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## **Independent Researchers Find High Voter Confidence in New Paper Ballot System**

*Governor Richardson Calls Transition to Paper Ballot a Success*

SANTA FE – Independent researchers from the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, the University of New Mexico and the University of Utah issued a report today on the administration of the 2006 General Election and the state’s transition to a paper ballot voting system. Over eight in 10 voters rated their voting experience excellent or good and the report concluded that “New Mexico is on the cutting edge of election administration and has executive and local leadership forging aggressively ahead with the intent of building a better, strong, efficacious and more voter confident voting system.”

“This independent report confirms that our state’s transition to a paper ballot system has been successful,” said Governor Bill Richardson. “Voters and poll workers favored the new voting process and gave it high marks for reliability, privacy and ease of use. Our experience clearly demonstrates that states can transition to paper ballot in less than a year and conduct accurate and transparent elections.

According to researchers, New Mexico is the first state to move from a predominantly electronic voting system to a single durable paper ballot system statewide, using optical scanners. Governor Richardson, working closely with New Mexico election reform groups and key state legislators passed legislation in 2005 requiring all state elections to be conducted with a voter verifiable paper trail, but could allow for continued use of Direct Recording Electronic voting systems (DREs). Recognizing state and national concerns over continued use of DREs, during the 2006 legislative session Governor Richardson pushed for a single state-wide voting system using durable paper ballots, which represent the official record of the vote. The paper ballot system allows for recounts of New Mexico elections, which the DRE systems did not, and it also allows elections to be audited for accuracy and provide an environment that promotes greater voter confidence, which the previous electronic systems could not accommodate.

Some of the reports findings include:

- “(the NM election) system is fundamentally working, where voter problems are infrequent and where voter and poll worker confidence is generally high.” (p.4)

- “Voters and poll worker data also indicated that both groups were largely favorable to the new voting process. Poll workers gave the new process particularly high marks on reliability, privacy and ease of use.”
  - Over eight in 10 voters rated their voting experience excellent or good (p. 5)
  - Three in five poll workers indicated that voters were satisfied with the new system (p. 4)
  - 65% of poll workers also considered the optical scan paper ballot system better than previous voting systems. (p. 30)

“We listened. We acted. New Mexico now has a progressive process for its voters - one durable, unified paper ballot system that with some recommended adjustments will further improve the election process as we look to 2008,” said Speaker Ben Lujan

The report also recommends improvements in voter, poll worker and poll judge education, poll worker and poll judge training and precinct preparations. The report demonstrates the strong role played by county clerks for the implementation of a new policy.

“The report also outlines the important role played by county clerks and the professional staff of the Secretary of State for the implementation of a new policy. Despite early misgivings, we convinced many county clerks to embrace this change. And with their hard work, the transition was a success,” said Governor Richardson. “By working with this research team the county clerks of Santa Fe, Bernalillo, and Dona Ana Counties have provided a real service to improve future elections in our state.”

The three part report provides Election Day observations in Bernalillo, Dona Ana and Santa Fe counties, examines the attitudes and experiences of a random sample of poll workers in the same counties and analyzes the experience of a random sample of registered voters in the first Congressional District.

Funding for the report was provided by the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology project from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; research support was provided by the Institute of Political Policy and International Affairs at the University of Utah and the Department of Political Science at the University of Utah; and from the Research Allocation Committee in the College of Arts and Science at the University of New Mexico and the Department of Political Science at the University of New Mexico.

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