

Humboldt Election Problems in GAO Report

Dave Berman

In October 2005, the official Congressional watchdog body, the non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO), released a report¹ proving there is no basis for confidence in the results reported from U.S. federal elections. Nationally, the corporate media has blacked out this story. You are reading about it because of the report's clear implications on Humboldt's election conditions:

- p.24-25: Weak system security controls
- The Humboldt County website contains a memo² to the Board of Supervisors dated 2/22/05. It is from Carolyn Wilson, Clerk-Recorder, County Elections Manager Lindsey McWilliams also signed it as the "preparer." Regarding storage of voting equipment, they wrote:
Since Public Works has unfettered access to our equipment at present, there is little reason to seek a security audit which we would undoubtedly fail.

security status of election machines, or segregated for the machines' security? No apologies accepted either way.

- Humboldt County uses modern for transferring data (vote tallies) between the precincts and the central tabulator." The GAO report mentions modern problems, citing a study³ by the Maryland General Assembly: By successfully directing Canvas [commercial software] at the GEMS modern interface, the team was able to remotely upload, download and execute files with full system administrator privileges. All that was required was a valid phone number for the GEMS server.
- Humboldt County uses GEMS, which is vote counting software made by Diebold. Other GEMS problems include:
 1. Trade-secret ("proprietary") programming kept private from election officials and the public at large.
 2. While no one can explain precisely how GEMS works, it is known that GEMS operates on Microsoft's Access platform, proven to be highly insecure by industry experts.
 3. VoterGate (the Motorola free download at: www.votergate.tv) contains footage from a national TV broadcast of Bev Harris instructing Howard Dean how to hack GEMS in under two

minutes, altering vote tallies without a trace. Additional vulnerabilities have been found and published at www.blackboxvoting.org.

--p.37: Poor version control of system software

The GAO report cites an April 2004

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client counties without notifying the Secretary of State as required by law, and that the software was not federally qualified in three client counties. Diebold eventually acknowledged that it had failed to notify the Secretary of State of its proposed system modifications, and that its failure to obtain certification for those modifications violated state law.

Who allowed uncertified software to be installed in Humboldt's voting machines? Was someone in the Humboldt County elections department complicit in this crime or merely negligent? Is this person still employed by the elections department, and if so, why? Humboldt voters deserve answers and local media that will pursue accountability.

--p.38: The GAO report is a mix of concerns for what could happen, and evidence of what has happened. The former illustrates the need for transparency and greater awareness; the latter promises fallout for our continued collective willful ignorance. Nevertheless, there is evidence that some of these concerns—including weak controls and inadequate testing—have caused problems with recent elections, resulting in the loss and miscount of votes.

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This is a call to action, Humboldt. Our local media need encouragement to investigate and report further on this GAO report and local election conditions. The Board of Supervisors must also know that we will only accept election officials committed to election reforms aimed at ensuring conclusive outcomes, creating a basis for confidence in the results reported, and establishing accountable government representing We The People with the Consent of the Governed. That is what Democracy should look like.

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Article References:

1. <http://tinyurl.com/aaow5>
2. <http://tinyurl.com/azn1>
3. <http://tinyurl.com/azn1>
4. <http://tinyurl.com/7u2wu>

Cross Volunteer's

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