

Corporate Control over the Electronic Ballot Booth

Merger of ES&S with Diebold: A dangerous monopoly?

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The recent announcement of the pending merger of Election Systems & Software (ES&S) of Omaha, Nebraska with Diebold/Premier [has raised warning flags that a monopoly in vote counting will be the inevitable result](#). See the maps attached here for the coverage of the new ES&S.

Suspicious of rigged ballot-counting via manipulation of computer-transmitted data [reached a fever pitch](#) one year ago with the affidavit filed in federal court by Stephen Spoonamore, a business associate of Mike Connell, the leading Republican Party specialist in IT and web development. Spoonamore's affidavit was explosive, because the whistleblower revealed that Mike Connell had informed him that radical Republican operatives could have manipulated the results of elections including the presidential election of 2004 and the general election of 2006. An attorney sent a letter to then Attorney General Michael Mukasey that [stated](#):

"We have been confidentially informed by a source we believe to be credible that [Karl Rove](#) has threatened Michael Connell, a principal witness we have identified in our King Lincoln case in federal court in Columbus, Ohio, that if he does not agree to "take the fall" for election fraud in Ohio, his wife Heather will be prosecuted for supposed lobby law violations."

Mike Connell died on December 19, 2008 while piloting his small airplane near the Akron airport.

The nature and circumstances of Connell's death [raised suspicions about the entire controversy](#) swirling around him at the time of his fatal air crash.

ES&S [has a very interesting Republican pedigree](#) including a major investment by Carolyn Hunt of the well-known right-wing Texan family. The following is an account of the company's dubious origins:

Republican Senator Chuck Hagel disclosed in public documents that he was the Chairman of American Information Systems and claimed between a \$1 to 5 million investment in the McCarthy Group. In 1997, American Information Systems purchased Business Records Corp. (BRC), formerly Texas-based election company Cronus Industries, to become ES&S. One of the BRC owners was Carolyn Hunt of the right-wing Hunt oil family, which supplied much of the original money for the Council on National Policy.

In 1996, Hagel became the first elected Republican Nebraska senator in 24 years when he

did surprisingly well in an election where the votes were verified by the company he served as chairman and maintained a financial investment. In both the 1996 and 2002 elections, Hagel's ES&S counted an estimated 80% of his winning votes. Due to the contracting out of services, confidentiality agreements between the State of Nebraska and the company kept this matter out of the public eye. Hagel's first election victory was described as a "stunning upset" by one Nebraska newspaper.

Planetary is monitoring the situation emerging around ES&S and its impact on the quality of democracy in the United States.

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