

MAY 17, 2001

SCHAKOWSKY'S FLOOR STATEMENT ON PROVISIONAL VOTING

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Thank you, Representative Waters for your leadership on this very important issue of election reform and for organizing this Special Order. As Chairperson of the Democratic Caucus Special Committee on Election Reform, you are working to ensure that citizens across the nation are aware that the Democrats are serious about reforming our system and guaranteeing that in the future no eligible voter will be turned away, shut out, or discriminated against on election day.

This Saturday, the Committee will hold its next hearing in Chicago. Hundreds of Voters will have the opportunity to tell us about their experiences and how we can improve the system. Chicago had the most error-ridden presidential election last fall of any major U.S. city, with 123,000 uncounted ballots. That is why the work of this Committee is so important. We can learn from voters from across the country and from local officials and experts on how we can reform our election system.

What the 2000 election has taught us is that many problems exist and that without serious federal legislative steps, we are destined for another Florida fiasco and an election decided by the Judicial Branch and not the electorate. On Election Day, voters were turned away from the polling place; they were unfairly targeted; and they were not allowed to fully exercise their Constitutional right during the election. This past election taught us a very important lesson: voters were penalized for no fault of their own.

That is why I believe Congress can play a role in reforming current law, including provisional voting. I believe that it is important that one standard exists nationwide that would guarantee that no registered voter is turned away at the polls. By passing legislation for example such as my Provisional Voting Rights Act of 2001, H.R. 1004, registered voters can feel confident that if their name does not appear on the registration list, they will be permitted to vote. They will not have to go to a police station or leave the polling place in order to get their provisional ballot.

During the Committee's hearing in Philadelphia, we heard testimony from Juan Ramos, Founder of Delaware Valley Voter Registration Education Project, and Petricio Morales, an ordinary voter, who testified that voters had to travel to police stations to see a judge to determine whether they are eligible to vote. Voters must then travel all the way back to the polling place to cast their vote. Many voters who are confronted with that process either decide not to vote because they feel intimidated.

That must change. Voters should be given a provisional ballot after affirming their right before an election official right there at the polling place. They can vote immediately and feel confident that their vote will count. If our goal is to ensure more voter participation, we should take steps to ensure that this is achieved. And reforming

provisional voting is a step in that direction.[] []

I am certain that we will hear more during our Committee's hearing in Chicago on Saturday and across the country as the Committee continues to highlight the importance of election reform in subsequent hearings.[] I look forward to that and once again congratulate my colleagues from California on a job well done.