

## *Electronic Voting*

### **Diebold, electronic voting and the vast right-wing conspiracy**

**By Bob Fittrakis**

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March 10, 2004—The Governor of Ohio, Bob Taft, and other prominent state officials, commute to their downtown Columbus offices on Broad Street. This is the so-called “Golden Finger,” the safe route through the majority black inner-city near east side.

The Broad Street BP station, just east of downtown, is the place where affluent suburbanites from Bexley can stop, gas up, get their coffee and New York Times. Those in need of cash visit BP’s Diebold manufactured CashSource+ ATM machine which provides a paper receipt of the transaction to all customers upon request.

Many of Taft’s and President [sic] George W. Bush’s major donors, like Diebold’s current CEO Walden “Wally” O’Dell, reside in Columbus’ northwest suburb Upper Arlington. O’Dell is on record stating that he is “committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president [sic]” this year. On September 26, 2003, he hosted an Ohio Republican Party fundraiser for Bush’s election at his Cotswold Manor mansion. Tickets to the fundraiser cost \$1,000 per couple, but O’Dell’s fundraising letter urged those attending to “Donate or raise \$10,000 for the Ohio Republican Party.”

According to the Columbus Dispatch: “Last year, O’Dell and his wife Patricia campaigned for passage of two liquor options that made their portion of Tremont Road wet.

On November 5, Upper Arlington residents narrowly passed measures that allowed fundraising parties to offer more than beer, even though his 10,800-square-foot home is a residence, a permit is required because alcohol is included in the price of fundraising tickets. O’Dell is also allowed to serve “beer, wine and mixed drinks” at Sunday fundraisers.

O’Dell’s fund-raising letter followed on the heels of a visit to President [sic] Bush’s Crawford Texas ranch by “Pioneers and Rangers,” the designation for people who had raised \$100,000 or more for Bush’s election.

If Ohio’s Republican Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell has his way, Diebold will receive a contract to supply touch screen electronic voting machines for much of the state. None of these Diebold machines will provide a paper receipt of the vote.

Diebold, located in North Canton, Ohio, does its primary business in ATM and ticket-vending machines. Critics of Diebold point out that virtually every other machine the company makes provides a paper trail to verify the machine’s calculations. Oddly, only the voting machines lack this essential function.

State Senator Teresa Fedor of Toledo introduced Senate Bill 167 late last year mandating that every voting machine in Ohio generate a “voter verified paper audit trail.” Secretary of State Blackwell has denounced any attempt to require a paper trail as an effort to “derail” election reform. Blackwell’s political career is an interesting one: he emerged as a black activist in Cincinnati supporting municipal charter reform, became an elected Democrat, then an Independent, and now is a prominent Republican with his eyes on the governor’s mansion.

## **Voter Fraud**

A joint study by the California and Massachusetts Institutes of Technology, following the 2000 election, determined that between 1.5 and 2 million votes were not counted due to confusing paper ballots or faulty equipment. The federal government's solution to the problem was to pass the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002.

One of the law's stated goals was "Replacement of punch card and lever voting machines." The new voting machines would be high-tech touch screen computers, but if there's no paper trail, how do you know if there's been a computer glitch? How can the results be trusted? And how do you recount to see if the actual votes match the computer's tally?

Bev Harris, author of "Black Box Voting: Ballot Tampering in the 21st Century," argues that without a paper trail, these machines are open to massive voter fraud. Diebold has already placed some 50,000 machines in 37 states and their track record is causing Harris, Johns Hopkins University professors and others great concern.

Johns Hopkins researchers at the Information Security Institute issued a report declaring that Diebold's electronic voting software contained "stunning flaws." The researchers concluded that vote totals could be altered at the voting machines and by remote access. Diebold vigorously refuted the Johns Hopkins report, claiming the researchers came to "a multitude of false conclusions."

Perhaps to settle the issue, apparently an insider leaked documents from the Diebold Election Systems website and posted internal documents from the company to Harris' website. Diebold went to court to stop, according to court records, the "wholesale reproduction" of some 13,000 pages of company material.

The Associated Press reported in November 2003 that: "Computer programmers, ISPs and students at [at] least 20 universities, including the University of California, Berkeley, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology received cease and desist letters" from Diebold. A group of Swarthmore College students launched an "electronic civil disobedience" campaign to keep the hacked documents permanently posted on the Internet.

