

Editorial

'DRE': As Discredited as 'WMD'

An election based on “direct recording electronic” voting machines is as illegal as a war based on conjured-up weapons of mass destruction, and in both cases, not a trace of evidence can be found afterwards. The United States has already seen electronic voting experiments become fiascos: the 2002 Georgia Congressional elections, in which the candidates leading in the election-eve polls lost and the state was barred from seeing the vote-counting software used by the Diebold Corporation; the Iowa county in 2000 where 300 votes cast were counted as 4 million; the 2002 races in which computers awarded victories to the losers; and the 2004 Presidential primary in the nation’s capital, in which the total reported vote abruptly doubled well after midnight, the results bore no correlation to election-eve polls, and city officials’ demands for an investigation have so far resulted in nothing. Plans to introduce electronic voting in other states have been proliferating nonetheless, topped by the Pentagon’s obscene but operational experiment in “Internet online voting” for overseas absentee voters (which article of the U.S. Constitution gave the Defense Department responsibility for organizing elections?).

The threat of widespread “DRE” and related virtual voting arose from the Congress’ misnamed Help America Vote Act of 2002, exploiting the reaction to the 2000 Florida Presidential primary mess. Thus the threat really arose from Al Gore’s and Joe Lieberman’s decision not to challenge or even mention the real outrage in Florida—the disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of mainly minority voters—and to protest instead against the type of voting machines used in the Miami area. The introduction of electronic voting, which leaves no record of citizens’ votes and counts votes by unverifiable procedures subject to easy tampering, can disenfranchise many millions of voters, and destroy the Constitutional election process entirely.

But since the outrage of the Jan. 13 Washington, D.C. primary, and candidate Lyndon LaRouche’s statement that the American Constitutional republic could not survive such virtual elections, the tide has

turned against electronic voting, which is now thoroughly discredited.

One major blow came from outside the United States: The Philippines Supreme Court handed down a hard-hitting decision on Jan. 13 that banned electronic voting as a danger to the Philippines Republic, and confirmed that testing of DRE machines purchased for elections there had shown them inherently unreliable. The Court wrote that “We are thus confronted with the grim prospect of election fraud on a massive scale by means of just a few keystrokes.”

Then on Jan. 19, computer experts from Massachusetts Institute of Technology publicized their study of the Pentagon’s online voting plan, and warned that it was even more dangerous and unreliable than electronic “touch-screen” voting. Ten days later, on Jan. 28, all of the associations which organize the absentee voting of Americans abroad—those of Democratic, Republican, and independent voters—joined in a public call for the Pentagon plan, intended for them, to be abandoned, as capable of calling an entire close election into question once again.

That same day, the news came out, of a realistic hands-on test of the state of Maryland’s planned electronic voting system—a study in which computer experts were brought in as “hackers” to tamper with Maryland’s computer-voting set-up. The hackers had a field day, gaining entry to the machines physically, electronically, gaining control of them with small concealed keyboards in the voting booths; one managed to get control of the entire system, so that he “could have changed the result, could have shut down the election, could have given one guy’s vote to another,” as he told a radio interviewer. The score was hackers 99, DRE 0, and the Maryland official in charge was reduced to repeating, “We’re sure the system is secure”!

Neither candidates, citizens, nor the world’s respect for the U.S. Constitution is secure, while electronic voting has not been stopped. As the U.S. Congress helped open this Pandora’s box, it is the responsibility of Congress to close it shut tight by appropriate remedial legislation.