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## Touch Screens Vie With Candidates

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By TOM STUCKEY  
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ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) - Touch-screen voting machines will replace paper ballots and punch cards for the first time in every polling place in Maryland on Tuesday when voters choose nominees for president and Congress in the Democratic and Republican primary elections.

"We're good to go," Linda Lamone, state election administrator, said Monday. "We have tested this equipment extensively, and there is absolutely no evidence that there's been any tampering."

Election officials are confident the system will accurately and quickly record the votes of people expected to cast ballots in Democratic and Republican primaries, she said.

Lamone estimated about half of voters will be using the new machines for the first time. Touch screen systems were used in Baltimore city and Montgomery, Prince George's, Dorchester and Allegany counties in the 2002 election.

Avi Ruben, an associate professor of computer science at Johns Hopkins University whose critical report on the Diebold Election Systems machines attracted national attention to potential security problems, scoffed at the claim that the machines are secure because there were no problems in earlier elections.

"From a security perspective, that's like saying that because you walked through a bad neighborhood and didn't get mugged, that the neighborhood is inherently safe," Ruben said.

With little on the ballot to bring out voters, Lamone is expecting a turnout of about 35 percent of the 2.4 million registered Democrats and Republicans, which would be in line with what happened in the 2000 primary election.

Voters will register their presidential preferences, choose delegates to political conventions and nominate candidates for the U.S. Senate and eight congressional districts.

President Bush has no opponent in the Republican presidential primary, but 11 Democrats will be on the ballot even though several candidates have dropped out.

Democratic Sen. Barbara Mikulski and the eight House members - six Democrats and two Republicans - are expected to win their party nominations to seek another term in November.

Also on the ballot will be candidates who want to be delegates to the Republican and Democratic national conventions along with circuit court judicial races in some counties.

In Maryland as well as nationally, the Democratic presidential race narrowed down to John Kerry and John Edwards with Kerry favored to take most of the 69 convention delegates at stake in the primary.

With bigger pools of Delegates available in states such as New York and California, Maryland got little attention from the Democratic candidates.

Kerry made a quick stop in Baltimore Monday to speak to supporters at a rally at Morgan State University.

"I need your help," Kerry told several hundred people who attended the rally. "Send him back to Texas."

Democrats will be looking for a good turnout in the primary as a sign of dissatisfaction with Bush.

"We'd like to see turnout above 30 percent," said Josh White, executive director of the state Democratic Party. But he said the size of the vote may depend on how convinced Democrats are that Kerry, heavily favored to win both in Maryland and in nine other states holding primary elections Tuesday, has the nomination sewed up.

Eric Sutton, White's counterpart in the Maryland Republican party, said GOP turnout may be only in the 10 percent to 15 percent range with Bush unopposed.

Republican leaders hope to see a big vote for state Sen. E.J. Pipkin, their favorite among nine candidates for the nomination to challenge Mikulski in the November senatorial election.

"I think the party is really going to rally behind him," Sutton said.

While the outcome was pretty much a foregone conclusion for the federal offices, Matthew Crenson, a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins, said turnout will be a signal as to what might happen in November in Maryland.

"I think it's not going to be really big, but moderately big because Democrats are trying to send a message to George Bush. They do that by turning out," he said.

Paul Herrnsen, director of the Center for American Politics and Citizenship at the University of Maryland College Park, agreed.

"A big turnout would be a good thing for the Democrats," he said.

*Associated Press Writers Nedra Pickler and Foster Klug contributed to this story.*

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