

LOU DOBBS TONIGHT - CNN

6/22/04

ANNOUNCER: LOU DOBBS TONIGHT continues. Here now, for more news, debate and opinion, Lou Dobbs.

DOBBS: There's widespread concern about e-voting in this country, and hundreds of people today rallied on Capitol Hill calling for a new law to require paper records of all electronic voting. One-third of the votes cast in this country this year will be cast on those electronic machines with no paper receipts. Congressman Rush Holt of New Jersey and 140 co-sponsors are trying to change that.

Lisa Sylvester reports tonight from Washington.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

LISA SYLVESTER, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Paperless equals powerless. Protesters rallied in Washington pushing for a backup paper ballot system for electronic voting machines. They argue without a way of verifying electronic votes, there's no way to do a recount and no way to know for sure who won an election.

REP. JANICE SCHAKOWSKY (D), ILLINOIS: How can President Bush and Republican congressional leaders who may be blocking this bill speak about exporting democracy and freedom to nations across the world if we can't guarantee that our own citizens' votes are counted and counted accurately?

SYLVESTER The latest polls show Senator John Kerry edging President Bush by a single percentage point within the margin of error. With the presidential contest this close, it could come down to a handful of votes.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: They need to have the kind of system of accountability that we would want for ATMs, for gambling machines, for any electronic device we thought was particularly important, and voting is -- what could be more important?

SYLVESTER: A bill in Congress with 141 co-sponsors would require electronic voting machines have a paper record to verify results. But the legislation is opposed by disabilities groups who argue electronic voting is the only way the blind and visually impaired can cast their ballots in secret. The companies that make the electronic machines argued in a hearing last month that backup paper systems are unneeded.

WILLIAM WELSH, ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS AND SOFTWARE: We believe this option is not necessary, as it will add, clearly, to the cost and complexity to what is already a secure process.

SYLVESTER: Voter watchdog groups say it may add cost and complexity, but it's a small price to pay for certainty.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

SYLVESTER (on camera): The League of Women Voters modified its position on electronic voting machines at its national convention earlier this month. The group is urging county officials to make sure their voting systems and procedures are not only secure, accurate, and accessible, but recountable - - Lou.

DOBBS: Lisa, thank you. Lisa Sylvester.

Congressman Rush Holt of New Jersey is the author of the legislation requiring a paper trail for electronic voting. Also joining us tonight, California Secretary of State, Kevin Shelley. Secretary Shelley is the first Secretary of State in the country to call for paper ballots to be standard in electronic voting machines.

Gentlemen, good to have you both with us.

CONGRESSMAN RUSH HOLT (D), NEW JERSEY: Good to be here

KEVIN SHELLEY, SECRETARY OF STATE, CALIFORNIA: Nice to be here.

DOBBS: Let me turn to you first, Congressman Holt. You had quite a demonstration in Washington. You've got 140 others joining you. What are the prospect that this legislation could move forward and accomplish anything before -- in time for the November election?

HOLT: Well, it's become something of a national movement, I would say. Members of Congress tell me at town meetings all over the country this is one of the first subjects that's brought up. So, certainly, the public pressure is to move.

The process here in the committee, though, seems to be stalled. And that was really the point of today's demonstration, I guess you would call it, here in Washington, to say that this -- we're getting -- we're running out of time. We're getting near the deadline of getting something done in time for this year's election.

DOBBS: Congressman, Bob Ney, Congressman Steny Hoyer, Senators McConnell and Dodd, they say that your proposal, effectively, is premature. How do you respond to them?

HOLT: You know, talk to these hundreds of thousands, millions of voters. I'm very pleased to see how seriously people are taking this. They -- it's a sign that they believe their vote is, indeed, sacred, and they're willing to travel to Washington in today's case to make that point.

I think this is really a fulfillment of the Help America Vote Act, not a revision of it. I think, in fact, it adds the principle of verifiability to the principle -- to the principle of accessibility. So, it does nothing to deter voters with physical disabilities, for example. It just makes the vote verifiable, auditable.

DOBBS: Do you concur, Secretary Shelley?

SHELLEY: I do. In fact, as you mentioned earlier, California is the first state to actually put in place standards for a voter verified paper trail. And we took great pains to ensure that our paper trail requirement ensures that it's fully accessible to the disabled community.

So, I would agree with the Congressman that the mere fact of requiring a paper trail doesn't, in and of itself, have to be disincentive for disabled voters.

DOBBS: Four registrars -- four of your county registrars in California have said your mandates, basically, are going to force them to go to paper ballots. Which is worse: e-voting without a paper record or paper ballots?

SHELLEY: Well, I would respectfully disagree with them. What we're doing here in California is we're providing voters the option. They can vote on the touchscreen voting devices or they can vote on a paper ballot, if they so choose.

We're not requiring one or the other; we're providing the voters with the option. I simply would question, whether it be to a vendor or anyone else for that matter, why wouldn't we want to take every step to provide the security and protections for that most sacred expression of our democracy, the right to vote.

DOBBS: Let me ask you both this one question -- and we're out of time, really. But quickly: what is the cost of adding a paper record to e- voting? What is the -- what's the cost?

HOLT: It's not prohibitive. It would vary from manufacturer to manufacturer what it would be. But you know, just to paraphrase the late President Reagan, you know, trust is no substitute for verification.

DOBBS: Secretary Shelley, you get the last word.

SHELLEY: What is the cost of our democracy? I think every voter has to have the confidence that his or her vote will be counted as it was cast. That's the cornerstone of our democracy, and we have to protect it and we must.

DOBBS: Secretary of State of California, we appreciate it -- Kevin Shelley -- and Congressman Rush Holt of New Jersey. Thank you, gentlemen.

SHELLEY: Thank you very much.

DOBBS: That brings us to the subject of our poll tonight. The question is: Should e-voting without a paper record be banned? Yes or no. Cast your vote at CNN.COM/LOU. We'll have the results for you coming up later in the broadcast. .

DOBBS: The results of our poll tonight. 94 percent of you say e-voting without a paper record should be banned. 6 percent of you say it should not. Thanks for being with us tonight. Please join us tomorrow. We'll have a debate in our face-off. American government contracts being awarded to foreign companies. Should the practice be continued?

And we'll have a special report on what America's Olympians will be wearing. Those uniforms, much of that equipment, not made in the USA. Please be with us. For all of us here, good night from New York. "ANDERSON COOPER 360" is next.

