

## *Electronic Voting*

### **Democrats, paper 'trails' aren't good enough; count the damn ballots!**

**By Lynn Landes**

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March 19, 2005—After the 2004 election I thought I would barf if I heard one more Democratic pundit or politician lament the lost election and blame it on the party's "message." As grassroots activists across the country reported thousands of election irregularities and voting machine "glitches" that overwhelmingly benefited Bush, the Democratic leadership seemed unusually willing to look the other way. John Kerry quickly conceded, former President Carter attended Bush's ignoble inauguration, and Bill Clinton now pals around with Bush the First.

Rank and file Democrats are tearing their hair out.

Now, in a gesture calculated to win back their base, but gain little else (in terms of voting security), both House and Senate Democrats have offered a flurry of bills (with many state legislatures following in hot pursuit) that require ballot printers for touchscreen voting machines.

Incredibly, none of these bills call for the ballots to be counted . . . except in the extremely remote event of a recount.

It takes your breath away. The Dems know that two Republican-controlled companies (ES&S and Diebold) count 80 percent of all votes in America. Why do they still trust these companies and their lousy machines, particularly after the last two presidential elections? In fact, since the 1960s when computerized voting technology was first introduced, machine malfunctions almost always benefit Republicans. Perhaps that's why the Republican stranglehold over the political landscape has grown so tight. Otherwise, things don't add up. One example, if Bush's war on the world is so popular, why don't lots of young Republicans sign up for the military? Haven't the Dems noticed that?

The proposed legislation, popularly known as "voter-verified paper audit trail", sounded all right when I first heard about it a few years ago. But, on closer inspection it became clear that it wasn't a good idea at all. Fundamentally, it allows "voter verification" and "audits" to replace our constitutional right to mark, cast, and count ballots. Under this legislation, machines and election officials continue to control the process, while meaningful citizen participation and oversight is effectively destroyed.

Besides all that, don't Dems understand that malfunctioning machines make ballot printers irrelevant? What are they thinking?

In the real world, recounts are very rare. In general, they only get triggered if an election is "close." Many people think that if a candidate wins by a significant margin (as Bush appeared to do), then vote fraud or system failure is unlikely. I call it, "The myth of the margin of victory". There are four things to consider regarding recounts and margins of victory:

First, anyone contemplating vote fraud will certainly want to win by a significant margin in order to avoid triggering an automatic recount.

Second, two corporations are counting 80 percent of the votes. Millions of votes can be easily manipulated by a handful of company technicians. There will be little chance of detection. So, even a landslide election is not evidence that massive vote fraud or system failure did not occur.

Third, a significant margin of victory packs a powerful psychological punch against the opposing candidate. They will be unlikely to contest the election under these circumstances. Some observers contend that is exactly what happened to John Kerry in this past election. On the other hand, something was fishy when candidate Kerry said that he was going to make sure that "every vote will be counted" in the 2004 presidential election. Who was he kidding? He had to know that 99 percent of all votes are processed by machines, not people. Kerry sent thousands of attorneys and volunteers to the polls on Election Day 2004 in a futile attempt to monitor an unobservable vote count.

Fourth, although polling data can be used to raise red flags where election fraud may have occurred, polls can also be used to shape public opinion, create false expectations, and even support rigged election results. The relationship between the corporate news media and polling organizations is completely nontransparent. There is no reason to believe a thing these polls have to say. And there's plenty of reason to suspect the news media. This country's largest voting machine company, ES&S, is owned by one of their members, The Omaha World Herald.

But, none of this should be news to the Democrats. So, why aren't they demanding the obvious solution? Get rid of the machines. Or, at least don't wait for a recount. Count the damn ballots the first time. Again, what are they thinking? Either the Democrats are unbelievably naive or they've been bought off.

The Democratic National Committee's (DNC) leadership on the issue of voting systems has been mind-bending. On Oct. 3, 2004, the DNC voted to endorse the policy of requiring paper ballots for touchscreen voting machines by the 2004 election. Then, on Nov. 22, the DNC approved the use of the most insecure voting system on the face of the planet for the 2004 Michigan Democratic primary—Internet voting. That was the second time. In the 2000 Arizona Democratic primary, the Internet was also used. Strangely, the Democrats tried to stonewall this journalist from finding out the name of the company that conducted the online Michigan primary. What did they have to hide? See [Democrats Send Mixed Signals in Voting Technology Debate.](#))

There's more. John Fund, author of the book, *Stealing Elections*, writes, "Joe Andrew, chairman of the Democratic National Committee until 2001, is a senior adviser to a biotech firm that owned several Internet companies. He says the conspiracy theories aren't healthy and last month he told the Maryland Association of Election Officials that "When it comes to electronic voting, most liberals are just plain old-fashioned nuts.' While conservatives were skilled at coordinating their messages, he added, 'that does not mean there is a vast right-wing conspiracy trying to steal votes in America, as the loudest voices on the left are saying today' . . . Mr. Andrew said the people obsessed about DRE manipulation are either computer experts with impressive technical knowledge but little practical experience with elections or left-leaning computer users who are conspiratorial by nature. He noted with regret that they have been joined in their hysteria by prominent Democrats who 'are rallying behind the anti-DRE bandwagon in a big election year because they think that this movement is good for Democrats.'"

Mr. Andrew appears to be batting for the other side.

Will things change under Howard Dean's leadership? Maybe not. Back on Oct. 02, 2003, the Associated Press reported, "Eight of the presidential candidates have written national Democratic officials to support a challenge of Michigan Democrats' plan to allow Internet voting in its caucuses Feb. 7. Only Howard Dean, former Vermont governor, and Wesley Clark, the retired general who just joined the race, did not sign on to back the protest."

Perhaps, the Democrats need a crash course in Voting 101. There is an enormous difference between people marking, casting, and counting ballots and machines performing these same functions. People can be observed and machines can't. If poll watchers can't observe the process, then they'll have no real

opportunity to discover if vote fraud or miscounts occur. It's that simple. But, it's a simple truth that seems to elude congressional Democrats.

In contrast, the Republicans have figured it out. An HBO documentary that aired on October 11, 2004, shows Congressman Pete King (R-NY) bragging about the upcoming election, *"It's already over. The election's over. We won. It's all over but the counting and we'll take care of the counting."*

They sure did.

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