

Statement of
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For the
Committee on Rules & Administration
United States Senate

Hearing on
Voter Registration: Assessing Current Problems

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The Reform Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy organization working to strengthen the foundations of our democracy and build a resilient society, applauds the Committee for convening a hearing on assessing current problems in voter registration and offers the following statement.

The Reform Institute believes that providing relevant information to voters – such as polling location and registration status – in an easily accessible manner is critical to advancing voter participation and effective election administration. To that end the Institute has been an active partner in voter assistance hotlines that provide such information to voters. Data accumulated by such hotlines in recent elections underscore that registration-related problems represent one of the primary impediments to voters casting ballots in an orderly and efficient manner.

In the 2008 election the Reform Institute partnered in promoting the 877-GOCNN08 national election hotline. The hotline informed and empowered voters by providing information on poll locations, allowing voters to record messages reporting problems at the polls and connecting them to local election administrators. The hotline logged over 96,000 calls from concerned voters through Election Day. According to InfoVoter Technologies, which administered the hotline, some 47% of calls were from voters using the hotline's automated poll locator to ascertain where they were to vote.

Of complaints directed to the hotline, the largest share by far (31% of complaint calls) involved registration problems. Of calls coded as registration complaints 42% were from callers who claimed they were registered to vote but were informed by poll workers that they were not. Another 12% complained that they never received confirmation of their registration status.

Registration grievances were also the most prevalent complaints to similar hotlines the Institute was involved with in the 2004 and 2006 elections. The data illustrates the need for reforms that enhance transparency and efficiency in the voter registration

process as well as improving the management of voter registration databases and the ability of voters to easily confirm and change their registration status if necessary.

Election Year	% of complaint calls involving registration
2004 National Presidential Election	38%
2006 National Midterm Election	20.6%
2008 National Presidential Election	31%

Sources: 877.GOCNN08: A Preliminary National Report, InfoVoter Technologies, Nov. 2008; MyVote1 National Election Report: Voice of the Electorate 2006, Fels Institute of Government, August 2007.

Many voter registration problems are caused by the combination of large numbers of voters registering just before the registration deadline, often as part of voter registration drives conducted by political parties and interest groups, and undermanned election administration offices unable to cope with the blizzard of registrations in time for the election. Equipping election administration authorities with the resources to adequately process voter registrations in a timely manner and promoting coordination between election offices and organizations conducting voter registration drives would enhance the registration process and alleviate many of the registration-related problems experienced by voters on Election Day.

Above all, voters need easy access to reliable information. The lack of basic information – namely regarding polling place and registration status – is effectively creating serious barriers to voting by citizens across the country. This problem can and must be addressed by drawing on the innovation, collaboration and leadership that have often fueled progress in this nation.

Voters should not have any doubt concerning their registration status. Voters should be able to “track” their voter registration from when they fill-out the form, to when it is processed by their local elections official, much like the tracking system used by shipping companies like FedEx and UPS. Building a robust and effective system will require both enhanced education for election officials and knowledge on the part of voters as to their rights and responsibilities.

Improving voter access to basic information must be a cornerstone of efforts to improve election administration. The technology is there – we must encourage collaboration among federal, state and local elections officials, as well as with outside organizations, to take advantage of innovative solutions and to develop systems that efficiently assist voters and enhance the voting process. Congress has a role to play in

providing the leadership necessary to bring the relevant actors together and effectively exploiting technology. Citizen education and empowerment are one of the major pillars to building a resilient society. The Reform Institute is ready and able to assist in this critical effort.