



Statement on Election Protection and the 2008 Elections

Submitted by
People For the American Way and
People For the American Way Foundation
Committee on House Administration

People For the American Way is a national, nonprofit social justice organization with more than hundreds of thousands of members and supporters, and more than a quarter century of commitment to nonpartisan civic participation efforts. Since our founding by Norman Lear, Barbara Jordan, and other civic, religious, business and civil rights leaders, People For has urged Americans to engage in civic participation, and we have sought to empower those who have been traditionally underrepresented at the polls, including young voters and people of color.

Since the 2000 Presidential Election, our non-partisan sister organization, People For the American Way Foundation has been a leader in **the first nationally established non-partisan Election Protection Coalition (1-866-OUR VOTE)** along with its partners the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law, the NAACP, the National Bar Association and over 150 other voting and civil rights organizations.

The scale of Election Protection is inspiring; the complexity of this multi-faceted undertaking has made it extraordinarily comprehensive. Election Protection's multiple components have included:

- Pre-election advocacy, including litigation, grassroots organizing and media
- Large-scale recruitment, training and deployment of poll monitors, operating out of Field offices, to provide same-day assistance to voters in targeted precincts
- National toll-free Voters' Rights Hotline (1-866-OUR-VOTE)
- Collection of voter complaints through the Election Incident Reporting System (EIRS)
- Web sites, including www.EP365.org; www.workingfordemocracy.org; www.866OURVOTE.org
- GOTV and voters' rights public service announcements and paid radio spots featuring stars such as Angela Basset, Danny Glover and Chris Rock
- Extensive earned media coverage
- Preparations of state specific legal manuals and millions of Bills of Rights summarizing state and local electoral procedures
- Election Official Surveys and meetings with state and local election officials
- Legal command centers in over 30 states with trained attorney volunteers helping voters on and before Election Day overcome legal obstacles

The Election Protection Voter Assistance Hotline – 1-866-OUR VOTE received over 200,000 calls during the 2004 Presidential Election cycle and the Election Protection Coalition was able to provide same-day legal and other assistance to voters who reported complaints to the Hotline. This invaluable service has continued during the 2006 mid-term elections and most recently for the 2008 primary season.

Integral to Election Protection in 2004 and 2006 was the deployment of thousands of volunteers across the country to serve as poll monitors to assist voters and document the problems voters faced as they attempted to exercise their right to vote. The data collected from volunteers and voters through reports from the field and through the Election Protection Hotline clearly evidence a need for election officials to address the real problems created by voter harassment and intimidation, the lack of machines at low-income and minority poll sites, improperly trained poll workers and the creation of overly burdensome voter registration procedures by partisan election officials just to name a few.

In our view, this Administration has placed an inordinate and inappropriate amount of focus on supposed “voter fraud” claimed to exist by voter ID proponents while the above mentioned real problems continue and deserve the priority of election officials. People For the American Way fundamentally rejects the notion that the use of voter ID would remedy the perceived threat of in-person impersonation fraud - which by all reputable accounts - does not present a serious threat to our electoral process. Instead of lawmakers focusing on real documented threats that have disenfranchised thousands, if not millions of voters, unsubstantiated allegations of voter fraud have infected policy discussions regarding elections since Reconstruction with lawmakers using alleged, and nonexistent fraud as a pretext to justify restrictive and burdensome laws against black voters. The same types of baseless claims are being used once again to impose extra burdens on the most vulnerable among us, particularly minorities, immigrants, students and the elderly.

The right to vote is fundamental and Congress should be focused on ways to open the franchise to all eligible citizens, not restrict it to selected communities. PFAW and PFAW Foundation looks forward to working with Congress and through the Election Protection Coalition to protect this right to vote for all Americans.