine-toothed comb,” noted James O’Toole, Co-Director of Elections.

¹¹ “Emerging Issues in Election Reform,” at www.lwv.org/join/elections/McCormick_final.pdf. Cantigny Conference Series, Executive Summary, 2003.

The Right to Cast a Provisional Vote.

HAVA will also make provisional voting a right for American voters. While Missouri has already begun introducing provisional voting, this will be a new evolution for Illinois. Provisional voting ensures that every eligible voter who shows up at the polls will be able to cast a ballot. Their names may not be on an official roster—either due to human error, technological glitches, or changes of addresses—but even if their names are not listed, they will be invited to complete a ballot. Once election judges determine that the voter is eligible, that provisional vote will be counted.

E) IMPROVE VOTER EDUCATION AND VOTER INFORMATION.

“The implementation of HAVA has presented us with the opportunity for a massive public education campaign,” noted one elections commissioner. Indeed, both Missouri and Illinois articulated detailed plans for more robust voter education and information activities that would enhance voters’ confidence and attitude toward voting. While there is some skepticism regarding the level of federal funding allocated toward education efforts (with most believing the sum is too scant), RegionWise found that a majority of the counties are using HAVA to catalyze their education efforts. Counties reported that they have already jumpstarted their education efforts. Some notable examples include the following.

- *“I have increased the number of schools I speak at. And I am writing articles for our local paper about the elections process and the changes on the horizon.”*
- *“We have started a middle-school program where all sixth, seventh, and eighth graders will go through the elections process. Our middle school valid vote rate is higher than the county’s average.”*
- *“HAVA will give us the chance to raise awareness about the power of voting.”*
- *“We have started working with neighborhood groups for the first time.”*
- *“We just started a public information campaign for homebound seniors with Meals-on-Wheels.”*
- *“The switch to a new [optical scan] system has energized us around the issue of education. I will take the new machines to rotary clubs, nursing homes, and high schools.”*

Training the Poll Workers—A Formidable Task.

A key area of concern for counties is the need to train poll workers and election judges to use new voting systems. To many elections experts, election judges and poll workers are the critical linchpin; they are the public face of the voting process. “If voters encounter poll workers who are dismissive of their questions, or simply ill informed, then we are jeopardizing public confidence,” commented one election official.

Both the Missouri and Illinois state plans outline detailed plans for more comprehensive poll worker training. Illinois even calls for increased compensation to entice poll workers to participate in the training. Both states plan on developing a uniform training guide and performance criteria for poll workers.

RegionWise found that training and recruiting poll workers to learn a new system was top concern and priority. In many counties, poll workers tend to be older, retired citizens. For example, in St. Louis City, the average age of the poll worker in the 2002 election was 72 years. The City needs about 1,700-2,000 election workers per election, who work approximately 10 to 12 hours on Election Day for minimal pay. “Seniors are a great resource,” explained one election commissioner, “but since we are transitioning to a more technologically advanced machinery, we also need to recruit a new generation.”

Comments from other election officials relay similar feelings:

- *“We fear that these older workers will not want to learn a whole new system,”*
- *“The switch to touch screens may be too big an adjustment for some of our elderly judges.”*
- *“My poll workers don’t have faith in computers. You think I will be able to train them to train voters?”*

Already, counties like St. Louis City, St. Charles, Lincoln, and Franklin are developing strategies to recruit college students and high school seniors as poll workers.

CONCLUSION

Complying with HAVA regulations is a work in progress for counties in the St. Louis region, and we are at the beginning of a long road. Numerous county clerks reported that they were waiting for decisive direction from the state before taking further actions toward compliance. Indeed, the states have been awaiting direction from the federal government, which may become clearer when the HAVA oversight committee (the Elections Assistance Commission) is appointed. RegionWise's report and survey is meant not only to capture where the region stands on the brink of this major election reform, but also to trigger collective learning and collaborative ventures. Strategies for phasing in new voting machinery, increasing voter confidence, training election workers, and raising a vigorous new generation of voters are just some areas in which counties can collaborate. The Appendix D of this report includes highlights of promising practices counties and non-profits are already pursuing to improve voting in our community. RegionWise is committed to communicating the value of these efforts and encouraging new ventures that maximize the wisdom of the region's seasoned election commissioners and promote the spirit of the Help America Vote Act.