

The Problem of Securing Our Elections Has Been Solved. DNC Politicians Refuse To Do It, Though?



With midterm elections coming up and the entire Trump agenda at stake, be you for it or agin' it, the puzzle of securing our elections from hacking **has been solved**.

It doesn't matter if you believe the greatest threat is from the Russkies or from inside the US. Few any longer disagree that there is a problem.

Politicians from Tulsi Gabbard to Rep. Mark Pocan [D-WI-2] have been aiming at the mark but missing. Gabbard has submitted **HR5147**, the Securing America's Elections Act. Pocan has filed **HR1562** the Secure America's Future Elections Act or the SAFE Act. What they both miss is the easiest, cheapest way to verify the vote counts from hackable vote-counting machines.

Such a flurry of activity in Washington usually means voters have forced politicians to take notice of a problem, but the politicians don't really want to fix it. If they had wanted to fix it, it would be fixed. It's not rocket science.

For one thing, Gabbard's bill does not require a hand-marked paper ballot option for voters, which provides the best audit trail and the most incontrovertible evidence of a voter's intentions. Some states

and voting jurisdictions, like Georgia, are attempting to transition to "verifiable paper trail" voting, where a voter uses a touch screen device to select his or her choices. The voter can then examine the choices on a paper "receipt" on a roll of tape in the machine. The problem is, first, no one ever examines the roll, and second, the machine vote count is easy to hack, as is the tape.

Neither bill, Gabbard's nor Pocan's, solves the problem.

But first, it is necessary to back up. In order to understand the solution, you need to understand how vote-counting machines work in most of America.

After the 2000 presidential fiasco, most states moved to voter-marked paper ballots, with exceptions such as touch screen machines noted above. Make a long story short, most voting in the US is done by paper ballot, hand-marked by the voter, and counted by "electronic eye" optical scan vote-counting machine. This is a sound way of vote-counting, as long as all cross-checks and audit trails are in place.

The problem is, they are not.

What few people understand, but more are beginning to, is that when a paper ballot is fed into an optical scan vote counting machine, the machine takes a digital image of each ballot, at lightning speed, then stores it into memory. One of the audit trails in these machines is these ballot images.

Even better, the jurisdictions which do not have these state-of-the-art vote counting machines have machines which are rapidly reaching end-of-service-life obsolescence. They should have been replaced by now. The fact is any machine which does not take and store a digital image of each ballot is an obsolete machine, including all touch screen machines, except as they are allowed for handicapped use.

Let's get this right: Yes, after every election, in most voting jurisdictions across the US, inside of each precinct's paper ballot vote-counting machine's memory is a digital image file of each ballot. Where such machines are used. These images can then be posted online or burned onto a DVD by the county, town, or city.

Elections experts have realized that the import of this little known audit feature is enormous.

Making these ballot images publicly available would allow citizens who wish to verify the vote-counting machine's total, to do it themselves. As the last year has shown, it is notoriously difficult to force election authorities to hand-count the paper ballots. Even with the \$7 million raised by Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein for a three-state recount of the Trump vs. Clinton vote, she still did not get a full hand recount of all the paper ballots available.

Any citizen who likes can discover whether or not the Russkies are at it again, as far as hacking into vote-counting machines and altering the vote, which hackers have repeatedly demonstrated is easy to do. One of the most recent instances was the [DefCon Hacker's Conference](#) in Las Vegas last year, when hackers just for funsies broke into voting machines in under 90 minutes.

At this point the discerning reader might ask: Say what? You mean we could verify these elections ourselves all along? So why hasn't it happened? More than 50% of precincts [have this feature](#).

The short answer is, election activists have ben trying to make it happen, but election authorities are fighting it tooth and nail. Apparently, your local county and state election authorities want to make it easy for the Russkies to get away with swinging American elections.

In Arizona, Pima County Elections Director Brad Nelson went to

court **to block citizens** from preserving, nevermind having access to, the ballot images. Nelson argued that the county has the authority to destroy this part of the election record and audit trail, a view the judge vehemently disagreed with.

