

Data Security: Microsoft to Tally Iowa Caucus Results And Why You Should Be Concerned

February 1, 2016 – Whether you are for Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump or any of the other candidates running for president, something is going on at the Iowa caucuses tonight that should concern you. Microsoft will be using a smart phone application to tabulate the results. That might not be such a big deal if Iowa had purchased the software, deployed it on the state's dime and provided training to everyone using the system. But that doesn't appear to be what is happening. Instead, the company is providing use of the software to the state free of charge. And as far as we know, the state hasn't done a thing to make sure that the software is accurate or free of back doors that would allow election results to be manipulated.

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(function() {  
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];  
s.type = 'text/javascript';  
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';  
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);  
})();
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(function() {  
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po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';  
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})();
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At ACCESS, we're always concerned with data security. That's why what is happening in Iowa is so disconcerting.

From all outward appearances, Microsoft has a huge conflict of interest here. According to an article published by Breitbart, the company has contributed to both the Rubio and Clinton campaigns. Additionally, Microsoft has already called the election on the Democratic side for Hillary Clinton. It did that earlier today using search results from its Bing search engine. In our opinion, these things alone should disqualify them from any actual participation in tallying the results.

But there is more. As far as we can tell and for the record, there is very little information that has been published on the actual software the company is supplying - the State of Iowa has had no visibility to the development process for the software involved. We don't believe they have had the chance to test the software or to look through the code for back

doors that would allow vote manipulation. But we do know that it uses the company's cloud technology meaning that it is connected to the internet.

History tells us that anything that resides on the internet can be manipulated, hacked, breached, you pick the one that makes you the most uncomfortable.

Over the past few years we've seen numerous troubles electronic voting machines. Fortunately, these machines have been owned and operated by states or local governments. That has given the voters some recourse when things have gone wrong and, in some cases, led away from technology and back to old fashioned ballots. In this case, we don't know if the state has any control over any part of the system.

We're not members of the Flat-Earth Society. Technology has a place in the voting process and we believe that it will eventually replace large numbers of paper ballots. But we don't think that using a system donated by a private company with its own specific political interests is the way to go about introducing technology to the process. It is however a way to obliterate any faith the public may have in the electoral process.

Fortunately, most of the campaigns have said that they have backup systems in place to tabulate the votes tonight manually. Pay close attention to the results. If there are discrepancies between manual counts and what Microsoft tallies show, you can count on the campaigns calling for manual recounts. And in precincts that are close, you can be sure that any discrepancies are likely result in a recount.

For the record, congress needs to get involved in this issue. There needs to be legislation that requires testing and audit procedures for any software used in voting. And that legislation needs to insure that the states and/or local governments own and are responsible for operating any software systems used in elections. It should probably also subject any state run systems to periodic federal audits for accuracy and to see if the systems being used are vulnerable to manipulation.
by Jim Malmberg

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