

**Testimony of April Pye, Interim Director  
Fulton County Board of Registration and Elections  
State of Georgia**

**Before the Subcommittee on Elections  
Of the  
Committee on House Administration  
United States House of Representatives  
April, 9 2008**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee on House Administration, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the February 5, 2008 Presidential Preference Primary Election. I bring you greetings on behalf of the Fulton County Board of Registration and Elections and the Fulton County Board of Commissioners. My name is April Pye and I am currently the Interim Director of the Fulton County Department of Registration and Elections. I have been in this interim position since January of 2007. I have been in elections for six years, serving as the Administrative Chief with oversight of all administrative operations for the department, and in previous years served as a poll worker and assisted with election tabulation on election night.

The Mission of the Fulton County Board of Registration and Elections is to ensure that the registration and elections process is efficiently and effectively provided to eligible citizens of Fulton County according to applicable laws and rules. We seek to be a leader in best practices for achieving and increasing voter confidence, equality, voter education and voter turnout throughout Fulton County, Georgia.

**Fulton County Background**

Fulton County is the largest county in the state of Georgia with an estimated population of 960,009. The total number of active and inactive registered voters is currently 552,613. We have 342 precincts and operate a total of 266 poll locations on election day with a staff of 24 permanent employees and, during elections, approximately 80 temporary staff. During General Primary and General Elections in a Presidential election year we generally process from 100,000 to 200,000 new voter registrations. Following the 2008 Presidential Preference Primary, to date we have received 47,600 applications, which are twice as many applications as received this time last year.

In an attempt to meet the needs of a rapidly growing voter base of electors, Fulton County has sought to adhere to the rules and regulations set forth by HAVA and the State of Georgia. In addition, we seek to provide the electors of Fulton County with the best possible options that fall within those guidelines as it relates to the most efficient technology, an adequate number of voting units, a

sufficient number of poll locations, and quality voter education regarding the voter registration and elections process.

Currently, Fulton County, as well as all counties within the State of Georgia, uses the TS R-6 voting units (TS unit) for in-person absentee and at the polls on election day and the Express Poll 4000 Electronic Poll Book (Express Poll). The use of the TS R-6 was implemented after the 2000 General Election with the Georgia Secretary of State selecting a statewide voting system and allocating a proportioned number to each county. Fulton County was provided 1,976 state owned voting units and the county purchased an additional 1000 at a cost of approximately \$3,000,000.00 to maintain our current voter to booth ratio. The use of the Express Poll was instituted during the 2006 General Primary Election when the Secretary of State instituted statewide use of the electronic poll book, issuing a proportionate number to each county based on the number of active registered voters. At that time the county did not purchase additional Express Poll units.

### **Challenges for Fulton County and All Georgia Election Officials**

It is important to note that Elections in Georgia have been under a constant state of flux since the 2000 General Election, with election officials having to make quick adjustments based on changes in state law and the introduction of new technology. Along with the electronic overhaul of Elections came the increase in costs to conduct the election. The maintenance and preparation of technical equipment requires staff with specialized training and requisite pay, constant upgrades to software and electrical supplies, specialized storage and electrical upgrades to office and facilities. Obtaining the required funding has been an issue because most governing authorities do not see the immediate need and as a result the improvements in terms of purchasing additional equipment or hiring additional permanent staff has not kept pace with the growth in voter rolls and changes in the law.

Election officials in all Georgia counties are contending with very tight budget constraints and cut backs due to a very depressed economy during what will be the largest year in the history of elections. Fulton County faced major reductions to the General Fund budget due to the recent incorporation of four new cities, pulling revenue with them. The Registration and Elections Department's budget request was cut by \$852,769, reducing the 2008 elections budgets and eliminating all enhancement requests for new positions and election supplies. Although the county was experiencing reductions in personnel and capital, the voting population represented and served by the Fulton County Registration and Elections Department remained constant. In addition, Fulton County faced rapid succession of tenured employees with the retirement and resignation of personnel in key management positions during 2006 and 2007; Director, Elections Chief, Registration Chief, Systems Manager and Elections Administrative Coordinator.

However, election officials, though under tremendous pressure to conduct a near perfect election, do not in any way use these constraints as an excuse or a crutch. In fact, we embrace the challenges, making the most efficient use of the resources provided to us because our ultimate goal is to ensure that the voter has a pleasant voting experience and has a fair and equitable opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

### **Identifying and Executing the Many Facets of Elections**

In order to operate at the highest level of integrity and provide a transparent process to the voters a great deal of planning and preparation goes into executing the many components involved in conducting an election, from registering voters to conducting the election on Election Day. Election officials must successfully maneuver many aspects that are performed by separate departments in most businesses. They not only have oversight and administration of the voter registration and elections office, but they are human resource managers, recruiting and training poll workers and temporary workers on a regular basis within a short time span. They are computer and system management specialists being charged with the task of testing and maintaining electronic voting equipment. They are logistics experts, strategically planning and executing the delivery and pick-up of voting equipment to and from training sites, demonstration sites and poll locations. Election officials have become GIS mapping experts, creating maps, redrawing precinct lines and placing voters in the correct precincts. Clearly, we operate a very large data entry pool with the entry of voter registration applications and processing of absentee ballot application. Last, but not least, we are customer service organizations, responding to various citizen concerns and providing myriad services to enhance their elections experience.

