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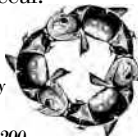
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commentary BY KATE ROGERS GESSERT

Election Wrongs

Is there enough fraud to challenge the outcome?

"The right of voting for representatives is the primary right by which all other rights are protected." — Thomas Paine

As a rural precinct worker, I combed the Crow-Lorane valley for Kerry supporters. Nov. 3 was a day of grief, but the next morning I read "Kerry Won," an article by Greg Palast, a respected investigative reporter. My first joyful thought was that maybe a majority of Americans hadn't really voted for Bush.

As it turns out, the situation is muddy. Maybe Kerry won Ohio, Florida and/or New Mexico, maybe not, but what's becoming clear is that extensive recounts and audits will be necessary to reassure voters about an election with so many disturbing, sometimes startling, problems and discrepancies.

Until the Electoral College votes Dec. 13, no one is officially the next president. I believe that if the Democratic Party leadership wants people to work as volunteers in the future — even just bother to vote — it must take a strong role now in defending the efforts so many Americans made both to vote and to help others vote. As Congressman Kucinich writes, "We must pursue every lead that raises questions about the integrity of the electoral process. Our work may not change the outcome, but it will demonstrate that beyond our commitment to our candidates, we have a higher commitment to our democracy."

Last week Diana Abernathy, a Eugene field organizer for MoveOn in the recent election, e-mailed people she thought would be concerned about voting irregularities. On less than a day's notice, 60 people crowded a room in the Atrium. On Friday scores of people gathered to present petitions to Congressman DeFazio and Sens. Wyden and Smith, urging them to "initiate an independent investigation and ballot audit into possible election fraud."

Saturday a small group of us stood on Coburg Road where cars left the highway for the Ducks game, holding a banner that read "Presidential Election Dishonors Democracy." Many motorists swung their eyes away from us. People gave us the finger and yelled, "Get over it!" A blond-haired woman screamed, "Four more years! WOOOO!" shrieking so loudly that a small dog in her lap leapt into the air. Many passersby gave a courteous "No, thanks," to the handout I offered. Others said, "Oh, yes!" reaching out quickly with relief in their faces.

Here are recent developments:

- 11/15: There will be a recount and close

examination of ballots in Ohio. Common Cause Ohio and Alliance for Democracy are raising money. Losing candidates can request a recount for \$10 a precinct, so Green and Libertarian Party candidates made the request. (www.thealliancefordemocracy.org)

- 11/12: Bush's lead over Kerry narrowed to 6,800 votes in New Mexico after initial counts of provisional ballots were included. (Ralph Nader asked for hand-recounting of ballots in New Hampshire, where a state recount costs only \$2,000 and Bush led by 5 to 15 unanticipated percentage points in counties where Diebold optical-scan machines counted votes.)

- 11/11: Kerry campaign lawyers compiled 30 questions for Ohio election officials. (A recount began in Franklin County, Ohio, where optical-scan machines had counted straight-party Democratic votes as Libertarian.)

- 11/10: Ohio Secretary of State Blackwell ordered that any of Ohio's 155,000 provisional ballots — with a likely majority for Kerry — must be rejected if they omit voters' dates of birth, which were not required at election time. New Ohio votes can still come from absentee ballots, provisional ballots, and computer errors.

Researchers are arguing over how 11/2 evening exit polls could predict a 3 percent Kerry win that became a 3 percent Bush win, and why Florida counties with optical-scan equipment — but not counties with other devices — had so many Democrats voting for Bush. One third of U.S. voters used the new electronic voting machines. Reports of votes added and deleted, more votes cast than registered voters, screens that don't register Kerry votes, and provisional ballots wrongly disqualified, continue to appear. These events consistently favor Bush, with disproportionate numbers of problems for poor and minority voters.

What can we do? Stay informed and talk with friends. Write and call Senators Wyden and Smith, Reps. DeFazio of Oregon and Kucinich, Tubbs Jones, and Kaptur of Ohio, all at (800) 839-5276. Ask them to join John Conyers and other members of Congress who have asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate the voting machines and new technologies used in the election. E-mail the Democratic Party at www.democrats.org to demand they head a rigorous investigation. Sign the online petition at www.moveon.org. Join a meeting of concerned citizens at the Atrium at 6:30 pm Monday Nov. 22 (www.botworks.com/~tiv or info truthinvoting.org).

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