



Florida Fair Elections Coalition
Deland, FL
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Letter to the Editor
By Susan R. Pynchon
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Re: "Poll worker fired for scene over touch-screen machines," *Daytona Beach News Journal*, August 29, 2006)¹

When an off-duty poll worker is fired for expressing her views in favor of paper ballots and against "paperless" touch-screen voting machines while she is trying to vote, it is time for all citizens to speak up in protest. The article was excellent, but one relevant fact was missing: The reason that 73-year old poll worker Drusilla Synal talked about the machines at all was because she was being pushed to vote on a touchscreen voting machine when she had expressed her desire to vote on a paper ballot.

Ms. Synal is not alone. A number of phone calls have been received by Florida Fair Elections Coalition from citizens who are upset because poll workers have tried to convince them to use the touchscreens after they expressed their desire to vote on paper ballots. In one case, an elderly woman was distraught because she had wanted to vote on a paper ballot but ended up voting on a touchscreen after a poll worker kept urging her to do so. In another case, a young man was asked to use the touch-screen by a poll worker. When he declined, the poll worker said, "What? A young man like you shouldn't be afraid of new technology." In other cases, voters who stated they wanted to use the optical scan (paper ballot) voting machines because they have a paper trail (as Ms. Synal did), were *incorrectly* told by poll workers that the touch-screens *do* have a paper trail.

Touchscreen voting machines do *not* have a paper trail, except to spit out the totals at the end of the day. Voters have no assurance that their votes are being recorded accurately by the machines, as stated in numerous reports over the past year. These reports have documented countless failures of computerized voting systems and recent discoveries of easily hackable "back doors" into the vote totals on those systems. Each of these reports has stated that the *only* way to detect tampering or to recover from catastrophic failures of electronic voting machines is to audit (hand count) a portion of the paper ballots after EVERY election to confirm that the machines have counted accurately. These reports have been issued by the Carter-Baker Commission, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Brennan Center for Justice, the Election Science Institute, and by a team of scientists commissioned by the California Secretary of State, among others.

A full 95 percent of all computer scientists state that the only way to conduct a meaningful audit, now and in the foreseeable future, is on paper. If top computer security experts state there is no technology available that is dependably reliable, secure, and accurate, and that hand counting a voter-verified paper record is the only way to audit our votes, why wouldn't we believe them?

¹ The content of this letter to the editor has not been changed; however, formatting changes and minor editorial corrections have been made prior to uploading to the FFEC website.

A recent Zogby poll determined that 92% of all voters want a voter-verified paper trail. Yet in the face of overwhelming evidence against paperless touch-screen voting machines and the public's clear desire for paper ballots, the fact is that Supervisor of Elections Ann McFall has continued to advocate touchscreens for over a year. I personally heard her urging a candidate, at the elections office during the 2005 municipal elections, to "tell the county council we need touch-screens." She fought for the touchscreens at a series of special hearings on the subject during 2005, despite the fact that a majority of the county council was fighting to keep 100% paper ballots in Volusia County.

McFall has said on numerous occasions that all ballot images can be printed from the touchscreens. What she doesn't say is that these so-called ballot images are only a duplicate of whatever the machine recorded to begin with. If votes have been wrongly recorded for any reason, whether through faulty programming, machine or human error, or by tampering, the ballot images will be equal to – and as wrong as – the final total printed at the end of the day.

The point should be made here that it is not the touchscreen feature that is a problem. The ballot-marking device preferred by the county council also had a touch-screen feature, which is beneficial to voters with disabilities, but it simply marked a paper ballot rather than actually counting votes. Florida has refused to certify this ballot marker despite the fact that it is federally certified and has been certified in 34 states, forcing Volusia County to purchase the DRE touchscreens for disabled voters and anyone else who chooses to vote on them.

If Ann McFall is correct in saying that a voter's decision as to how he or she prefers to vote is "political," then her poll workers have no right to be interfering with the voters' "political" decisions and should stop urging nondisabled voters to use the touchscreens. Ms. McFall's reason for advocating the touchscreens has more to do with expediency than politics. I believe that she likes the touchscreens because they make her life easier – no recounts are possible, and there is no messy paper to deal with. McFall needs to realize that democracy *is* messy and that running a fair election may require extra effort. It is far more important for voting to be accurate and auditable than it is for it to be convenient for elections administrators.

The story of Drusilla Synal, who had happily been a poll worker for 13 years prior to being fired by McFall, is representative of McFall trying to force these machines down the throats of Volusia citizens against their will – and firing any poll worker, or other employee, who dares to disagree with her. (McFall has also fired the assistant supervisor of elections and forced the departure of the operations supervisor, citing a "difference in management styles."). In a recent newspaper article, McFall expressed surprise at the "popularity" of the new touchscreens. In light of what we have learned, that statement seems disingenuous at best.

McFall and other supervisors of elections need to remember that they work for the citizens of this state, not the other way around. The last time I checked, we still live in a democracy – people have a right to freedom of speech, freedom of the press -- and freedom to vote, without coercion or intimidation, on the voting system of their choice.

If you want to continue to have that choice, I recommend that you contact the county council and Ann McFall to tell them that you, like Drusilla Synal, want to vote on paper ballots.