

## And Now: The Bubble Election

by Gotham Gazette Staff

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In many years, only Democrats have primaries in New York. Since the state has a closed party system -- where only party members can select their party's candidates -- that keeps many Republicans, to say nothing of unaffiliated voters, at home.

This year, though, Republicans have primaries for governor, lieutenant governor and two US Senate seats, meaning members of the GOP have reason to go to the polls Tuesday . Even the small Conservative Party has a primary contest: for governor. And Independence Party members -- in Richmond County only -- have an array of local contests to weight in on.

Voters without an affiliation or with affiliation with the Working Families, Green or Libertarian Party, though, cannot vote on Tuesday.

### The New System

Regardless of party, anyone who votes on Tuesday will cast his or her ballot with new voting technology. The drawn green curtain and the big red lever have gone the way of tube television and dial telephones, as New York finally comes into compliance with the Help America Vote Act.

The new system relies on a ballot marked with pencil or pen, filled in much like a form for a standardized test. Voters can complete the ballot in privacy booth or elsewhere in the polling place. Once they have made their choices, they will insert the paper in an optical scanning device, which will record the vote and store the ballot.

At a recent demonstration at the [Goddard Riverside Community Center](#) most of the largely elderly participants seemed to readily accept the new system. Several expressed concern about the small type size -- state law requires all candidates be on a single sheet of a ballot forcing somewhat tiny type. A Board of Elections employee, though, allayed their concerns by showing them a magnifying sheet that would be at each polling station.

While the sample ballot involved question about ice cream, several of the attendees called out that this new system might have changed the results in the presidential race in Florida in 2000. For this largely Democratic crowd, that made the change all right with them.

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The new system does, in fact, arise out of the debacle in Florida that year. The Help American Vote Act, enacted after the election, requires a paper trail for votes. New York is the last state to comply with provisions of the law.

While the people at Goddard Riverside seemed sanguine about the new system, some politicians and reporters have expressed doubts. In a recent debate, Assemblymember Richard Brodsky, a candidate for attorney general, [said](#) he expected the ballots would confuse many voters and expressed concern about whether voters who do not speak English would receive adequate instructions for the new system.

And a writer for the New York Times who tested the new system [complained](#) of confusing instructions particularly when a citizen overvotes -- votes for too many candidates for the same post. "The new system compounds the shortcomings of print media with those of electronic media -- and makes matters worse with hard-to-read, hard-to-understand instructions and a lot of extraneous nonsense," Ariel Kaminer wrote.

The city Board of Elections has a section of its website on how to use the new system and also has scheduled demonstrations throughout the city. For more information go [here](#) .

Citizens Union, whose sister organization publishes Gotham Gazette, will hold a demonstration of the new system in Brooklyn Heights this Friday. For more information, go to [Citizens Union](#) .

New Yorkers who do not like the new system -- or suffer from disabilities that would make it hard to use -- do have another option. They can use a [ballot marking device](#) , a new technology introduced in 2006 to let people with disabilities vote independently and privately. Any voter can ask to use this -- regardless of whether or not he or she has an disability.

### When and Where to Vote

The election will be Tuesday, Sept. 14, with polls open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Only who have registered at least 25 days before the election can vote. Since this is a primary, only registered members of parties with contests can cast ballots.

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You should have received a notice in the mail telling you where to vote, but if you do not have it, you can go to the Board of Election's [poll site locator](#) or call 1 866 VOTE-NYC. This number can provide you with other information as well, including registration deadlines.

People who cannot vote in person because they will be out of town, are ill or in a care facility can vote by absentee ballot. While it is already too late to apply for by-mail absentee voting, people can cast absentee ballots in person from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day through Monday, Sept, 13.

If the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot by mail has passed and you cannot appear at the polls on Election Day because of an accident or sudden illness, you may send a representative with an authorized letter to receive an Absentee Ballot Application and Absentee Ballot and return both to the Board of Elections by 9 p.m. on Election Day at your borough office.

For more information, call the Board of Elections at 212-VOTE-NYC (868- 3692) or 1-866-VOTE-NYC.