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Rage Against the Machines

Like a modern version of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, well-meaning people battle corrupt mechanisms only to discover that the true enemies of democracy are human.

BY REBECCA WAKEFIELD

Lida Rodriguez-Taseff was trying to grab a quick lunch on September 11, 2002, when Keith Hartley cornered her in the Pollo Tropical downtown. He wouldn't let her go until a wad of napkins covered in a girlish scrawl lay piled beside her tray of dessicating chicken. "This was a disaster," Hartley assured the then-president of the local chapter of the ACLU. "I worked the polls on Miami Beach. I saw it all happen."

The day before, Miami-Dade County had managed to top its record for screwy elections with a spectacular show of incompetence that nearly eclipsed the debacle of 2000. It was the gubernatorial primary, the one in which Janet Reno was narrowly beaten by a sweaty, bland lawyer from Tampa, who in turn was easily crushed by Jeb Bush in November. This was the first time the spanking-new voting toys for which the county elections department had laid out \$24.5 million were used, and sheer, stark chaos reigned. Precincts opened late, voting machines malfunctioned, hundreds of voters were turned away from the polls, and more than 1500 votes vanished.

Hartley, 44, was one of that day's heroes. A residential contractor by trade, he was inspired by the debacle of the 2000 elections to become a poll worker in his precinct at Nautilus Middle School in 2002. But in the wee, dark hours of September 10, he arrived to discover that the clerk of the precinct hadn't booted up any of the machines. In a scene repeated many times throughout the county that day, the new technology flummoxed an undertrained poll-working population heavily skewed toward the elderly and the unskilled. "I grabbed a book and got the machines up and running," Hartley recalls. "I'm used to computers. The clerk had no clue how to do it. From then to end of the day I ran the poll." Other precincts weren't so fortunate.

After hearing this story, Rodriguez-Taseff called Courtenay Strickland, who coordinates the ACLU's voting rights project. "This is really important," she said to Strickland. "Let's get a group together." A lot of other people in Miami-Dade County had the same idea. Calls flooded into the ACLU offices. Within a couple of days, a loose coalition of activists held a press conference at the Apostolic

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The garage band of democracy do-gooders, clockwise from back left: Marta Gillette, Courtenay Strickland, Franisco Pardo, Dan McCrea, Bud Gillette, Lida Rodriguez-Taseff, and Sandy Wayland.

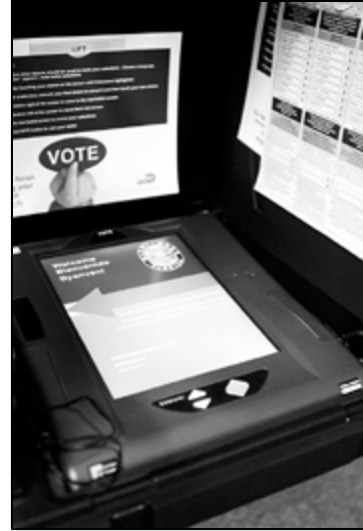
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Revival Center in Liberty City. The talk was angry, with many black voters complaining that, once again, their votes had been, in effect, stolen. "A reporter asked, 'What are you going to do?'" Rodriguez-Taseff remembers. "Without thinking, I said, 'We are going to form a coalition.'"

Thus was born the Miami-Dade Election Reform Coalition (MDERC). Meetings were (and still are) every Wednesday evening at the ACLU offices on Biscayne Boulevard. A shared outrage attracted dozens of citizens from black, Hispanic, and Anglo sectors. "They came pouring in from all over Miami," asserts Martha "Marnie" Mahoney, a University of Miami law professor and coalition member. "The sense of urgency and desperation, and of there needing to be a citizen response, was intense." Rodriguez-Taseff led the disparate, sometimes unruly mob, verbally arm-wrestling it into a workable crew. With such a large number of people, including members of the NAACP, Miami Workers Center, Brothers of the Same Mind, the League of Women Voters, part of the fight was to remain non-partisan and free of discrediting conspiracy theories. "You have to be willing to indict everybody," Rodriguez-Taseff argues. "Not just one target."

Within a scant two months, the coalition firmly inserted itself into the scrambled efforts of the county to get its shit together for November. Among other things, they demanded and got a concession unprecedented in the United States -- international, independent elections observers, of the sort normally seen trooping into godforsaken places most Americans can't find on a map. "I just thought that was the nuttiest damn thing," admits Rodriguez-Taseff, "but it turned out to be brilliant."

