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## Pencil and paper

*Ohio's chosen balloting technology isn't revolutionary, but it appears to be both economical and reliable*

After years of haggling over the next generation of voting machines, a decision has been made: Ohio's future elections will continue to be conducted on paper.

Optical-scan voting machines were selected by Secretary of State Ken Blackwell last week as the preferred equipment, putting a sudden end to the debate over electronic touch-screen machines.

It was the proper decision. The optical-scan equipment is not only more practical, but is more affordable.

The machine will operate something like an ATM, into which the voter will feed the ballot after marking it with a pencil.

Currently, the optical-scan device is the only machine that meets the state requirement for providing a certified paper audit trail with each ballot. In the end, that's what made optical-scan devices the most practical equipment for Ohio's expanding voter rolls.

Fans of electronic voting devices are unhappy. They argue that their preferred machine is more accessible to voters and that the technology to provide a paper trail for each ballot is being developed. Other critics, such as Michael

Vu, the highly regarded director of Cuyahoga County's Board of Elections, chafe at Blackwell's unilateral decision, especially given that Vu's board reportedly was leaning toward the electronic equipment.

Blackwell certainly could have done a better job of articulating his reasoning to election directors on the ground level, rather than going through their associations and county commissioners. But given approaching federal deadlines for conversion and the limited amount of federal money provided for equipment, he seems to have made a prudent choice.

Counties that wish to add their own money to the federal contribution may buy more expensive electronic equipment if they wish — if it meets state and federal requirements. But such a decision would make little financial sense. Blackwell estimates that the optical-scan equipment will cost Ohio taxpayers about \$80 million less than the electronic devices.

His decision upsets Ohio's voting technology into the 21st century. Now Ohio's 88 election boards and their directors must quickly see that the hanging chad becomes a distant memory.

## Queasy over all that sick leave

The public-sector practice of allowing employees to bank and then cash out large numbers of sick days makes for poor policy.

For one thing, it means cash-strapped companies can be socked suddenly by huge expenditures when a long-time employee retires. For another, it alienates local taxpayers, who neither enjoy such benefits nor knew they were buried in employee contracts.

It would be far better, both for agency planning and public perception, to write contracts that offer reasonable numbers of sick days annually — and resolve their status in the same year.

Some institutions may wish to reward workers who miss few days with a cash bonus or a few vacation days that year. But allowing staff to accumulate days over decades — and then earn pay for those days at the end of their careers, usually based on their highest salary — means that officials who write contracts at one

time are making promises for the future without knowing whether the agency will be in a position to keep them. It also feeds the skepticism of an already-wary public, in that the value of the compensation is, in essence, hidden until the employee retires.

The question here isn't about whether public-sector workers are paid adequately. In some cases, the answer is yes, while in others, it is an unequivocal no. The point is that citizens who pay these employees' salaries should have a full and accurate picture of the compensation, not one muddled by provisions that obscure or delay earnings.

Those who have toiled under existing luxurious sick-leave policies clearly should get what has been contractually promised. But looking to the future, employees and officials both must look to restructure agreements. Annual sick leave allowances should be made more realistic — and they should not be allowed to accumulate indefinitely until retirement.

## Mandela's cure for HIV stigma

Former South Africa President Nelson Mandela made a courageous announcement: He told the world that his last living son, Makgatho Mandela, 54, had died of an AIDS-related illness.

This may not seem like a very significant admission, but it was. Africa has 25 million people infected with HIV — more than any other continent — but AIDS remains a disease of whispers, not shouts. And full disclosure of one's HIV status in Africa or Asia can destroy a family's life and livelihood.

Perhaps that is why the current President Thabo Mbeki sticks to the fiction that he knows of no one who has died of the disease, although many members of his party, the African National Congress, are afflicted with HIV.

Why the shame? Because in many countries, anyone infected with the disease is assumed to have engaged in drug abuse or sexual immorality. Yet, studies have shown that marriage is a risk factor for women, because of husbands' infidelities.

Still, friends and family have been known to abandon sufferers, and even their uninfected spouses and children. The employed lose their

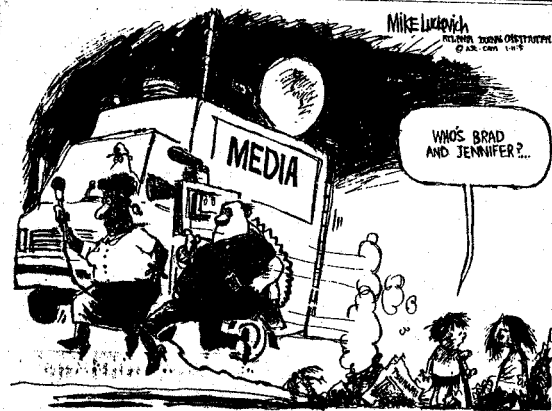
jobs and become pariahs. Secrecy becomes essential.

And that doesn't apply only to poor countries, where AIDS is often a death sentence. Here in the United States, many people with HIV, particularly in black neighborhoods, are ashamed and fearful to speak openly about the disease because of similar stigmas.

