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Democratic governor backs Ehrlich on balloting

By Jon Ward

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New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson visited Maryland yesterday to support Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley's bid for governor, but said he agrees with Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s views on paper balloting's superiority to electronic voting.

"I believe that the best way is paper ballots, with optical scanners," Mr. Richardson, a Democrat, said during an event in Silver Spring. "We did that in New Mexico, and it should become nationwide."

The event was sponsored by CASA of Maryland, an immigrant advocacy group, to encourage foreign-born voters to go to the polls in November.

Mr. Ehrlich, a Republican seeking re-election, has said he wants to replace electronic voter rolls with paper ballots, citing problems with the new devices in the Sept. 12 primary.

After his voter-registration speech to about 200 Hispanics, Mr. Richardson took a broad swipe at Diebold Inc., the manufacturer of Maryland's electronic voting machines.

"The American people don't believe in the Diebold system. It has too big of an error rate," said Mr. Richardson, the country's first Hispanic governor.

Mr. O'Malley, a Democrat in his second term as mayor, declined to comment about Diebold, saying he thinks "this will be a much smoother election than the last one was."

He blamed Mr. Ehrlich for the primary election problems, saying the governor messed up "the management of this election."

"The errors were primarily human. ... They were errors created by a board that Bob Ehrlich directly appointed and that he did not hold accountable," Mr. O'Malley said.

Ehrlich spokesman Henry Fawell yesterday said that although the governor appoints the members of local elections boards, state elections Administrator Linda H. Lamone is responsible by law for elections.

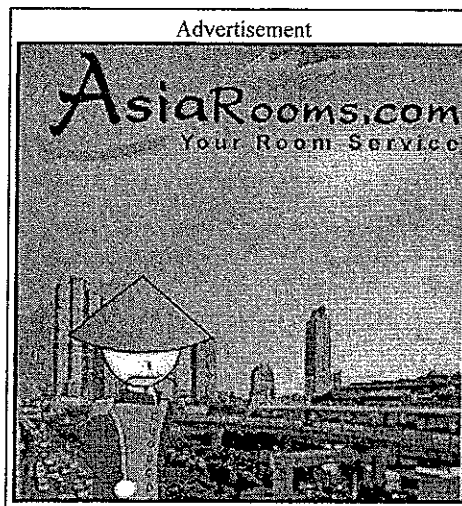
Mr. Ehrlich has threatened to call a special session of the General Assembly to discard the entire electronic voting system in favor of paper ballots.

Many of the primary election problems were caused by human error, but others were caused by electronic voter rolls freezing and rebooting.

Computer analysts also have said the voting machines are susceptible to tampering.

Mr. Fawell said the governor is still considering a special session, with less than six weeks until the Nov. 7 election, and that short of that, he is asking voters to consider voting by absentee ballot.

"There's clearly bipartisan agreement between Governor Ehrlich and Governor Richardson that voters deserve to have confidence that their vote will be counted. The best



way to do that is with paper ballots," Mr. Fawell said.

"The governor has fought for the better part of a year to replace the Diebold machines with paper ballots," he added.

Mr. Richardson is the second national Democrat to visit Maryland this week. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York came Monday.

Mrs. Clinton appeared at a fundraiser in Adelphi for Mr. O'Malley and for the Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin.

Mr. Cardin did not attend the event yesterday with Mr. Richardson.

Today, Sen. Barack Obama, Illinois Democrat, will headline an event on the University of Maryland College Park campus with Mr. Cardin.

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