

**Testimony of Charlie Crist, Governor of Florida**  
**Committee on House Administration**  
**Subcommittee on Elections**  
**March 23, 2007**

Chairman Lofgren, Ranking Member McCarthy, Members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I also want to thank my friends Congressmen Robert Wexler and Lincoln Diaz-Balart for being here with me today. Congressman Wexler has worked tirelessly to ensure Floridians have faith in the electoral process. Congressman Diaz-Balart is a passionate advocate of the Voting Rights Acts and guaranteeing all Floridians have their voices heard. I am proud to work with Lincoln and Congressman Alcee Hastings as they serve the Florida delegation as co-chairs.

I also would like to recognize Florida's Secretary of State, Kurt Browning, who is here with me today.

I want to speak to you about the important issue of voter verification and describe to you the improvements that we have proposed in the State of Florida for our elections process.

As we all know, Florida has garnered much attention in past elections. However, I am pleased to report that our state has entered a new era. With the bipartisan efforts of the Florida State Legislature and my administration we have moved beyond pointing fingers and laying blame. Together we have tackled the challenges facing our elections process and have made great progress towards implementing a system that allows every eligible voter to have their voice heard.

I will begin today by explaining the improvements that have been made to the Florida election process in the last several years. In 2001, we set a model for the rest of the nation when our Legislature passed the Florida Election Reform Act. Highlights included the following: (1) punch card machines, mechanical lever machines, paper ballots and central-count voting systems were decertified, beginning with the 2002 primary election; (2) implementation of uniform ballot designs for each certified voting system; (3) implementation of a provisional ballot process; (4) clarification of recount procedures including the elimination of "partial" recounts; (5) greater facilitation of the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act; (6) elimination of barriers for casting an absentee ballot; (7) adoption of a uniform polling place manual to

guide poll workers; and (8) established minimum standards for voter education.

In July of 2003, Florida fully implemented the Help America Vote Act. Our state was one of only a handful to accomplish the monumental task of meeting all the requirements in preparation for the elections that followed.

In 2004, the State formed a dynamic partnership with Florida's Supervisors of Elections, and private and public entities to implement a statewide, nonpartisan Voter Education Campaign. It was an unprecedented, cohesive effort to educate Florida's voters in preparation for a successful 2004 election cycle.

The 2004 election cycle was a great success. Over 7.6 million Floridians voted in the presidential election. In 2000, undervotes and overvotes accounted for nearly 3% of the votes cast in the presidential race. In 2002, that number dropped to below 1%. The 2004 election cycle saw yet another reduction in that number, dropping it to a historically low 0.4%.

Florida launched the new Florida Voter Registration System on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006, coming in on time and under budget to meet the federal deadline of January 2006. This system is a single, uniform, centralized, interactive, computerized statewide voter registration list defined, maintained and administered at the state level.

With support of our Legislature, Florida responded to the new responsibilities mandated by HAVA by establishing a Bureau of Voter Registration Services. I believe the Florida Voter Registration System and Bureau has already provided more timely and efficient registration services to voters, enhanced the integrity and accuracy of the voter registration rolls, and significantly minimized the risk of voter fraud.

As you can see, Florida has made great strides in all areas of elections. I am proud the State of Florida has been a nationwide leader in this process.

Moving forward, I would like to share with you the proposal that I am presenting to our Legislature during the current session in Florida. I'd like to emphasize that every aspect of this proposal is aimed at a commitment to ensuring that every Floridian's vote will be counted and verifiable. This proposal will move Florida toward a comprehensive, streamlined elections system that uses a paper

ballot in every voting precinct in time for the general election in the fall of 2008.

Our proposal has three major components. First we will replace of all touch screen voting machines in polling places with optical scanners. Optical scan voting machines have a proven track record for accuracy and provide a paper trail that can be used for any recount. As you know, this system allows for the voter to use a pencil to fill in a designated space on a paper ballot for each race. The voter would then insert the completed ballot into an optical scanning machine, which then records the vote on paper that can be used for verification purposes.

Second, we will provide a system known as “ballot on demand,” that will produce an optical scan ballot for all early voting sites. Ballot on demand is a ballot production system that can be utilized for absentee, provisional, and early voting.

Ballot on demand allows for individual optical scan ballots to be printed when the voter arrives for early voting thus eliminating the need for touchscreens with voter verifiable paper audit trails to be used at early voting sites. The benefits of the Ballot on Demand system, from an election management standpoint, are numerous.

With these two measures, 99% of ALL ballots in Florida would be on a voter-marked ballot; that is, each individual voter will physically mark their own ballot, rather than through a machine.

In order to comply with the HAVA requirements, we will also retrofit touch screen machines in early voting sites with a voter verified paper audit trail (VVPAT). In other words, touch screen machines that are used by the disabled or visually impaired will produce a vote that is recorded on paper. Additionally, visually impaired voters are able, through audio directions, to vote a secret ballot; just as all other voters are able to do.

In conclusion, the State of Florida has worked in a bipartisan manner to effectively improve the elections process. Our goal is to restore voter confidence through new systems, procedures and implementation of both federal and state legislation. We are pleased with the progress we have made in Florida and continually look to enhance our elections system and streamline the voting process for millions of Floridians. When one of our citizens casts a ballot in an election at any level—local, state or federal—they can leave the polling place with the confidence that their vote has been counted, recorded and can be verified.

The right to cast a vote is the most fundamental of all American rights. There is no greater testament to the democracy that our country was founded on than the ability for every American to take part in the legislative process by casting a vote for a candidate of their choice.

Thank you for your time and attention, today. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you may have.