With a massive infusion of chagrin, police help, and millions in emergency cash, the county pulled off a fairly smooth November election. The coalition, which had monitored the process throughout, put out a report on its observations and recommendations. People talked about meeting less frequently, with the idea that eventually the group would fade away. But this is Miami, the nexus of weird within the spiral of political oddities the world has come to know and love as the state of Florida. Things were just starting to get interesting.



Jonathan Postal



When Miami-Dade elections supervisor Connie Kaplan arrived from Chicago in 2003, she inherited a sleepy, insular department, new technology, and a lot of critics

Lida Rodriguez-Taseff looks like a fashion model, talks like a sailor, and strategizes like a general. She's actually a harried attorney, at 37, a partner in a big firm in downtown Miami. As lawyer bitches go, she's the kind you want on your side, chipping away at seemingly unassailable defenses with staccato bursts of logic and sarcasm. "Lida will use the F-word if it fits," observes coalition member Bud Gillette, a 72-year-old ex-Army colonel. "She's very direct. I like that." For two years, she's led what she calls "the ultimate garage band" of civic platoons. The members come and go as their lives change, but there are a few constants. Bobbie, Dan, Marnie, Bud,

Marta, Sandy, and a dozen more form the core of the idiosyncratic bunch that has managed to make life miserable for the likes of local Supervisor of Elections Constance Kaplan, Secretary of State Glenda Hood, and Jeb Bush. The strain occasionally breaks through, as in June, when the MDERC called on Bush to ask for an independent review of the state's error-prone touch-screen voting systems. The response? "We are not going to engage in every accusation du jour from people whose goal it is to undermine voters' confidence," snapped a Bush spokesman. A Hood spokeswoman echoed a nearly identical sentiment. In general, the pair has taken the position that Florida has its elections well in hand and any criticism must be motivated solely by partisan politics. Likely true in some cases.

In this case, just the opposite is true. If anything, Rodriguez-Taseff is often criticized by left-leaning elections groupies for her militant approach to scouring partisan rhetoric from the organization's efforts. Such criticism occurred at an August meeting in which one new member complained that she was being uncompromising about kicking people off the MDERC Internet listserve for posting even mild political statements. Rodriguez-Taseff was unapologetic. "There's a certain purity to what we do that makes us successful," she explained sternly. "It leads to really unrigorous thinking when people are willing to polarize and say that this party is stealing the election from that party. Al Gore got everything coming to him because he did nothing to ensure every vote was counted. He didn't care about counting every vote. He just wanted to win."

Besides their concentration on the voter rather than the race, the members are remarkably effective because they focus on the nuts and bolts of elections -- everything from poll worker training to voter registration, absentee ballots, the squirrely voter purge list of ex-felons, access for disabled voters, and of course, the darkest secrets of those troublesome machines. Tied into this last item is tracking the real cost of elections. For instance, during the August 31 primary, the county mobilized thousands of county workers and cops to ensure a smooth election, a cost which was borne by the general fund rather than the elections department budget.

Each member brings his or her own special powers to the endeavor. Marnie Mahoney is a meticulous, obsessive-compulsive law prof the group credits with much of the heavy intellectual lifting in figuring out the technical problems with the machines. Square-jawed, bespectacled Bud Gillette and his Chilean wife Marta have volunteered as poll workers for years, which gives them a street-level perspective and access to elections department gossip.

A strutting blond bundle of energy, 48-year-old Sandy Wayland is a Fendi distributor and chairwoman of the Miami-Dade National Women's Political Caucus. She has become the group's lobbyist in Tallahassee. Or as Dan McCrea puts it, "Sandy understands sausage town." McCrea is a construction consultant by profession, and one-term South Miami commissioner who was briefly the second Green Party member elected in Florida. A doughy, affable man partial to Marlboros and white wine, he's the holistic, practical one, who often helps with writing and dealing with county officials. And then there's Bobbie Brinegar, president of the Miami-Dade chapter of the League of Women Voters. Brinegar, 51, is a bright, disarmingly friendly woman prone to silly jokes and devising button slogans. She's the one they send in to soften up public officials who might otherwise be inclined to dismiss the group, or see it as an adversary. "I'm the county kiss-ass," she quips.

After the 2002 election crisis had passed, Miami-Dade's long-serving supervisor of elections, David Leahy, was quite rightly called to task for the debacle in September. Leahy, a blandly agreeable

bureaucrat, had been the appointed supervisor for 21 years (all other county supervisors in Florida are elected). Then county manager Steve Shiver, in a quest to save his own neck, encouraged Leahy to resign, but he planned a sneaky maneuver that would essentially ensure that the status would remain quo.

