

January 25, 2007

Re: Standards for Ballot Screen Layout Formatting

South Dakota is using optical scan ballots with an AutoMark for the assistive device. I understand the importance of proper ballot layout. We go to great lengths to make sure our paper ballots are well layout is perfect. Unfortunately as we prepared for the 2006 general election, we were faced with severe limitations in laying out the screens on the AutoMark. We knew what we needed to do for good layout but the limitations in the programming software prevented us from optimal screen layout.

A couple of examples:

1. Ballot question text had to be a center justified. We could not left justify the paragraphs.
2. The size of the boxes around each candidate's name could not be easily controlled. Some candidates would have a larger box than another. Or the boxes would be the same size in regular type but when the zoom button was activated for large print the boxes became differing sizes. You can understand the horrible implications this has for treating each candidate fairly. In most cases (but not all) we were able to "trick" the system by putting varying numbers of spaces and a period after the candidate name.
3. Text could not be underlined.
4. Bolding could only be done by line, not individual words.

Because of this experience, I am of the opinion that the standards should include some minimum requirements for screen layout formatting.

Thanks for taking my input.

Chris Nelson
South Dakota Secretary of State