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Executive Director
Mr. Arturo Vargas

Testimony

submitted to the

Commission on Federal Election Reform

Hearing on

The access to voting by all citizens, and assuring
the privacy and integrity of the vote and the
count

By

Arturo Vargas

Executive Director

**National Association of Latino Elected and
Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational
Fund**

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□ 1122 W. Washington Blvd., 3rd
Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90015
(213) 747-7606
Fax (213) 747-7664

□ 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Suite 230
Washington, DC 20003
(202) 546-2536
Fax (202) 546-4121

□ 1314 Texas Ave., Suite 1630
Houston, TX 77002
(713) 228-6400
Fax (713) 228-0606

□ 60 East 42nd St., Suite 2222
Lincoln Building
New York, NY 10165
(646) 227-0797
Fax (646) 227-0897

President Carter, Secretary Baker, other distinguished members of the Commission, fellow panelists and guests. Thank you for the invitation to testify before you today on the accessibility, privacy, and integrity of our federal election system. I am Arturo Vargas, the Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, the leading national organization that empowers Latinos to participate fully in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. We fulfill our mission through programs that promote the civic integration of Latino immigrants into American society, provide technical assistance and skills development to the nation's Latino elected and appointed officials, develop leaders among Latino youth, and conduct research on issues relating to Latino political engagement and impact. The NALEO Educational Fund is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan organization, and our constituency includes the more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials nationwide.

The NALEO Educational Fund has been on the forefront on efforts to ensure that federal election reform is accomplished in a manner that enhances opportunities for full participation by all of our citizens, including the Latino community, which is one of the fastest growing groups in the nation's electorate. Between 1988 and 2000, the number of Latino voters in Presidential elections grew from 3.7 million voters to 5.9 million – a 59% increase – and we believe that more than 7 million Latinos cast their ballots in the 2004 Presidential contest. Because it is so critical that Latinos have an active presence in our democratic process, our organization's election work incorporates a broad range of policy development and voter engagement efforts. Nationally, we were involved in the efforts to shape the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), and we continue to educate policymakers about HAVA's impact on the Latino community. In April 2001, during the early stages of discussion on election reform legislation, we were invited to testify before the Ford-Carter National Commission on Election Reform regarding citizen participation in the voting process, and in May 2001, we were invited to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs regarding election practices and procedures. In April 2004, we also testified before the United States Commission on Civil Rights regarding the potential negative impact of HAVA's voter identification requirements on the Latino community.

We are also on the forefront of efforts to shape the implementation of HAVA on the state level and in jurisdictions with large populations of Latino voters. We were a member of the California Secretary of State's (SOS) HAVA Plan Advisory Committee, and we have also served on SOS Advisory Committees on pollworker training and recruitment, and election system accessibility. In Los Angeles County, which is home to more than 1 million Latino registered voters, we are active members of the Community Voter Outreach Committee, where we work with the Registrar Recorder-County Clerk's office on election issues. We have also provided technical assistance to Latino policymakers in states other than California regarding the development of their state HAVA plans.

Finally, we have extensive experience in educating Latino voters about the importance of electoral participation through our *Voces del Pueblo* non-partisan voter engagement program. Since the inception of the program in 2001, the NALEO Educational Fund has worked closely

with elections officials, the media, and other community-based organizations to mobilize Latino voters across the country who do not yet fully participate in the electoral process. This mobilization effort has two important components. First, we listen to Latino voters by conducting voter forums, where we learn about the issues of concern to the voters and their perspectives on the voting and elections. We have conducted these forums in several cities with significant Latino populations, including Albuquerque, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Phoenix. Additionally, we engage the voters in the community by sending them positive motivational and informational messages through phone, mail and the media. Over the years, we have reached more than 500,000 Latino voters across the country, in states including Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, New York and Texas.

Our *Voces del Pueblo* program also includes our national bilingual voter information and protection hotline, *1-888-VE-Y-VOTA*, which has provided assistance to more than 12,000 callers since September 2004. Through the *VE-Y-VOTA* hotline, we have been able to ensure that thousands of Latino voters across the country have access to information regarding voter registration, where to vote, and how to cast a ballot. Additionally, our hotline has helped us document the challenges facing Latinos and other voters who are not yet fully proficient in English when they attempt to participate in the electoral process.