Harris writes that the documents expose how the mainstream media reversed their call projecting Al Gore as the winner of Florida after someone "subtracted 16,022 votes from Al Gore, and in still some undefined way, added 4,000 erroneous votes to George W. Bush." Hours later, the votes were returned. One memo from Lana Hires of Global Election Systems, now Diebold, reads: "I need some answers! Our department is being audited by the County. I have been waiting for someone to give me an explanation as to why Precinct 216 gave Al Gore a minus 16,022 [votes] when it was uploaded." Another hacked internal memo, written by Talbot Iredale, Senior VP of Research and Development for Diebold Election Systems, documents "unauthorized" replacement votes in Volusia County.

Harris also uncovered a revealing 87-page CBS news report and noted, "According to CBS documents, the erroneous 20,000 votes in Volusia was directly responsible to calling the election for Bush." The first person to call the election for Bush was Fox election analyst John Ellis, who had the advantage of conferring with his prominent cousins George W. Bush and Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

## **Incestuous Relationships**

Increasingly, investigative writers seeking an explanation have looked to Diebold's history for clues. The electronic voting industry is dominated by only a few corporations—Diebold, Election Systems & Software (ES&S) and Sequoia. Diebold and ES&S combined count for an estimated 80 percent of U.S. black box electronic votes.

In the early 1980s, brothers Bob and Todd Urosevich founded ES&S's originator, Data Mark. The brothers Urosevich obtained financing from the far-right Ahmanson family in 1984, which purchased a 68 percent ownership stake, according to the Omaha World Herald. After brothers William and Robert Ahmanson infused Data Mark with new capital, the name was changed to American Information Systems (AIS). California newspapers have long documented the Ahmanson family's ties to right-wing evangelical Christian and Republican circles.

In 2001, the Los Angeles Times reported, “. . . primarily funded by evangelical Christians—particularly the wealthy Ahmanson family of Irvine—the [Discovery] institute's \$1-million annual program has produced 25 books, a stream of conferences and more than 100 fellowships for doctoral and postdoctoral research.” The chief philanthropists of the Discovery Institute, that pushes creationist science and education in California, are Howard and Roberta Ahmanson.

According to Group Watch, in the 1980s Howard F. Ahmanson, Jr., was a member of the highly secretive far-right Council for National Policy, an organization that included Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, Major General John K. Singlaub and other Iran-Contra scandal notables, as well as former Klan members like Richard Shoff. Ahmanson, heir to a savings and loan fortune, is little reported on in the corporate U.S. press. But, British papers like The Independent are a bit more forthcoming on Ahmanson's politics.

“On the right, figures such as Richard Mellon Scaife and Howard Ahmanson have given hundreds of millions of dollars over several decades to political projects both high (setting up the Heritage Foundation think-tank, the driving engine of the Reagan presidency) and low (bankrolling investigations into President Clinton's sexual indiscretions and the suicide of the White House insider Vincent Foster),” wrote The Independent last November.

The Sunday Mail described an individual as, “. . . a fundamentalist Christian more in the mould of U.S. multi-millionaire Howard Ahmanson, Jr., who uses his fortune to promote so-called traditional family values . . . by waving fortunes under their noses, Ahmanson has the ability to cajole candidates into backing his right-wing Christian agenda.

Ahmanson is also a chief contributor to the Chalcedon Institute that supports the Christian Reconstruction movement. The movement's philosophy advocates, among other things, “mandating the death penalty for homosexuals and drunkards.”

The Ahmanson family sold their shares in American Information Systems to the McCarthy Group and the World Herald Company, Inc. Republican Senator Chuck Hagel disclosed in public documents that he was the chairman of American Information Systems and claimed between a \$1 to 5 million investment in the McCarthy Group. In 1997, American Information Systems purchased Business Records Corp. (BRC), formerly Texas-based election company Cronus Industries, to become ES&S. One of the BRC owners was Carolyn Hunt of the right-wing Hunt oil family, which supplied much of the original money for the Council on National Policy.

In 1996, Hagel became the first elected Republican Nebraska senator in 24 years when he did surprisingly well in an election where the votes were verified by the company he served as chairman and maintained a financial investment. In both the 1996 and 2002 elections, Hagel's ES&S counted an estimated 80 percent of his winning votes. Due to the contracting out of services, confidentiality agreements between the State of Nebraska and the company kept this matter out of the public eye. Hagel's first election victory was described as a “stunning upset” by one Nebraska newspaper.

Hagel's official biography states, “Prior to his election to the U.S. Senate, Hagel worked in the private sector as the President of McCarthy and Company, an investment banking firm based in Omaha, Nebraska and served as Chairman of the Board of American Information Systems.” During the first Bush presidency, Hagel served as Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer of the 1990 Economic Summit of Industrialized Nations (G-7 Summit).

