

**Opening Statement of
Representative Henry A. Waxman**

**Ranking Member
Committee on Government Reform**

April 5, 2001

Good morning. I would like to welcome everyone to this “Special Investigations Briefing.” This Special Investigations Briefing is a forum the minority has organized for members of the Government Reform Committee and other members of Congress to hear the results of important and timely investigations that may not receive a full hearing elsewhere. The title of today’s briefing is “Election Reform in Detroit: New Voting Technology and Increased Voter Education Significantly Reduced Uncounted Ballots.”

Every child learns in school that in America every vote is supposed to count. The principle of “one person, one vote” is one of the bedrock principles of our nation.

Unfortunately, we saw in the last election that every vote doesn’t always count. We learned that millions of Americans had their votes for president nullified.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine whether we can live up to the principle that every vote should count.

The recent commentary about the 2000 election has been confusing and often pessimistic. Experts have offered different explanations about what causes votes to go uncounted. These differing explanations have caused confusion about what should be done to fix the problem. Some have even suggested that nothing can be done.

Today, we have good news to present. I am releasing the first case study that examines the success of election reforms designed to reduce the undercount. The study looks at what happened in one major U.S. city that installed new voting machines and conducted extensive voter education.

The city is Detroit. And its results are stunning: by installing new machines and increasing voter education, Detroit reduced the percentage of uncounted votes by two-thirds. This reduction was across-the-board: every election district in the city reduced uncounted votes. Precincts where over 7% of ballots did not show a vote for president in 1996 reduced uncounted votes to less than 1% in 2000.

Detroit’s experience has nationwide significance. Detroit is the poorest major city in the United States, and it has one of the highest minority populations. If Detroit can reduce its undercount rate by two-thirds, other areas can too.

The study I am releasing today looks at only one aspect of election reform: what can be

done to reduce the undercount. There are other important components of comprehensive reform, such as improving voter registration and eliminating delays at polling places that turn voters away. The report does not examine Detroit's performance in these other areas.

What the report does show, however, is vitally important. Detroit has proven that it is possible to reduce significantly the number of uncounted ballots.

Today, we will hear presentations by three individuals who can tell us more about Detroit's experience and the importance of election reform. They are: Gloria Williams, Detroit's Director of Elections, Hilary Shelton, Director of the Washington Bureau of the N.A.A.C.P., and Charles Stewart, a professor at M.I.T. who has studied voting issues for a number of years.