



**UNITED STATES ELECTION  
ASSISTANCE COMMISSION**

**TESTIMONY**  
**OF**  
**GINEEN BRESSO, COMMISSIONER**  
**U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION,**  
Subcommittee on Elections

**THURSDAY, MARCH 17, 2011**



**U.S. Election Assistance Commission**  
**Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Administration**  
**Subcommittee on Elections**  
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Good morning Chairman Harper, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to be here on behalf of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to discuss the Commission's operations and my observations as a Commissioner.

There have been changes in the way elections are administered since the implementation of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). Some of these changes include states purchasing voting equipment to meet the new standards, deploying a computerized statewide voter registration database, and implementing procedures for provisional voting.

During my tenure at EAC, I have witnessed many innovative and creative approaches in election administration. Some of the innovations I have seen at the state and local levels include the integration of technology into the administration of elections. For example, several states are using electronic poll books to check-in voters during an election which allows for this information to be updated instantly. Other states offer all voters, in addition to military and overseas voters, the ability to track the status of their absentee ballot electronically. Through a barcode on the ballot envelope, the ballot is scanned before it enters the mail system and after it is returned to the elections office. Election offices are also using technology to provide greater access to election-night operations such as, using the internet to provide a live video stream of vote tabulations and updates of election results on regular intervals.

Many election officials have also embraced social media to communicate with voters and the news media about polling place hours, wait times and closures. Douglas County, Kansas, used Twitter during a local election in 2009 to inform voters of a polling place closure due to a fire. News outlets saw the feed and broadcast the news within minutes. Broward County, Florida and Forsyth County, Georgia posted early voting wait times on their website so voters could avoid lines. Some jurisdictions have also used mobile phone text messaging to coordinate Election Day activities with poll workers.

As a Commissioner, one of my responsibilities is collecting these innovations and solutions from local and state jurisdictions and making them available to election officials throughout the nation in EAC's clearinghouse. Election officials work diligently year-round and strive to provide excellent customer service to voters, despite shrinking budgets and fewer resources. EAC will continue to collect those solutions and share them, and lead national discussions on cost saving initiatives, shared resources and other issues that may affect their ability to conduct accurate and secure elections.



## **COLLECTING AND SHARING SOLUTIONS**

HAVA instructs the Commission to establish a “*national Clearinghouse and resource for the compilation of information and review of procedures with respect to the administration of Federal elections.*”

*“...including the maintenance of a Clearinghouse of information on the experiences of State and local governments in implementing the guidelines and in operating voting systems in general; carrying out the duties described in subtitle B (relating to the testing certification, decertification, and recertification of voting system software and hardware; carrying out the duties in subtitle C (relating to conducting studies and carrying out other activities to promote the effective administration of Federal elections; carrying out the duties described in subtitle D (relating to election assistance), and providing information and training on the management of the payments and grants provided under such subtitle; carrying out the duties described in subtitle B of title III (relating to the adoption of voluntary guidelines); and developing and carrying out the Help America Vote College Program under title V.”*

### **National Clearinghouse for Elections Categories**

Clearinghouse Materials Defined by Section 202 of HAVA:

- I. Documented experiences of State and local governments implementing the voluntary voting system guidelines and general information about the operation of voting systems.
- II. Information generated by the EAC’s Voting System Testing and Certification Program.
- III. Best practices, guidance, election management materials and research findings
- IV. Advisory opinions, training materials, audits, updates on the use of HAVA funds and HAVA reporting documents and reports.
- V. The Voluntary Voting System Guidelines (VVSG)
- VI. Application information, training materials, best practices and information about recipients of the Help America Vote College Program.

As tasked by HAVA to be the national clearinghouse of elections, EAC has taken the lead in collecting these innovative and modern solutions in elections, and providing this information to election officials and the general public in a central location at [www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov).

