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## Election fraud plan to miss fall vote

### Database ready, but lists of felons, dead won't be checked

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**Madison** - Election fraud will not be as easy to catch this fall as had been hoped because technical glitches and data problems will prevent the state's new voter database from being checked against lists of felons or dead people.

*Advertisement* The voter database also will not be compared with the Department of Transportation's file of driver's license numbers before the fall elections, said Kyle Richmond, a spokesman for the State Elections Board.

Election officials plan to roll out the long-delayed database to almost all municipalities by the Sept. 12 primary.

The biggest problem is with the felons list. Even when technical hurdles are overcome, elections officials will be unable to use the list of felons provided by the Department of Corrections because it does not include dates of birth or valid addresses for many of the 63,000 felons on the list. A check of 7,000 entries found about half had problems, Richmond said.

Investigators and auditors identified instances of felons voting and people voting twice, and raised the possibility that people voted in the names of dead people, in the November 2004 election in Milwaukee. The Elections Board has told lawmakers the new database will help clear up those problems.

The disclosure about the felons list marks the latest trouble for the voter database, which was supposed to be ready this past Jan. 1 under federal law.

"It's something that should have been done last December, and done right. And now it's done this fall half-assed," said state Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Madison), a frequent critic of the project.

But Barb Hansen, director of the Statewide Voter Registration System, said the Elections Board is nearing a milestone because virtually all municipalities will use the database in the fall. There are now more than

300 municipal voter registration systems in the state, and about 1,550 municipalities have no registration system at all because state law did not require communities with fewer than 5,000 people to have them.

"For the first time ever, (the new system) will allow municipal clerks to identify data problems because we'll have one single list," Hansen said.

Even if computer technicians find a way to integrate the various lists into the voter database before this fall, election officials won't use the information. Doing so would likely overwhelm municipal clerks as they are being trained on the complex system in a tight time frame, Hansen said.

The state is spending \$27.5 million in mostly federal money to build a system to run elections and track voters. Software developer Accenture is getting about \$14.1 million for its work. Congress ordered the states to create voter registration systems after Florida's rash of election problems in 2000.

## Falling behind

All states were to have statewide voter registration systems by Jan. 1, but Wisconsin and at least nine other states have yet to complete their lists, according to *electionline.org*, which monitors voting reforms.

The state expects to use the registration system in virtually all municipalities in the Sept. 12 primary, though not all functions will be in use by then. The Elections Board plans to complete the project by the spring 2007 elections, but even then will still have to work through problems with the felons list.

Accenture has provided interfaces allowing the voter database to accept information from the other lists, but state computer workers have not yet been able to integrate the various systems, Richmond said.

Sen. Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) said the state has to get a handle on its computer contracts because so many have been delayed or gone over budget. A legislative audit of those contracts requested by Cowles is under way.

"It's particularly galling to pay someone for something and not get a service," he said.

Owen Davies, an Accenture executive director, said the company will not be paid fully until it finishes its work.

"We are delivering on the commitments we have," he said.

Cowles said the problems with the felons list could shake voters' faith in the system.

"We need to make this a priority to get this running at least by the spring so people have confidence that felons aren't voting," he said.

People convicted of a felony cannot vote in Wisconsin while they are on state supervision. The Department of Corrections list includes some felons whose voting rights have been restored, Hansen said.

When fully functional, the voter database will alert election clerks when names in the voter database match the names of felons or people who have died. Clerks can inactivate voters once they verify they

are not qualified to vote.

The records are expected to generate many potential matches. Clerks will need a lot of time to figure out which of those matches are valid - time they don't have before the fall elections, Hansen said.

"It is too risky for us to be adding a new thing," she said.

None of the three lists can be plugged into the voter system yet, but workers have encountered the most trouble with the felons list. When the state tried to translate the list of 63,000 felons into a format the voter database can use, only 7,000 names came through. In addition, the Department of Corrections does not track all the information needed for the voter list.

For instance, the department rarely collects Social Security numbers and does not collect driver's license numbers. The department has also warned the Elections Board that many birth dates might be wrong because people sometimes provide false information, according to the Elections Board. The department did not ask felons for their birthdays before 2004.

The list includes up to nine aliases for each felon, which greatly increases the chances of false matches, Hansen said.

A check of 7,000 entries on the felons list found about half of them did not include valid addresses.

John Dipko, a spokesman for the Department of Corrections, said the addresses in the system are helpful to probation agents but might not be what elections officials need.

The Elections Board has not contacted the department about the matter, he said.

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