Both our policy development work on election reform and our voter engagement efforts in the Latino community have led us to the same conclusion – there needs to be a comprehensive effort involving the federal, state, and local government, together with community-based organizations (CBOs) and the private sector, to eliminate barriers to Latino participation in the electoral process and to promote voter engagement within the Latino community. In my testimony, I will highlight the following key components of this effort:

- 1) full federal funding of HAVA;
- 2) the strict enforcement and reauthorization of the language assistance requirements of the Voting Rights Act of 1965;
- 3) the immediate cessation of state legislative efforts to impose proof of citizenship and voter identification requirements that are more restrictive than those contained in HAVA;
- 4) careful implementation of any “voter verified paper trail” requirements for voting systems;
- 5) vigorous efforts by local jurisdictions to improve their basic administration of elections, including the procedures for registering voters and providing them with election information in a timely manner;
- 6) better programs for pollworker training and recruitment, particularly for pollworkers who can provide language assistance to Latino voters;
- 7) stronger partnerships between election officials and CBOs to work together on the translation of election materials, voter outreach, and other election administration enhancements; and
- 8) increased support for non-partisan voter engagement efforts by the philanthropic and private sector.

I. Full Federal Funding of HAVA

When Congress first enacted HAVA, it authorized \$3.9 billion over three fiscal years, primarily to help states and local jurisdictions upgrade their voting technology, implement uniform computerized statewide voter databases, and improve voter education and pollworker training programs. While Congress has appropriated approximately \$3 billion in HAVA monies to date, there is still \$830 million that remains unappropriated from the initial Congressional authorization. States and localities need the remaining funding to comply with HAVA requirements and implement its initiatives, many of which will make local election systems more accessible to Latino voters. Additionally, HAVA funding will help ensure that the federal Election Assistance Commission (EAC) can carry out its responsibilities, which include the development of standards, guidelines and research that will help states and localities implement federal election reform.

When states developed their HAVA plans, they established budgets that incorporated the amounts promised by Congress, and without full federal funding, many will encounter serious fiscal challenges. We are particularly concerned that if states are faced with shortfalls, they will concentrate their resources on those aspects of HAVA which have strict implementation requirements, such as voting technology improvements and the creation of uniform statewide registration databases. Under these circumstances, jurisdictions may reduce the scope of programs that are more discretionary, but which are also critical to ensuring full voter participation, such as improved pollworker training and voter education and outreach. It is critical that Congress allow states and localities to complete their HAVA efforts with the full measure of funding it committed when the legislation was first enacted.

II. Enforcement and Reauthorization of Key Provisions of the Voting Rights Act

In 1975, Congress extended the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA) to “language minorities,” such as Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans. For the last three decades, the VRA has served as a powerful tool to combat discriminatory election practices, including arbitrary literacy/English language requirements, capricious voting rules, and poll taxes. Additionally, the VRA provisions that require certain jurisdictions to provide language assistance to Latinos and other population groups have made the electoral process accessible to voters who are not yet fully proficient in English. From our work with *Voces del Pueblo* and our *VE-Y-VOTA* hotline, we have learned that these voters face particularly challenging barriers in obtaining information about voting and elections, and the language assistance provided by jurisdictions enhances their opportunity to cast their ballots on Election Day.

We were pleased to see that the language of HAVA reinforced the language assistance requirements of the VRA, and we commend the U.S. Department of Justice’s (DOJ) efforts to vigorously enforce the requirements. For example, since 2002, the DOJ has entered into consent decrees with several jurisdictions throughout the nation to compel them to improve to language assistance for Latino voters, from San Benito, San Diego, and Ventura counties in California, to Orange and Osceola counties in Florida, to Suffolk and Westchester counties in New York, to Yakima County in Washington. The DOJ, together with community and civic organizations, has

also conducted outreach to jurisdictions to emphasize the importance of strict compliance with the VRA. These efforts are particularly important for areas with “emerging” Latino populations – regions that were first covered by the language assistance requirements after the 2000 decennial census. Many of these jurisdictions do not have experience with providing assistance to Latino voters, and have been able to work with the DOJ and private groups to develop programs based on successful practices from jurisdictions with longer Latino language assistance experience.

In 2007, two key provisions of the VRA will expire unless Congress acts to renew them. These include the language assistance requirements, and Section 5, which generally requires states and local jurisdictions with a documented history of discriminatory voting practices to obtain prior federal approval of planned changes in their election laws or procedures. To ensure that our federal election system is fully accessible, it must be free from discrimination and must provide Latinos and other population groups an equal opportunity to elect the candidates of their choice. Thus, the Congressional reauthorization of the language assistance provisions and Section 5 of the VRA must also be a top priority for our federal election reform efforts.

