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## Legislative agenda: Election safeguards

**OUR OPINION: RECOUNT BAN WOULD PREVENT ELECTRONIC PAPER RECORD**

**A** Florida Senate committee last week made a mistake by approving an otherwise good bill that includes a ban on manual recounts in the 15 Florida counties that use electronic-voting equipment.

If the bill is approved with this provision, it holds the potential to set up Florida for another voting fiasco, *a la* the 2000 election. That's because it would create two standards for recounts -- one for electronic votes and another for paper ballots. In ending the 2000 presidential-election stalemate, the U.S. Supreme Court cited Florida's lack of a single standard to tally votes.

Yes, much has improved in how Floridians vote since 2000. Most large counties now use electronic-voting systems. Elsewhere, voters mark paper ballots with pencils. The infamous "over-votes" -- where two votes were cast in the same race on punch cards -- are impossible in electronic voting.

But other concerns about the touch-screen system have cropped up in South Florida elections. Undervotes, where no vote is cast, leave officials clueless as to whether they're the result of incorrect use of the machine, a machine malfunction, election officials' mistakes -- such as providing the wrong ballot -- or the voter simply not making a choice. Some voters using the touch screens also are concerned about whether their votes are actually recorded.

Voters must have confidence in the process. U.S. Rep. Robert Wexler, D-Boca Raton, wants the state to equip electronic machines with a paper-record capability. He's right. Automatic printouts of voters' choices are possible. Printouts would provide an accurate backup for an electronic recount.

Mr. Wexler is suing in federal court to require counties using touch-screen equipment to add a printout option. Yet SB 3004's ban on manual recounts of electronic votes would make it impossible for county election officials to install printers. Several counties have shown an interest in adding printers. They should pursue that path without waiting for the result of Mr. Wexler's lawsuit.

Meantime, as this bill travels through committees, the recount ban should be removed.

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