Dear sir/madam,

This is in response to the ad placed in The Gazette (Nov. 12, 2005) inviting the public to express its views on the new electoral system.

I am pleased to say that my vote for mayor and one councilor here in Côte St-Luc, was cast quickly and without incident on Nov. 6. What troubled me however, was the feeling that from the moment the ballot was sucked into the machine, I had no assurance that my vote was counted as marked, unlike the old manual system where the paper ballot could not be altered and was subject to a recount.

As a person who designed a computer system for a hospital laboratory, I am aware of the fact that the values measured on an analyzer could be changed by programming the computer to do so - and indeed this was done deliberately at times to correct for specimen abnormalities e.g. calcium in the presence of protein, or cholesterol for bilirubin. This gave our doctors truer values with which to diagnose their patients.

However, counting ballots is not the same as analyzing blood samples and as we learned from elections in the United States, electronic voting was clearly tampered with to falsify election results by programmers in the employ of companies who wished to ensure that the candidate of their choice would be elected.

I have no argument with the use of computers in our elections, for the sake of efficiency in processing and counting ballots for each candidate. However, since voting is at the heart of our democratic system, I believe that every precaution must be taken to ensure that the system is free of corruption or interference by hackers or by the firms who manufacture the system and provide its software. In short, government observers must be given complete access to and cooperation in examining and testing the system in advance of an election without restrictions as to the proprietary nature of the system.

The following information, obtained on the internet illustrate the reasons for my concerns and suggest some necessary precautions:

September 29, 2005

20 Amazing Facts About Voting in the USA

We owe a huge debt to Angry Girl for compiling this list.

1. There is no federal agency with regulatory authority or oversight of the U.S. voting machine industry.
2. 80% of all votes in America are counted by only two companies: Diebold and ES&S.
3. The vice-president of Diebold and the president of ES&S are brothers.

4. The chairman and CEO of Diebold is a major Bush campaign organizer and donor who wrote in 2003 that he was "committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year."
5. Republican Senator Chuck Hagel used to be chairman of ES&S. He became Senator based on votes counted by ES&S machines.
6. Republican Senator Chuck Hagel, long-connected with the Bush family, was recently caught lying about his ownership of ES&S by the Senate Ethics Committee.
7. Senator Chuck Hagel was on a short list of George W. Bush's vice-presidential candidates.
8. ES&S is the largest voting machine manufacturer in the U.S. and counts almost 60% of all U.S. votes.
9. Diebold's new touch screen voting machines have no paper trail of any votes. In other words, there is no way to verify that the data coming out of the machine is the same as what was legitimately put in by voters.
10. Diebold also makes ATMs, checkout scanners, and ticket machines, all of which log each transaction and can generate a paper trail.
11. Diebold is based in Ohio.
12. Diebold employed 5 convicted felons as consultants and developers to help write the central compiler computer code that counted 50% of the votes in 30 states.
13. Jeff Dean was Senior Vice-President of Global Election Systems when it was bought by Diebold. Even though he had been convicted of 23 counts of felony theft in the first degree, Jeff Dean was retained as a consultant by Diebold and was largely responsible for programming the optical scanning software now used in most of the United States.
14. Diebold consultant Jeff Dean was convicted of planting back doors in his software and using a "high degree of sophistication" to evade detection over a period of 2 years.
15. None of the international election observers were allowed in the polls in Ohio.
16. California banned the use of Diebold machines because the security was so bad.
17. 30% of all U.S. votes are carried out on unverifiable touch screen voting machines with no paper trail.
18. All -- not some -- but all the voting machine errors detected and reported in Florida went in favor of Bush or Republican candidates.
19. The governor of the state of Florida, Jeb Bush, is the President's brother.
20. Serious voting anomalies in Florida -- again always favoring Bush -- have been mathematically demonstrated and experts are recommending further investigation.

ALSO---

"Introduction To The Concerns About Electronic Voting

A growing concern over the inadequacies of election equipment in the United States has recently been heightened by the problems of the 2000 Presidential election. Added to the mix is the election reform mandated by recent federal legislation attempting to address the concerns. The result is that many states are scurrying to replace their older equipment with new electronic voting computers.

"Unfortunately, election technology has not advanced to the point where it can provide us with electronic systems that are reliable enough to trust with our democracy. In other words, we just aren't there yet.

"Here are the facts:

Computer experts say today's voting machines are prone to errors and vulnerable to fraud.
Even thorough testing can't reveal malicious programs that could subvert an election.
Courts have ruled that secret software can be used to record and count our votes
Defective hardware and bugs in software could decide who wins an election.
Many election officials don't realize the risks inherent in using electronic voting machines.
Manual recounts will be impossible in districts that don't allow voters to inspect a paper record of their votes.
What does this mean about the 2004 election?
Americans will use voting computers with secret software that has not been sufficiently scrutinized, just as they have in past elections.
"They will have to trust computers to record and count their votes correctly – computers that are not advanced enough to ensure the security and accuracy that could justify their trust.
If something odd occurs, manual recounts of the original ballots will be impossible , because the only record of the votes will be in electronic form, which will, of course, match the questionable tally.
"HAVA isn't a solution
In response to the 2000 Florida debacle, Congress passed a law, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which mandates voting process reform in all the states. Unfortunately, many are interpreting the requirements in a way that does not provide the safeguards necessary to ensure integrity in our elections.

"HAVA requires that voters be able to verify their ballots before they are cast and counted.
HAVA requires that all voting machines provide a "permanent paper record with a manual audit capacity" and that the voter must be given the "opportunity to change the ballot or correct any error before the permanent paper is produced."
"Mr. Darryl R. Wold, former chairman of the Federal Election Commission (FEC) believes that HAVA requires a voter-verifiable paper trail . Senator John Ensign (R-NV), who contributed the audit requirements now incorporated into HAVA, explains that the intent of the provision was to provide a voter-verifiable paper trail. However, many proponents of touch screen voting systems are claiming that the HAVA requirement does not mean the system must allow the voter to verify the paper record. They claim the HAVA requirements are met if the voter verifies a screen version of the ballot, and if a paper report can be printed later for audit purposes. However, if the voters cannot verify the actual audit record in the voting booth, meaningful recounts are impossible, since the recount would simply be an identical retabulation of the original count that was in question. Since HAVA remains open to this kind of interpretation, it does not provide a solution..

"More information can be found here at HAVA Information Central.

"Fixing software isn't a solution

In July 2003, computer researchers from Johns Hopkins and Rice Universities published a scathing review of one of the most widely used electronic voting computers, the Diebold touch screen. Their analysis showed that the software was badly designed, full of errors, and open to

fraud.

"Some people say that the manufacturers could simply fix the software, and the problem will be solved. However, they fail to see that the solution is not that simple. There are two unfixable problems with electronic voting machines:
No one knows how to write bug-free software. The more complex the software, the more difficult it is to find the bugs, and election software is very complex.
Malicious code embedded into the software could go undetected. Neither close inspection of the code nor thorough testing of the computer could ensure that malicious software has not slipped through the cracks".

Thank you.

Samuel W Levy, Ph.D.