III. Cessation of State Efforts to Impose Restrictive Voter ID Requirements

When Congress enacted HAVA, the legislation included new provisions which required certain first-time voters to provide identification (ID) when casting their ballots. We opposed these requirements, because we were concerned that they create new obstacles for Latino participation in the electoral process. However, the requirements are somewhat narrowly-drawn – they apply to only one segment of the voting population (generally, first-time voters who register by mail), and when jurisdictions implement HAVA-compliant statewide databases, these requirements will no longer apply to most voters.

Since HAVA’s enactment, there has been an alarming proliferation of state efforts to impose proof of citizenship and voter ID requirements that go far beyond its federal mandates. As of this writing, thirteen states have such measures pending in their legislatures, and one state (Arizona) enacted these requirements through the initiative process (Proposition 200). These measures differ in the nature and extent of the restrictions they impose – some require voters to provide proof of citizenship when registering to vote, some require all voters to present photo ID before casting a ballot, and some impose fairly limited identification requirements at the polling place. However, we believe that all of these measures will make it more difficult for citizens to register to vote and greatly increase the risk that eligible voters will be denied the right to vote.

Proof of citizenship measures would generally require citizens to provide documentary evidence of citizenship when registering to vote, such as birth certificates, U.S. passports or certificates of naturalization. Registration applicants who lack these documents may have to incur substantial costs to obtain them. Additionally, under the National Voting Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), citizens must be able to register to vote by mail, and proof of citizenship measures would force states to make significant and cumbersome changes to their mail-in registration procedures. These measures would also make it far more difficult for citizens to register at

driver's license offices and other public agencies, as provided by the "Motor Voter" provisions of the NVRA – legislation that was initially enacted to remove obstacles to voter registration.

Restrictive voter ID requirements will also impose significant burdens on voters, particularly the elderly, the poor or people living in rural areas who may not have such forms of identification as driver's licenses, utility bills or bank statements. Many of the voter identification laws require that the addresses on the identification exactly match of the address on the voter rolls. However, it is difficult for citizens who are particularly mobile to ensure that their identification documents consistently reflect their most current address – for example, in some states, when citizens send their driver's license agency their new address, the notification may trigger their address being updated in the voter rolls, but they may not receive a new driver's license. Thus, pollworkers may refuse to allow them to vote because of the "mismatch" of the address on their identification and the voter rolls. This would create serious obstacles for population groups that are particularly mobile, such as Latinos.

Both proof of citizenship and voter identification requirements are difficult to administer, and impose new and costly burdens on election officials and pollworkers, who must comply with complicated documentation requirements, or make hundreds of judgment of calls as to whether certain forms of identification are acceptable. There is also a significant risk that pollworkers or election officials will arbitrarily use these types of requirements to prevent Latino voter participation. Through our *VE-Y-VOTA* hotline, we have received reports from Latino voters of rude or unhelpful treatment by pollworkers, particularly from voters who need language assistance at the polling place.

Polling place ID requirements give election workers enormous discretion in determining whether the identification presented by voters meet the requirements, and these workers often make these decisions quickly at busy polling places. It is likely that pollworkers will subject Latino voters to more rigorous and unfair scrutiny in determining whether they are qualified to vote, particularly those whom they view as "problem voters" because of their need for language assistance.

The proponents of proof of citizenship and voter id requirements justify their measures by raising the specter of widespread voter fraud – but documented occurrences of voter fraud are rare and isolated. We can prevent these occurrences through improvements in current election laws and procedures, including improved voter database management and enforcement of existing federal and state laws.

Ultimately, we believe that proof of citizenship and voter ID provisions that go beyond the scope of those included in HAVA are unnecessary and will create new barriers for the participation of Latinos and other population groups in the electoral process. These requirements will also impose costly and time-consuming burdens on election officials and pollworkers. We urge this Commission to include a statement condemning these measures in its policy recommendations.

IV. Careful Implementation of VVPT Requirements

The heated public policy debate about the accessibility and security of direct record electronic (DRE) voting systems has led some jurisdictions to require the addition of a voter verified paper trail (VVPT) capability to those systems, a paper record of voters' choices that they can review before finally casting their ballots. We believe that DRE voting systems hold several advantages over older, paper-based systems and will help to ensure that more votes are accurately counted. For jurisdictions covered by the VRA's language assistance requirements, DREs can be programmed to provide ballot screens in multiple languages, which is more cost-effective and efficient than printing numerous sets of paper voting materials.

