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BUDGET BOONDOGGLE AWARD

THROWING GOOD MONEY AFTER CHADS

20 November 2008

Having spent billions of Federal dollars to “modernize” elections, State and local officials are finding much of that spending is actually *creating* the very problems it was intended to solve. Mechanical troubles, fraud, and voter confusion again this year plagued the taxpayer-funded electronic voting machines installed to replace the traditional manual systems. Now many States are planning to scrap the new equipment – which the Federal Government strongly encouraged them to buy – wasting those billions of taxpayers’ dollars. Here’s how it happened:

- In 2002, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act [HAVA], intended to address the serious problems that occurred at polling places during the 2000 Presidential election.
- Congress provided States with \$3.2 billion to implement the act. Of that amount, \$325 million was explicitly earmarked to States to replace punch cards and lever voting machines with new electronic equipment, but much of the other money was also used for this purpose. Estimates indicate that approximately \$1.3 billion in Federal funding has been used to purchase new voting machines and improve voting systems.
- Many States have found the money Congress rushed out the door was spent on machines that could be susceptible to fraud and are extremely expensive to maintain. In addition, many election participants had trouble learning how to use the new “voter-friendly” machines. Hence, some States are abandoning the new systems and going back to the paper ballots that made the phrase “hanging chad” a household term.
 - For example, after spending at least \$26 million in Federal money to convert to an electronic voting system – with a likelihood of spending millions more – the State of Maryland plans to scrap its new machines and replace them with paper ballots in 2010.
 - In addition, at least parts of California, Florida, Kentucky, New Mexico, and Virginia, among others, have already discarded their electronic systems or are considering similar initiatives.



This sad tale serves as a stark reminder of what can happen when the Federal Government throws money at a problem and imposes a “one-size-fits-all solution” on the States without fully considering the implications of its plan. If a democratic government can’t figure out how to run an election, one of its basic functions, how can it be expected to address many of the much more complicated issues facing the country? This colossal waste of Federal dollars to “Help America Vote” has earned the latest Budget Boondoggle Award.