

EDITORIAL

Unreliable Voting in New Jersey

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Voters nationwide have seen that electronic voting cannot be trusted, and New Jerseyans are the latest to learn this unfortunate lesson. It is now clear that the state's machines produced suspicious results in the Feb. 5 presidential primary. Rather than working to put doubts to rest, the machines' manufacturer is resisting a proper inquiry. New Jersey needs to quickly get to the bottom of the problem to ensure voters that in November their ballots will be counted accurately.

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At least five of New Jersey's 21 counties have reported discrepancies in the tallies of a small number of their machines. Election officials insist that the inconsistencies, which involve the number of Republican and Democratic voters casting ballots, do not affect the accuracy of the vote counts, but there is no way to be sure.

When the Union County clerk, Joanne Rajoppi, learned of the problem, she did the responsible thing and moved to have a respected independent computer scientist from Princeton University examine the faulty machines. The machines' manufacturer, Sequoia Voting Systems,

responded by threatening to sue.

Sequoia, which says the discrepancies were because of human error by poll workers, insists that allowing an outsider to access its equipment would endanger its "trade secrets." Instead, it is hiring its own consultant to assess what went wrong.

That is unacceptable. Sequoia's consultant would work for the company, not for the public. It is unlikely to come up with findings that put its client in a bad light. That's particularly true in this case since Sequoia has shown how eager it is to file lawsuits.

County officials from around the state, including Ms. Rajoppi, have asked Anne Milgram, the state's attorney general, to intercede to assure an independent analysis. David Wald, a spokesman for Ms. Milgram, has said that she is satisfied with Sequoia's arrangement.

The nation is heading into an important presidential election. Now that serious concerns have been raised about its voting system, the state must make every effort to assure voters that its machines are reliable.

Ms. Milgram must be shaken out of her lethargy regarding these voting disparities. If she is unwilling to order an impartial investigation, Gov. Jon Corzine should turn the case over to someone who will.

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