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Statement of

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before the

U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

“Voter Information Websites Design and Best Practices, EAC Study 05-62”

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Good afternoon Commissioners. Thank you for inviting me here today. I apologize in advance because I know some of you have heard some of this information at various presentations before. Today I’m compressing 30 months into 5 minutes – just the highlights as you consider the final document.

Most of HAVA focuses on who can get to the ballot box, who controls the ballot box, and how that vote is counted after a ballot has been cast. Despite being the most important participant in any election, the voters on the other side of the ballot box have comparatively few tools available to help them perform their function. While the infrastructure changes are critical, Voter Information Websites promote what may be the best fair-election insurance of all - a more informed and engaged voter.

There have been pioneers in the field of delivering election information online, but the recommendations before you today represent the first real compendium of best practices in this field. There are some issues to be sure, and they may be a little late for major changes in the 2008 election cycle, but this is an area of elections that the EAC can take into the future, and this report marks the first step.

The most succinct summary of the recommendations before you I can offer is this: a how-to guide to offer the maximum benefit to voters without jeopardizing personal information. The recommendations contained in this report represent an initial marker for reference in an area of elections that is certain to grow in the future.

The document before you is not based on particular technologies. The EAC will not be recommending one programming language or operating system over another. The recommendations are not dependent on screenshots that would be dated by publication. It does not condemn or overly endorse any one of the websites it studied because the

recommendations are derived as much from early failures as successes. What you are looking at is a set of principles that will be viable long enough to help election administrators create or improve Voter Information Websites until they are superseded by another set of EAC recommendations as technology evolves.

These principles were derived from studying what was already being done, cataloging and quantifying the innovations and pitfalls of the work in the field, extrapolating the key considerations being addressed and then offering those results to our expert panel for consideration. These recommendations are strong and timely but they are also about the next generation of voters. The EAC should advise protecting a voter's information over vetting voter records, and encourage interactive sample ballots linked to information about candidates. I am sure that some of these recommendations will serve as points of debate and discussion, but that is appropriate for an initial discovery.

The next step for future study on the use and function of Voter Information Websites should include the development of a set of standardized measurements applied over one or more peak election cycles so that similar quantitative data could be compared. Soon functions like online voter registration will have the track record necessary to study in detail. Every campaign cycle brings new Internet based technologies, along with the continued blending of traditional and online media. There will definitely be more to come.

As one of the earliest EAC research projects, we all learned how to execute an EAC research contract as that process was evolving. This project is available for your consideration today because of the guidance and navigation provided to us by Edgardo Cortes, Karen Lynn Dyson, Tamar Nedzar, Tom Wilkey and support from EAC departments. We are grateful for their reasonable and thoughtful collaboration.

In closing, I want to thank the election officials who contributed their time to interviews and their websites for scrutiny. I also want to thank the experts in our working group that met to help sift through our preliminary research, frame the debate, and offer their insights and detailed consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to work on this project.