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Alaska Democratic Party

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August 8, 2007

The Honorable Sarah Palin, Governor
State of Alaska
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001
Sent by fax: 907-465-3532

Dear Governor Palin,

I know we share the same goal with regard to Alaska's elections – we want them to be accurate and secure, so that Alaskans can have confidence in the results. Unfortunately, disturbing new information casts doubt on the security and reliability of the Diebold voting system used by the State of Alaska. According to technical reports conducted by academic experts that were recently released by California Secretary of State Debra Bowen, serious problems exist with the Diebold voting systems that are used in California as well as throughout the State of Alaska. [1]

Earlier this year, Bowen commissioned a top-to-bottom independent evaluation of the security and reliability of electronic voting technologies used in California. The evaluation was performed by computer experts at the University of California and Princeton University. This comprehensive study examined products from three major voting system vendors and included voting machines as well as the back-end systems that create ballots and tally votes. The California reports constitute the most detailed published information available about how these systems work and the specific risks associated with their use in elections.

In summary, the expert reviewers found pervasive, serious security weaknesses in all the systems studied. The review demonstrated that the technology and security of all three systems could be compromised.

One of the reports on the Diebold voting system, which consists primarily of the AccuVote-TSX DRE (touchscreen machine); the AccuVote-OS (optical scan machine), and the GEMS election management system (software), stated: "Our analysis shows that the technological controls in the Diebold software do not provide sufficient security to guarantee a trustworthy election. The software contains serious design flaws that have led directly to specific vulnerabilities that attackers could exploit to affect election outcomes." The vulnerabilities cited include: vulnerability to malicious software, susceptibility to viruses, failure to protect ballot secrecy, and vulnerability to malicious insiders.

In addition, a recent review by Florida State University for the Florida Department of State found similar security flaws in Diebold voting systems. [2]

In light of the troubling findings of the California and Florida reports, I urge that you immediately undertake a comprehensive review of Alaska's voting system. I urge you to act quickly, since the problems appear to be significant and should be fixed before the next statewide elections in 2008. We need to address these issues forthrightly in order to ensure that the voting system we are using is accurate, reliable and secure, and to ensure public confidence in the integrity of our elections.

Thank you for your consideration. Please take prompt action to address these critically important concerns. I would appreciate receiving a response from you as soon as possible. Please contact me at 360-2561.

Regards,



Patti Higgins
Chair
Alaska Democratic Party

cc:

Lt. Gov. Sean Parnell
Whitney Brewster, Director, Division of Elections

[1] http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_vsr.htm

http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting_systems/ttbr/diebold.pdf

http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting_systems/ttbr/diebold-source-public-jul29.pdf

http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting_systems/ttbr/red_diebold.pdf

[2] Software Review and Security Analysis of the Diebold Voting Machine Software, Security and Assurance in Information Technology Laboratory, Florida State University, July 27, 2007

<http://election.dos.state.fl.us/pdf/SAITreport.pdf>