



Congressman José E. Serrano

Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government

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Opening Statement of Chairman José E. Serrano Hearing on Election Administration February 27, 2008

Today's hearing is on election administration and will focus on the work we need to do to ensure that elections are secure, reliable, and accessible to all voters.

This hearing is particularly timely since we are well into the 2008 primary season and a little more than eight months away from the November general election. We are anxious to hear what our witnesses will say about how the primary elections have proceeded and what issues or concerns have arisen. Will these primary elections be indicators of election administration successes or failures in the general election? What are the potential problems that we may face in the general election?

We also want to use this hearing to learn more about the issues facing the Election Assistance Commission, including the funding requirements that will help the EAC meet its mission. This is a small agency with a very big responsibility. The EAC has an important role in giving guidance and information, providing regulatory authority over the National Voter Registration Act, and directing Federal resources to support the conduct of elections at the state and local levels.

More than \$3 billion has been appropriated over the past six years to improve election administration and voting systems. Even with this commitment of Federal resources, States continue to have critical, unmet needs relating to ensuring that their elections run smoothly. The need is not more apparent than in the case of providing states with secure, reliable, and accessible voting systems.

Touch-screen, direct recording electronic voting machines were purchased by many states using money they received through Help America Vote Act programs. These machines were touted as the answer to election officials' prayers. Indeed, they offer the important benefits of accessibility and ease of use. But, unfortunately, concerns have been raised about the reliability and security of these machines. Many states and their voters have lost confidence in them. Some states are reviewing their voting system requirements and are scrambling to modify or replace their systems to increase public confidence. It may be fair to say that no voting system is going to be 100 percent

perfect, especially considering human factors that go into operating our polling places. However, we should continue to strive for an election process that has a minimum of confusion and error and a maximum of accurate results.

Finally, I strongly believe that the often intense debate over election issues is due to the passion we share when it comes to protecting our democratic process and guaranteeing the right of every individual to cast a ballot in a fair, open, and honest election. Our goal should be to ensure that we count every vote and make every vote count. I hope this hearing will help us to understand better how we can be more helpful to election officials in meeting that goal.

Today we welcome several witnesses who come before us to share their knowledge on election matters. On our first panel, we have from the Election Assistance Commission: Rosemary Rodriguez, the Chair of the Commission, as well as commissioners, Caroline Hunter, Gracia Hillman, and Donetta Davidson. On our second panel we will have Wendy Weiser of the Democracy Program at the NYU School of Law's Brennan Center for Justice, Susan K. Urahn, Managing Director for State Policy Initiatives at the Pew Charitable Trusts, Arturo Vargas, Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, and Jeff Matthews, Director of the Stark County, Ohio, Elections Board. We welcome you all.

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Congressman José E. Serrano has represented the Bronx in Congress since 1990. He is the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, which oversees the budget of the EAC, among other agencies.