The audio capability features of DREs are particularly useful for voters who are visually impaired because it provides them with the right to cast a vote privately and independently. DREs also have other features that make them far more accessible to voters with motor or neurological impairments than paper-based systems. HAVA requires all jurisdictions to have at least one accessible voting system at each polling place by January 1, 2006, and there are very few non-DRE voting systems that jurisdictions can use to meet these requirements.

However, we understand the concerns of policymakers who believe that VVPT capabilities are necessary to maintain public confidence in the accuracy and security of votes cast on DREs, and we are pleased to see that voting system manufacturers are developing new technology that will provide VVPT capabilities for DRE systems. We also believe that manufacturers and entities providing federal and state certification should ensure that the VVPT technology meets HAVA accessibility requirements, which not only include accessibility for persons with disabilities, but also accessibility for language minorities. For jurisdictions that have already adopted VVPT mandates, we recommend that the state certification requirements include testing to ensure that the VVPT is fully accessible to language minorities. We urge states to work with organizations that are familiar with language minority voters during the testing process to obtain their input regarding accessibility issues.

However, the timing of the deadlines imposed by some states for the addition of VVPT capabilities to DRE systems is creating challenges for many jurisdictions, particularly where jurisdictions want to use DREs to meet HAVA's January 2006 accessibility requirements. When a state requires all DREs deployed in the first federal election in 2006 to have VVPT capabilities, there are several steps that must occur before jurisdictions can comply with that deadline. First, the manufacturers must obtain federal and any applicable state certification of the system. Then, the jurisdiction must become familiar with the VVPT technology, train its election officials and pollworkers on its proper use, and conduct voter education about the new system. Election officials in states with early 2006 VVPT requirements are particularly concerned about their ability to effectively deploy equipment that has passed federal and state certification before the 2006 deadline. We urge states that have or are considering imposing VVPT requirements to ensure that their deadlines leave jurisdictions sufficient time to obtain properly-certified

equipment, and to implement effective pollworker training and voter education programs for the new systems.

V. Enhanced Election Administration Practices and Procedures

Both demographic research on Latino voters and our own experiences through our *Voces del Pueblo* program indicate that Latino voters face special challenges when they participate in the electoral process. Latinos tend to be younger population than non-Latinos, and significant portion are naturalized citizens who do not have extensive experience with voting. Additionally, Latinos are a relatively mobile population, and voters who change addresses experience difficulties with ensuring that voter rolls consistently reflect their most recent residence. In general, we have learned that Latino voters often lack basic information about the importance of voting and the basic mechanics of registering and casting a ballot. Additionally, when jurisdictions do not have well-administered election procedures, they may fail to maintain correct data about Latinos on their voter rolls, or they may fail to provide Latinos with election materials in a timely manner. Thus, before each election, Latinos often have several basic questions about voting, including where to find their proper polling site and how to address situations where their names do not appear on the voter rolls.

Our experiences with our *VE-Y-VOTA* hotline underscore the need for improved election administration and information dissemination to Latino voters. Callers from 42 states and 371 counties contacted us, and 99% of the calls were inquiries about registering to vote, or about where and how to vote. With respect to voter registration, many callers could not obtain basic information from their own jurisdictions about whether or not they were registered to vote. In some cases, voters tried to use phone lines established by jurisdictions to confirm their registration, and encountered either long waiting times, or problems with finding bilingual operators who could assist them. Latino callers experienced similar problems when contacting jurisdictions to obtain the location of their polling place.

The problems experienced by Latino voters were exacerbated by inconsistent jurisdiction practices with respect to the mailing of election materials, such as sample ballots. While not all states mail this information to registrants, a large share of Latino voters are registered in states that do mail this information (such as Arizona, California, Florida, New York and Texas). However, among our callers during the November 2004 election, we found that less than half of Latino registered voters in these states reported having received any information about voting from their election officials. We also found that voters who are not yet fully proficient in English were more likely to experience problems with obtaining information from their jurisdictions – 61% of these voters reported that they had received no election information from their jurisdictions compared to 55% of voters who were more proficient in English.