Shiver trotted out the old political contrivance of doing a "national search" for Leahy's replacement. A selection committee of respectable community types would vet applicants, but Shiver made Leahy the head of the committee. The guy had screwed up so badly he couldn't be trusted with the job, yet he was going to get to help choose his replacement. Shiver had also restructured the elections department to, in effect, take power away from the next supervisor, and give it to -- David Leahy. He planned to keep Leahy on as a highly paid elections adviser (late last year Leahy was moved through the ever-generous county pipeline of jobs to land a gig in the Consumer Services Department, initially keeping his annual \$155,000 salary). Oh, sweet irony.

Because of the civic racket the MDERC had been making, Shiver tossed the busybodies a bone, one seat on the selection committee. The coalition sent Rodriguez-Taseff, and backed her up by doing the research on candidates. There were 115 applicants for the job. Over a few months, the committee went through the résumés, and each member recommended his or her top picks. From that, a short list of eight candidates was chosen by vote to interview. Make that nine. "The selection process was the sleaziest thing in the world," maintains Rodriguez-Taseff. "We selected the eight people. The name Constance Kaplan was not among them. But the chairman, Dave Leahy, stands up and says, 'Oh, we should also interview Connie Kaplan from Chicago. She's terrific.'"

Connie Kaplan spent 33 years with the Chicago Board of Elections Commissioners, the last eleven as its number two, responsible for community services, training, and special programs. She also had experience as an elections troubleshooter in places such as Indonesia, Albania, Zambia, and China. She seemed competent, but coalition members were disturbed by Leahy's last-minute meddling. Especially when they began hearing that the fix was in. "From inside the elections department, people were saying that this woman from Chicago, whose application we didn't even have, was on the fast track," recalls Bobbie Brinegar. "She ended up in the top two." Unsurprisingly, Shiver picked Kaplan over the other sucker the selection committee had also recommended.

But the coalition wasn't going to lie down for this. The group didn't know if Kaplan was aware of what she was walking into, which, given the sly reorganization Shiver planned, would leave her with little power but all of the blame if something went wrong. So they sent Brinegar, with her League credentials, as a friendly emissary. Brinegar sweetly presented the visiting Kaplan with a copy of Leahy's "adviser" contract and the manager's chart depicting the new order inside the elections department.

No fool, Kaplan took a step back. She began asking for a specific job description, and she wanted a contract. The coalition pushed the county commission to give her a three-year contract, and to undo Shiver's reorg scheme. "We wanted to buy her freedom," Rodriguez-Taseff explains, "to do what needs to be done to fix this department." The commission obliged, except the contract was only for one year.

Poor leadership was only part of what went wrong in September 2002. Another significant problem was the voting machines themselves, the 7200 iVotronic systems purchased months earlier after a typical county hall lobby-fest. After the election, Rodriguez-Taseff had gotten a copy of the contract won by Elections Systems & Software, Inc. She spotted the problem with it right off. The contract

was written in such a way that the company would be almost completely paid off right after the November election, and likely before any major problems could be discovered. The county initially dismissed this criticism. "They said, 'Bollocks. You sweet little folks don't know what you're talking about,'" laughs coalition member Dan McCrea.

But a May 2003 report by the county's independent inspector general was critical of both the contract and the performance of ES&S, calling it overall "a bad business decision," on the county's part. The report points out many instances in which the super slick sales pitch of company reps didn't match up to what they actually delivered. For instance, the county needed to have ballot items appear in three languages, and the company promised that its system could do that with no problem. Yet, according to the IG report, ES&S knew that this would require a bit of jury-rigging of the slug-brained machines. In this case, it meant that the machines took much longer to boot up on election day and required the county to buy more equipment for them to work properly.

The report also pointed out the underlying reason the county was and is in the fix it's in. The investigator found elections staff in general to be an incurious, co-dependent lot, disturbingly complacent about the competence and veracity of the vendor. "According to Mr. Leahy, we currently do not have the independent knowledge of how to work the system," the report stated, incredulously. The OIG recommended, "cutting the umbilical cord," of dependence, which the company had clearly fostered in order to milk more cash out of the dimwitted and fecund county.

This sort of thing of course made critics and some county commissioners wonder whether they should ditch the ES&S system altogether. Given the expense, however, the report suggested making do for the time being, with some caveats, including much greater vigilance of the vendor's claims.

