

# Vote Centers or Super Precincts

By Joyce McCloy, Founder of the North Carolina Coalition for Verified Voting. See [www.ncvoter.net](http://www.ncvoter.net)

**Super Precincts, Vote Centers or “Mega Precincts”** are often defined as a polling place at which any registered voter in the political subdivision holding the election may vote, regardless of the precinct in which the voter lives. The advantage is that there is no wrong place to vote. In some states, the Vote Centers are open multiple days or weeks prior to Election Day. To pay for Vote Centers, sacrifices are made: the number of voting locations and voting machines are cut by as much as 66% or more. Neighborhood election day precincts are often eliminated.

**Super Precincts or Vote Centers can become a poll-tax for the elderly, disabled, minority and rural voters** - because of the additional travel, time, missed work or physical stress of waiting in long lines to vote. Voters can no longer walk or travel a short distance to vote. For disabled, the voting location is no longer in a familiar neighborhood, and may be in a busy crowded facility. Election officials have to rely more on expensive and error prone technologies such as electronic poll books and touch-screen voting machines. When equipment crashes or fails to work, greater numbers of voters are simultaneously disenfranchised. Denial of service attacks affect larger portions of voters. (More eggs in one basket)

In 2006 one North Carolina election official from Guilford County proposed a plan for Vote Centers that would serve 10,000 voters each and reduce voting locations and voting equipment by two thirds (2/3). See page two for that plan. County Commissioners unanimously voted that plan down.

**A report on precinct sizes put together for the North Carolina State Board of Elections presents information about the effect of size and numbers of precincts.** This report was put together by Edward Packard, an elections administrator for the Secretary of State of Alabama.

## ***Limitations of Large Voting Precincts - “Mega-Precincts”***

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While large voting precincts, “mega-precincts” (precincts with over 2,000 voters), may be useful under certain circumstances, they have their own limitations which may adversely affect activities on election day: Highlights below:

- "The general consensus among election officials is that 1,500 voters is a desirable target for the base size of a voting precinct."
- "While large voting precincts, "mega-precincts" (precincts with over 2,000 voters), may be useful under certain circumstances, they have their own limitations which may adversely affect activities on election day."
- "Even when centralized, individuals may have to travel farther to reach the polls, especially if the precinct is not compact. Additionally, highly urbanized areas experience problems with traffic congestion that coincides with the peak voting hours before and after traditional work hours."
- "When they reach the polls, voters in large precincts face the prospect of long lines, particularly during the peak voting hours. In past elections, the State Board of Elections office has received many calls from individuals reporting congested polling places and excessive waiting to cast a ballot. In some cases, these potential voters indicated they did not have the chance to vote due the inconvenience, and even burden, arising from these factors."
- ""Mega-precincts," especially those that encompass large geographic areas, are more likely to be split among various districts for the same offices. For example, two or more state senate or state house seats may represent different portions of the same precinct. As a result, polling officials in this "split precinct" must properly administer multiple ballot styles and ensure that individuals cast ballots only for the races in which they are qualified to vote. Historically, the use of multiple ballot styles in a split precinct has the created confusion on the part of some election officials and voters.

## Vote Centers or Super Precincts (cont'd)

From the Election Center Website, here is the plan by George Gilbert for Voting Centers:

- Reduce the number of precincts
- Voting Centers will serve up to 10,000 voters!
- Guilford will reduce number of voting machines by two thirds, from 1,212 machines to 420 machines
- Reduce the number of voting locations by two thirds, from 159 regular precincts and 11 early voting sites to 40 Vote Centers.
- People will get to drive/walk/ride the bus farther to go to their consolidated voting center

Below is a chart of George Gilbert's plan

Cost of Voting Equipment, Labor and Supplies for Presidential Election  
All HAVA Compliant Machines  
Guilford County, NC  
Precinct vs. Voting Centers

	Voters	Voters per machine	Machines	Total Voters	Cost / machine	Cost/ Precinct	Voting Sites	Precinct Voting	Voting Center Voting	Voting Center Cost Difference
Machines for Precinct Voting	120000	120	1000	120000						
Machines for Early Voting	100000	650	154	100000						
Machines for Reserve (5%)			58							
Total Machines	220000		1212		\$3,200			\$3,876,923		
Machines for Voting Center Voting*	220000		400	220000						
Machines for Reserve (5%)			20							
Total Machines			420		\$3,200		40		\$1,344,000	
Voting Machine and Computer Cost								\$3,876,923	\$1,344,000	-\$2,532,923

\* While roughly 340 machines deployed in 40 Voting Centers would, theoretically, enable us to vote 220,000 voters, in reality, we must anticipate a disproportionate share of voters will choose to wait until the final days to vote. This projection would enable roughly 70,000 votes, 32% of the vote, to be cast during the final two days of voting.

### Voting Centers:

- disenfranchise rural voters, the elderly, the disabled, minorities and any persons with transportation issues
- concentrate election problem risks to larger numbers of votes
- lead counties to purchase electronic poll books - if there aren't enough of these, or if they crash, voters can't vote.
- encourages the use of touch-screen or Direct Record Electronic (DRE) voting machines, the least secure and reliable voting systems.

