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ELECTION 2008



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Some swing states lack procedures to verify votes

By Benjamin Miraski
MEDILL NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Before you cast your ballot on Nov. 4, can you be sure that your vote will be counted — and counted correctly?

It has been eight years since major voting problems in Florida spurred

changes in the way that America votes, moving toward electronically enabled voting. But issues with the new systems continue to plague the political process.

Much of the challenge comes from simple vote verification — ensuring that the choices a voter entered into the machine are the

ones that are recorded when the tally is made. While some states allow voters to see a printout of their vote, others, including parts of swing states Virginia, Pennsylvania and Florida, have no such paper trail.

The Help America Vote Act passed by Congress in 2002 originally provided

money for local jurisdictions to make the switch away from flawed voting methods, such as the punch ballots which drew scorn in Florida. But no follow-up money has been approved by Congress.

Repeated attempts by Rep. Rush Holt, D-N.J., to amend the law to require a paper trail of all votes have

failed in Congress. His latest effort in April, which would have reimbursed states for part of the cost of providing paper ballots and counting the results, did not gain enough Republican support to pass.

Jeremiah Vangen, the registrar in the city of Fairfax, Va., needs more machines to meet demand, but his

hands are tied as he awaits a federal decision on what voting systems will meet federal standards. It is a headache for registrars everywhere as they struggle with competing priorities, he said. Despite fears, Vangen said that the electronic voting machines in Fairfax are tested thoroughly and are certified by the state.