

APRIL 2, 2001

**STATEMENT OF VICE CHAIR JAN SCHAKOWSKY
DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ELECTION REFORM**

PHILADELPHIA, PA - Vice Chair Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined members of the Democratic Caucus Special Committee on Election Reform in Philadelphia for the first hearing of the Committee.

Schakowsky is the author of H.R. 1004, the Provisional Voting Rights Act of 2001. The bill permits individuals whose names do not appear on a voting registration list to vote after affirming their right to vote; calls for provisional votes to be transferred immediately for verification; and requires that provisional votes be counted unless the state can prove that those voters should not be allowed to cast their votes.

The following is Schakowsky's statement.

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"I wish to thank Representative Maxine Waters for organizing this hearing and for her leadership on what I believe is the civil rights issue of the new millennium: guaranteeing voting rights for all Americans.

"In early March of this year, I joined 22 other members of Congress on a civil rights pilgrimage to Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma, Alabama. We visited Dr. King's church where four little girls were killed; we visited the Rosa Parks museum; and we marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with John Lewis to the spot where he was brutally beaten nearly forty years ago.

"This trip to revisit the history of our civil rights movement, a battle whose center piece was the struggle for the right to vote, had particular meaning this year. Last November, Americans realized that that struggle, which claimed many lives, is not over. Thousands of Americans, for dozens of reasons, were disenfranchised, most notably, but not exclusively, in Florida. In my own city of Chicago and Cook County, there were more than 120,000 undervotes, overvotes, and spoiled ballots.

"The mission of the Democratic Caucus Special Committee on Election Reform is to examine the serious allegations of widespread unfair voting practices. Over the course of many months, this Committee will hear from disenfranchised African American, Latino, and other voters. We will listen to registered voters who were turned away; voters whose names were improperly purged from voting lists; foreign language speaking voters, seniors, and persons with disabilities who were denied assistance; voters who were misidentified as felons; military personal whose ballots were mishandled.

"We will also hear from civil rights leaders, experts, and local elected officials who have meaningful suggestions on how to prevent disenfranchisement in the future.

"I am also particularly interested to hear from voters and expert witnesses on the issue of provisional voting, because every effort should be made to ensure that no voter is turned away on election day. In Congress, we have a real opportunity to set national standards dealing with provisional voting and I look forward to working with my colleagues on this issue.

"As we travel across our country and hold field hearings in Philadelphia, San Antonio, and Chicago, our mission is the same as that of President Lyndon Johnson, who in 1965, in an address before a joint session of Congress, spoke of the challenges facing our country and our democracy. He spoke about the privilege of citizenship and about the necessity to pass the Voting Rights Act. He said to the nation:

Our mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country; to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man. . . . Because all Americans just must have the right to vote. And we are going to give them that right.

"I believe that the work of this Committee will help guarantee that right."