Information for the clearinghouse does not have to be generated only through research by the EAC. As the designated federal officer for the EAC Standards Board, I have a built-in group of election officials willing to share their insight and ideas. The most recent Standards Board meeting in Oklahoma City featured panels on cost savings initiatives,



commercial-off-the-shelf hardware challenges, implementing the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act and how local media and election officials can work together to communicate with voters. Panelists were selected directly from the Standards Board membership whenever possible, and represented election officials from the state and local levels. Their ideas fostered discussions with the audience, also election officials, on approaches that may be applicable to other jurisdictions.

In addition, during my tenure as chair, I observed that many local government entities were preparing for the flu season, particularly the threat of H1N1. Realizing that flu season could present challenges in staffing and preparing for an election, I asked election officials that had flu season contingency plans to submit them to EAC to be shared with their peers. EAC received preventative plans and approaches, which included common sense ideas like placing hand sanitizers in polling places, backup staffing strategies and coordination with local health departments. These contingency plans and others are posted on EAC.gov.

During this past Federal election cycle, I furthered my commitment to supplement EAC's clearinghouse, by taking the best ideas from the field and highlighting them after observing the primaries in Maryland and the District of Columbia and early voting in Georgia and Florida.

### **Maryland and District of Columbia 2010 Primary Elections**

While in Maryland, I had the opportunity to learn more about Maryland's electronic poll book system. Election judges demonstrated how the poll books were synchronized to reflect real time information (Maryland refers to poll workers as election judges) and how the election judge could direct a voter appearing at the wrong precinct to the correct one. Many commented that with each election, the familiarity of the electronic poll books make them easier for the election judges to use. Another election judge showed an evaluation form provided by the Maryland Board of Elections to facilitate feedback and suggestions for future polling place improvements, including layout and training. This was the first time I had observed the use of such a form, but recognized it as a simple, but effective, idea.

During my visit to the Maryland State Board of Elections, staff and volunteers were conducting parallel testing, a process that duplicates a portion of the election under similar time and conditions as in the polling place. One person was casting ballots into the voting machine and two others were comparing those selections by hand counting the ballots. This process, which occurs on Election Day, informs election officials as to whether the voting system is operating the way it should in the field, as well as provides a method to determine whether malicious code may have been introduced into the voting system software. EAC is in the final stages of producing an online video designed to educate voters about parallel testing and how it contributes to making sure voting



equipment works accurately. This is an example of a step that some election officials can take to bolster voter confidence by evaluating the operation of the voting system.

In the District of Columbia, I stopped throughout the afternoon at polling places in different parts of the city not only to observe the voting process, and also to talk to poll workers about their role within the process. One poll worker explained the thought process that had gone into the arrangement of the polling place, to ease the traffic flow and ensure maximum privacy for the voters. At another polling location, the poll workers realized that the curbside voting bell was not easily heard and set up a relay system of workers to greet and assist those voters.

At the end of the day, I went to the D.C. Board of Ethics and Elections office to observe the Election Night tabulation process. D.C. Board staff had set up a process which encouraged the public to observe the activity after the close of the polls. Voting machine cartridges began to arrive from the polling places and were unloaded out in a room with an observation window which made the process more transparent. Additionally, an information center was available for the public from which one could access camera feeds of the election night activities. The spokesperson also provided regular updates to the public and the media about the process.

### **2010 Early Voting in Georgia**

I traveled to Georgia to observe the state's early voting procedures as well as initiatives to assist military and overseas voters. Georgia is one of 32 states that offer some form of early voting. Early voting in Georgia begins at least 45 days before a general election or 21 days before a municipal general election.

I learned about the many ways Georgia is using technology to improve the process for voters. I visited the server farm, which supports Georgia's My Voter Page (MVP) and the delivery of voter registration information between the counties and the Secretary of State's office. Visitors to MVP can look up such information as their polling place location, status of their voter registration, or even view the sample ballot. There is a vote safe feature to offer anonymity to those voters who need to keep information confidential, such as victims of domestic violence. I was very impressed that the program was constructed internally requiring no additional funds.

