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From the Baltimore Sun

Pitching at the polls

June 29, 2007



We would hazard a guess that the average Maryland voter doesn't have all that high an opinion of Diebold Election Systems Inc. Oh, the company's election equipment worked just fine last November - to the surprise of many of its critics. But memories of the breakdowns that plagued the state's September primary are still pretty fresh. And because of their lack of a paper trail, the company's touch-screen voting machines may soon be scrapped anyway - at a cost of \$20 million to replace them.

So what was Linda H. Lamone, administrator of the State Board of Elections, thinking when she agreed to allow her words of praise for the company's electronic polling books to run along with her photograph in a Diebold brochure? "Our election judges just love this product, and so do I," Ms. Lamone is quoted as saying.

No doubt the sentiments are accurately reported (Ms. Lamone has publicly sung the praises of Diebold often enough), but one would have expected a bit more restraint considering what those same election judges went through during the primary when Diebold's voter check-in system repeatedly malfunctioned.

Perhaps a better quote would have been, "I certainly appreciated their willingness to debug their software after it failed our voters." Or maybe: "Maryland's \$106 million investment in voting equipment wasn't totally wasted after all."

Ms. Lamone received no money for her endorsement, and the company has been asked to stop using it. At worst, this appears to have been a lapse in judgment. The state ethics commission has been asked to review the matter; we trust it will conclude that government employees shouldn't be pitching products of any kind.

Now that's a point of view we can wholeheartedly endorse.

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