Thus, we believe that jurisdictions need to scrutinize every aspect of the registration and voting process, and ensure that there are quality control procedures for effective election administration. From our *VE-Y-VOTA* hotline calls, we learned that every misstep in proper election procedures could potentially prevent an eligible voter from being able to cast a ballot. For example, we found many Latino callers who had been registered to vote and voted in the past found that they had disappeared from voter rolls on or before Election Day. New registrants and re-registrants reported having registered through their state's motor vehicles license agency (hereinafter referred to as the state's "DMV") only to later realize that their registration had not been

processed. We believe that states need to carefully examine their procedures for maintaining voter databases and processing DMV registrations to ensure that all eligible registrants are added to and appear on the voter rolls in a timely manner. The proper maintenance of voter rolls also affects the extent to which voters will receive the information they need to cast their ballots in time for Election Day.

Other basic election administration improvements that have a particular impact on Latino voters include:

- For jurisdictions that are required to comply with the language assistance requirements of the VRA, the timely mailing of alternate language voting materials – we have consistently received reports of voters who request these materials receiving them far later than the English-language materials; and
- The implementation of effective systems for voters to 1) verify their registration status; and 2) determine the location of their polling place. We have found that jurisdictions vary widely with respect to the quality and accessibility of these systems. Some jurisdictions have on-line computer-based systems or telephone hotlines that work effectively for these purposes, while others have little or no capability to assist voters with these matters. We recommend that there be an examination of the “best practices” among jurisdictions to highlight the most effective and accessible systems for providing voters with basic registration and voting information.

Ultimately, when election officials institute better basic election administration procedures, they will not only eliminate barriers to Latino participation, but to the participation of all voters in their jurisdiction.

VI. Improved Pollworker Training and Recruitment Efforts

Pollworkers serve on the “frontlines” of election administration, and they are often the first point of contact for voters. In the Latino community, where many citizens are not fully familiar with the voting process, it is critical that there be well-trained pollworkers who can effectively serve voters at each polling place. Jurisdictions must institute effective pollworker recruitment programs, particularly for pollworkers who have appropriate language assistance skills. Jurisdictions must also ensure that they provide comprehensive training to these workers which covers the proper operation of voting equipment (particularly when new equipment is being deployed), the specific needs and rights of language minority voters and those with disabilities, and the non-discriminatory application of voter ID requirements. The training should also cover basic “customer service” and cultural sensitivity techniques for pollworkers. As noted earlier, from our experience with VE-Y-VOTA, we learned that some Latino voters experience rude or unhelpful treatment from pollworkers, particularly those voters who are not yet fully proficient in English. While these instances were relatively rare, they should not be occurring at all.

We believe that state and local jurisdictions should work closely together on pollworker training and recruitment. States can provide overall guidance to local jurisdictions by creating basic

standards for pollworker training, and states should also consider providing local jurisdictions with a general training curriculum. The standards and curriculum should be broad enough to provide local jurisdictions with the flexibility they need to tailor pollworker training to the specific needs of their voters; however, there should be some sense that there is a uniform set of guidelines for pollworker training that will ensure all voters in the state receive quality service at the polling place.

States can also serve as a clearinghouse for best practices in pollworker recruitment. Many states and local jurisdictions have innovative programs to recruit pollworkers, which include programs which encourage the participation of certain government workers, youth, or persons employed in private businesses. We also understand that the federal EAC is examining the issue of pollworker recruitment and training, and we look forward to the guidance it can provide to state and local jurisdictions in this area.

VII. Stronger Partnerships between Election Officials and CBOs

In order for election officials to improve the administration of elections in a manner that ensures full participation by all eligible citizens, they must establish strong partnerships with CBOs that serve population groups such as Latinos who are underrepresented in the electoral process. These CBOs have expertise in the challenges facing underrepresented voters, and can provide invaluable assistance in nearly every aspect of election administration. For jurisdictions that are covered by the language assistance requirements of the VRA, CBOs can assist election officials with the implementation of language assistance programs, including the translation of materials and the recruitment and training of pollworkers. CBOs can also provide guidance to localities on the effectiveness of their voter outreach and education efforts. As noted earlier, state officials should seek CBO input into the language accessibility of new voting systems during the state certification process. States should also involve CBO representatives in the review of the curriculum and standards they develop for pollworker training.

States and localities can establish CBO partnerships by creating advisory panels or committees which include CBO representatives. We note that some jurisdictions, such as Los Angeles County, have on-going committees that meet with election officials on a regular basis. These committees enable CBOs to have “face-to-face” discussions on issues such as the implementation of language assistance programs, and “troubleshooting” on election administration problems. We recommend that all states and localities establish on-going advisory committees that include representatives of CBOs familiar with the needs of voters in underrepresented communities.