Meanwhile, outside the asylum, a buzz was sweeping the nation's elections activists and computer geeks: CAN WE REALLY TRUST THESE INFERNAL MACHINES? The answer depends somewhat on how much you trust your government and the free-market democracy it leases.

The truth is that the standards for accuracy and accountability have always been pretty low in American elections. Until 2000, people generally didn't think too much about whether a few ballots got lost or altered along the way. Elections supervisors nationwide pray for a wide margin of victory, for this conceals a multitude of sins.

Many people argue that the big problem with these systems is that there's no 100 percent certain way to verify that what the voter touches on the screen is what will end up counted at the end of the day. Many things can and do go wrong between the touching and the tabulating, such as software bugs that cause undervotes or overvotes, touch screens worn out by too many jabbing fingers, and the not-at-all-remote possibility of sabotage by system hackers or anarchy-minded voters. In Miami, the reform coalition held town hall meetings in the summer of 2003 and circulated a petition calling for a voter-verified paper trail of electronic voting. Last September, commissioner Jimmy Morales sponsored a resolution calling for a paper trail, but it was downgraded to doing a "study" of the issue, meaning nothing would get done. The coalition also began making numerous public records requests in an attempt to investigate the local history of the touch screens.

Florida scrapped the punch-card ballot system in 2001, but failed to establish a uniform system for electronic voting. The result was predictable. There was a scramble among voting machine vendors

to get their whiz-bang technology into county elections departments, ASAP. First the state had to "certify" the systems for use in Florida, a process that unfortunately offers few qualitative assessments. Then, each county was free to buy whichever system it preferred. Of the 67 counties in Florida, 52 bought optical scan systems, in which voters mark a paper ballot and it is scanned into a computer for tabulation.

Fifteen counties, including Miami-Dade, purchased touch-screen systems. These machines produce no paper ballots. In a close election, the only way to recount is to ask the machines to re-add the numbers they already produced. The success of ES&S in securing the contract for the largest county in the state is partly due to the shrewd choices the company made in hiring lobbyists. For instance, it hired former secretary of state Sandra Mortham, who was Jeb Bush's original choice of running mate in 1998, until she was tarnished by a spending scandal in her office. She lost her seat to Katherine Harris, that other darling of voting rights advocates. In 2001, Harris made ES&S's touch-screen system the first certified in Florida. Mortham got a cut of every deal the company made. The company's lobbyist for the sale in Miami was Miguel de Grandy, long a successful suckler at the county commission seat. In January, 2002, a Miami-Dade selection committee headed by David Leahy chose ES&S and the commission approved the contract.

After the elections problems in 2002, the county transferred Orlando Suarez, a division director, from the Enterprise Technology Services Department, where he was a kind of floating expert on various projects, to the elections department, where he was put in charge of the voting machine technology. In June 2003 he discovered bugs in the system from a May runoff election in North Miami Beach that made it difficult to match vote totals to a particular machine. He reported these problems to the vendor. The most significant conclusion Suarez drew was this: "The purpose of my review was to make sure that we could use these reports to 1) audit an election, 2) recount an election, and 3) if necessary, use these reports to certify an election. Unfortunately, if my observations are correct, we cannot use these reports in their present state for any of these purposes."

News of the bugs never made it out of the elections department, however, until the reform coalition began digging into the records of e-mails, memos, and reports. In December 2003 Dan McCrea was pawing through a box of records when he stumbled upon the Suarez e-mail. Later, an October 2003 e-mail from Suarez to Kaplan revealed that he had reviewed the audit logs for the October 7 primary in Homestead, and found that the activity record from five machines on which 162 votes were cast was missing. Big problem.

Connie Kaplan didn't agree. After accepting a "workaround" solution from ES&S, she transferred Suarez out of her department and back to his department. In his place, she promoted computer tech Donald Llopis. This later proved an embarrassment to her, when he "lost" important elections data. Suarez is, by some accounts, an exacting man. But he knows computer and management systems well. His personnel file is thick with commendations for the quality of his work going all the way back to his hiring as a computer programmer in 1977.

Llopis is a different story. The bulk of his career, from 1980 to 2002, was in sales. For instance, from 1998 to 2001, he was a general manager in sales for Café Bustelo, then had a short stint as a regional sales manager for Fedders International. In May 2002, his career took a sharp turn when he was hired by the elections department as a computer tech to work on the new iVotronic machines. An evaluation in his file gives him gold stars for his work ethic.

