

## ***Electronic Voting***

### **Voting rights groups 'block' talk of machine-free elections**

**By Lynn Landes**

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December 17, 2004—So much for a free and fair exchange of ideas. At conferences and hearings across the country, traditional voting rights organizations have successfully blocked any serious debate on machine-free, paper-only elections. It appears that our well-entrenched so-called 'voting rights' organizations, including the NAACP and ACLU, haven't absorbed the lesson from America's election debacles. They would rather invite the industry-funded National Association of State Election Directors (NASED) to speak at their conferences, than invite researchers and activists who will argue that the machines must go.

The Dec. 7 conference in Washington, DC, [Voting 2004: A Report to the Nation on America's Election Process](#), sponsored by Common Cause, The Century Foundation, and LCCR (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights) was no exception. Instead of fighting for the *peoples' right* to a paper ballot and a hand count, the conference adopted the VerifiedVoting.org and Congressman Rush Holt's (D-NJ) prescription for voting integrity. It is beyond worthless.

It gives people false hope, instead of a sensible solution. Holt's legislation calls for ballot printers and audits. First, that leaves the machines in the voting process—ready, willing, and able to malfunction, break down, or not show up—causing chaos and confusion. Ballot printers won't fix that. Second, it proposes spot audits, which leaves the counting of ballots in the hands of the very election officials who prove with each new election how truly inept or completely evil they really are. And third, the only time paper ballots will be counted is in case of a "close" election, ensuring that perpetrators of vote fraud will steal a sufficient number of votes to avoid triggering a recount.

At the conference, I privately asked Rep. Holt about the shortcomings to his legislation. He looked like a deer caught in the headlights. When I asked what happens when the machines malfunction (ballot printers and all), Holt said something about "emergency ballots". When I asked what "emergency ballots" were, he said that it's up to the states. It was obvious that he is not accustomed to tough questions. That's strange, I thought. I've been communicating with Michele Moulder of Holt's staff for the past two years. So how could he be so unprepared to defend his legislation?

When I asked Ms. Moulder why the conference was not discussing the machine-free/paper-only election option, she said that people just weren't "there" yet. I surmised she meant that people weren't ready to consider that option. But judging from the reaction to my articles and speeches, I suggested to her that a growing number of people are already "there." And more people might be "there" if the issue was allowed to be on the agenda at these conferences. She smiled and walked away.

The conference organizers did graciously allow members of the audience to ask questions. I was one of the first up. I, of course, questioned the effectiveness of ballot printers and audits. Wade Henderson, executive director of the LCCR, and with whom I have spoken personally, was ready for me. He neatly batted the birdie back across the net, responding that my questions would be addressed later on in the conference. That really never happened. So, just before the conference ended, I waited my turn again and then spoke into the microphone. I asked Mr. Henderson why the organizers were not debating the

machine-free option. He said that machine-free elections *were* up for discussion in that *I was there* bringing it up. Welcome to the world of Wade.

One question does not a debate make. And the panelists who answered me included in their responses enough baloney to choke a horse. That's par for the course. Voting rights organizations are misleading the public on several critical issues. At the "Claim Democracy" conference in Washington last year, speakers from several organizations, including DEMOS (whoever the heck they really are) were running around telling audiences that HAVA (Help America Vote Act) requires that each precinct have a touchscreen voting machine for the disabled. Actually, Rush Holt's Ms. Moulder insisted on it. To her credit, she was open to be corrected. She had a copy of the act in her hotel room, so we ran up and read it. I pointed out the pertinent passage and she accepted the fact that HAVA does not require voting machines for the disabled.

The alleged need for voting machines for the disabled often gets trotted out at these conferences. Forget the fact that the blind *can* vote privately and independently using tactile paper ballots and audio assistance; something that is used all over the world as well as in Vermont and other states. Forget the fact that voting machines can cheat the disabled as easily as the able-bodied. Forget the fact that voting machines are harder for the disabled to use; that it will take the blind significantly longer to vote on a machine than to be assisted by a person of their choice. Forget the fact that two leading associations for the blind have received over \$1 million dollars from the voting machine industry to flog their wares. These things are never mentioned because conference organizers make sure that the debate is never allowed.

Discussion about the accuracy of voting machines is also fodder for disinformation. Take Dr. Ted Selker of MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), please. At the conference, he once again blathered about "residual votes" (i.e., overvotes and undervotes), claiming that "new" machines are better than old machines. How wonderful for the industry. Selker avoids the real elephant in the closet—that voting machines can be easily rigged and impossible to safeguard. Selker claims that voting machines reduce undervotes and overvotes, when in fact, he can provide no evidence that the voting machines don't add and subtract votes on command or willy-nilly.

But, the most shocking response to my question at the conference came from Dr. Avi Rubin. He said that Americans would not go back to paper ballots. He said that one day we'll all be using our home computers to vote. So much for all Avi's first-rate reports on voting machine insecurity. He just endorsed voting by electronic ether. Can an endorsement of VoteHere's products and services, on whose technical advisory board Avi sat for two years, be far behind?

It's time for a good hard look in the mirror. Voting machines have been around since 1892. Why have the voting rights groups failed for so long to recognize the tremendous threat to basic civil rights these machines pose? When the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed why didn't these groups question the use of voting machines? Why didn't they stop and consider that all the good the act would do, would be rendered moot by these technological Trojan Horses? Sure, a few minority congressmen have made it to Congress, but that doesn't mean that elections haven't been routinely rigged. The U.S. Congress does not remotely represent the diversity of people or opinions in the general population.

Didn't these voting rights groups notice that Craig Donsanto, chief of the U.S. Department of Justice Election Crimes Branch, has sat on his hands for the past 30 years. He has refused to seriously investigate complaints of vote fraud, particularly when it involved computerized voting machines. Actually, that guy doesn't seem to investigate much of anything, ever. Why haven't these groups made an issue of Donsanto?

Even if the voting rights groups weren't sensitive before, the elections of 2000 should have concentrated their minds on the limitless problems and endless threats voting machines assure a democracy. So, why didn't they say one word in public protest when the DNC (Democratic National Committee) allowed the use of Internet voting in the 2004 Democratic primary in Michigan?

It makes a person question everything about these organizations. Ever wondered why the voters who were unfairly purged from the rolls in Florida are still not back on the list? It seems that instead of getting a court order, the voting rights groups (including the Legal Defense Fund of the NAACP), agreed to an out-of-court settlement with the state of Florida. Four years later, disenfranchised citizens are still not on the voter rolls.

Four years after the 2000 election, voting machines are causing more problems than ever. Someone needs to get a clue. At least let's have a real debate, Wade.

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