

Democrats send mixed signals in voting technology debate

By Lynn Landes

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January 29, 2004—There's something strange going on in the Democratic Party. While George Bush's buddies dominate the vote counting business with no apologies to anyone about this rather incredible conflict-of-interest, Democrats are sending mixed signals on this continuing train wreck for democracy.

Let's start with billionaire George Soros, the Democrats' anointed billionaire savior. They should get to know him better. According to voting rights activists, Soros is a proponent of Internet voting, the most insecure voting technology on the face of the planet. He's also a disciple for Direct Democracy (i.e., the initiative process). Think about that. For anyone who wants to control a government, the combination of the Internet voting and Direct Democracy is a fascist's dream-team. Through control of vote-counting technology, not only could "someone" pick our legislators, they could also pass their own legislation. They could be a true Wizard of Oz.

Howard Dean says on his website, "I support pending legislation to require that all voting machines produce an actual paper record that voters can view to check the accuracy of their votes, and allow election officials to verify votes in the event of irregularities."

However, the Associated Press reported on Oct. 02, 2003, "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."

One day later, on Oct 3, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) voted to endorse the policy of requiring paper ballots for touch screen voting machines by the 2004 election. So far so good. This action was in line with Congressman Rush Holt's (D-NJ) legislation to require touch screen voting machines to produce paper ballots for audit purposes and recounts (HR 2239). Presidential candidate Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) is one of 96 co-sponsors. And despite the fact that the legislation does not call for a full hand count of the ballots, which many activists feel is essential to establish real security, most agree that it's a step in the right direction. Of course there are others, this writer included, who believe that all the machines should be junked.

But on Nov 22, hardly a month later, the DNC took it all back. They voted to approve the use of Internet voting for the Michigan Democratic Primary. What's up with that? Aren't they connecting the dots? No paper ballot—no security—no recount. But, there's also something sinister in the air. When this reporter called the Michigan Democratic Party to find out which company got the contract for the Internet vote, I was told that the company did not want its name released at that time. I then called the DNC who had to approve the deal and who also agreed to keep the company's name a secret. They finally relented under the merciless scorn this writer heaped on their spokesperson.

So, Election Services Corporation (ESC) is the Internet voting company and Democratic bad boy Tony Coelho is on their board. This is a little unusual in a business dominated by the Republican and foreign corporations. Tony *"was a six-term congressman and House majority whip, who resigned from Congress after reports surfaced that he had accepted a sweetheart loan from a troubled S&L operator. The loan helped Coelho buy a \$100,000 junk bond, but he never reported it on his government disclosure form. The Justice Department decided not to bring charges against him,"* according to Slate.msn.com. He was also investigated by the State Department when he was Al Gore's campaign manager for the 2000 presidential election. The investigation was reportedly related to his work as the commissioner general of

the United States Pavilion at the 1998 World Expo. As a result, Tony resigned as Gore's campaign manager.

More mixed signals keep coming from the Dems.

In December, Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) introduced companion legislation to Rep. Rush Holt's. So far, none of the senators running for president (Kerry, Edwards, or Lieberman) have signed on as co-sponsors. Actually, the bill has no co-sponsors in the Senate. Where is their survival instinct? Do Democratic senators really believe that a bunch of corporations can be trusted with election security after all the business scandals of the past few decades?

Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton introduced her own bill, which curiously calls for no real change in the status quo. Although her bill offers the option of paper ballots printers for touch screen voting machines, it does not require them. Clinton's bill reads, *"While requiring that all election jurisdictions give voters the ability to verify their votes, this legislation also gives States and local jurisdictions the flexibility to employ the most appropriate, accurate, and secure voter verification technologies, which may include voter-verifiable paper ballots, votometers, modular voting architecture, and/or encrypted votes, for their State or jurisdiction in a uniform and nondiscriminatory manner."* One wonders if Hillary simply got bad advice or if she's just blowing smoke in a move reminiscent of some of her husband's political machinations while in office.

Frankly, it's too late to require touch screen voting machines to have printer attachments for the 2004 election anyway. The only option now is for the Dems to call for a machine-free 2004 election the old-fashioned way, using paper ballots and local hand counts. The Dems need to tell the public that paperless voting machines are an invitation to uncontrolled and undetectable vote fraud. It's a pretty clear message that the public can understand.

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