Bob Urosevich was the programmer and CEO at AIS, before being replaced by Hagel. Bob now heads Diebold Election Systems and his brother Todd is a top executive at ES&S. Bob created Diebold's original electronic voting machine software. Thus, the brothers Urosevich, originally funded by the far-right, figure in the counting of approximately 80 percent of electronic voting in the United States.

Like Ohio, the State of Maryland was disturbed by the potential for massive electronic voter fraud. The voters of that state were reassured when the state hired SAIC to monitor Diebold's system. SAIC's former CEO is Admiral Bill Owens. Owens served as a military aide to both Vice President Dick Cheney and former Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci, who now works with George H.W. Bush at the controversial Carlyle Group. Robert Gates, former CIA Director and close friend of the Bush family, also served on the SAIC Board.

### **Diebold's Track Record**

Wherever Diebold and ES&S go, irregularities and historic Republican upsets follow. Alastair Thompson, writing for [Scoop](#) of New Zealand, explored whether or not the 2002 U.S. mid-term elections were "fixed by electronic voting machines supplied by Republican-affiliated companies." The Scoop investigation concluded that: "The state where the biggest upset occurred, Georgia, is also the state that ran its election with the most electronic voting machines." Those machines were supplied by Diebold.

Wired News reported that ". . . a former worker in Diebold's Georgia warehouse says the company installed patches on its machine before the state's 2002 gubernatorial election that were never certified by independent testing authorities or cleared with Georgia election officials." Questions were raised in Texas when three Republican candidates in Comal County each received exactly the same number of votes—18,181—on ES&S machines.

Following the 2003 California election, an audit of the company revealed that Diebold Election Systems voting machines installed uncertified software in all 17 counties using its equipment.

Former CIA Station Chief John Stockwell writes that one of the favorite tactics of the CIA during the Reagan-Bush administration in the 1980s was to control countries by manipulating the election process. "CIA apologists leap up and say, 'Well, most of these things are not so bloody.' And that's true. You're giving politicians some money so he'll throw his party in this direction or that one, or make false speeches on your behalf, or something like that. It may be non-violent, but it's still illegal intervention in other country's affairs, raising the question of whether or not we're going to have a world in which laws, rules of behavior are respected," Stockwell wrote. Documents illustrate that the Reagan and Bush administration supported computer manipulation in both Noriega's rise to power in Panama and in Marcos' attempt to retain power in the Philippines. Many of the Reagan administration's staunchest supporters were members of the Council on National Policy.

### **The Perfect Solution**

Ohio Senator Fedor continues to fight valiantly for Senate Bill 167 and the Holy Grail of the "voter verified paper audit trail." Proponents of a paper trail were emboldened when Athan Gibbs, president and CEO of TruVote International, demonstrated a voting machine at a vendor's fair in Columbus that provides two separate voting receipts.

The first paper receipt displays the voter's touch screen selection under plexiglass that falls into a lockbox after the voter approves. Also, the TruVote system provides the voter with a receipt that includes a unique voter ID and pin number which can be used to call in to a voter audit Internet connection to make sure the vote cast was actually counted.

Brooks Thomas, coordinator of Elections in Tennessee, stated, "I've not seen anything that compares to the Gibbs' TruVote validation system. . . ." The assistant secretary of state of Georgia, Terrel L. Slayton, Jr., claimed Gibbs had come up with the "perfect solution."

Still, there remains opposition from Ohio Secretary of State Blackwell. His spokesperson Carlo LoParo recently pointed out that federal mandates under HAVA do not require a paper trail: “. . . if Congress changes the federal law to require it [a paper trail], we'll certainly make that a requirement of our efforts.” LoParo went on to accuse advocates of a paper trail of attempting to “derail” voting reform.

U.S. Representative Rush Holt introduced HR 2239, The Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2003, that would require electronic voting machines to produce a paper trail so that voters may verify that their screen touches match their actual vote. Election officials would also have a paper trail for recounts.

As Blackwell pressures the Ohio legislature to adopt electronic voting machines without a paper trail, Athan Gibbs wonders, “Why would you buy a voting machine from a company like Diebold which provides a paper trail for every single machine it makes except its voting machines? And then, when you ask it to verify its numbers, it hides behind ‘trade secrets.’”

Maybe the Diebold decision makes sense, if you believe, to paraphrase Henry Kissinger, that democracy is too important to leave up to the votes of the people.

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