



Response to New York Times Editorial Opinion (09/05/08)

Dear Mr. Hoyt:

Your September 5th editorial about the Okaloosa Distance Balloting Pilot , "A Bad Experiment in Voting" might be better headlined as "A Bad Experiment in Reporting". The editorial writer, Adam Cohen, is conflating his personal lack of awareness about this project to represent the general state of affairs. As I informed Mr. Cohen when he interviewed me, this project has been briefed to various Members of Congress and their staffs, as well as several Florida legislators. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the Federal Voting Assistance Program, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology have all been informed. The project plan, which contains a great deal of information about how the system works, has been available on the Florida Secretary of State's website for several months. We held a press conference on December 5, 2007, at the National Press Club and widely distributed a press release to announce the project. There have been several items in the press, including Kim Zetter's "Wired" blog. Pat Hollarn, Supervisor of Elections of Okaloosa County, and the proponent of this project, has discussed it several times with Ian Urbina, also of The New York Times.

Mr. Cohen asserts that the nation's computer experts should be invited to examine how the Okaloosa voting system works. This is exactly what the Florida Division of Elections has done. The "group of academics" mentioned in the editorial includes the same computer scientists, software engineers, and cryptographers who have conducted other voting system reviews in Florida, Ohio, and California. When given the names of the review team members he noted that Avi Rubin was not among them. Dr. Rubin was asked to take part, but he declined. One of his students participated in his stead.

The report of this independent review team has just been delivered to the Florida Division of Elections and will be considered in conjunction with system documentation and test data as they make their certification determination. The Division of Elections has thoroughly vetted and tested this system themselves. Their certification decision has not yet been issued, but they would not approve any system that was not reliable and secure.

And just a footnote regarding the lead-in sentence: "The words 'Florida' and 'Internet voting' taken together should send a chill down everyone's spine." Apparently Mr. Cohen hasn't heard that 52 Florida voters, along with 32 voters in three other states, voted over the Internet in the 2000 election. The intent of the voters casting ballots in the Voting Over the Internet Pilot Project was never in question and their electronic ballots were counted without incident.

We agree with Mr. Cohen's point that Internet voting is a very important topic of national interest. This is why it is essential to have complete and accurate reporting so the public debate

can be a well-informed one. We rely on respected publications like the Times to help educate the public by presenting the facts accurately and in an even-handed manner. This editorial states the conclusion that Okaloosa has not persuasively made the case so voters can have confidence in the software being used for this project. But no evidence is presented to support this conclusion. Mr. Cohen was given contact information to get briefed on how the security aspects of the system were investigated. Dr. Alec Yasinsac, a nationally recognized expert on voting software code review, coordinated the independent review team's efforts. As best we can determine, Mr. Cohen did not attempt to contact him. The editorial's conclusion, and call for the Florida Secretary of State to not allow the project to proceed, is not well-founded. We expect more due diligence on the facts from The New York Times.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,
Carol Paquette
Okaloosa Project Manager