Mandela, whose fight against AIDS is a personal crusade, has had enough of silence. "Let us give publicly to HIV/AIDS and not hide it," he said, "because the only way to make it appear like a normal illness, like TB, like cancer, is always to come out and say somebody has died because of HIV/AIDS, and people will stop regarding it as something extraordinary."

He's right. The countries that have made the most progress in fighting this epidemic — Uganda and Thailand are at the top of the list — are those with leaders who have confronted the disease with honesty and openness.

Even Mandela did not do such a great job of leading the charge against HIV when he was president from 1994 to 1999. Fortunately for South Africa, he has no such reticence now, and neither must Mbeki.



## LETTERS

### King's legacy of freedom and brotherhood

As our nation marks the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, it behooves our communities to re-tell the story of this brave man's fight. Reminiscent of the Passover story, the Rev. King helped lead his people toward freedom.

At a time when the distinctions between right and wrong seem to be blurring, the powerful oratory and deeds of King bear remembering and repeating. His support for Israel was proud and unequivocal. He spoke out against black anti-Semitism. He found inspiration for his own moral code in Jewish history, ethics and teachings.

Before his assassination, King told the Rabbinical Assembly of America, "I see Israel, and never mind saying it, as one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land almost can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for

Israel means security and that security must be a reality."

To him, anti-Semitism and racism were both part of the same disease. "It is not only that anti-Semitism is immoral — although that alone is enough. It is used to divide Negro and Jew, who have effectively collaborated in the struggle for justice."

As our nation takes a holiday in honor of this great American, it is important that we all remember his wisdom, his courage and his support for the human struggle against all forms of injustice. We in the Jewish community are especially grateful.

JOHN B. HENNER  
Cleveland

Henner is executive director of the American Jewish Committee, Cleveland chapter.

When people hear the words "Martin Luther King Day," some imme-

diately think "a day off from school" or "a day off from work." When I hear them, I think of how proud I am of Dr. King. I think he was brave, strong and a lifesaver.

Years ago, people thought of black people as nothing, but I think of them as just normal people. I don't judge my friends on whether they are black or white. I judge them based on how nice they are to me. I have a couple of black friends, but so what?

If there were one way that I could change the world, I would want everybody to think of everybody the same — not black, not white, just human. I believe that I can convince some friends at school, parents and everybody I know that everybody is the same.

KALEIGH STROMH  
Macedonia

Kaleigh is a sixth-grader at Lee Eaton Elementary in the Lorain Hills School District.

### Yet another pro athlete runs a familiar pattern

Kudos to Connie Schultz for saying what many of us have been thinking ever since this story became public ("Trial a fine display of poor decisions," Jan. 13). Jeff Garcia is an embarrassment to the Browns and this city, as are his girlfriends.

Garcia has only one thing going for him: a contract. Carmella DeCesare has only one thing to mention. It's appropriate that the brawl happened at a place called Tramp.

Neither of their advantages has anything to do with intelligence or strength of character. No, the things that make both Garcia and DeCesare newsworthy are "diminishing" qualities. One day, and it can't come too soon, we will no longer have

to hear about the likes of them.

CHRIS CANZULRO  
Macedonia

Connie Schultz was right on the money (Jan. 13). I am disappointed by the behavior of some of today's professional athletes, whether it be steroid use, infidelity to their partners or fathering children out of wedlock.

These individuals, whether they want to be or not, are role models for many children. I know that they are only human and are bound to make mistakes, but they need to understand that they are in the public eye, and they need to act accordingly.

SHERYL DI FRANCO  
North Olmsted

### Volunteerism is fundamental to the ethical practice of law

It was disheartening to learn that most law students skip volunteer work (Plain Dealer, Jan. 8). Equally disheartening was the "good news" that three-fourths of all law students believe their schools emphasized the ethical practice of law.

*Every lawyer... should find time to participate in serving the disadvantaged.*

In the profession of law, volunteering and ethics go hand in hand. Ohio lawyers subscribe to the Code of Professional Responsibility. This ethical code states: "Every lawyer, regardless of pro-

fessional prominence or professional workload, should find time to participate in serving the disadvantaged."

Lack of interest in volunteer work among law students concerns us; we certainly need all the volunteers we can get.

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland provides high-quality free legal assistance to low-income individuals. Volunteer attorneys are an important component of our service-delivery model. They supplement the work of full-time Legal Aid attorneys and provide a valuable service to their community.

C. LYONEL JONES  
Cleveland

Jones is director of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland.

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**Will Abbas make a real difference?**

Cleveland.com's question of the moment: Do you think the Palestinian's choice of a new leader, Mahmoud Abbas, improves the chances for peace with Israel?

The best responses — they must be by e-mail — will be found on Cleveland.com. And the best of the best will appear with the Letters to the Editor on Saturdays. To respond, log on to [www.cleveland.com/livelines/](http://www.cleveland.com/livelines/) or send e-mail directly to [livelines@cleveland.com](mailto:livelines@cleveland.com)

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5.6 million of South Africa's 45 million people are infected with HIV.

1.25 million South Africans have already died of AIDS.

600 people die each day of the disease.