



ILLINOIS BALLOT INTEGRITY PROJECT

NEWS RELEASE

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Transcript from a September 2006 Interview with Reverend Deforest Soaries - Former U.S. Elections Assistance Commission Chair 2004-2005

"I resigned, effective April 30th, 2005 after having served through the 2004 elections and concluding that neither the White House nor the Congress was really serious about election reform.

"Florida 2000, the whole world watched America express embarrassment over the status of the Election Assistance Administration and by November 2004, we had not only not made significant changes but in many ways, had made things worse through the passage of the Help America Vote Act.

"After Florida 2000, the politicians were all on the soap box promising the country that we would 'repair' the problem and the problem was much more than hanging chads and lever machines. For instance, the Help America Vote Act mandates that an electronic voting machine be in every precinct in the country and that mandate preceded the funding of research necessary to ensure that there is some prototype or standard for such machines. If every home were mandated to have a microwave without the prerequisite kinds of safety standards for microwaves, it would be considered scandalous. But we know more today about how to build a machine to take pictures of rocks on Mars than we know about how to build a machine to safeguard the American right to vote.

"There is no prototype. There are no standards. There is no scientific research that would guarantee any election district that there's a machine that can be used to answer these very serious questions. And so, my sense is that the politicians in Washington have concluded that the system can't be all that bad because, after all, it produced them. And as long as an elected official is an elected official, then whatever machine was used, whatever device was used to elect him or her, seems to be adequate. But there's an erosion of voting rights implicit in our inability to trust the technology that we use and if we were another country being analyzed by America, we would conclude that this country is ripe for stealing elections and for fraud.

"What was ironic that was each of us accepted our appointments knowing that EAC had no statutory authority to regulate. But what we were told was that EAC would have sufficient money to do research. And while regulatory authority was not present, we felt that if we could do the proper research, no state would be caught dead using equipment that didn't meet up to the standards that our research proved were acceptable standards. Well, in the absence of regulatory authority and in the absence of money to do the research, we were basically asked to make bricks without straw.

"Well, the states were forced to comply and they were asking us for guidance. We were ill-equipped to provide guidance. We didn't begin our work until January 2004 and we spent the first three months of our work looking for office space. Here we were, the first federal commission, responsible for implementing federal law in the area of election administration and for the first three months we didn't even have an address. And we physically had to walk around Washington DC looking for office space. This was a travesty. I was basically deceived by the leaders of the House, the Senate and the White House. And I decided that it just made more sense to spend my time watching my sons play basketball than to participate in this charade.

"While we're spending a billion dollars a week in Iraq, we're told at EAC, by both the White House and the Congress, here is how much we're going to give you. You tell us what you're going to do with it. They never asked us the question, what would it really take to lead election reform in this country. How much money should the country really spend not only on buying new equipment, but on doing the proper research before using that equipment and how much will it cost over the long haul to keep that equipment up to date and to repair such equipment. Those questions were not asked. So in my view, it was a just a charade that I would chose not to participate in.

"Most people who really know, like election officials. They pray on election day that the election is not close. Because if an election is not close, then the flaws are hidden. But it's when you have this perfect storm of equipment failures like Florida and a close election where there's a call for recounts and an inability to determine who won right away, that's when the glaring issues emerge and when election officials begin biting their nails.

"Either EAC or some agency must have the capacity to hold the entire system, elections officials, public officials and the manufacturers of voting equipment accountable. Where there's no accountability, then you're open for fraud and for inefficiency. EAC has regulatory authority over the National Voting Rights Act but that's a small piece of the voting process. Someone has got to be able to say, no one in America should use machine 'A' ever again. And if it's not EAC, it's got to be someone. Someone in America has got to hold America accountable for protecting the most fundamental right in a democracy and that is the right to vote."

The **Illinois Ballot Integrity Project** is a not-for-profit, non-partisan civic organization dedicated to the correction of election system deficiencies and ensuring fair, accurate, and completely transparent elections. 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. This transcript, quoted without comment, is courtesy of Brad Friedman at BradBlog – Read Brad's comments here: <http://www.bradblog.com/?p=3491>

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