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VOTING MACHINES

Critic: Paper vote records vital

A California computer expert discussed with two local groups the importance of having a paper record attached to electronic voting machines.

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States that use electronic voting machines must also have a system of paper records to verify votes, a leading critic of touch-screen voting said Tuesday night at a lecture in Coral Gables.

David Dill, a Stanford University computer science professor, talked with about 40 people, most members of the Miami-Dade Election Reform Coalition and the Human Services Coalition at the home of Daniella Levine, executive director of the human services group.

Dill has worked since 2003 to expose flaws in electronic voting systems, which he said are open to fraud and manipulation.

'LESS CONFIDENCE'

"A lot of us believed, prior to the Florida 2000 debacle, that we were in good shape with our elections," Dill said. "But then people saw that the more you looked, the more problems you found and the less confidence you had in the process."

He helped create the Verified Voting Foundation, to which some of Tuesday night's attendees gave donations after the lecture.

Dill spoke for an hour about what steps his group is taking to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of elections.

He said touch-screen voting machines must be improved to allow them to be independently verified to ensure their accuracy. He also said his foundation is working with government officials to streamline the voting process so that every county uses "the best practices for running elections."

And, he said, more citizens must get involved in keeping watch over the process. "You can have the most transparent system in the world, but unless you have people looking into that transparent system, you're not going to have the trust of the voters," he said.

Florida is not one of the 27 states that have passed laws requiring voter-verified

paper records along with electronic voting machines.

"Your state is lagging behind the curve in that regard," Dill told the group.

After the lecture, Dill answered audience questions about paper records, early voting, absentee ballots and voter registration.

INTERNET VOTING

Dorrit Marks, vice president of the Miami-Dade County League of Women Voters, asked about the possibility of Internet voting.

Dill responded that voting on the Internet is not currently a plausible option. "It's going to take multiple breakthroughs before it can be trusted as a voting resource," he said.

Last year, Leon County Election Supervisor Ion Sancho had his county's Diebold touch-screen voting machines tested for security measures. A hacker was able to break the security protections and change vote results.

Dill was part of a California panel that followed up on the Leon County tests. The group found the same flaws in the Diebold machines that Sancho's consultants discovered.

Florida officials have since added new safety measures that prohibit one person from ever being alone with voting equipment.

Miami-Dade and Broward counties use iVotronic touch-screen machines from Election Systems & Software, which were not tested in Sancho's experiment.

Lida Rodriguez Taseff, chairwoman of Miami-Dade's Election Reform Coalition, said her group looks forward to working with Dill to help fine-tune the election process.

"We're glad his debut in Florida was at the Miami-Dade Election Coalition," Rodriguez Taseff said. "He is one of the foremost experts in this issue."