In Alabama, the Secretary of State successfully obtained a state **Supreme Court order** to allow local election officials to destroy the ballot images. And in Massachusetts, Secretary of State William Galvin reportedly directed all local election authorities to *destroy* the digital ballot image audit trail. This is according to the election chief of a large Massachusetts city. Calls to the Secretary's office to confirm or deny this have not been returned.

The cat is out of the bag on the digital ballot images, and election authorities don't like it.

We can only scratch our heads as to why election authorities have adopted this stance. Preserving and posting the ballot images costs next to nothing, is easy, and violates no principles of the secret ballot. All ballot images are completely anonymous, and cannot be traced to any individual voter. Nevertheless, apparently there are things election authorities do not want people to see.

Underscoring the wisdom of preserving the digital ballot images, in a high-profile, hotly contested Democratic primary between Bernie Sanders protege Tim Canova, a Florida law school professor, and US Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, former chairman of the DNC, after losing the election Canova discovered problems with the vote. Not least of which was that there were almost 1000 more cast ballots than voters who voted.

When Canova called for a hand recount of the paper ballots, he discovered that Broward County Supervisor of Elections Brenda Snipes had ordered the **paper ballots in the race destroyed**, illegally, in violation of federal statute requiring the ballots in federal races to be kept for two years. There was nothing to recount.

Wasserman-Schultz is a Clinton acolyte, and was forced to resign as chairman of the DNC when leaked emails revealed her lack of neutrality in the 2016 presidential primary race, in favor of Clinton.

It is not clear whether or not Snipes also ordered the digital ballot images destroyed. Broward County uses the kind of machines which make them. But the value of having them available as a backup to determine what actually happened in the race is obvious.

The Canova - Wasserman-Schultz race, in which Wasserman won by a landslide, uncovered a disturbing possibility. Canova, perhaps more alert than the typical candidate to the possibility of cheating, found strong evidence of it, and had his suspicions all but confirmed by the outrageous actions of election authorities. But in how many instances has such behavior not been uncovered? How many of our congressmen now sitting making laws for us, and for corporations, have no legitimacy whatsoever?

Preserving and posting the ballot images, where they are available, solves a number of problems all at once. Election authorities rightly cannot allow just anyone to paw through the paper ballots, and so state laws for hand recounts are strict and usually require a court order. Courts in turn have shown themselves loath to grant them. In most states, automatic recounts are not triggered unless a candidate loses by less than one-half of one percent, an overly restrictive and arbitrary hurdle. Indeed, it has been asked, what is the point of using paper ballots if no one is ever allowed to see them?

But digital ballot images cannot get coffee spilled on them, or get lost by improper handling. Citizens can verify the results of precinct machine counts to their heart's content, in case the Russians, as we are told, are at it again.

The question is do politicians really want to secure our elections, or merely look like they are "doing something?"

There are other reforms which are necessary in order to truly protect every citizen's right to vote, and as importantly, to have that vote properly counted.

The trend toward mail-in ballots is viewed warily by election integrity experts. Nothing cries for mischief like stacks of marked ballots sitting in offices weeks before an actual election. Voter suppression must be halted by mandating a minimum number of voting stations per thousand registered voters, to eliminate long lines often seen in poorer inner city neighborhoods. Voter registration systems must be secured to eliminate the kind of registration hacking we saw in numerous 2016 Democratic presidential primaries, such as New York and Arizona.

DRE - Direct Recording Electronic voting machines, in other words screen touch - should be banned with the exception of use for persons with disabilities.

Some states, such as South Carolina, host to an important early presidential primary, still have completely paperless electronic voting, what election experts call "push and pray."

But any bill which does not codify a mandate to preserve and post the digital ballot images, and to require jurisdictions to transition their now obsolete machines to one which generates them, is window dressing. The saying is as true as ever: Never listen to what politicians say. Watch what politicians do.

 Software interface of a ballot imaging audit feature.

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