

Submitted to the Cleveland Plain Dealer...
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To the Editor,

I oppose the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections' decision to select Touch Screen machines manufactured by the Diebold corporation to count the votes in the choosing of our elected officials. My primary opposition to this decision, voiced at their recent public hearing, was not based on the fact that the vendor chosen was the Diebold corporation, nor that the actual technology chosen was Touch Screen rather than Optical Scan. To me, these are secondary concerns, arguably even distractions.

The real issue is one of authority – one of maintaining public authority to ensure that public officials and institutions are in complete control in the collection, counting and reporting of public votes during public elections in the democratic selection of public officials.

The Diebold Corporation is not a public entity. Nor is ES&S corporation. Nor are any other vendors. They are all for-profit business corporations which have a bottom line not to maximize public confidence in elections but to maximize corporate profit and shareholder value.

Debates over Diebold vs. ES&S as a vendor or Touch Screen vs. Optical Scan voting machines are akin to choosing between paper vs. plastic at the check out line and calling it a real decision to save the environment – while SUVs and smoke stacks are destroying the Earth's ozone. Obviously we need verified voting but these choices aren't central.

Voting machine technology is private. It's trademarked. It's private property. Corporations manufacture the machines, program the machines, service the machines, "troubleshoot" any problems with the machines, and possess the proprietary "keys" to the machines. In other words, corporations have the bottom-line authority over the machines.

This is not public. This is not democratic. This is the main problem. Public "oversight," "monitoring," "advisory," "watchdogging," or any other word to describe the passive and deferential role the public has under this scheme to corporate voting machine vendors doesn't cut it. It's not acceptable. It's a sham.

The real issue is whether or not the public, via Boards of Elections, can actually be in control of the voting machine technology, proprietary program "keys," servicing and counting. In other words, can public entities be actively in charge rather than passively watching what's going on. There's a huge difference.

The implications of what I suggest is clear. Public entities need to take over and totally control this technology.

Two centuries ago, the Ohio legislature chartered one corporation at a time to perform a specific function for a limited period of time. In some cases, after a corporation built a road and received a fair return on their investment, the road was taken over by the public and the toll road became a public road.

Similar action needs to occur today. Let corporations build the machines but once built and sold at a fair price to Boards of Elections, the machines become transformed from private to public with zero role thereafter for the corporations. The technology becomes totally transparent with all

proprietary information open and with the certainty that votes counted and verified are lodged and recorded. If the corporations object, there's always paper ballots.

The real choice is not on the order of paper or plastic grocery bags. It's authority – our authority as citizens to control the democratic process of counting public votes to elect public officials. The County BOE should scrap its plan and vote for democracy.

Sincerely,

Greg Coleridge

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Organization)

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