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Offshore company captures online military vote

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July 21, 2003—Last year, while George W. Bush marshaled U.S. forces for the invasion of Iraq, the patriots at the Department of Defense awarded the contract for a new online voting system for the military . . . to an offshore company.

It gets worse.

Secure Electronic Registration and Voting Experiment (SERVE) is the system and Accenture (formerly Anderson Consulting of Enron bankruptcy fame) is the company. And although Accenture has not been officially implicated in the Enron scandal, they have created a reputation of their own that is already raising eyebrows.

This is hot off the newswire—7/15/03 *NEW YORK (CBS.MW)*—*Accenture Ltd., the former Andersen Consulting, disclosed Tuesday that it might have violated the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Chairman and CEO Joe Forehand, on an earnings call with analysts and reporters Tuesday, said the consulting firm's Middle East operations could be in non-compliance with the Act, which prohibits the bribery of foreign government officials by U.S. persons.*

The Canada-based Polaris Institute published a scathing report on Accenture, saying, "Accenture's efforts in government outsourcing have often been very expensive and/or of poor quality. There is good reason to question Accenture's track record in outsourcing of government services."

Accenture is the leading offshore beneficiary of government contracts whose main business is the privatization of government services, according to Lee Drutman of Citizen Works, a non-profit founded by Ralph Nader. Accenture has a troubling track record, a close business relationship with Dick Cheney's Halliburton, and 2,500 partners of which more than half are not U.S. citizens.

Since 2001. Accenture and Election.com have been strategic partners "to jointly deliver comprehensive election solutions to governments worldwide," according to their press release. Last month Accenture bought the public-sector election assets of Election.com, which suffered its own scandal this year when it was discovered that Osan Ltd, a firm of Saudi and other foreign investors, bought controlling interest in it. According to Mark Harrington of NewsDay.com, "Several shareholders of the company said they were surprised by the recent buyout and have asked for securities regulators to investigate."

Election.com has had other problems. In January 2003, during Canada's New Democratic Party leadership convention, the Canadian Broadcasting System reported, "Earl Hurd of Election.com said he believes someone used a 'denial of service' program to disrupt the voting—paralyzing the central computer by bombarding it with a stream of data" . . . service was restored, then . . ."Toronto city councilor Jack Layton's victory on the first ballot surprised many, who had expected a second or even third round of voting before a leader was chosen from the pack of six candidates."

For election security experts, a strong and growing suspicion is that computer glitches or disruptions are actually vote rigging. A surprise election result should raise a red flag.

Accenture is big. It has more than 75,000 employees in 47 countries, and generated net revenues of \$11.6 billion for the fiscal year ended Aug. 31, 2002. On their board of directors is Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO and known to many as Bad Boy Ballmer for his ruthless, if not illegal, business

practices. Microsoft has been sued by the federal government and several states for monopolistic business practices which were designed to destroy their competition. Massachusetts's Attorney General is still pursuing Microsoft. In March 13, 2000 Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) and Microsoft signed a "\$1 Billion Pact To Form Joint Venture and Expand Global Alliance." What's the alliance? To control voting systems around the world?

A sense of civic duty isn't high on Accenture's list of priorities. According to an article last year in TheDailyEnron.com, "Accenture is lobbying furiously on Capitol Hill to defeat a measure that would deny federal contracts to US companies that move offshore to escape US taxes. Accenture, you see, has incorporated in Bermuda. But, Accenture also holds nearly \$1 billion in government contracts in the US. The company earned nearly \$700 million last year working for Uncle Sam and, ironically, is currently under contract with the Internal Revenue Service itself to redesign its online and Internet operations."

Then there's the Accenture connection to Halliburton, Vice President Dick Cheney's former employer. Halliburton is widely criticized for doing business with brutal regimes and was the subject of an SEC investigation and several lawsuits surrounding their accounting practices during and after Cheney's tenure at the helm. The Polaris Institute says that in July 2000 David Lesar succeeded Dick Cheney as chairman and CEO of Halliburton Company. Before joining Halliburton, Lesar was employed by Arthur Andersen, Accenture's former parent company. Polaris says, ". . . while defending Halliburton's accounting practices, David Lesar publicly acknowledged that Cheney knew about the firm's accounting practices . . ."

In an October 2001 press release, Halliburton and Accenture announced a major expansion of their longstanding relationship with the signing of an alliance between Accenture and Landmark Graphics Corporation, a wholly owned business unit of Halliburton.

And unlike the words of the U.S. military's anthem, "I'm proud to be an American," Accenture owes its allegiance to "partners" outside the USA.

In a letter to the editor of the Austin Chronicle last year, Accenture Director of Corporate Communications Roxanne Taylor wrote, "When Accenture's parent company, Accenture Ltd., was first incorporated last year, the organization's 2,500 partners, more than half of whom are non-U.S. citizens, decided to incorporate in Bermuda. With thousands of partners and employees of many nationalities, it was important commercially and culturally for the organization to select a neutral location such as Bermuda for its parent company."

How very global of them.

Potentially, 6 million U.S. military and civilian voters could soon be using the military's new online voting system. According to computer voting security experts, any online system will be easy to rig by company insiders and vulnerable to attack by outsiders. Apart from that reality, does the U.S. military really want a company owned by non-U.S. citizens in charge of their vote?

Can anyone at the Pentagon spell "national security?"

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