

Posted on Wed,  
Jun. 30, 2004

Group wants check of state's voting systems

**By Nancy Cook Lauer**  
**DEMOCRAT CAPITOL BUREAU CHIEF**

A Miami group is asking Gov. Jeb Bush to order a statewide, independent audit of voting systems, following a county employee's discovery of ballot-counting irregularities there.

The Miami-Dade Election Reform Coalition said computer glitches causing vote tallies to be wrong in two elections last year justify a return to statewide audits that look at how voting machinery, processes and personnel work on election night.

The group includes citizen activists, the local League of Women Voters and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Their request drew a strong response from Bush spokesman Jacob DiPietre.

"We are not going to engage in every accusation du jour from people whose goal it is to undermine voter confidence," DiPietre said. "The governor has every confidence in the Department of State, election supervisors and the staffers who are working to ensure a fair and seamless election, and the voter should, too."

The glitches were in touch-screen iVotronic equipment by Elections Systems & Software, but the coalition says all counties using touch-screen voting machines and a random sample of those using the paper ballots should be audited. Florida law once required that all systems be audited every five years, but the Legislature never provided money for it and it was repealed in 1996.

The "problems we uncovered in Miami-Dade should be a warning to the rest of the state," said Sandy Wayland, legislative chair of the group. "The time to heed the warning is now, while we can still do something about it."

### **Dropped votes**

The system failed to record 38 votes in two machines during a May 2003 North Miami Beach municipal runoff election, according to Orlando Suarez, division director for Miami-Dade County's information technology office.

What Suarez found most troubling was that the 38 missing votes turned up in a tally for a machine that wasn't used during that election. The machines are identified by their

serial numbers.

There were similar problems in an October 2003 election, where five machines dropped 162 votes.

The company didn't respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

Wayland said Bush should find the money - and call a special session of the Legislature if necessary - to hire auditors to evaluate the Aug. 31 primary election. It's uncertain how much it would cost to audit the 15 counties that use touch-screen systems and a sample of the counties that don't.

Secretary of State Glenda Hood, who learned about the problems from a newspaper article just last month, has ordered an investigation. She said in a May 13 letter to Supervisor of Elections Constance Kaplan that she was "disturbed" that the required report to her office on the conduct of elections never mentioned the problems.

Leon County Supervisor of Elections Ion Sancho said he's never experienced a state audit in the 16 years he has run elections here. He said he would "have no problem" with one now.

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## **Orlando Sentinel**

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/state/orl-locvote30063004jun30,1,7724115.story?coll=orl-news-headlines>

# **Coalition wants governor to examine voting systems**

By Bob Mahlburg  
Tallahassee Bureau

June 30, 2004

TALLAHASSEE -- A coalition of groups Tuesday called on Gov. Jeb Bush to order a statewide study of the August primary election to make sure voting systems work for November's presidential vote.

Florida is a key battleground state, and problems have been found with a type of electronic voting machine used by 11 of the state's 67 counties, including some in Central and South Florida.

"The buck stops with Gov. Jeb. Bush," said Sandy Wayland of the Miami-Dade Election Reform Coalition. "He can either be a leader in election reform, or he can stick his head in the sand and do nothing. We are calling on him to lead."

Jacob DiPietre, a Bush spokesman, declined to say if Bush would call for an audit, adding, "The governor is directing the [elections] agency to deal with it."

DiPietre later released a statement that Bush has "every confidence" in efforts for a smooth election.

"We are not going to engage every accusation *du jour* from people whose goal it is to undermine voter confidence," he said.

Some problems have been found with touch-screen voting machines made by Election Systems & Software used in 11 counties, including Lake, Sumter, Broward, Miami-Dade and Martin. A Miami-Dade elections worker found that the machines failed to record 162 votes in an October local election, according to a report to county officials.

Nicole de Lara, a spokeswoman for Secretary of State Glenda Hood, Tuesday also expressed confidence in voting equipment and accused the group of trying to erode voter confidence.

However, Hood expressed concern in a May letter to Miami-Dade officials, saying she was "disturbed to have only recently learned that your office has been dealing with an equipment anomaly" for a year but did not tell the state.

The election coalition, which includes the American Civil Liberties Union, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and League of Women Voters, said that is "the tip of the iceberg." An audit would boost public confidence, they say.

Coalition members said that they did know what an audit would cost or how long it would take, but a Maryland study reportedly took three months.

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## Groups seek study of August primary

By Bob Mahlburg - Tallahassee Bureau

June 30, 2004

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## **ELECTIONS**

Voting-gear check rejected

**The governor and the secretary of state accused a coalition of election watchdogs of trying to undermine the election by seeking a statewide review of voting equipment.**

**BY MARY ELLEN KLAS**

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**TALLAHASSEE** - The state's top election officials dismissed a request Tuesday from an election watchdog group to conduct an independent review of the state's touch-screen voting systems.

The Miami Dade Election Reform Coalition urged the governor to conduct audits of the electronic touch-screen voting machines used in 15 Florida counties, and do random audits of the optical scan machines used in the other 52 counties, to determine if they are working correctly during the Aug. 31 primary.

An independent audit of voting equipment has not been conducted in Florida, and state officials rely on the work of supervisors of elections in each county to check the accuracy of their machines.

Spokesmen for Gov. Jeb Bush and Secretary of State Glenda Hood did not respond to the request, instead accusing the coalition of trying to erode confidence in the state's elections systems.

"We are not going to engage in every accusation *du jour* from people whose goal it is to undermine voters' confidence," said Jacob DiPietre, a spokesman for Bush. "The governor has every confidence in the Department of State and the Division of Elections."

### **'MOST SECURE'**

Nicole deLara, a spokeswoman for Hood, argued that Florida has "the most rigorous certification process in the country and uses the most secure and accurate technology available today" and "has conducted hundreds of successful elections using touch-screen equipment since 2002."

"When organizations set out to erode voter confidence, they do a disservice to the

constituents of Florida who should feel nothing but confident that their votes will be counted," she said.

The coalition was joined at a Tallahassee press conference Tuesday by the League of Women Voters of Miami-Dade County, the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida and the American Federation of County, State and Municipal Employees.

The coalition uncovered documents this spring from Miami-Dade elections officials that show that internal tests found computer flaws in the iVotronic voting machines used in Miami-Dade, Broward and nine other counties when doing post-election audits.

"The real questions today is does our system work, and we don't have a real answer to that," said coalition member Dan McCrea.

### **'AUDITING DEFECTS'**

Howard Simon, executive director of the ACLU of Florida, emphasized that the group ``was not here to launch a full-blown attack on [touch-screen voting] systems in Florida. What we are saying is . . . the auditing defects slipped through the state verification system."

Sandy Wayland, spokeswoman for the coalition, said an audit would ensure voter confidence by determining whether the machines record the touch-screen vote and tabulate it accurately. He also called for the machines to provide paper result reports.

### **MARYLAND REVIEW**

At least one other state has conducted a statewide review of its touch-screen voting equipment in light of recent problems. Last year, the Maryland legislature authorized a report by independent auditors. In January, the report concluded that the Diebold electronic voting machines the state uses had security flaws that could allow hackers to corrupt the system.

But the authors of the report emphasized that the machines, if operating correctly, count votes accurately.

Florida election officials likewise argue that the computer flaws in the iVotronic machines manufactured by Election Systems & Software can be fixed and do not affect the ability of the machines to accurately record votes.

Herald staff writer Gary Fineout contributed to this report.