VIII. Public and Private Resources for Non-Partisan Voter Education and Engagement Efforts

Through our extensive work with Latino voters, we have learned that there is a critical need for non-partisan CBO voter engagement and education efforts in underrepresented communities. Traditional voter engagement campaigns conducted by political parties and candidates target

voters who are already likely to vote - citizens referred to as “high-propensity voters.” Since Latinos are less likely to be “high-propensity voters” than non-Latinos, traditional voter engagement campaigns tend not to target Latinos. Low Latino participation rates are partly attributable to demographic factors such as youth, high mobility, and lack of access to education and economic opportunities. However, the traditional voter engagement approaches of political parties and candidates also contribute to a cycle that reinforces the low Latino participation rates. Because traditional mobilization efforts fail to promote participation among Latinos and other low-propensity voters, they vote infrequently, which means that the mobilization efforts continue to ignore them in the future.

Additionally, strategic political considerations in each election cycle have a significant impact on how parties and candidates target their outreach efforts. For example, in the November 2004 Presidential election, the parties adopted a “battleground state” strategy where they concentrated their voter engagement resources in states they believed would be the most significant for an Electoral College vote victory. As a result, the parties conducted minimal voter engagement activity in the 32 states which were not considered “battlegrounds” – states with about 63% of the nation’s registered voters. The battleground strategy had a particularly pronounced impact in shifting voter engagement resources away from states with large numbers of Latino voters. About 73% - or nearly three-quarters – of Latino registered voters lived outside of the battleground states.

The traditional mobilization approaches of parties and many candidates generally try to produce short-term increases in turnout among certain select groups of voters. They do not aim to create the long-term, fundamental changes in voter attitudes and behavior that are needed to ensure that underrepresented groups become full participants in the electoral process.

Many non-profit organizations that conduct non-partisan voter education and engagement activities target those voters who are ignored by traditional mobilization campaign. Efforts by CBOs and civic groups can complement the voter education work of state and local election officials. In some cases, Latinos or members of other ethnic population groups feel more comfortable contacting CBOs than government agencies to obtain information. CBOs also have relationships with ethnic media that can prove invaluable in disseminating election information within their communities.

However, CBOs and civic groups often lack the resources they need to for their election information activities. A few states do offer HAVA funding to non-governmental groups for non-partisan voter education, but most states are tending to use HAVA funding for already-established activities conducted by government agencies. Thus, the private sector, including corporations and foundations, should explore ways to generate more resources for the non-partisan CBO voter information and engagement work. A vital and responsive democracy that is truly representative of our nation’s diverse voices is a laudable goal, and the private sector can play an important leadership role in helping us to achieve it.

IX. Conclusion

Chairpersons Carter and Baker, and other members of the Commission, the enactment of HAVA resulted from a spirited public discussion about the integrity and reliability of our federal election system. However, this discussion also provides us with an opportunity to re-examine the fundamental challenge of ensuring that all of our citizens become full participants in our electoral process. For the Latino community, some of the tools to address this challenge – such as the provisions of the VRA - existed before the enactment of HAVA, and we can use federal election reform as an opportunity to renew our commitment to an election system that provides fair access for all of its citizens. HAVA has also laid the foundation for governmental efforts that will result in a more inclusive and participatory democracy, and it has provided significant resources for these efforts. HAVA's requirements for the accessibility and integrity of voting systems should encourage jurisdictions to make significant improvements in all aspects of election administration. Many of HAVA's provisions have highlighted the need for enhanced programs of pollworker training and recruitment and voter education.

Our nation now has the opportunity to build upon the foundation established by HAVA to ensure that Latinos and other population groups become full participants in our democracy. This will require a partnership between the federal, state and local jurisdictions, together with CBOs, civic organizations, and the philanthropic and private sector. But the effort is critical for our nation. Between 1960 and 1996, we saw a general decline in voter turnout for Presidential elections. While this trend may have started to reverse itself, U.S. Census data suggest that there were still more than 75 million voting-age U.S. citizens (41%) who did not cast ballots in November 2000. Latinos and other underrepresented groups are eager to participate in the electoral process and become active and informed citizens. Federal election reform presents a sterling opportunity to make significant improvement in the accessibility of election systems for Latinos and the nation as a whole. We thank this Commission for its work on the issue of federal election reform and we stand ready to work with you in ensuring that our democracy remains vital and responsive to the voices of all of its citizens. Thank you.