

**TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO CUYAHOGA COUNTY (OHIO)
BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

Monday, December 17, 2007 Cleveland, Ohio

My name is Greg Coleridge. I'm with the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee and on the national board of the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy – 2 organizations that have for many years researched and educated on the relationship between democracy and corporations.

The real issue before us today 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.

Voting machine technology is private. It's trademarked. It's private property.

Corporations manufacture the machines.

Corporations program the machines.

Corporations service the machines.

Corporations “trouble-shoot” any problems with the machines.

Corporations possess the proprietary “keys” to the machines.

Corporations have the bottom-line authority over the machines.

In short, vote counting has become privatized or, more specifically, corporatized.

In the Project EVEREST report issued last Friday, Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner states on page 73 under the General Conclusions and Background section, 3rd paragraph:

“It has been said that elections belong to the people. Excessive dependence on any voting machine company to operate the state's elections, when that company's voting system is subject to trade secret or propriety information claims, result in a loss of transparency that should exist to assure election officials and the public that a fair and accurate process has been implemented for democratic self-governance.”

Exactly.

She concludes that same paragraph by saying:

“The information available to the scientists who performed the assessments of this study is some of the most comprehensive information available to date for any such study. This was not accomplished without the assistance and cooperation of the voting machine companies whose equipment and software were studied”

This is precisely the problem – having to rely on or depend upon the assistance and cooperation of voting machine corporations.

This is not public. This is not democratic. This is the main problem. Public “oversight,” public “monitoring,” public “advising,” public “watchdogging,” or any other word to describe the passive and deferential role the public has under the current vote-counting

framework is unacceptable. It's undemocratic.

Issues of Touch Screen vs Optical Scan is akin to choosing between paper or 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 with a paper ballot but the choice as presented is a secondary concern.

The real issue is public authority. 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 profound difference.

Public entities need to take over and totally control this technology. Public elections are too important to have private for-profit business corporations in charge. Vote counting needs to be open, transparent, and verifiable.

The real choice is not paper or plastic. It's authority. Citizen authority or corporate authority. May this body be wise enough to make the right choice.