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## Election threats can be addressed

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After reviewing the report from Ohio's recently concluded review of voting systems, one has to be struck with the differences between the findings in the report vs. the secretary of state's recommendations. In fact, one has to wonder, did Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner read the report?

In just a snippet of the technical-details report for one manufacturer, of the 19 high-risk areas for voting-system integrity, all of them can be mitigated with procedural controls, precinct records and simple additional guidance from the secretary of state's office. Rather than embracing the notion that all voting systems, paper and electronic, have certain levels of risk associated with them, Brunner has attempted to portray all of the electronic systems as wholly inadequate. When the ability of a state election official to certify an election is based upon the results from the local boards of elections, one has to wonder why the local elections officials, who actually conduct elections, weren't more involved in the review of the findings prior to their release.

Brunner's recommendation for central-count, optical-scan systems for the entire state also raises more questions than answers, as this system also will rely upon strong procedural controls by local elections officials. When central-count, optical-scan technology debuted 40 years ago, it was a great addition to the elections environment, but it certainly has its own limitations, given the complexities of elections today. In fact, some of the very risks identified within her report will not be addressed with the use of centrally counted, optical-scan ballots, nor will Ohio voters be able to benefit from the provisions under the Help America Vote Act. Electronic voting systems still represent the greatest potential for addressing new legislative requirements such as vote centers, minority-language access and the ability for voters with disabilities to cast an independent ballot.

There is a time to lead when it comes to technology and public service. The report actually speaks to the need for strengthening local elections procedures in order to balance the dual needs of prevention and detection. The integrity of elections comes down to a series of processes and procedures administered by each county, combined with the technology and



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its established procedures. For every identifiable risk, there is a clear step to take for protecting each Ohioan's vote. The challenge is whether Brunner will recognize the opportunity to lead an effort to address the threats identified with real-world solutions or will, instead, sacrifice technology upon the altar of preconceived opinion.

The decision to scrap current technology appears to be a waste of public dollars based upon threats that are speculative and that have never occurred in a real-world election. One must hope that while the industry responds to Brunner's effort, and local elections officials work diligently to conduct the 2008 elections, the voters of Ohio do not end up suffering by having to watch another presidential election come down to 36 days of discerning voter intent from paper.

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