

Did Kerry Concede Too Soon?

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Why did a voting machine in Republican Gahanna, Ohio report 4,258 votes for George W. Bush when only 638 people cast votes at the New Life Church polling site?

Buried on page A6 of the Columbus Dispatch, the story also reported that the computerized e-voting machine recorded 0 votes in a race between Franklin County Commissioners Arlene Shoemaker and Paula Brooks.

Kerry conceded on Nov. 3 before some troubling election irregularities have surfaced in Ohio. Investigative reporter Gregory Palast has pointed out that there are more than 92,000 “spoiled” ballots in Ohio, mostly in Democratic wards that could easily be hand counted, 155,000 uncounted provisional ballots, uncounted overseas military ballots and some uncounted absentee ballots.

Despite the comments of Kerry’s running mate, Senator John Edwards, that every vote should be counted, Kerry’s concession makes that promise unlikely. In Ohio, an estimated 14.6% of the votes are cast on e-voting machines, known for their glitches and susceptibility to hacking and fraudulent manipulation. Just this year, four Ohio counties purchased voting machines from the notoriously partisan Diebold corporation, whose CEO, Columbus resident and Bush fundraiser Wally O’Dell, pledged to help “Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the President.”

Voting rights activists from Citizen’s Alliance for Secure Elections (CASE-OH) have already begun to claim that the voting places with e-voting machines were sites that did not match scientific exit poll data.

Franklin County Board of Elections Director Matt Damschroder told the Dispatch that the voting machine glitches were “why the results on election night are unofficial.”

Damschroder is the former Executive Director of the Franklin County Republican Party, and sources close to the Board of Elections tell the Free Press that Damschroder and Ohio’s Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell met with President Bush in Columbus on Election Day.

The Dispatch also confirmed a Free Press story, posted on Election Day, involving far fewer voting machines in predominantly black Democratic inner-city voting wards. On page one, under the misleading headline, “Suburbs were busiest even with more machines,” the Dispatch reports that: “As seasoned voters in many of Columbus’ predominantly black neighborhoods waited in long lines Tuesday, they quickly recognized that the crush of new voters wasn’t the sole cause of congestion. There also were fewer voting machines.” In one precinct, the Free Press reported 12 voters leaving due to work or because they were handicapped or elderly.

Prior to Election Day, the Republican Party in Ohio planned to utilize an archaic Ohio election law to place Republican poll challengers in every polling site. The strategy, according to Republican insiders, was to clog the voting lines in predominantly black Democratic wards in urban areas, so voters would turn away in frustration. When that plan came under heavy media scrutiny, federal courts in Ohio ruled against it, and a massive Election Protection Coalition operation was put in place to monitor the polling sites, Republican Central Committee sources say that Damschroder instituted "Plan B."

One Republican Central Committee member told the Free Press that Damschroder held back up to 2000 machines and dispersed many of the other machines to affluent suburbs in Franklin County.

The Free Press has previously documented massive Republican voter suppression techniques leading up to this year's election in an article entitled "Twelve Ways Bush is now Stealing the Ohio Vote" (<http://freepress.org/departments/display/19/2004/810>). The growing election irregularities suggest that John Kerry conceded too soon, and that spoiled ballots, provisional ballot, e-voting glitches and partisan manipulation by Republican election officials deprived the Senator of the victory projected in Zogby and CNN exit polls. The lesson voters in Ohio take away from this election is that every vote doesn't count and computer glitches count more.

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