Written by **Kurt Hyde** on February 1, 2016

Iowans Prepare to Caucus — Will The Process Be Transparent?

COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA — The first votes of the 2016 presidential contests will be cast tonight as the Iowa Caucuses begin. The Republican Party of Iowa will be using a new Microsoft app for computerized reporting of precinct totals from all 1,681 precincts in Iowa's 99 counties.

Bloomberg.com, reporting on the new technology and reflecting on the electoral integrity problems in the Iowa Caucuses in 2012, noted on January 27, "While it may not offer much solace to those organizing the count, it could hardly go worse than it did four years ago." The article continued, "Numbers from eight precincts were never found or certified."

According to the Iowa GOP's web site, "The Iowa GOP has held more than 300 caucus trainings — at least two per county — to prepare caucus night reports to quickly, accurately, and securely report results using the new Microsoft app on February 1st."

While no one should be upset with quick and accurate reporting, there is no reason given why this app should work "securely." Why should publicly disseminated information be transmitted securely? If everyone has a right to know this information, why should it be secured? The answer is, it shouldn't.

Students of German history will note the numerous elections held during the Adolf Hitler era. The Nazis did well in their elections using a combination of behind-closed-doors vote counts and keeping the precinct vote totals secret until all precinct vote totals were reported to the central authority. That gave the Nazis a final check on the election results to make whatever changes they needed to have the vote totals they wanted. The Nazis weren't alone in using behind-closed-doors vote counts and secreting the results to a centralized authority before letting the people know the precinct totals. Such are the techniques of the likes of Joseph Stalin and other dictators as they run their sham elections.

What Happened in 2012?

Many of the problems in the Iowa caucuses (as well as those in Maine) in 2012 were avoidable and were caused by behind-closed-doors vote counts and accumulating vote totals in a secret location. In Iowa it started with a false alarm of disruption of the Iowa Caucuses in the form of an online recording supposedly originated by the hacktivist group Anonymous. The reaction to the false alarm was the implementation of behind-closed-doors vote counts and vote accumulation in a secret location. Most Iowa GOP Caucus participants accepted these changes without question.

If the threat was disruption, why do the wrong thing instead of the right thing? If the threat was disruption, why didn't the caucus administrators react by opening the process? Counting the votes

immediately, whether they be by show of hands, standing in groups with fellow supporters or by paper ballots, along with encouraging participants to videotape, would have enabled accurate reconstruction of vote totals in case the Iowa Caucuses were disrupted. Also, the videotapes would have been valuable in helping local law enforcement identify the disruptors if there had been any.

Within days after the 2012 Iowa Caucuses, Edward True, a man who served as a vote counter in Moulton, Iowa, made national news when he noted discrepancies between the official vote totals and those he wrote down on a slip of paper.

True told *The New American* that initially he faced criticism for having recorded the vote totals on a piece of paper, but he felt exonerated when at least one other witness to the vote count verified the accuracy of his hand-written list of vote totals.

Another similar event took place in Belfast, Maine, later that year. Pastor Matt McDonald made national news when he noticed discrepancies between the official vote totals and his hand-written totals.

In an interview with *The New American* shortly after the Maine Caucuses, McDonald explained that he was given strict orders from the Maine GOP not to count the votes in public, but when he convened the caucus he entertained a motion to count the votes in front of those who cast them. All 22 voters voted unanimously to count the votes immediately and in front of the people who cast them — a great example of lesser magistrates legally resisting a harmful edict.

The official totals from the Maine GOP were quite different than the actual vote totals in Belfast:

Candidate	"Official" Maine GOP Vote Totals	Actual Vote Counts
Ron Paul	2	8
Rick Santorum	5	7
Mitt Romney	9	5

Will The New Technology Prevent a Recurrence of 2012?

The New American asked Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) in a press conference on January 30 if his campaign is taking precautions to prevent a recurrence of the problems in 2012. Senator Paul responded, "You know, one of the things that we're doing which helps not only turning out the vote but monitoring how the vote is counted is having a lot of precinct chairs. We have over a thousand precinct chairs. This is probably nearly double what my dad had when the caucuses were held in 2012. So, we think we have a good handle on who will be voting, how the vote will be counted and we think it'll be accurate."

Senator Paul's campaign made great strides by recruiting over 1,000 precinct chairs, but they need to also ensure the process is transparent. Having over 1,000 precinct chairs physically present at the caucuses is good, but those people serving as precinct chairs need to observe what is being done. What good is their physical presence if all they can do is stare at a piece of electronic equipment and hope it's doing its job right?

The new technology will not prevent a recurrence the election integrity problems of 2012 because it doesn't address the root cause of the problems. It may mask the problems by using electronic technology to do its work unseen, therefore making problems less noticeable to the public. The fact that the reporting will be quick and accurate seems like an improvement, but the only way to prevent a

recurrence of the problems of 2012 is to restore transparency. Count the votes in the open, record the precinct results on paper, post those results in a public place for at least 24 hours, and accumulate the votes in a place accessible to the news media and the public.

The Iowa Democratic Party Caucuses

The Iowa Democratic Party will not be using the new software that the Iowa GOP has adopted, but they are also taking steps that will reduce the electoral integrity in their caucuses. This year the Iowa Democratic Party will inaugurate Tele-Caucusing. The party website explains the new Tele-Caucus:

> The Tele-Caucus is available to Iowans who are registered to vote and covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) and any active duty member of the military who is outside the borders of Iowa on the day and time of the Iowa Caucuses. This would include:
>
> • Members of the military stationed outside Iowa
>
> •Military family members living abroad
>
> • Members of the Peace Corps
>
> • Diplomatic Corps
>
> • Students and other Iowans living abroad

One of the electoral integrity advantages of the traditional form of Iowa Caucuses was the requirement for physical presence of the voter at the place and time of the caucus.

When the American Republic was first founded, the physical presence of the voter at the polling location was considered so important that very few states had provisions for absentee voting. It wasn't that they didn't care about those voters who couldn't make it to the polls, rather a trade-off where the people's right to ensure election integrity was viewed as more important. Absentee voting in America was increased slightly during the War of 1812 and expanded even more during the Civil War. Today we have election integrity weaknesses in absentee balloting. It is a sad commentary that those weaknesses can be traced to a movement that was at first intended to benefit those serving in the military, but over time expanded into something vastly different.

With only a few changes, the Tele-Caucus could morph the Iowa Caucuses into something more like a political party running an electronic election. The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) is an unconstitutional federal law that reduces states' ability to ensure integrity in voter registrations.

As tonight's results from Iowa Caucuses are reported, undoubtedly the news commentators will be praising the new technologies used by the Iowa Republican and Democratic parties. But will they be using critical thinking to analyze what the technology is doing and whether or not the new technologies are increasing transparency or reducing transparency in the process?

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