

Death Of A Patriot: No More 'Blind Faith Voting'
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Opinion: Bob Fittrakis

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By Bob Fittrakis March 17, 2004

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The subject line on yesterday's email read: ''Another mysterious accident solves a Bush problem. Athan Gibbs dead, Diebold lives.'' The attached news story briefly described the untimely Friday, March 12th death of perhaps America's most influential advocate of a verified voting paper trail in the era of touch screen computer voting. Gibbs, an accountant for more than 30 years and the inventor of the TruVote system, died when his vehicle collided with an 18-wheeled truck which rolled his Chevy Blazer several times and forced it over the highway retaining wall where it came to rest on its roof.

Coincidence theorists will simply dismiss the death of Gibbs as a tragic accident - the same conclusion these coincidence theorists came to when anti-nuclear activist Karen Silkwood died in November 1974 when her car struck a concrete embankment en route to a meeting with New York Times reporter David Burnham. Prominent independent investigators concluded that Silkwood's car was hit from behind and forced off the road. Silkwood was reportedly carrying documents that would expose illegal activities at the Kerr-McGee nuclear fuel plant.

The FBI report found that she fell asleep at the wheel after overdosing on Quaaludes and that there never were any such files. A journalist secretly employed by the FBI, and a veteran of the Bureau's COINTELPRO operation against political activists, provided testimony for the FBI report.

Gibbs' death bears heightened scrutiny because of the way he lived his life after the 2000 Florida election debacle. I interviewed Athan Gibbs in January of this year. "I've been an accountant, an auditor, for more than thirty years. Electronic voting machines that don't supply a paper trail go against every principle of accounting and auditing that's being taught in American business schools," he insisted.

"These machines are set up to provide paper trails. No business in

America would buy a machine that didn't provide a paper trail to audit and verify its transaction. Now, they want the people to purchase machines that you can't audit? It's absurd."

Gibbs was in Columbus, Ohio proudly displaying his TruVote machine that offered a "VVPAT, that's a voter verified paper audit trail" he noted.

Gibbs also suggested that I look into the "people behind the other machines." He offered that "Diebold and ES& S are real interesting and all Republicans. If you're an investigative reporter go ahead and investigate. You'll find some interesting material."

Gibbs' TruVote machine is a marvel. After voters touch the screen, a paper ballot prints out under plexiglass and once the voter compares it to his actual vote and approves it, the ballot drops into a lockbox and is issued a numbered receipt. The voter's receipt allows the track his particular vote to make sure that it was transferred from the polling place to the election tabulation center.

My encounter with Gibbs led to a cover story in the Columbus Free Press March-April issue, entitled, "Diebold, electronic voting and the vast right-wing conspiracy." The thesis I advanced in the Free Press article (<http://www.freepress.org/columns/display/3/2004/834>) is that some of the same right-wing individuals who backed the CIA's covert actions and overthrowing of democratic elections in the Third World in the 1980s are now involved in privatized touch screen voting.

Additionally I co-wrote an article with Harvey Wasserman that was posted at MotherJones.com (http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2004/03/03_200.html) on March 5, 2004. Both articles outlined ties between far right elements of the Republican Party and Diebold and ES&S, which count the majority of the nation's electronic votes.

As I wrote in the Free Press article, "Proponents of a paper trail were emboldened when Athan Gibbs, President and CEO of TruVote International, demonstrated a voting machine at a vendor's fair in Columbus that provides two separate voting receipts."

In an interview on WVKO radio, Gibbs calmly and methodically explained the dangers of "black box" touch screen voting. "It absolutely makes no sense to buy electronic voting machines that can't produce a paper trail. Inevitably, computers mess up. How are you going to have a recount, or correct malfunctions without a paper trail?"

Now, the man asking the obvious question, and demonstrating an obvious tangible solution is dead in another tragic accident, a week after both articles were in circulation.

When I called TruVote International to verify Gibbs' death, I reached Chief Financial Officer Adrenne Brandon who assured me "We're going on in his memory. We're going to make this happen."

Every American concerned with democracy should pledge to make this happen. To beat back the rush for state governments to purchase privatized, partisan and unreliable electronic voting machines without verified paper trails.

Gibbs' last words to me were "How do explain what happened to Senator Max Cleland in Georgia. How do you explain that? The Maryland study and the Johns Hopkins scientists have warned us against 'blind faith voting.' These systems can be hacked into. They found patches in Georgia and the people servicing the machine had entered the machines during the voting process. How can we the people accept this? No more blind faith voting."

Dr. Bob Fittrakis is Senior Editor of The Free Press (<http://freepress.org>), a political science professor, and author of numerous articles and books.

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