

TESTIMONY



Testimony
Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs
Hearing on Election Practices and Procedures
May 9, 2001

Testimony by Sharon Priest, President, National Association
of Secretaries of State and Arkansas Secretary of State

Fundamental faith in American democracy depends on well-run elections. Well-run elections require that all eligible voters have access to vote and know that their vote will be counted. The National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) adopted a resolution making this requirement a priority. It is never acceptable to deny a voter his/her right to vote. This testimony focuses on the civil rights portion of the Secretaries resolution.

In most cases, states have good election laws and simply carrying out existing law would avoid violations based on race, language or physical disability. Unfortunately, many people are finding themselves denied their right to cast a ballot that they can understand. I believe this happens for several reasons. First, election equipment was designed not to be voter friendly, but to give almost instantaneous results. Punch cards were the demon in Florida, but I suggest further study shows that the optical scan method produces as many errors, and in some cases, more errors than the punch card. The State of Georgia recently conducted a study that showed that twenty-one optical scan counties had undervote rates of 5% or higher and one county had an undervote of rate 15%. Georgia found that undervotes are higher in predominantly black precincts than white precincts using the same equipment. They further found that counties that used the opti-scan had a higher rate of undervote than punch card counties.¹ I recite this only to point out that there is still much work to be done regarding the technology of voting.

our poll workers are “held prisoner” for up to fifteen hours on election day because of a shortage of workers. Our poll worker work force is aging. In order to have qualified poll workers, aggressive recruiting methods must be employed. In North Dakota, California and Colorado, persons under eighteen can work the polls. In Sacramento

County, California, the elections board contracts with groups such as the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and makes a contribution to the PTA in exchange for poll workers. In Arkansas, I intend to recruit from two and four-year colleges as well as the private and public sectors. Recruitment will not help if our poll workers are not trained. Mandatory training of poll workers will help voters on election day. Poll workers need training in the law, the process and need to know that civil rights violations come with personal liabilities that give no cover from state or local governments. Arkansas passed a mandatory poll worker training bill which is now Act 1820 of 2001. (Attached).

Voter education is critical to insuring that voters leave their voting precinct feeling informed, confident and satisfied with their experience. Voter education is more than knowledge of the candidates and issues, it is knowledge of their rights as voters, where to register to vote, as well as the mechanics of voting.

In trying to solve the nation's election woes and with the understanding that all elections are local, the best recommendation is flexibility in how funds are delivered to the states and flexibility in spending guidelines.

The nation's secretaries of state embrace the new interest in the elections process and are committed to having informed, confident and satisfied voters. We see this as an opportunity not to shift the funding burden to the federal government, but an opportunity to *partner*. Our democracy depends on our abilities to work together, without partisan battles, for the best interest of our beloved country.

¹Testimony of Secretary of State Cathy Cox of Georgia before the National Commission on Election Reform

March 26, 2000

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