



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20515

May 14, 2004

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We are writing to request a General Accounting Office (GAO) study of a critical aspect of American democracy -- the ability of Americans to have confidence that the votes they cast in an election will be counted accurately and fairly.

In October 2002, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).¹ The goal of this legislation was to ensure that all Americans were able to accurately cast a vote for the candidate of their choice. In response to HAVA, many local governments are now purchasing new electronic voting machines. While the existing data indicate that these machines can be more accurate than outdated punch card voting machines, experts are becoming increasingly concerned that many of these electronic voting machines have other flaws. Experts have indicated that their software has security gaps that could potentially allow unscrupulous individuals to alter the vote count, unlawfully impacting election results while leaving no paper trail or other auditable evidence. In addition, a number of incidents in recent Presidential primaries and local elections raised concerns about the performance of the machines, and the fact that their reliability could be impaired by implementation problems during elections.

In light of these concerns, we are writing to request a GAO study of the security of electronic voting systems (including direct recording electronic (DRE), optical scanners, and punch card readers). Specifically, we would like GAO to:

- 1) Describe the operational plans of Federal and State governmental entities involved in the security and reliability of electronic voting systems and identify key actions being taken by such entities.
- 2) Identify the significant issues that need to be addressed to improve the security and reliability of electronic voting systems.

¹ Public Law 107-252.

- 3) Identify best practices that can be implemented to improve the security and reliability of the electronic voting process.


Also, we request that GAO's review include:

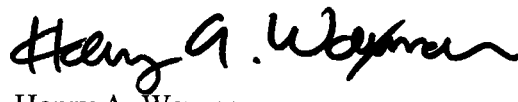
- 1) A post-election survey of state and local election officials to determine the extent to which they complied with the states' policies and procedures for ensuring the security and reliability of electronic voting systems, and
- 2) Post-election interviews with a selected number of local election officials concerning the procedures they followed.

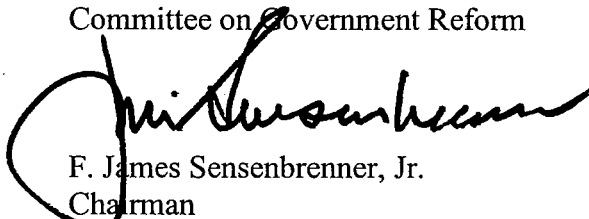
Because many states and localities are currently purchasing electronic voting machines and are in need of guidance regarding potential problems, we are requesting that this study be conducted with the highest priority

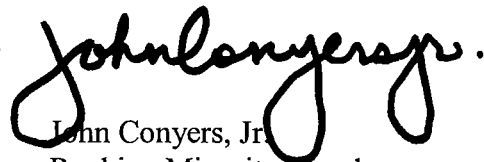
GAO staff should feel free to contact Jim Moore, Counsel, Majority Staff, on 225-5074 and Brian Cohen, Senior Investigator and Policy Advisor, Minority Staff, on 225-5051 with the Committee on Government Reform to discuss additional details of this work and the time frame for completion.


Sincerely,


Tom Davis
Chairman
Committee on Government Reform


Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform


F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary


John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on the Judiciary


Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress


John B. Larson
Member of Congress

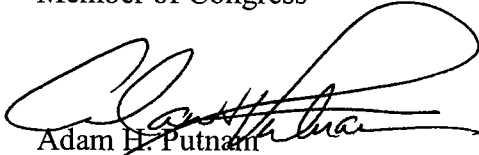
The Honorable David M. Walker

May 14, 2004

Page 3



Doug Ose
Member of Congress



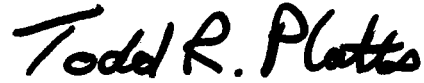
Adam H. Putnam
Member of Congress



Robert C. Scott
Member of Congress



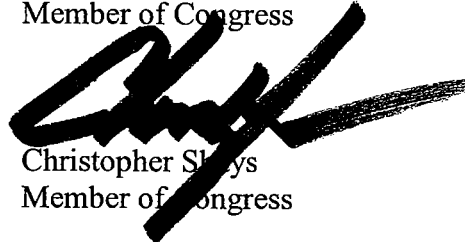
Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress



Todd Russell Platts
Member of Congress



Heana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress



Christopher Shays
Member of Congress