

Opening Statement for Senator Saxby Chambliss

**COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES SENATE**

Hearing on
S. 1487, the Ballot Integrity Act of 2007

Wednesday, July 25, 2007, 10:00 a.m.
SR-301, Russell Senate Office Building

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and good morning. I'd also like to welcome our distinguished witnesses and extend my gratitude for your participation in today's hearing. I'm pleased to have the opportunity this morning to address this critical issue of the security and secrecy of our voting process; specifically, the ability of our state and local officials to ensure accurate votes are cast and counted. As I've said on many prior occasions, protecting the electoral process is a fundamental feature of our government and is worthy of our utmost scrutiny.

Since the 2000 elections, voter security and verification has gained momentum and exposure as a matter of public concern. In response, Congress has rightfully attempted to address the many facets of this complex task. However, as we yet again turn toward ensuring the accuracy of the voice of the electorate, we see once more a level of disregard for the input and concerns of our state and local officials; in whom the authority for carrying out these elections is placed.

In the last congress, and as recently as these past seven months, we've seen an evolution of the legislative attempts to solve some of these serious concerns with our voting processes. While no doubt part of this progress is a result of listening to the concerns of our state and local officials on the ground, the current form of the bill before us still falls short of the appropriate deference to the men and women who are most suited to execute the necessary steps to ensure the protection and precision of votes cast.

Provisions in S. 1487 set forth certain compliance requirements seen by State's Board of Elections as impractical and virtually impossible to meet. This bill essentially mandates the use of optical-scan voting for all federal elections; mandates no-excuse absentee balloting for federal elections; and prohibits states from restricting certain methods of acceptance or use of absentee ballots -- effectively restricting a state from even being able to compare the signatures on the absentee ballots with those on the voter registration cards.

Currently, in Georgia and several other states, the direct recording electronic voting machines (DREs) used for elections are not fitted for the type of paper verification records this legislation seeks to require be apart of all balloting machines. Accordingly, this mandates a significant cost to Georgia and those states in similar situations. A cost not explicitly funded in this legislation.

Moreover, in my meetings and conversations with Georgia state and local officials who oversee the execution and implementation of our election and voting standards and operations I have heard some very grave concerns regarding the timetables, implementation costs, and other federal mandates in this legislation. Ultimately, they have conveyed to me that it is in our best interest to fully analyze the impact requiring these types of DREs at a federal level will have on a state level; and also to examine other methods for creating a form of voter verification.

We must do all we can to guarantee that the votes we cast on election day are in fact the choices we have made while in the voting booth. However, this goal must be approached with the cooperation and coordination of those on the ground at our polling places and in the offices of our state and local governments.

Thank you again madam Chairwoman for holding this hearing and I look forward to the testimony of our distinguished panelists. Thank you.