



U.S. Election Assistance Commission

Thursday, September 18, 2008

3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Testimony of Secretary Pedro A. Cortés

Pennsylvania Department of State

President, National Association of Secretaries of State

Preparing for Election Day 2008: Empowering Voters

Good afternoon and thank you. Thank you, Chair Rodríguez, for the invitation to participate in today's meeting. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the states' efforts to empower voters as we prepare for Election Day on Tuesday, November 4th.

This year, I wear two hats: one as Pennsylvania Secretary of State; the other as President of the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS). My colleagues and I at NASS believe that a well-informed voter is an empowered voter.

States have been increasing their efforts to better educate the public on the rules of elections and the tools we have been developing at the state and local level to assist them. Our belief at NASS is that taking the time and resources to ensure that voters know the “tools and the rules” in advance of Election Day will serve to reduce voter confusion and frustration on Election Day, and reduce the administrative burden on local election officials and poll workers.

From a national standpoint there are a few efforts I would like to point out:

In July of this year, the members of NASS voted unanimously to declare September 2008 as “National Voter Registration Month.” During this month, our members across the country are working to inform and encourage eligible voters on how to register in time for the November 2008 General Election.

We are working as well to promote state and local resources to help make the process faster and more manageable. Individual states are launching individual initiatives to promote National Voter Registration Month. You can go to the NASS Web site at nass.org to see some examples of those efforts. One key component for this year’s election is to emphasize the 29 states that have voter registration lookups and the 40 states that offer polling place locators. This is largely thanks to the technology provided by statewide voter registration databases under the Help America Vote Act.

The states have also taken steps to inform voters about the importance of making sure their voter registration records are up-to-date in advance of Election Day. Accurate voter registration records are essential to the effective administration of elections, which in turn, promote a positive voting experience for electors. I thank you, Chair Rodríguez and members of the EAC, for your efforts to share the same message with voters throughout the country. New for September 2008, NASS has updated and redesigned our “Can I Vote” voter outreach Web site, which you can find at CanIVote.org. NASS launched this site, which is essentially a Web portal for state and local election offices, in the fall of 2006 to help answer the two major questions which emerged from national voter hotline calls in 2004 and 2006:

(1) “Am I registered to vote?” and

(2) “Where is my polling place?”

In short, Can I Vote links to all of the voter registration lookups in the states and if your state does not have a voter registration lookup yet, then we provide contact information for all the local election officials in that state. If you are not registered to vote, the site also provides a link to the federal form.

This site also provides the voter identification requirements for each state by linking to the specific location on the state Web site with that information, and for voters who want more information about candidates, we provide a link to *Project Vote Smart's* Web site.

Finally, but importantly, we provide links to state and local information and applications to become a poll worker. We also list the state voter registration deadlines and the state polling place hours for November 2008. We are very proud of our Can I Vote Web site and the number of people it assists on a regular basis, particularly new and first-time voters. As expected, traffic clearly increases during an election year. In the past twelve months, we have had more than 800,000 visitors to CanIVote.org. We average approximately 30,000 visitors per month – but during the Presidential Primary season (February/March/April) we averaged more than 150,000 visitors per month.

I am also proud to announce that in the upcoming weeks, NASS will release a new report titled, “Engaging the Energized Electorate: State Preparations for the 2008 Presidential Election.” NASS surveyed the states this summer to learn what programs and initiatives they were implementing to prepare for this historic election. Since the implementation of the Help America Vote Act, which states were required to complete in 2006, many states have now focused their efforts on refining and fine-tuning those changes required by federal law.

For example, while statewide databases have enabled the majority of states to provide online voter registration lookups and polling place locaters, some states are now using this technology to offer Election Day registration like Iowa or online voter registration like Washington. Federal resources also provided many states with the opportunity to increase, expand or enhance poll worker recruitment efforts and training. Our report focuses on three general areas:

- (1) State outreach for voter education and registration;
- (2) Polling place operations; and
- (3) Election results.

In Pennsylvania our efforts have been similarly robust as we reach out to inform and empower voters. We have launched our Ready.Set.Vote campaign – the Pennsylvania Department of State’s interactive voter education campaign. It is designed to help Pennsylvania voters become familiar with voting processes, rights and technology. At the heart of the campaign is our all-new, voter-friendly Web site VotesPA.com, where you can find everything you need to know about voting in Pennsylvania. Information is available there to give you an understanding of what to expect on Election Day. If you are a first-time voter, you can learn what identification to take when heading to the polling place.

At VotesPA.com, voters can view an online demonstration of the particular voting system used in their county. There is also information about absentee and provisional ballots, and other voting-related topics. You can even sign up to have text messages sent directly to your cell phone reminding you of key dates regarding the election. All of this has been designed with Pennsylvania voters in mind. Pennsylvania is as large as it is diverse, but there is something for everyone on VotesPA.com – from college students and members of the military to citizens with disabilities and older Pennsylvanians.

If you cannot find answers to your questions on the Web site, you can call using the toll-free voter hotline, 1-877-VOTES-PA (1-877-868-3772). You can also call your county board of elections. County contact information is also available through VotesPA.com.

It is my hope this report will help to provide a good snapshot of what is happening around the country and provides assurances that states are prepared and excited to handle the high levels of voter registration and turnout predicted for the 2008 presidential election cycle. Furthermore, we are confident in our ability to deliver a fair, accurate, accessible and secure election with reliable results.

Thank you again for your invitation today. I welcome your questions at this time.

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