



EQUAL TIME

Paper receipts no guarantee

By Meg Smothers
The Atlanta Journal Constitution
Published on: 2/23/04

The Georgia Senate is considering two pieces of legislation requiring paper "receipts" for ballots cast on Georgia's electronic voting machines. Supporters claim that providing voters with an individual paper confirmation of their ballot is necessary to safeguard our election system.

Concern exists that electronic voting equipment can be manipulated to incorrectly tabulate election results and that without paper receipts, voters have no way to tell if their vote was "stolen."

A voter-verified paper receipt simply does not guarantee a solution to these perceived security concerns. If an electronic voting machine could be programmed to record an incorrect vote, it also could certainly be programmed to print a misleading confirmation.

Paper ballots are notoriously susceptible to being lost, mangled or manipulated. The proposed receipts would likely have to be counted by hand -- the least accurate means of determining results. Individual paper receipts would link voters' identities to their ballots, undermining ballot secrecy. How to collect each paper receipt, ensure that voters do not leave the polls with their receipt in hand and store these receipts so that they are not exploited remains unresolved.

Federal standards already require that new voting machines provide paper records for recounts and authentication of elections. Georgia's machines are no exception and are capable of printing copies of every ballot cast in the state for those two purposes.

The Secretary of State's office estimates the proposed change would cost the state \$15 million. Even if that money could be found in the state budget, the Federal Election Commission has not yet approved a machine for use in producing the paper receipts. Without that approval, the state cannot buy the machines.

Georgia's election system security rests not only with the integrity of 28,000 individual machines, but also with the operational structure surrounding them. Numerous mechanisms have been implemented to enhance election security in Georgia. Among

them are: the physical isolation of each machine to prevent hacking; election officials' control over ballot creation, source codes and management systems; improved equipment management practices and training for election officials; and testing of election equipment before and after elections, as well as parallel monitoring on Election Day. These safeguards are the real way to make Georgia's elections secure.

Since 1920, the League of Women Voters has worked to remove obstacles between voters and the polls. Our advocacy for electronic voting underscores our support of full and equal voting rights for all eligible citizens.

In 2002, Georgia's visually impaired voters were able to vote without assistance for the first time. It is now easier to adapt ballots into multiple languages. Electronic voting equipment prevents voter errors and reduces errors that commonly result from counting paper ballots, resulting in a more accurate vote count than previously possible.

Nothing is more fundamental to making democracy work than ensuring that every vote cast is counted as each voter intended. By implementing a statewide voting system reliant on modern technologies and stringent election law, and by emphasizing training, testing and continued vigilance to safeguard our system, Georgia is a tremendous step closer to that goal.

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