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## Cieslewicz calls voter registration system inefficient

By Judith Davidoff  
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The state's new voter registration system can't process absentee ballots and is five times slower than the city of Madison's current system, says Mayor Dave Cieslewicz.

Cieslewicz fired off his concerns in a June 29 letter to Kevin Kennedy, executive director of the Wisconsin Elections Board.

Cieslewicz charged that numerous "uncorrected" problems remain with the State Voter Registration System, created by software developer Accenture, and due to debut in Madison and communities around the state in time for the fall elections.

"As currently configured, the SVRS is inefficient, often ineffective, and inaccurate," Cieslewicz wrote.

Cieslewicz said he was taking a number of steps to make sure that people's right to vote wouldn't be jeopardized because of uncorrected glitches with the new system.

He said the city would continue to maintain its own voter registration system as a backup and hire six additional temporary employees, at a cost of more than \$50,000, to help process voter registration applications on the new system.

"Because we are concerned that SVRS will not allow us to generate absentee ballots in a timely manner, our current system will be used to assure that voters who want absentee ballots receive them," Cieslewicz said.

Kyle Richmond, spokesman for Kevin Kennedy, said Monday night that a new version of the voter registration software has addressed some of these issues.

He said city election staff in Milwaukee used the new software last week and was able to process voter registration applications in 30 to 45 seconds.

"If Madison is still having to spend four to five minutes for one, there's obviously a problem, but it's not a problem we're experiencing generally," Richmond said.

Richmond said some of the pop-up menus that cause slow response time are there to ensure accuracy and are particularly important for clerks in small towns and cities who have not worked with computerized voter lists before.

Maribeth Witzel-Behl, acting city clerk for the City of Madison, said Monday night that the new software eliminated some unnecessary error messages and made it easier to remove dead people from the poll lists.

But she said "major issues" remain because of the response time.

"The old system took one minute to enter a new voter and you could also issue an absentee ballot during that time," Witzel-Behl said. "In the new system, it takes four minutes just to enter a new name and the new system doesn't process absentees."

The Help America Vote Act, passed by Congress in 2002, required all states to develop a statewide voter registration system by Jan. 1, 2006. The law's aim was to help eliminate voter fraud.

Many states, including Wisconsin, have not met that deadline.

Of the four states that contracted with Accenture for development of a web-based statewide voter registration system, only Wisconsin has not pulled out of its pact.

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