January 11, 2009

New Zealand Votes To Hold Future Elections On The Net

By Tom Brown

Voting by old-fashioned paper ballots and machines, New Zealanders became the first nation to authorize the use of The Internet to stage future elections.

"From now on, if you're not wired, you can't vote," said a member of Parliament, which certified the results of a national poll of all New Zealanders who endorsed the move by a vote of 2,013,997 - 977,355.

Although "no wire - no vote" is the spirit of the new law, it's really not as severe as it seems. Those New Zealanders who do not have their own home computer will be able to access the "Net Vote" website by visiting a public library.

"What this does," said James Rogers, who has spearheaded the drive for Net Vote, "is to actually enable more people to participate in future elections." Rogers pointed out that New Zealand — which is almost

9

104,000 square miles in size — is not only split into two major islands, its mountainous terrain does not make it easy to hold national elections.
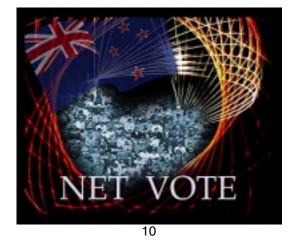
"And there's even more significance to this decision," Rogers said. "The more this country goes beyond using The Internet for simple communications, the more The Internet can become a tool for governance.

"There really is no reason why — just as I've said in my five-year campaign for Net Vote — election campaigns and post-election governance issues can't be intelligently discussed and tracked electronically."

New Zealand began, in 2005, a conscious effort to connect everyone in the country by computer. Current estimates show that New Zealand's 4.7-million population is 91% computerized via cable or modem.

During the campaign to establish Net Vote, opposition was fierce. Claims of potential voter fraud, e-manipulation, e-corruption, and techno-slavery were all, in the end, set aside in order to make Internet elections a reality.

"By 2015, New Zealand will have the most-wired, most-interconnected, most-democratic, most-electronic government on the planet," Rogers said.

digital art by dave pierson

NET VOTE

10