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Our Say: Lamone's sales pitch for electronic voting a blunder

By THE CAPITAL EDITORIAL BOARD

What was Linda Lamone, the state elections administrator, thinking when she allowed her glowing testimonial to Diebold Election Systems to be used in a sales brochure for the company?

Surely, she must have known that, given Maryland's experiences, more than a few guffaws would be triggered by her sappy quote: "Our election judges just love this product, and so do I. We in Maryland are extremely pleased with the performance of the system in the general election."

Some election judges may have loved the voter check-in system Diebold was advertising - although we doubt it's unanimous. But voters didn't. During the September primary, many of them endured long lines because the machines kept crashing.

The machines - introduced nationally in Maryland - did indeed function more smoothly in the November election. But their overall performance hardly called for a rapturous review.

Our bigger concern is the impropriety of state officials appearing to endorse vendors they do

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public business with. We didn't like it when former governor Robert Ehrlich Jr. appeared in an ad for Baltimore Gas and Electric Co., but at least he was promoting energy conservation.

Ms. Lamone said she wasn't paid for her testimonial, which merely repeated statements she has made in public. But the appearance of conflict of interest will give taxpayers the impression that there is some quid pro quo involved. It's not a good image for an elections administrator.

Diebold has since withdrawn the brochure and the state Ethics Commission has been asked to determine whether any laws were broken.

State officials are prohibited from using their office for someone else's gain. If the law doesn't prohibit this kind of action, it should.

KIPP is still there

WE ARE gratified that officials with the Knowledge is Power Program Harbor Academy decided to try to remain open this fall.

Last week KIPP's board of directors narrowly voted to keep the charter school open. KIPP will accept \$300,000 in county funds to bring portable classrooms to its Edgewater school at Sojourner-Douglass College.

KIPP said it needs additional classroom space to stay afloat.

Unfortunately, most of KIPP's teachers and staff have taken other jobs in anticipation of the school's announced closing. Assembling enough staff to reopen the school will be a challenge.

KIPP has been trying to find another site for quite some time, but it was only a few months ago that public school and government leaders grasped the seriousness of the charter school's predicament. As alternative after alternative fell through, KIPP initially decided it could not continue offering an acceptable quality of education.

We hope the county's offer is not too little or too late. In its first two years, KIPP has succeeded in boosting scores for many at-risk students. It would be a shame to lose this momentum.

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- No Jumps-

Published July 01, 2007, *The Capital*, Annapolis, Md.

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