January 20, 2006. Guilford County Commissioners rejected Mr. Gilbert's plan to eliminate two thirds of all voting locations. See <http://blackboxvoting.com/s9/index.php?/archives/82-A-Loss-and-a-win-in-Guilford.html>

## Vote Centers or Super Precincts (cont'd)

**Vote Centers create a significant risk to elections** because a denial of service of any kind can prevent tens of thousands of people from voting.

### November 2006 Election Day Failures at Vote Centers in Colorado

11/17/2006	Machine malfunction	CO	Hart InterCivic	Montrose County. Machines broke down in all seven vote centers. Montrose Pavilion was the worst, where 11 out of 12 eSlate electronic voting machines broke down. Insufficient paper ballots were available, so poll workers made copies, which the scanners failed to read. <a href="#">Story Archive Story2</a>
11/14/2006	Ballot printing error	CO	Sequoia	Denver. Sequoia misprinted the barcodes that identify precincts on absentee ballots, so the county has to sort 70,000 ballots into the 23 different ballot styles. "Sequoia's vice president of communications, Michelle Shafer, did not return four calls and pages seeking comment." <a href="#">Story Archive</a>
11/8/2006	E-pollbook malfunction	CO	Sequoia	<p>Denver. E-poll books failed, computers crashed and voting machines broke down across the city, causing long lines and waits up to three hours. <a href="#">Story Archive</a></p> <p>Computer glitches prevented thousands of residents from voting, piles of absentee ballots are still to be counted, and Denver Auditor Dennis Gallagher today asked that Denver's two elected voting commissioners - Susan Roger and Sandy Adams - resign and that the mayor fire Clerk and Recorder Wayne Vaden as well as the entire senior staff of the election commission, including executive director John Gaydeski. <a href="#">Story Archive</a></p> <p>11/16/06 update. It is revealed that "Denver election officials never tested the capacity of the troubled computer systems they used to verify voter registrations on Election Day - an omission one computer expert called "shocking" and others said seemed shortsighted." <a href="#">Story Archive</a></p>
11/7/2006	E-pollbook malfunction	CO	Sequoia	Denver. At the Convention Center, though 100 people stood in line, only 25 percent of the voting machines were in use at any given time, as poll workers tried to get verification of voter registration from computers that were frequently down. At Denver Botanic Gardens, more than 200 voters backed up in a line that stretched out of the gates and down the block more than half way to 11th Avenue. At Corona Presbyterian Church, voters were being told to expect about a two-hour wait as they snaked around the building. Many voters were unable to wait. <a href="#">Story Archive</a>
11/7/2006	Machine malfunction	CO	Sequoia	Denver. Power failures, voting machines crashing, electronic poll books failing cause long lines and chaos in the Denver election. Judge refuses to extend the voting time. Voters are encouraged to go to other vote centers, but many vote centers are experiencing similar problems. <a href="#">Story Archive</a>
11/2/2006	Poor design	CO	Sequoia	Denver. Poll workers struggle to learn how to use the Sequoia touch screen voting machines. <i>Training sessions in Jefferson and Denver counties this week showed that although some judges are comfortable with computerized voting machines, others are baffled. Many of the judges are retired and trying to learn new technologies, often after years of working all-paper elections. "I've reached my saturation point," said Pat Gressett, 77, after more than an hour working with the new computers.</i> <a href="#">Story Archive</a>

(Table by Voters Unite.

<http://www.votersunite.org/electionproblems.asp?sort=date&selectstate=CO&selectvendor=&selectproblemtyp=ALL> )

## Vote Centers or Super Precincts (cont'd)

### Another Bad Idea Recommended by "The Election Center"

The Election Center highlights Vote Centers in their report of the 2004 election here - <http://www.electioncenter.org/frontdocs/Task%20Force%20Report%20Book%202005.pdf> (warning this is huge file, about 2 mg).

The Election Center is an organization that is supposed to educate and inform election officials, but accepts money from voting machine companies. (their website here - <http://www.electioncenter.org/> and more information about problems with Election Center here <http://www.ncvoter.net/ElectionCenter.html>)

### **January 01, 2007. Wolf in Sheep's Clothing Heads to DC. The Fox in the Henhouse Series, Part III**

Does the Election Center lobby for the voters' or for the interest of the voting industry? This week a "wolf in sheep's clothing", The Election Center, will be in Washington DC to lobby our Congressmen... [www.votetrustusa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2152&Itemid=26](http://www.votetrustusa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2152&Itemid=26)

**January 15, 2006. The Election Center: The Fox Guarding the Henhouse Updated** - The Election Center Wants To "Improve" Democracy - And The Profit Margins Of Their Corporate Sponsors. [http://www.votetrustusa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=741&Itemid=26](http://www.votetrustusa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=741&Itemid=26)

### **August 26, 2005 The Election Center: The Fox Guarding the Hen House**

*Editor's Note: The Election Center influences the actions and decisions of state election directors across the country. In this article, originally published on VoteTrustUSA.org in June, 2005, Joyce McCloy takes a close look at the organization. New photos supplied by John Gideon.*

How long will "The Election Center" be allowed to act as an educator, trainer and advisor of election officials? How long will it continue to give bad advice to North Carolina election officials?

### **"Ethics 101 for NC Election Officials":**

Learn more about how the Election Center influences our election officials and helps the bottom line of voting machine companies - <http://www.ncvoter.net/ElectionCenter.html>