

Bill could give touch-screen voting the boot

By JEROME L. SHERMAN
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

WASHINGTON

Congressional Democrats hope to move quickly on legislation that would make obsolete many touch-screen voting machines.

Rep. Rush Holt, D-N.J., this week introduced a bill that requires machines to have paper trails that allow voters to verify their choices. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., plans to bring a similar bill before the Senate.

Both lawmakers want to put the new standard in place before the 2008 presidential election.

"I think we should try. Whether we can get there or not remains to be seen," said Feinstein, who chairs the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration. "There needs to be some national standard."

Momentum for such a move has been building nationwide. In Florida, home of the infamous "hanging chads" of the 2000 election that prompted widespread changes in voting technology, Gov. Charlie Crist announced last week that the state would dispose of expensive touch-screen machines in favor of paper ballots read by optical scanners.

The Virginia Senate also passed

a bill that would gradually replace touch-screen units with the scanners.

Florida's most recent voting woes were at the center of a committee hearing. Uncertainty still hangs over November election results in the state's 13th Congressional District, where Republican Vern Buchanan bested Democrat Christine Jennings by 369 votes.

Jennings has sued, pointing to Sarasota County's 18,000 under votes, or the number of voters who made no choice for their ballot's congressional contest. Neighboring counties recorded much fewer under votes.

So far, a judge has not allowed the Jennings campaign to bring in its own experts for an examination of the copyright-protected software in the ES&S iVotronic voting machine. Florida officials have already conducted a review, said ES&S spokesman Ken Fields.

Holt called the Florida situation "Exhibit A" in his push for mandatory paper trails.

"A Democratic government works only if we believe it does," he said. "And the confidence in the mechanism of our government has been shaken badly."

His bill would make the paper trail the "vote of record," and it

would require random audits to ensure that machines are properly compiling votes. It also would provide \$300 million to help states and local governments pay for new equipment.

That figure, however, is dwarfed by the \$3 billion in federal money doled out under the Help America Vote Act, the law passed in the wake of Florida's 2000 presidential debacle. The expense for more equipment, or upgrades to earlier purchases, would be considerable, and local governments would face another daunting transition just a few years after their first purchases of new technology.

"Any additional change prior to the 2008 presidential election is likely to place an additional burden on the already very stressed system."

Connie Schmidt
President of Election Consulting Services on new legislation that would make touch-screen voting machines obsolete

Homeland security program criticized

Lawmakers say administration cut emergency funds

By BEVERLY LUMPKIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The Bush administration is trying to fund homeland security "on the cheap," cutting grants to local emergency workers and other programs, the chairman of a House committee said Friday.

Visiting Congress for the second time this week, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff was criticized anew by lawmakers of both parties upset with the government's security efforts, including at the borders and at airports.

"Millions of lives are at stake,



CHERTOFF

and we cannot continue to protect the homeland on the cheap," Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, told Chertoff.

At a panel hearing, Thompson and Rep. Peter King of New York, top Republican on the committee, told Chertoff they were unhappy with the administration's plans for a \$1 billion fund meant to upgrade communications systems for emergency workers.

The fund was created by Congress in anticipation of the auction later this year of valuable portions of radio bandwidth. As private companies vacate other parts of the radio spectrum, those will be taken over by emergency workers who would purchase new equipment with

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House Homeland Security Committee chairman on cutting grants to local emergency workers and other programs

money generated by the auction.

"I am deeply concerned by the delay in getting this program up and running," King said. He said equipment that would let different emergency agencies communicate with each other during disasters — which many are currently unable to do — is "critically important to the nation's first responders."

King said the fund is supposed to supplement other aid programs, not be used in lieu of them. Chertoff acknowledged cuts in grant programs but argued they would be more than offset by the \$1 billion. And he pointed out there would still be \$2.2 billion coming in grants.

Afterward, Chertoff told reporters: "The bottom line is this — we're going to put \$3.2 billion in the hands of communities

and first responders, roughly the same amount as this year." He added that he doesn't "get hung up on what bucket the money comes from."

In a follow-up letter sent late Friday, Thompson and King told the secretary that local first responders "are left in limbo while federal agencies and departments drag their feet" establishing the program.

At the hearing, the secretary maintained that the department has made progress in building systems to protect the nation, highlighting a number of examples.

He said a new focus on the southwest border had achieved significant and measurable results. He also said the Federal Emergency Management Agency has made "a remarkable turnaround ... from what was a very sad story" immediately in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

As for grants to states and localities, Chertoff reiterated, "Our commitment is to be risk-based, and that means while we don't put all the money into the high-risk areas; we do lean more toward" such areas.

U.N. peacekeepers raid violent Haiti slum

By TRENT JACOBS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti

Hundreds of U.N. peacekeepers raided Haiti's largest and most violent slum Friday, seizing a portion of it in a six-hour gunbattle that left a gang member dead and two soldiers wounded, officials said.

More than 700 heavily armed blue-helmeted troops from seven countries participated in the pre-dawn raid on Port-au-Prince's sprawling Cite Soleil slum, entering the mazelike shantytown in armored vehicles and on foot as U.N. helicopters circled above.

The peacekeepers seized several abandoned buildings in a section known as "Boston" that had been used by gangs to stage attacks. The raid sparked an intense firefight within the densely populated slum of 300,000 people.

Two U.N. soldiers — from Brazil and Bolivia — were slightly wounded, one by gunfire and the other in an unspecified incident unrelated to the fighting, U.N. spokesman Jean-Jacques Simon said.

The spokesman said U.N. troops killed one suspected gang member and wounded four others.

"There will be no tolerance for the kidnappings, harassment and terror carried out by criminal



AP PHOTO

A U.N. peacekeeper holds a tear gas grenade as residents protest at the slum of Cite-Soleil in Port-au-Prince on Friday.

gangs," said Maj. Gen. Carlos Alberto Dos Santos Cruz, the Brazilian commander of the 9,000-strong international force. "I will continue to cleanse these areas of the gangs who are robbing the people of their security."

Friday's raid was one of the biggest in months by peacekeepers, who were sent to the troubled Caribbean country more than two years ago to quell violence in the chaos of a 2004 revolt that toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Dos Santos, speaking earlier from Cite Soleil as gunfire still echoed through the streets, said gang members fired thousands of rounds at peacekeepers. Peacekeepers returned fire and at one point could be seen using a sniper to fire into the slum from a water tower.

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female

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