



Faith-Based Voting

By Holly Hudson

It could be a chapter from a John Le Carré political thriller set in some distant Balkan state — crooked election officials stuffing their pockets as well as ballot boxes while also engaging in bribery, voter intimidation and cooked-up terrorist threats. No, this isn't the Ukraine. Welcome to 21st-century voting in Ohio.

After the Florida debacle in 2000, President Bush signed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2002, which was purportedly designed to reform each state's election system and funnel millions of dollars into the purchase of e-voting systems. Recently indicted Congressman Bob Ney, a key author of HAVA, used heavy-handed tactics to block any amendments to the bill, such as a mandate to provide voter-verified paper ballots for the e-voting machines.

Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell — also co-chair of Bush's 2004 re-election committee — has been busy ensuring that every Ohioan's right to vote is made progressively more difficult. According to Bob Fittrakis, the Green Party candidate for Governor, dirty and illegal methods were used in 2004 such as "wrongful elimination of voters, selective deployment of voting machines... and intimidation of alleged felons who were told illegally they could not vote."

The GOP in Warren County went to great lengths to keep reporters and observers away from the vote count. After the polls closed on Election Day 2004, they fabricated a terrorist threat that locked down the administration building and allowed officials to tabulate results without reporters or observers present.

With the recent passage of House Bill 3 (HB3), the voting process has become a labyrinth. The main features of HB3 is that voters must present a valid photo ID, bank statement, or utility bill with a current address when they turn up at the precinct to vote.

This bill will effectively disenfranchise as many as 200,000 voters, mainly the young, the elderly, the poor, and the homeless, voters who are least likely to carry ID. HB3 also opens voter registration activists to partisan prosecution, exempts e-voting machines from public scrutiny, quintuples the cost of citizen-requested vote recounts, and makes illegal the challenge of any federal election in Ohio.

Blackwell and the Republican Party used a wide range of tactics in Ohio in 2004 to keep their grasp on power, such as the absurd regulation requiring voter registration cards to be printed on 80-pound text weight paper, thereby disqualifying voters who showed up at the wrong precinct to vote.

However, that was then, this is now, as they say, but are we headed for more of the same this November 7? The most pressing issue facing us is that political races across the country are going to be decided by e-

voting machines which have, time and again, been shown to be extremely vulnerable to tampering and error. And most have no voter-verifiable paper trail. Major studies from the Government Accountability Office, Princeton University, The Brennan Center, and the Carter-Baker Commission, not to mention expert testimony from many computer programmers and statisticians, have all come to the same conclusion — one person with inside access can change the outcome of an election anywhere.

The two major e-voting machine companies, Diebold Election Systems of Ohio and ES&S of Nebraska, are operated by two brothers, Bob and Todd Urosevich. The companies are also major contributors to the Republican Party. Walden O'Dell, chief executive of Diebold, has been oft-quoted regarding his commitment "to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the President."

Diebold invites fraud for failing to fix a "back door" in their software. Both companies cite proprietary rights to their source code and so operate behind a curtain of secrecy with no oversight by federal or state commissions. Would you trust your quarters to a rigged slot machine in Vegas? It's comforting to know that state regulators such as the Nevada Gaming Control Board won't let slot machine manufacturers operate unless they reveal their source code. But no such safeguards are afforded to voters.

Instead, what has taken place is the corporatization of the electoral process. Voting only works when its components are fully available for public scrutiny. Stuffing the ballot box is nothing new for either party, but the 21st century brings us to the confluence of technology, politics and corporate power to a point where never before in history has the ability to alter the course of political events been potentially in the hands of a guy with a wi-fi and a double-mocha latte. This should concern Democrats and Republicans alike.

We cannot safeguard our democracy without faith in the electoral process. ATM machines, of which Diebold is a major manufacturer, print receipts every second. There is no reason why we cannot have a voter-verifiable paper trail. But the Republicans are asking us to participate in faith-based voting. It's ironic considering that Ronald Reagan always said, "Trust, but verify." At the moment, I have more faith in John Le Carré to deliver a satisfying end to this story than the one I'm afraid reality has in store for us.

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