Georgia's use of technology made for a smoother transition to implement the MOVE Act requirements, which include that all states provide military and overseas voters the ability to track the status of their voted ballot to ensure receipt by the election official's office and have the option of receiving blank ballots electronically. I learned about another technological solution, the Election Day Issue Tracing system, which processes calls from election officials, voters and the general public. Calls are routed to experts who can



answer questions and resolve issues. This year, there was a dedicated line established for people with disabilities who needed assistance during the voting process.

I had the opportunity to visit local election offices in Fulton, Bibb and Chatham counties while in Georgia. I learned that Fulton County applies the same hiring process for county employees when hiring poll workers. The philosophy of the Fulton County director of elections is “No excuses. Just results.” Bibb County’s philosophy is to “touch ballots as little as possible.” Chatham County literally practices transparency by using a bag with a transparent back to store and seal memory cards. Election officials can verify the correct number of memory cards without ever breaking the seal or opening the bag. They follow the CASE process – Copy And Seal Everything. Each county’s philosophy emphasizes the importance of having public confidence in the election results.

### **Early Voting and Election Day in Florida**

I visited eight counties in Florida in five days and it was apparent that commitments to transparency and election office partnerships are prevalent. My first stops were in Duval and Clay counties. Duval uses a high-speed mail sorter system that encompasses tracking, sorting and verification of signatures for all vote-by-mail ballots similar to the system used in Fulton County, Georgia. The Duval County website is set up to provide information easily, lending to greater transparency. For instance, visitors can easily find a comprehensive schedule for the Canvassing Board, early voting locations, as well as information about voters’ rights. Clay County, much like its neighbor, is committed to helping residents with the voting process. They partnered with area realtors to sponsor Move the Vote, which encourages county residents to register to vote or update registration after having moved. In addition to the office website, Clay County also uses Facebook and YouTube to share information.



In Seminole County voters can download sample ballots, get candidate biographies or request and check the status of an absentee ballot. As recipients of a 2010 mock election grant from the EAC, Seminole County partnered with Crooms Academy of Information Technology and was able to sponsor the only Congressional debate for the candidates seeking election to represent the third Congressional District of Florida. In Orange



County, a 2009 College Poll Worker grant from the EAC was used by the University of Central Florida, in partnership with Valencia Community College, to train poll workers through an online simulation on Second Life, a program recently highlighted on EAC's blog. Students who participated received three course credits in civic engagement. Orange County built their electronic poll books in-house, saving approximately \$3000 on the cost of each.

Lee County's absentee ballot tabulation process is similar to the one I observed in Fulton County, Georgia. Additionally, to familiarize voters with polling place locations, Lee County has an agreement with the Florida State Department of Transportation to place precinct signage throughout the county several weeks before Election Day. Comment cards are available at every early voting site to get voter feedback, as well as comment forms on Election Day.

Miami-Dade County and Broward County have various materials in Spanish and Creole. Broward County partners with county schools so that students can work at polling sites and assist with technical calls on Election Day. Palm Beach County uses volunteers from local scout troops at the warehouse to help bring in bags with ballots and memory cards and sort them according to precinct.



## LOOKING FORWARD

I have appreciated having the opportunity to meet with election officials and poll workers, hear directly from them about the work that they do, and share their insights with others. These observations confirmed my belief that many of the best ideas in election administration come directly from election officials in the field. EAC's national clearinghouse is an excellent opportunity to keep election officials abreast of ideas in other jurisdictions. To that end, EAC is establishing an online tool that will pair seasoned election officials with the profession's newest members, providing an online exchange of



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ideas and solutions. Helping election officials at both the state and local levels connect with each other will create a network of experts who can support each other and their goal to provide customer service to voters and fosters discussion of ideas that could be used to improve processes in other jurisdictions.

I will continue to encourage EAC stakeholders, especially election officials, to take advantage of the Commission's website and to promote a national dialog of how election officials can continue to serve voters during difficult budget climates.