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Congresional Hearing Reveals Voting Machine Flaws

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After years of criticism that the state was moving too slowly in certifying new electronic voting machines, many states nationwide are taking a second look at the machines that cost taxpayers millions of dollars and some possibly their votes. NY1's Molly Kroon filed the following report.

Experts testified at a Congressional hearing Monday that states scrambled to meet federal deadlines after the widespread problems back in the 2000 presidential election. But now, many states may have to go back to the drawing board.

"The testing labs have approved systems that have lost thousands of votes, approved systems that are unreliable," said Dr. David Wagner, a computer scientist who testified at the hearings. "They've approved systems with serious security vulnerabilities."

One of those labs, Ciber Technologies, tested 70 percent of the electronic voting machines in use today, but is now barred from approving machines after it failed to properly document its inspections.

States may now have to recertify all the machines. The company's chief executive officer blamed the government for lax oversight.

"We were lulled to sleep by the process, which was not our fault," said CEO Mac Slingerland. "The fact that we slept was probably our fault."

Some states are waking up. The Florida Legislature last week voted to throw out its touch screen voting machines for ones that provide a paper trail, after thousands of ballots failed to record votes in last year's election. Maryland's doing the same and California's secretary of state will begin state wide testing of their machines next month.

But New York still hasn't certified any machines. The state has been a lightning rod of criticism for taking so long -- because the state legislature was slow to move, but also due to the Board of Elections' independent review process. It was sued by the federal government and risks losing \$50 million in federal funding for the new machines.

"What's really interesting to me is that all these other states have already spent their money but now have inferior equipment," said Douglas Kellner of the Board of Elections. "New York is committed to getting it right the first time."

A bill in Congress would extend the deadline so New York won't lose funding and create more transparency in the testing process nationwide.

The state hopes to have another company complete the process begun by Ciber to certify machines, which means New Yorkers will still be voting the old fashioned way in the presidential primaries in February. T

The new machines are expected to be in place for the fall election.

- Molly Kroon

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