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MARYLAND BRIEFING

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ELECTRONIC VOTING

Diebold Vows to Correct Flaws

Gilles W. Burger, chairman of the Maryland State Board of Elections, said yesterday that he was only "partially" satisfied with commitments from the maker of the state's electronic voting apparatus to correct flaws in a new voter check-in system. "I need to see final results," Burger said.

Diebold Election Systems executives, speaking at an elections board meeting in Annapolis, acknowledged that software and assembly defects led to many electronic poll books freezing and rebooting without warning during the Sept. 12 primary. Some units also failed to communicate properly with each other or failed to encode the electronic cards needed to operate Diebold's touch-screen machines.

The executives said Diebold would install modified software in the state's 5,500 poll books to correct some problems and said the units' outside manufacturer would insert plastic shims in each machine to ensure proper connections with the electronic voter access cards.

Burger also said he was disappointed with the level of support that Diebold had provided to local election officials during the primary, in part because he said some temporary Diebold staffers had not had adequate background checks.

Diebold's Maryland project manager, Tom Feehan, said the company would review its plans for providing support to polling stations Nov. 7.

-- Cameron W. Barr

ANNAPOLIS KILLING

Man Is 3rd Charged in Slaying

A 20-year-old man has been charged in an indictment unsealed in Annapolis yesterday in a February slaying in which his younger brother and mother have also been charged.

Christopher Haarhoff, 20, of Halethorpe and his brother Daniel, 18, are each charged with murder in the death of Anthony Fertitta, 50, of Baltimore County, their mother's boyfriend. The mother, Cynthia McKay, is charged as an accessory after the fact.

Authorities say Fertitta was shot and stabbed in McKay's home on Nathan Way in Millersville. Police found his burning body several blocks away about 3 a.m. Feb. 22.

-- Eric Rich

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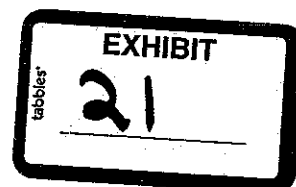
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PR. GEORGE'S CARJACKING

Woman Dies a Day After Attack

A woman who was shot Monday in an attempt to carjack the vehicle she was in died yesterday at a hospital, Prince George's County police said.

Barbara Mitchell, 45, of Mount Vernon Drive in Alexandria was shot about 2:45 a.m. when two men tried to take the vehicle she was in in the 1300 block of Southern Avenue, police said. Police said the assailants then took another car and fled in it.

-- Martin Weil

E. COLI ILLNESSES

Cases Confirmed in Harford, Cecil

A health official indicated yesterday that Maryland's three confirmed cases of spinach-linked E. coli illness were in Harford and Cecil counties. State officials continued to wait for test results in a fourth case, the Sept. 13 death of June Dunning, 86, of Hagerstown, who ate bagged spinach nearly a month ago. Harford health officer Andrew Bernstein said a county resident fell ill to the strain of E. coli that was linked to tainted spinach grown in California. The resident recovered, he said.

Bernstein said he had "heard indirectly" of other Cecil cases. Virginia Bailey, Cecil's health officer, said she could not confirm them, and cited state health department instructions on privacy.

The nationwide outbreak, which has infected 183 people in 26 states, has been traced to spinach from three counties in and around Salinas Valley in California, federal officials said yesterday.

-- Dan Morse

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