

**Statement by Vermont Secretary of State Deborah Markowitz, President of the
National Association of Secretaries of State**

As Delivered to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission December 7, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, thank you for the invitation to speak here today on behalf of the Secretaries of State. As the president of the National Association of Secretaries of State, I am honored to represent my fellow chief state election officials.

I am happy to report that this year's midterm elections went well overall for many of my colleagues nationwide. Legal challenges haven't been filed in large numbers as predicted. Election officials have been working over the last few weeks to verify vote totals in close races and determine the outcomes in a fair and impartial manner.

Unfortunately, not every jurisdiction enjoyed the same levels of success:

- Votes were lost in some jurisdictions;
- Some of the new electronic voting equipment malfunctioned;
- Not every statewide voter registration database worked as expected; and
- A handful of voting equipment vendors failed to provide the support they promised.

Where problems did occur, state election officials moved quickly to resolve them as best they could, and their focus now is on preventing them in the future. It's important to recognize though that, in general, predictions of Election Day chaos were overblown.

INACCURATE PREDICTIONS

Before Election Day, many academics, pundits and election specialists predicted widespread voting problems that did not materialize. There were only sporadic voting equipment malfunctions. The majority of voters did not have trouble understanding new identification requirements, using new voting equipment or finding new polling places. Poll workers, for the most part, managed their polling places well on Election Day.

There were fewer calls than expected to special interest groups' voter "trouble" hotlines – tollfree numbers intended to be used by voters to ask questions or report problems. Twice as many people visited the NASS voter education website, www.canivote.org, on Election Day as called all of the voter hotlines combined.

In fact, most of the voter confusion predicted was avoided thanks to proactive voter education efforts conducted by the states and the National Association of Secretaries of State. The NASS voter education website helped prepare voters to cast their ballots on Election Day by answering their questions about voter ID and helping them to locate their polling places and to find out whether or not they were registered to vote.

TURNOUT and VOTER CONFIDENCE

Voters nationwide demonstrated their confidence in the system by turning out in larger numbers than during 2002: more than 40 percent according to the Center for the Study of the American Electorate. And according to the nonpartisan group Young Voter Strategies, turnout among 18 to 29-year-olds increased by 25 percent.

After casting their ballots, voters expressed a high level of confidence in the way the election was being administered. According to a CNN exit poll, 87 percent of voters reported that they were confident that their votes would be counted accurately.

PROBLEMS and SOLUTIONS

For the most part, jurisdictions that encountered setbacks dealt with them quickly and effectively. Local election officials in Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania and South Carolina kept polling places open late to compensate for minor delays caused by new voting equipment. In Denver, Colorado, voters encountered long lines after power outages and equipment malfunctions, but everyone who was in line to vote before polling places closed had the opportunity to cast a ballot.

In Washington, a state that experienced a lengthy recount after its 2004 gubernatorial election, elections were virtually problem-free despite the fact that state and local election workers were responsible for implementing 351 election-related rule changes.

Many of the voting equipment glitches we saw this year were the result of election workers' inexperience with brand new, high-tech equipment. The technology and training must be fine-tuned, with help from the vendors, in order to avoid problems in future elections. Each state will work with their vendors to determine the best way to improve the machines and processes, and the NASS Elections Committee will also address these issues at future NASS conferences.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

An overwhelming majority of the states fulfilled the Help America Vote Act's mandates before this year's midterm elections, despite the fact that Congress has still not appropriated \$800 million of the money promised to the states to pay for the election reforms. But the outstanding \$800 million will have an impact. If HAVA is not fully funded, soft expenditures like voter education initiatives and poll worker training programs will likely be the areas that suffer most. The states may be forced to rely on outside groups like NASS and other nonprofit, nonpartisan organizations to continue these efforts. In the absence of federal funds, financing for the work will have to come from philanthropic groups and other appropriate grant programs.

CONCLUSION

Back in February of 2006, the Secretaries of State reaffirmed our determination and commitment to ensuring that all eligible voters can register and vote, and that all votes are counted accurately and fairly in each and every election. Reports of this year's election administration successes confirm overall that we have fulfilled our promise to administer free and fair elections – although there is still more work to be done.

In the coming weeks and months, we will continue to direct election administration and reform in our states in the manner in which we resolved to do. Practices will be examined at the state level and the states, not the federal government, will determine what solutions are best for their elections. The states will decide how to balance security and transparency requirements with their ability to conduct recounts.

Elections were arguably run more effectively this year than they have been in some time, but better elections aren't good enough. The Secretaries of State will continue to improve elections to make the system the best it can be. We look forward to working with our staff members, local election officials and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission to continue to improve elections administration across the country.

Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to represent NASS here today and thank you for your work to help us continue to improve elections.

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