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## **Randolph voting machine woes continue**

**After two elections in which electronic voting equipment malfunctioned, the apparent closing of the company that sold the machines leaves officials worried about tech support.**

By JOY LEIKER

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WINCHESTER -- After two troublesome elections last year, Randolph County's election problems continue, with the vendor of the county's electronic voting equipment apparently going out of business.

Randolph County Clerk Claudia Thornburg said Tuesday she doesn't expect the problems with Voting Technologies International to affect this year's city elections.

In Wisconsin, the VTI company telephone number is disconnected, and Bill Benning, a former director of sales, didn't return a message left on his cell phone.

Thornburg said Mike Burns, a former VTI employee, called her last week to report that he and the rest of the company's employees had been let go.

"From the best we can tell they no longer exist, so we have no support for our equipment," Thornburg said.

Randolph County is one of four counties in the state that used VTI machines. Boone, Cass and Parke counties also used the company's electronic machines.

Purchased in 2005, the machines cost \$300,000 Thornburg said, though \$250,000 of that was provided through state and federal reimbursements.

Last week, the Indiana Election Commission conducted a teleconference with officials from all four counties, and on Tuesday, Brad King, co-director of the state's election division, said Indiana was working to secure background data so those four counties could continue to use and maintain the machines.

"Obviously (the four counties) have concerns about the use and the maintenance of this company's software in the long term," King said. "The co-directors of the Indiana Election Division, myself and Pam Potesta, have written a letter to the escrow company that has custody of Voting Technologies International source code, which might be necessary at some point in the future to permit counties to administer elections using VTI equipment."

Randolph County is still working to build its ballot for the May 8 election. Absentee voting begins April 9.

In the short term, this year's election is the priority. But in the long term, the county now has no tech support or maintenance for its electronic voting system, which never functioned properly in either of its election tests last year.

In the Spring 2006 primary, the computer crashed, and results weren't finalized until 40 hours after the polls closed. Then in November, new problems surfaced. Vote totals didn't add up, and in some precincts, there were too many votes cast compared to the number of people who actually marked ballots.

Thornburg said the specific cause of the general election problems was never determined.

County Councilman Richard Wise said it's too soon to say where or how Randolph County will come up with the money to replace the VTI machines, which he and other officials expect they'll have to do by 2008, a presidential election year.

"This has been the best financial position we've been in the last 10 years. A nice little surprise like this is no good," Wise said.

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