Prior to each election, a thorough logic and accuracy assessment is conducted to ensure that all of the equipment has been properly serviced, updated and prepared for the coming election. After each election, a quality standards assessment and survey is conducted to gauge the voting experience and the accuracy of the election. In addition, all voter registration applications received prior to the deadline are entered, polling place and boundary line changes are updated, precinct cards are mailed to the voters, absentee ballot applications received are processed and ballots mailed to qualified voters, voter identification is issued to voters, poll workers are recruited and trained, and voter education sessions are conducted throughout Fulton County.

### **The February 5, 2008 Presidential Preference Primary Election**

In preparing for the February 5, 2008 Presidential Preference Primary (PPP), which was moved forward a month by a change in the 2007 legislature, our projections for allocation of supplies and equipment were based on the current

number of active voters and the history of turnout for previous similar elections. The total number of votes cast during the PPP Election was 213,527 of which 14,986 were cast during the absentee voting period.

Were we totally prepared? Based on past historical data and turnout statistics; yes we were. Was there a larger turnout than expected? Yes, we were pleasantly surprised. The February 5, 2008 Presidential Preference Primary was a very good indicator and our first real test of what Fulton County election officials can anticipate based on high precinct turnout for the coming November Presidential Election. In previous elections since instituting the use of electronic voting equipment, turnout during the PPP in Fulton County has been less than 30% of registered voters at the polls on Election Day. On February 5, 2008, 47% of registered voters turned out.

Currently, we have a total of 2976 TS voting units, which average out to a ratio of 1 voting machine per 186 voters. In addition, we have 640 Express Poll units, which is an average ratio of 1 unit per 864 voters. This is an adequate ratio of voter to machine. However, our office received numerous calls and emails on election day and afterwards regarding the long lines and wait times at several of our larger precincts and those of other counties. Callers contributed the problem to the lack of a sufficient number of electronic poll books at the polls or inexperienced poll workers operating the machines.

After a service quality assessment of what took place at the polls on Election Day, election officials have determined that over 90% of the challenges that occurred in relation to the Express Poll unit on Election Day were user error and not equipment malfunctions. In addition, due to the fact that the ballot on February 5<sup>th</sup> was extremely short in comparison to the preparation of voter access cards with the Express Poll units, which took on average about 40 seconds to one minute and voting time taking between 15 and 30 seconds, caused the express poll lines to bottle neck. Therefore, it created the perception to voters that in precincts where there may have been between 10 and 15 TS voting units, by the time they proceeded to the front of the line, it appeared that all the TS voting units were not being used.

### **Measures Established to Address Identified Issues**

We have taken into account each and every expressed concern and have put measures in place to address each of them. One thing that will help to decrease the wait time at the polls is early voting. The Georgia Legislature passed into law during the 2008 session "no excuse" absentee voting, which essentially allows for early voting throughout the 45 day absentee voting period. To increase participation during the early or advance voting period the week prior to the election, we have requested funding through the Fulton County Board of Commissioners for three additional early voting sites, for a total of six, and are extending the hours for voting to 7:00 pm.

In addition, we have concluded that more Express Polls will be needed at Fulton County poll locations with larger registered voter populations. Ideally, one Express Poll per 350 voters will cause the process to move quicker and more efficiently. However, budget constraints will not allow the purchase of the required number of electronic poll books to achieve that ratio. We have requested funding to purchase additional electronic poll books for precincts with larger numbers of registered voters. Also, during the approaching November election, the ballot will be much longer causing voters to spend more time at the TS units which will cause the flow of voters to move throughout the process more evenly. Adjusting our training program to include a more specific comprehensive training with extensive post testing will be implemented for all poll workers.

Through our voter education efforts, media outlets and the county website, we are encouraging as many voters as possible to take advantage of absentee voting by mail or in person, if eligible. In November, we are anticipating a very high turnout that could potentially cause long waits at some polling precincts. If voters, for whatever reason, are unable to wait in long lines, we are strongly encouraging them to take advantage of one of these two options.

Based on the recommendation of the Board of Commissioners, a Task Force of Registration and Elections, and County Manager management staff and IT Specialist have been created and are currently meeting to bring resolution to the previously mentioned challenges with the hopes of creating a better voting experience for the Fulton County Electors.

### **Dispelling Perception as Fact**

Broadcast Media and its many advantages is a much needed and vital resource. Radio and television personalities provide an extremely important service and an outlet to the listening audience, elected officials, boards and committees as well as election officials around the Country. It is due to the all pervasive nature of broadcast Media that we must all work together through media outlets to dispel perception as fact and insist that the election officials be allowed to provide an accurate and comprehensive description of the elections process, procedures and its challenges.

Often, the voting public, who is not familiar with the laws governing voter registration and elections, will receive information from avid community advocates and media personalities which is in conflict with the law. This is quite often the case with syndicated radio stations that reach a broader audience and provide more general information; their listeners are not aware that Georgia laws governing elections may be different than in other states. When they arrive at the polls and encounter a problem due to this conflict, they immediately take issue with the poll worker or election official who is delivering the message. We see this quite often in the areas of Provisional Voting and Absentee Voting. It is

not always understood that election officials do not make the laws but we are required to adhere to them.

In Fulton County, we believe that education is key and through coordination and cooperation with broadcast and print media and community advocates we will be able to provide our citizens with accurate information about the voter registration and elections process. Our goal is to ensure that the Fulton County electorate are informed about the laws governing voter registration and elections and know their rights within the law so that they will have every opportunity to cast a vote for the candidate of their choice and ensure their vote counts.