

Doubts Persist About Election Results

Integrity of vote questioned

(AP) — Concerns persist about the integrity of the nation's voting system - particularly in Ohio, where details continue to emerge of technology failures, voter confusion and overcrowded polling stations in minority and poor neighborhoods.

Reported problems include insufficient or incomplete provisional ballots and, in some places, brazen partisan shenanigans.

Democratic congressman John Conyers Jr. of Michigan, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and presidential candidates of the Green and Libertarian parties - are questioning the accuracy of certified results and demanding investigations.

Of greatest concern is the extent of disenfranchisement in the criti-



In Columbus, Ohio, Melissa Hedden draws attention to irregularities and possible fraud in the way elections officials counted the votes that gave President Bush a slim victory in the state. (AP photo)

cal swing state of Ohio, whose 20 electoral votes guaranteed Bush's victory.

The nation's voting system, despite improvements since the 2000 Florida fiasco, remains a locally administered patchwork whose lack of national uniformity distinguishes the United States from many other democracies.

Although most complaints have come from Democrats and the third-party candidates, Republicans and bipartisan groups acknowledge problems. The Government Accountability Office is investigating election problems. Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio and chairman of the House Administration Committee, will oversee an inquiry next year.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission, created in 2002, is also scrutinizing the outcome. It plans to publish in January the government's first report on the voting, which will serve as the basis for congressional recommendations and reforms.

Rev. Jackson and other activists want wholesale changes in the U.S. voting process, ideally before the 2006 midterm elections. Jackson says the most distressing problem appears to be the lack of nationwide standards. No federal agency enforces regulations when states or counties fail to comply with internal procedures.

Without national standards, he said, some poor counties have inferior equipment and insufficient numbers of voting machines to support dense populations.

Conyers, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, began examining Ohio's problems in a hearing this past week attended by eight Democratic lawmakers.

Among his concerns was that voters in urban, minority and Democratic precincts waited in lines up to eight hours. Conyers also charged that a "campaign of deception" directed some Democrats to wrong polling places, where they were forced to cast provisional ballots.

Carnage Builds with Suicide Bombings

(AP) — A suicide car bomber killed seven people at a Green Zone checkpoint in Baghdad early Tuesday, the second attack in two days near the district that houses Iraq's interim government and the U.S. Embassy, officials said. The earlier blast killed 13 and injured 15 people.

No U.S. troops were killed in either blast, but the American military said two Marines from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force based in western Iraq died in combat Monday, bringing the number of Marines killed to 10 in three days.



A US soldier inspects the site where a suicide car bomber killed seven people Tuesday at a Green Zone checkpoint in Baghdad's district that houses Iraq's interim government and foreign embassies. (AP photo)

Elsewhere in Baghdad, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced the U.S. military will have a record-high 150,000 troops in Iraq through the Jan. 30

elections and "a little bit after." The previous high for the U.S. force in Iraq was 148,000 on May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations were

over and most soldiers thought the war had been won.

Despite repeated forecasts in the past that successes on the battlefield and the arrests of most of Saddam Hussein's top aides would weaken the insurgency, the number of attacks on U.S. troops and the interim government's security forces has not decreased.

About 550 U.S. soldiers died in the first year after the invasion was launched; almost 750 troops have died in the nine months that followed.

Foster Parents Charged

Malnourished girl hospitalized

(AP) — Additional charges may be filed against the foster parents of a 5-year-old girl who was hospitalized after authorities responded to a call that the child had suffered a seizure after a head injury and found her weighing just 28 pounds.

William and Thelma Beaver, the foster parents of Jordan Knapp, were arrested last week on charges of criminal mistreatment. Thelma Beaver, 39, faces an additional as-

sault charge.

Additional charges could come after detectives speak with the little girl, who remains in serious condition at a Portland hospital, said Clackamas County Sheriff's Deputy Joel Manley.

Investigators have interviewed the other seven children who lived with William and Thelma Beaver near Sandy, Manley said. Three of the other children were foster children, three were the Beaver's biological children and one was a foreign exchange student from Korea.

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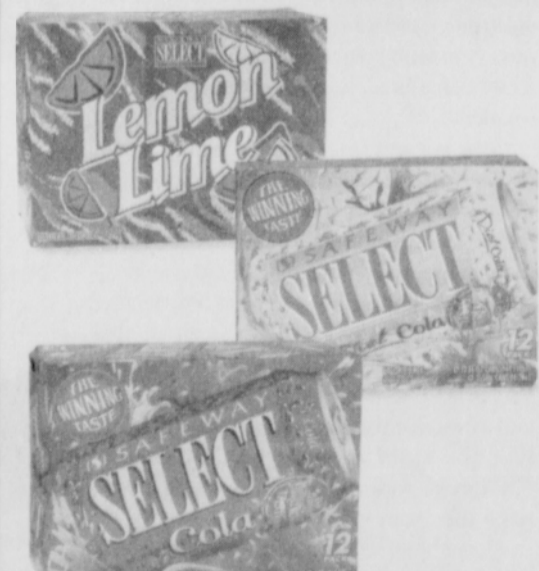
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