

U.S. Election Assistance Commission
Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform

*Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National
Archives*

April 18, 2007

Good afternoon Chairman Clay, Ranking Member Turner and all Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Gracia Hillman and I am a member of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission. The commission appreciates the opportunity to testify at this hearing.

The commission, or EAC as we are known, was established in HAVA, which is the Help America Vote Act of 2002.

Mr. Chairman, you asked me here today to discuss issues concerning fairness and accuracy in elections that use electronic voting systems. Today's hearing adds an important discussion to this issue.

Fairness and accuracy are crucial components in every facet of elections. This applies to voter registration, casting ballots and certifying election results. It is important to remember that whether we are discussing a ballot box, an optical scan machine or an electronic touch screen voting system – people control fair and accurate elections.

There are lots of discussions about whether we can or should trust electronic voting machines. States choose their voting systems and some are now switching to optical scan machines. However, we must remember that electronic technology is not exclusive to a touch screen voting system. The counting and casting of ballots on an optical scan machine is done electronically. So we must cast a critical eye on all voting technologies. And the system manufacturers and testing laboratories must join us in that endeavor.

Mr. Chairman, it is not enough to only examine the device that people use to vote. We must remember that voting is a human exercise.

To that end, EAC focuses on the technical functions and testing of voting systems and, at the same time, we examine the human management of elections.

America is in a period of major changes in the technology of our voting systems. We know that electronic voting systems bring advantages. For example, they enable us to meet the language and disability access requirements of HAVA. And they prevent people from over voting a ballot.

However, if people do not trust these systems -- if they believe the systems can be compromised -- then the advantages do not mean very much. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that to compromise a voting system -- and I am talking about any type of voting system -- you must have two things --

- knowledge of the system
- and unsupervised access to the machine and software.

Mr. Chairman, election officials follow security protocols to prevent access. I mean, really, no voting system should be fully trusted unless election officials store them in a secure location, prevent tampering, conduct logic and accuracy testing, have well trained workers, audit the results, and let the public observe the entire process.

EAC publishes guidelines on how to secure voting systems. We emphasize that details and training matter in every facet of elections. Just one person forgetting one detail, like forgetting to bring election day supplies to the polling place or not showing up to open the polls can make or break an entire election.

Mr. Chairman, before closing I want to address the issue of Paper Trail printing devices for DRE machines. As you know, this device enables a voter to confirm his selections before casting the ballot and presumably, the paper could be used in audits.

I am not here to discuss whether Congress should mandate VVPAT. I do want to point out that depending on the VVPAT requirements, at least 180,000 DREs would have to be replaced or upgraded.

When you combine the introduction of new equipment, earlier primaries, and the enormous tasks of recruiting and training poll workers to meet a presidential election year deadline – which is only a year-and-a-half from now -- you have all of the ingredients of a recipe for colossal confusion. That is why we cannot discuss voting system technology in a vacuum – we must also discuss and consider the human element.

I have spent my entire career working to make sure all voters are treated fairly and that votes are counted accurately. It is useful to question the use of electronic voting machines. However, I urge you to not let electronic voting divert your attention from issues such as voter registration, participation, and disenfranchisement.

It is my understanding that the committee likely has questions for me about other EAC matters, namely our research and study work. I am prepared to answer your questions about my testimony today and all of our other work.

Thank you for this opportunity.