But why would Kaplan want to replace a competent fellow boasting 30 years of technical experience

with a former sales manager who'd spent less than two years on the tech side? Kaplan says that Suarez asked to return to his old department. She adds that she put Llopis in charge of electronic voting because she reorganized the department for more efficiency and that's where his specific experience lies.

It was around this time, about December 2003, that the coalition's relationship with Kaplan took a turn. When the first Suarez e-mail was discovered, members met with her, but, they claim, she was dismissive of the problem. She acknowledged the glitches, but her attitude was that as long as the vote totals were accurate, the audit problems could be dealt with. Kaplan said as much to a reporter from the *Daily Business Review*, which broke the first stories on the issue, and the same again when *New Times* asked her. "The tabulation of the equipment has never been in question," she asserts. On her relationship with the coalition, she forces a tight smile. "It's my goal to have a good working relationship with them," she says. "My issues are if I've answered something, and these things that are not true keep getting brought up and brought up."

But Mahoney, the UM professor, had been consulting with computer experts around the nation, and in March 2004 she came to the conclusion that the audits absolutely had to be accurate. That's because there's no other way to determine whether the machines recorded every vote cast. There was, she reasoned, a real danger of undervotes, and no one would know without an accurate audit or a paper trail. There was some evidence supporting this conclusion. In January 2004, there was a special election for a state representative seat spanning Broward and Palm Beach counties. In Broward, about 10,000 people showed up to vote on the iVotronics that county also uses. There was only the one issue on the ballot, yet somehow, 134 of the people who signed in to vote that day, apparently, inexplicably, failed to do so. This was significant because the winning margin was twelve votes.

Mahoney began writing letters about this, including one to Ed Kast, head of the state's Division of Elections in Tallahassee. But up in sausage town, they were in full legislative hijinks mode. A very bad bill, filed on behalf of a state elections department lobbyist with the amusing name of Rivers Bufford III, was oozing through a senate subcommittee that aimed to outlaw recounts on touch screen voting systems. "They had sold the audit trails to us as the *reason* you don't need the paper ballot," points out Sandy Wayland.

Wayland organized to defeat the bad bill, leaning on a wide network of people to flood senate judiciary offices with calls and e-mails. "We shut down [state Sen. Alex] Villalobos's office for two days," recalls Bobbie Brinegar. "He couldn't take it. Took the phone off the hook." That campaign did the trick, eventually killing the bad language in the bill.

But it wasn't over. The state elections division created an administrative rule to prevent recounts on touch-screen machines. (An administrative law judge threw the rule out last month.) "Why was it so important to them to prevent a recount?" Wayland asks. "Then you go back to the Orlando Suarez memo. They can't do the audit. They can't do a recount. And they don't want everybody to find out."

This slightly paranoid perspective was bolstered in June, when Ed Kast suddenly resigned. Most people attributed it to the embarrassing revelation that state elections officials had known that the list of ex-felons ineligible to vote was seriously flawed in a way that disproportionately affected African-Americans. But Boca Raton congressman Robert Wexler, a Democrat who is suing the state to try to force a paper record for touchscreen machines, alleged that Kast really quit because he'd lied in a deposition about when he learned of a software flaw in the machines Miami-Dade uses. He asked the state's attorney general to investigate, but to no avail.

In July, the coalition again made public records requests, this time for the audits of the September 2002 primary. Donald Llopis, Kaplan's new tech guy, reported back that the elections department computers had crashed twice last year and so they'd lost most of the data files for that election. It later turned out that the lost information was sitting on a disk in a file cabinet. However, the national uproar over the extreme ineptness demonstrated by the department (and exposed by the wicked little do-gooders in the *New York Times*) finally put a fire under Kaplan's behind.

The flames came from commission chairwoman Barbara Carey-Shuler, who asked the inspector general to assess the department's readiness to conduct an election. *Herald* columnist Jim DeFede also shamed county manager George Burgess into cutting short a vacation to deal with the issue before the August 31 primary. Burgess, a veteran county man nervous about his prospects when a new mayor is elected in November, threw everything he had at it. There were sweaty press conferences filled with promises, numerous meetings, and a rollout of about a thousand county employees to work polls. On August 31, voter turnout was less than 30 percent. The election ran smoothly.

After the primary, the MDERC collected reports from members who had watched the polls. Mostly, people observed fairly minor violations of elections rules, describing overall a scene reminiscent of a bunch of nervous, eager kids putting on a school play for the first time. There were a few worrisome tales of "human error" -- poll workers using pencils for voter sign-in instead of non-erasable pens, of discrepancies between the number of people who signed in to vote and the number of votes recorded, and even a story about a lady voting in the wrong precinct, then having a poll worker cancel her vote on the machine.

