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92% of Americans Oppose Secret Vote Counting; Favor Public's Right to Know In Elections

By Kathy Dopp

A new Zogby poll will be released on Tuesday, August 22 revealing that fully 92% of every single demographic group in American favors the public's right to observe vote counting and to obtain any information regarding vote counting. The August 12-15 Zogby telephone poll sampled approximately 1200 likely voters nationwide.

One actual survey question and answers is:

“In some states, members of the public have the right to view the counting of votes and verify how that process is working. In other states, citizens are in effect barred from viewing vote counting even if they would like to view the process. Which of the following two statements are you more likely to agree with A or B?”

Statement A: Citizens have the right to view and obtain information about how election officials count votes.
92%

Statement B: Citizens do not have the right to view and obtain information about how elections officials count votes.
6%

Neither/Not sure
2%

The survey was commissioned by election protection attorney Paul Lehto of Washington State. According to Lehto, “The public overwhelmingly opposes secret vote counting and favors election transparency and the public right to know.”

Here in Utah, our election officials are out of touch with the public, as shown by this new Zogby poll. Utah Lt. Governor’s office implemented state-wide voting systems with secret (“proprietary”) programming code and decertified Utah’s former paper voting systems to force counties to adopt new electronic ballots that are not humanly viewable.

Bruce Funk of Emery County, Utah invited computer security experts to examine Utah’s new voting machines in March, 2006. The findings were reported in the New York Times on May 12, 2006. The security flaws that Funk found caused PA and CA to issue urgent security directives and Avi Rubin, professor of computer science at Johns Hopkins University said “I almost had a heart attack. The implications of this are pretty astounding” and Michael Shamos of Carnegie Mellon University said “It’s the most severe security flaw ever discovered in a voting system”. Yet Utah’s Lt. Governor’s office reacted by holding a closed executive session meeting with Diebold officials and Emery County officials, after which the doors on Bruce Funk’s office were locked to prevent this 23 year elected official from doing the job he was elected for. The minutes of their closed meeting have yet to be publicly released.

In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, where Salt Lake County’s former election official Michael Vu now officiates, it was found that 15% of the paper ballot records did not match Diebold touch-screen

<http://utahcountvotes.org/docs/ZogbyTransparencyPoll.pdf>

<http://ElectionArchive.org/uevInfo/release/ZogbyTransparencyPoll.pdf>

electronic counts in the recent primary. According to Kitty Pilgrim, CNN correspondent, "The May primary election in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, using Diebold electronic voting machines was a debacle."

The only way to be sure that electronic counts are correct is to count the voter verifiable paper records. Yet, the Salt Lake Tribune on July 7, 2006 quoted Utah Election Director Michael Cragun saying that a recount would consist of reconciling the electronic polling place records by "re-accumulating the memory cards" and "The permanent paper record comes into play only in an extreme situation."

Counting the paper roll ballot records by hand to verify the accuracy of electronic counts requires equipment called "paper roll advancers". Yet Utah election officials have not purchased any paper roll advancers; have not purchased the equipment required to install a known clean software system on Diebolds; and have kept Utah's security procedures a secret. "Security by obscurity" is a formula for insider tampering.

Utah election officials have actively worked against the transparency in elections that the public overwhelmingly wants. The US Constitution created a government with checks and balances, not a system of blind trust in the infallibility and good intentions of others. Yet Utah election officials implemented a new "faith-based" voting system which lets private companies secretly count unseen electronic ballots and determine outcomes of elections without any checks.

These nearly unanimous Zogby poll results bolster efforts to convince the Utah Lt. Governor's Office that the public recognizes this as a crisis on which they must act to change our election conditions. The staff of the Lt. Governor's office should be willing to admit the problems inherent with the secret vote counting machines and consult with expert computer scientists and mathematicians to develop methods to ensure our election outcome integrity.

In concert with Tuesday's full announcement of the Zogby poll, the National Election Data Archive has developed a new method for ensuring election outcome integrity. In this new paper to be released soon by the National Election Data Archive, "The Election Integrity Audit", presents a new method for calculating audit amounts -- hand counting of ballots done to check the accuracy of vote tallying machines—that would reveal any corrupted vote counts that could wrongfully alter any election outcome.

According to NEDA, a fixed rate audit of 1 or 2% or even 5% is not sufficient for detecting outcome-altering vote miscount in close races. This is extremely relevant given the enormous financial and legal barriers to bringing a challenge to a close election. Attached to NEDA's paper is a computer algorithm and spreadsheet that offers readers the ability to calculate, for particular races and elections the audit size to detect vote count corruption. NEDA recommends that their new calculation be adopted as the standard for calculating election audit percentages.

It is from the "Consent of the Governed", according to the Declaration of Independence, that government derives "Just Power." It is time for state and county election officials to listen to the public and make the election process publicly transparent and verifiable.



Kathy Dopp, kathy@ElectionArchive.org
National Election Data Archive, President
P.O. Box 682556, Park City, UT 84068, 435-658-4657 <http://ElectionArchive.org>

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