



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20515

May 14, 2004

The Honorable David M. Walker  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We are writing to request a General Accounting Office (GAO) study of a critical aspect of American democracy -- the ability of Americans to have confidence that the votes they cast in an election will be counted accurately and fairly.

In October 2002, Congress passed and the President signed into law the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).<sup>1</sup> The goal of this legislation was to ensure that all Americans were able to accurately cast a vote for the candidate of their choice. In response to HAVA, many local governments are now purchasing new electronic voting machines. While the existing data indicate that these machines can be more accurate than outdated punch card voting machines, experts are becoming increasingly concerned that many of these electronic voting machines have other flaws. Experts have indicated that their software has security gaps that could potentially allow unscrupulous individuals to alter the vote count, unlawfully impacting election results while leaving no paper trail or other auditable evidence. In addition, a number of incidents in recent Presidential primaries and local elections raised concerns about the performance of the machines, and the fact that their reliability could be impaired by implementation problems during elections.

In light of these concerns, we are writing to request a GAO study of the security of electronic voting systems (including direct recording electronic (DRE), optical scanners, and punch card readers). Specifically, we would like GAO to:

- 1) Describe the operational plans of Federal and State governmental entities involved in the security and reliability of electronic voting systems and identify key actions being taken by such entities.
- 2) Identify the significant issues that need to be addressed to improve the security and reliability of electronic voting systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Law 107-252.

- 3) Identify best practices that can be implemented to improve the security and reliability of the electronic voting process.


Also, we request that GAO's review include:

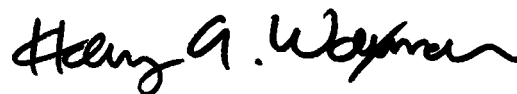
- 1) A post-election survey of state and local election officials to determine the extent to which they complied with the states' policies and procedures for ensuring the security and reliability of electronic voting systems, and
- 2) Post-election interviews with a selected number of local election officials concerning the procedures they followed.

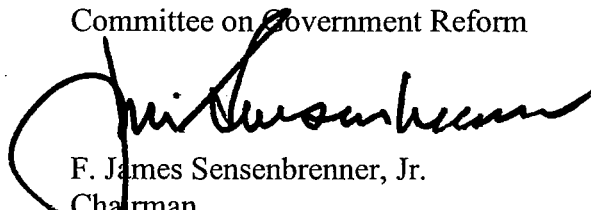
Because many states and localities are currently purchasing electronic voting machines and are in need of guidance regarding potential problems, we are requesting that this study be conducted with the highest priority


GAO staff should feel free to contact Jim Moore, Counsel, Majority Staff, on 225-5074 and Brian Cohen, Senior Investigator and Policy Advisor, Minority Staff, on 225-5051 with the Committee on Government Reform to discuss additional details of this work and the time frame for completion.


Sincerely,

  
Tom Davis  
Chairman  
Committee on Government Reform

  
Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Government Reform

  
F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary

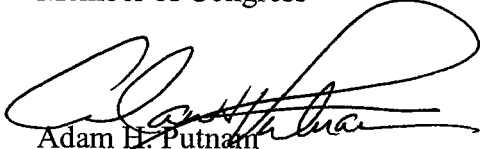
  
John Conyers, Jr.  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on the Judiciary

  
Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress

  
John B. Larson  
Member of Congress



Doug Ose  
Member of Congress



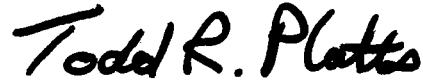
Adam H. Putnam  
Member of Congress



Robert C. Scott  
Member of Congress



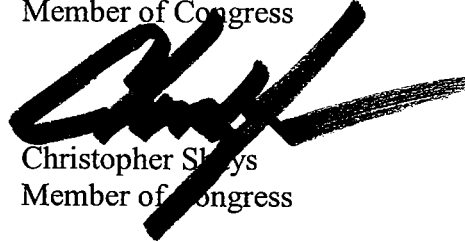
Michael R. Turner  
Member of Congress



Todd Russell Platts  
Member of Congress



Heana Ros-Lehtinen  
Member of Congress



Christopher Shays  
Member of Congress