Lynne Kaplan, a community education liaison at the Miami-Dade school district, told the coalition that she saw several violations occur at New Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Liberty City, where she stayed the entire day. For instance, she said, she witnessed poll workers actually helping voters to vote, instead of demonstrating the machine, then letting the voter cast a secret ballot. And there was more, a scene that probably fits the national view of elections in Miami as a perpetual fiesta. "The poll workers were cooking, fish and rice and greens," Kaplan relates. "They had a little kitchen back there and the precinct clerk yelled at one lady because she didn't bring any food to share." Kaplan added that she witnessed a strange phenomenon at the closing, which was that one precinct recorded five more votes than the number of people who signed the poll register. This was particularly odd because only seventeen people had voted.

Naturally, Lida Rodriguez-Taseff nearly got herself arrested. She and Brinegar went to watch the poll closing at Olinda Elementary in Liberty City, along with a documentary film crew from New York. The poll workers instructed the crew to turn off its camera, but Rodriguez-Taseff argued that a poll closing is a public event. They called the cops. Rodriguez-Taseff called Connie Kaplan, who first told her the crew couldn't film without permission from the poll workers, then relented. "The sad part, with all this, we didn't get to actually watch the poll closing," the scrappy lawyer laughs.

There will be time. August 31 was just the rehearsal. The real test, of course, will come in November. Let us pray for a wide margin.

Milestones on the Democracy Highway

Nov. 7, 2000 The closest presidential election in history comes down to a few hundred votes in South Florida, inadvertently showcasing the highly dodgy business of elections.

May 10, 2001 Florida legislature decertifies punch-card machines and orders counties to upgrade to touch-screen or optical-scan voting technology by the 2002 elections. Sandra Mortham, a former secretary of state, is a lobbyist for Elections Systems & Software (ES&S), which is the first company to get its technology certified for use in Florida.

Jan. 29, 2002 Miami-Dade County buys 7200 voting machines for \$24.5 million from ES&S, thanks in part to the efforts of lobbyist Miguel de Grandy.

Sept. 10, 2002 A primary election debacle is caused by a combination of glitch-prone technology, poorly trained poll workers, and a complicated ballot in three languages.

Nov. 5, 2002 A smooth, but extremely expensive, election noteworthy, among other things, for independent observers from the Center for Democracy, and the use of more than 3000 county employees, including police officers.

December 2002 Miami-Dade's supervisor of elections, David Leahy, resigns his post but chairs the selection committee to find his replacement. He's also given a well-paid position as an adviser to the county manager through November 2004 to help restructure the elections department. In stark contrast, his eventual successor is given a one-year contract which expired in June 2004.

April 29, 2003 County manager Steve Shiver offers the supervisor job to Constance Kaplan, even though she didn't make the selection committee's list of top picks -- until Leahy insisted she be included.

May 2003 Miami-Dade's Inspector General issues a critical report on the county's contract with ES&S, calling the machines hardly state of the art, and the vendors assertions about its capabilities misleading.

June 6, 2003 Shiver is forced out by an unhappy mayor, Alex Penelas. Meanwhile, the same day, an elections department tech discovers a glitch in the iVotronic auditing system and e-mails an ES&S employee about it.

Oct. 10, 2003 The elections department tech sends an e-mail to Kaplan, notifying her that a review of the Oct. 7 primary election in Homestead found that the iVotronic system's audit log failed to account for 162 ballots cast. The system's audit log did not recognize five of the touch-screen machines used.

Jan. 6, 2004 During a state House election in Broward and Palm Beach counties, 134 electronic ballots are cast without votes for any candidate. Without a paper trail, there is no way to determine whether those 134 voters really intended to make no choice. This seems relevant because the margin of victory was just twelve votes.

May 2004 ES&S admits there's a software glitch in the auditing system of its machines, but proposes a workaround solution for the fall elections.

June 6, 2004 Ed Kast, head of Florida elections division, suddenly resigns his post, reportedly because of mounting controversy over the state's flawed purge list of ex-felons said to be ineligible to vote.

July 2004 The elections department admits it lost important elections data because of computer

crashes, stirring national attention. It later turns out that the data was simply misplaced. But the brief crisis has the effect of focusing county attention on the elections department.

August 31, 2004 Because of a large mobilization of county employees and low turnout, the primary election is relatively smooth and well-run.

Nov. 2004 Stay tuned...