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HEADLINE: CAMPAIGN ROUNDUP

BODY:

Firm denies trashing Dems' voter cards

In several battleground states across the country, a consulting firm funded by the Republican National Committee has been accused of deceiving would-be voters and destroying Democratic voter registration cards.

Arizona-based Sproul & Associates is under investigation in Oregon and Nevada over claims that canvassers hired by the company were instructed to register only Republicans and to get rid of registration forms completed by Democrats.

"We treat these complaints very seriously," said Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury. The Democratic officeholder said three complaints were filed with election officials throughout the state.

Nathan Sproul, a former head of Arizona's Republican Party and the state's Christian Coalition branch, denies any wrongdoing and accuses Democrats of making things up. "This is all about making accusations," Sproul said. "They allege fraud where none exists and get the media to cover it."

It is illegal to tamper with voter registration cards, which are numbered and issued by local election officials. In some states, including Oregon, such acts are felonies.

European agency to monitor U.S. election

Europe's leading election monitoring agency, known for keeping tabs on voting in trouble spots such as Belarus and the Balkans, is gearing up for a super-size challenge: observing the U.S. presidential election.

The United States' reputation for smoothly run elections took a beating in 2000, and this is the first time the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is sending observers for a U.S. presidential vote.

About 100 observers will monitor the Nov. 2 election in up to 20 states, including Florida, where a recount of presidential ballots in 2000 exposed major problems in the voting system.

Although no one expects the U.S. vote to cause the same kind of headaches as the hotly contested Oct. 17 balloting in Belarus -- which the Organization for Security and Cooperation said fell "significantly short" of democratic norms -- there are fears problems may arise.

The Bush administration invited the monitoring agency to observe the vote.

Dem wants audit of Bush officials' travels

The chairwoman of the House Democrats' homeland security task force is asking Congress' independent auditors to examine travel by senior Bush administration officials in light of recent trips to hotly contested states in the 2004 presidential election.

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In a letter sent Friday to the General Accountability Office, Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., said she wants the GAO to look at the number and cost of trips taken by national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and Treasury Secretary John Snow.

Recent media reports indicated the three officials have spent increasing amounts of time in states key to the presidential election. Maloney wants to know if the trips were free of political considerations and if they were paid for by taxpayers or by the Bush-Cheney campaign.

Homeland Security spokesman Brian Roehrkasse has said political considerations don't determine travel plans for the secretary and other senior department officials.

The GAO said Maloney's request is under consideration.

REGISTRATION REMINDER

- Note: Deadline to register to vote or to change party registration has passed.
- Oct. 25: Deadline for new citizens to register to vote.
- Oct. 26: Deadline to apply for an absentee ballot.
- Nov. 2: Election day.

For more information, contact the California secretary of state's office at (800) 345-8683 or www.ss.ca.gov.

TODAY'S SCHEDULES

President Bush: Ft. Myers, Lakeland, Melbourne, Jacksonville, Fla.

Vice President Dick Cheney: Farmington, N.M., and Grand Junction, Colo.

Sen. John Kerry: Pueblo, Colo., and Las Cruces, N.M.; overnights in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Sen. John Edwards: Orlando and St. Petersburg, Fla.; overnights in Cincinnati.

COLORADO POLL

- Bush, 48%
- Kerry, 42%
- Unsure, 10%

Source: Pueblo Chieftain, Oct. 15-19

NEW JERSEY POLL

- Kerry, 49%
- Bush, 41%
- Nader, 1%
- Unsure, 9%

Source: Fairleigh Dickinson, Oct. 13-21

PENNSYLVANIA POLL

- Kerry, 51%

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-- Bush, 46%

-- Unsure, 4%

Source: Quinnipiac, Oct. 16-20

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