

TESTIMONY



Statement
Senator Christopher "Kit" Bond
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Senate Committee on Government Affairs

Safeguarding the Vote -- Reforms are needed

Mr. Chairman. Ranking member Senator Lieberman. My colleague from Missouri, as well as my other colleagues let me begin by thanking you for allowing me to testify today.

No one wants their state to become the poster child for a problem. No one wants their home town to become a laughstock. So it is with much dismay that I come before you today, to describe what has gone on in St. Louis, what is going on, and what reforms I believe are vital.

Over the past months many Americans saw for the first time how actual vote counting is done -- or not done. We have been given a real-life civics lesson that was as unexpected

as it was frustrating. And now those of us in positions of responsibility need to fix what needs fixing, reform what needs reforming, and prosecute where actual wrong-doing has occurred.

Voting is the most important duty and responsibility of a citizen of our republic. It should not be diluted by fraud, false filings in lawsuits, judges who don't follow the law, and politicians who try to profit from the confusion.

At the same time, voters should not be unduly confused by complicated ballots and voter rosters, or confounded by inadequate phone lines or voting booths.

Mr. Chairman, I want to make one simple point as I begin. Vote fraud is not about partisanship. It is not about democrats vs. republicans. It is not about the North Side of St. Louis vs. The South Side.

It is about justice. For vote fraud is a criminal, not political act. Illegal votes dilute the value of votes cast legally. When people try and stuff the ballot

box, what they are really doing is trying to steal political power from those who follow election laws. There can be no graver example of disenfranchisement.

As the Missouri Court of Appeals recently wrote:

"(E)qual vigilance is required to ensure that only those entitled to vote are allowed to cast a ballot. Otherwise, the rights of those lawfully entitled to vote are inevitably diluted."

And listen to what St. Louis democrats had to say these past few months:

State Rep Quincy Troupe: "There is no doubt in any black elected official's mind that the whole process has discouraged honest elections in the city of St. Louis for some time. We know that we have people who cheat in every election. The only way you can win a close election in this town,

you have to beat the cheat."

St. Louis's outgoing Mayor Clarence Harmon: " I think there is ample, longstanding evidence of voter fraud in our community."

11th Ward Alderman Matt Villa: " Who knows who did it. But it is apparent they are trying to cheat and steal this election."

What we have been seeing in St. Louis these past months has been nothing short of astonishing -- to the degree that we have become a national laughing-stock.

Dead people and dogs registered by mail. Fake people registering. Addresses which are vacant lots. Voter rolls with more names than there are people of voting age.

A City Judge violated state law by providing extended voter hours for only selected polling places, and individuals voting with absolutely no record of any registration.

But we have also discovered in our

ongoing review another major problem in St. Louis --- the voter rolls are so clogged up with incorrect or fraudulent data that legal voters are shortchanged.

St. Louis City *actually has more voters listed on its voter rolls than the voting age population of the city*. This means an over than 100% registration rate ... which is amazing, but not surprising if the dead are reregistering.

Equally amazing, we also discovered that in the City of St. Louis one out of every 10 registered voters is also registered somewhere else in the state!

In fact, over 24,000 people are dual registered in St. Louis City as well as somewhere else in Missouri. Now I don't know how many voted more than once -- but the voter rolls would have allowed them to do so.

To date my staff has reveiwed 11,826 of these multiple registered names

- Found 8789 voters who were still registered in the City, even after

moving out and registering at their new address.

- Found 335 voters who were actually ***registered twice in the City*** itself.
- Found 198 voters who were ***registered three different places*** in the state. And two of these 198 voters were actually ***registered three times in St. Louis City***.
- And then found 3 voters who were ***registered at four different places*** in the state.

Thus it is painfully clear that our voter registration system is broken. And desperately needs repairing.

But as I have said before Mr. Chairman, voter rolls are a symptom of a larger problem. We have also seen just about every illegal registration scheme imaginable:

- Fake addressses
- Dead people registering
- People registering from vacant lots

- Fraudulent dual registrations
- Dogs registering

That's right -- even dogs are able to register in St. Louis. A City Grand Jury is now investigating 3800 voter registration cards dumped on the election Board on the last day to register before the March 6th primary: press reports note that at least 1000 were bogus registrations for people already registered, and of course we have all heard about the cases of dead public officials being reregistered.

And now a Federal Grand Jury investigation is underway as the FBI recently issued a subpoena to the St. Louis City Election Board for all records pertaining to any person who registered to vote between October 1, 2000 and March 6, 2001. It also requested all records of anyone who cast absentee ballots or regular ballots during that period, as well as anyone who was turned away from the polls and barred from voting.

Mr. Chairman, it is obvious that there

has been brazen fraud with these bogus voter registrations. With dead people reregistering, fake names, and phony addresses, it is clear the system is being abused.

And because nearly all of these fraudulent registrations were the mail-in forms, I would urge the Committee to look at making real reforms in this area. At a minimum state's need to be given the authority to require on the mail registration form a place for notarization or other form of authentication. Under current federal law states are actually *prohibited* from including this safeguard. This is one obvious place where the federal law is a clear impediment to anti-fraud efforts.

In addition, election boards need time to review these cards -- as they are the most likely to be brought in on the last days of registration. Given what we have just seen the past months, a same day registration scheme would be an absolute invitation to fraud.

As the Missouri Court of Appeals

wrote when they shut down the improper efforts to keep only certain polling places open:

"...(C)ommendable zeal to protect voting rights must be tempered by the corresponding duty to protect the integrity of the voting process.... (E)qual vigilance is required to ensure that only those entitled to vote are allowed to cast a ballot. Otherwise, the rights of those lawfully entitled to vote are inevitably diluted."

As I noted earlier, I believe it is our duty to fix what needs to be fixed, reform what needs to be reformed, and prosecute where there has been wrong-doing. Criminal investigations are ongoing, I hope that anyone responsible for cheating will be caught and punished.

But we must get a handle on the voter rolls. People who register and follow

the rules shouldn't be frustrated by inadequate polling places and phone lines or confused by out-of-date lists. At the same time, we must require voter lists to be scrubbed and reviewed in a much more timely manner -- so the cheaters cannot use confusion as their friend.

I certainly don't want St. Louis to have the lasting reputation described by my old friend Quincy Troupe:

"The only way you can win a close election in this town, you have to beat the cheat."

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