EMBARGOED UNTIL: 8:00 pm – October 23, 2006   **Contact Bob Wilson – (847) 644-2654**

CHICAGO VOTER REGISTRATION BASE FLAWED – VOTERS' KEY PERSONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET!

Chicago, October 24, 2006. A serious security vulnerability was discovered in the City of Chicago online voter registration database that would allow an identity pirate to obtain the names, addresses, birth dates and Social Security numbers of more than 1.5 million current and former Chicago voters.

According to Bob Wilson, Cook County chair of Illinois Ballot Integrity Project, a malicious hacker could have readily change the voter registration status of individual voters or even groups of voters. "For example, you could change the status of all the voters in a precinct to inactive after the registration deadline so that when one of those voters checked their online status they might believe they were ineligible and wouldn't attempt to vote," said Wilson. "Or, you could change their polling place information so they would show up at the wrong precinct on election day . . . the possibilities are nearly endless and could cause election day havoc," he added.

Staff at the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners was notified several weeks ago about the vulnerability but no action was taken. "The assumption was that the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners would take quick action to plug this hole, but apparently that did not happen," said Illinois Ballot Integrity Project member, Peter Zelchenko. He estimates it would take little more than five minutes to fix the problem.

Late last week, IBIP and Zelchenko became aware that the security breach was significantly more severe than first thought. The Board was immediately notified and their staff began taking action to neutralize the threat last Friday and began installing a new web interface over the weekend.

Peter Zelchenko, 43rd Ward Aldermanic Candidate with more than 30 years of computer programming and database design and management experience, discovered the flaw during what he described as a "what if" session. Zelchenko said, "This situation shows how vulnerable the entire electronic voting system is. Identity theft is only one possible outcome. Election theft is another very real possibility." According to Zelchenko, "This was a very serious vulnerability. Here we have an online database that can be accessed by millions of PCs throughout the world. Am I surprised? Not much. Flaws like this turn up every day nationwide. Computer systems are inherently risky."

"Problems of this type occur when systems and personnel are strained to the limit," said Wilson, continuing, "An apt analogy is that of a balloon – it only takes a small hole to let all the air out. In this case, a small hole could have let out the personal information of 1.5 million citizens."

"Identity theft is a crime that everyone is concerned about," said Clare Tobin, chair of the Chicago Chapter of IBIP. "We need to be equally concerned about the theft of one of our most precious rights — the right to vote," concluded Tobin.

The **Illinois Ballot Integrity Project** is a not-for-profit, non-partisan civic organization dedicated to the correction of election system deficiencies and to ensuring fair, accurate, and completely transparent elections. IBIP sees paper ballots as fundamental to this quest. "It takes a lot of time, effort and people to change 10,000 paper ballots, but only a few keystrokes to change 10,000 computer votes," said Wilson. "We do not oppose the use of technology in the election process, but it's obvious that today's electronic voting systems fall far short of minimum acceptable standards," he continued.

"Each of the complex steps in an electronic voting process requires the translation of the voter's intent from one form of media to another," said Zelchenko. "Every time a translation occurs, there's an opportunity for error or deliberate manipulation. A paper ballot offers one simple step that's nearly impossible to misinterpret and very difficult to hack," he concluded.

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The **Mission** of the **Illinois Ballot Integrity Project** is to inform and educate the public, media and government officials about important election integrity issues and to promote the adoption of legislation and policies designed to secure the democratic process. IBIP believes that fundamental to election integrity is the inscribing of all votes (whether by hand or by machine) on durable paper ballots which are easily handled and verified by the individual voter. The voter's paper ballot should be the only official ballot for purposes of casting, tallying, counting, audit and recount.

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