Observations from the Election Administration Perspective on:

# Internet Voting: Spurring or Corrupting Democracy?

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The first significant difficulty with any discussion of *Internet Voting* stems from an absence of a consistent definition among individuals discussing the topic. For example, my experience has been that most people inquiring about this topic have already made the assumption that *Internet Voting* means voting from home.

Some argue that *Internet Voting* would disenfranchise significant numbers of the electorate in certain segments of our society.  This argument, however, is based upon the assumption that *Internet Voting* means "voting from home," and that specific demographic and economic groups would not have sufficient resources to vote from their home.

I contend that *Internet Voting* will not be restricted to "voting from home," and that "voting from home" may even prove to be insignificant or non-existent in the Internet voting systems that will ultimately evolve.

The State of Florida began looking at the policy implications of *Internet Voting* in the Fall of 1997.  We began by defining an *Internet Voting System* as one which transmits untabulated ballot images or ballot data through the Internet. Thus, when we say *"Internet Voting"* we mean the use of such a system.

Another difficulty stems from the mingling of concerns from related, yet distinct, issue areas. We believe there are four such issue areas although they may be interrelated. It is important that we recognize their individuality so that we do not mingle these areas during the policy analysis process. The four issue areas are…

> <u>Technology</u>  This area deals with concerns of how to send a ballot through the Internet while protecting its integrity and secrecy and assuring that it will be accurately counted and also protecting the system from sabotage and modification.

**Election Procedure**  This area deals with concerns about how elections are to be conducted. Issues within the area include: structure of precincts or polling places, polling place administration, the verification and qualification of voters and absentee balloting procedures. Although the availability of technology provides options for decisions in this area, discussion of issues in this area should not be allowed to cloud decisions about the *Technology* issue area.

**Governmental Structure**  This area deals with concerns about the restructuring of government and political systems. "Direct Democracy" and "Preference Voting Schemes" are examples of issues within this area. There is a risk of Governmental Structure issues clouding decisions in the *Technology* and *Election Procedures* areas. This must be avoided.

**Political Science**  This area deals with concerns about how candidates attract voters and how voters select candidates. Because elected decision makers can reasonably be expected to be cautious about changing the ground rules under which they were elected, this area has the greatest potential to inappropriately influence decisions in the other issue areas. It is therefore important when addressing concerns in this area that we are careful not to cloud any decisions made in the other issue areas.

We in Florida have concluded that, as long as we comply with our existing laws on election procedures and governmental structure, we can proceed with our efforts to formulate policy in the *Technology* issue area by examining, testing, and certifying Internet voting systems for pilot-project use. Furthermore, we believe this approach will have no effect on the *Political Science* issue area.

We are considering the certification of precinct-based Internet Voting Systems when a system vendor introduces a system which will meet or exceed Florida's existing standards for security, privacy and accuracy.

We are advocating the development of systems that technically can be used in a wide range of election procedure configurations, so that the Florida Legislature can look at the *Election Procedure*, *Governmental Structure* and *Political Science* issues without their decisions being clouded by concerns for the *Technology* issues.

*Note: This document reflects the opinions of Paul W. Craft, and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Florida Department of State or the Florida Legislature.*