

Statement of Teresa Hommel on electronic voting machines:

Electronic voting systems were designed to conceal errors and fraud (without a voter-verifiable paper audit record, there is no way to independently confirm that the computer has worked correctly). Hundreds of documented failures show that they don't work, and are unmanageable for Boards of Elections, poll workers, and voters.

Electronic voting systems are defended by sophistry, lies, and focus on wrong issues.

Michael Shamos' argument that there has never been "a single verified incident of successful tampering" is an example of sophistry -- since the machines have lacked the capacity for independent audits, there has been no way to verify either correct operation or tampering. There has never been an audit of any electronic election. Shamos could have said, "We have never been able to prove that any electronic election was honest."

People for the American Way's assertion that "paper systems ... are not fully accessible for the blind or visually impaired" is an example of a lie. In fact, the most accessible assistive devices at this time (June, 2006) for voters with all disabilities are paper ballot marking devices such as the AutoMARK and the Vote-PAD.

Questions that focus narrowly on how electronic voting machines work or don't work are examples of focus on wrong issues. They have limited usefulness for two reasons.

First, questions that focus on the computer alone are distractions from consideration of the computer's role in elections and the role of elections in a democracy. Even if computerized voting systems were perfect, their use undermines our democracy because they prevent the observation and participation that give legitimacy to elections, and to our government. Even as we move toward use of electronic voting systems with voter verifiable paper audit trails, not one Board of Elections has any intention of performing an audit of any election (a small spot-check is not an audit).

Second, questions that treat computerized voting systems as unique entities distract us from consideration of the realities of the Information Technology world: 72% of computer systems never work[Cringely]. The 2005 FBI Computer Crime Survey revealed that 87% of companies were broken into, 44% by insiders[FBI]. Since most Boards of Elections do not have computer expertise on staff and do not have an arms length relationship with their vendor, they would be easy targets for computerized tampering. Federal and state certification relies on the false premise that you can examine a computer one day, and guarantee that it will work the next day. That's not true for cars, computers, and many other products.

FBI: <http://houston.fbi.gov/pressrel/2006/ho011906.htm>

Cringely: <http://www.pbs.org/cringely/pulpit/pulpit20031204.html>