

Presidential Commission on Election Administration

June 28, 2013

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission for inviting me to be here today.

- Continuing to improve our election system is a critical task for our nation's democracy and it's a task we embrace year-round in Florida.

I would like to spend my allotted time talking about the 2012 General Election and how we are continually working to make the voting experience in Florida better for voters.

From a statewide perspective, I believe Floridians had a positive election experience in 2012.

- More than 8.5 million Floridians cast a ballot in our general election – which was a Florida record.
- Of these voters, more than 2.4 million voters cast their ballot at an early voting site and nearly 2.4 million voters cast their ballot by mail.
- This turnout is a clear demonstration that Florida is doing the right thing by being one of only 26 states in the country that offers both early voting and no-excuse absentee voting.

But as always after an election, we found areas that needed to be improved upon.

- So last December, I traveled across the state at the direction of Governor Scott and met with election experts to learn how we can do better and to make sure voters know that improving the election system is an ongoing effort that takes continual innovation.

My conversations were candid, direct and focused, and they were held with people from varying political parties, interests and backgrounds and from different parts of the state.

- I asked the tough questions about why some voter needs weren't met to the fullest extent possible.
- And in some cases, I found the most fundamental functions of elections administration failed.

The most prominent area I heard needing improvement involved taking further steps to increase the accessibility of our elections.

- Even if it's only in a few precincts, there is no reason Floridians should have to wait hours in line to vote.

Several factors appear to have contributed to Florida's long lines at the polling places.

- These factors included a very long ballot, fewer polling locations, a record number of voters, and in some cases, poor planning by supervisors of elections.
- Knowing this, our department presented Governor Scott and the Florida legislature with a set of recommendations to resolve these issues.

After a collective effort and that continued through the recent legislative session, Governor Scott signed bi-partisan legislation that allows more Floridians to vote and to do so in a timelier manner.

- For example, this legislation increased early voting days from eight days to up to 14 days, and from a maximum of 96 hours to a maximum of 168 hours – a record number of early voting hours for Florida that includes voting on the Sunday before Election Day.
- The legislation also expanded the allowable locations for early voting sites.

- Among many of its other improvements, the legislation also addressed the issue of long ballots by limiting the legislature to the same number of words for proposed constitutional amendments as is limited to citizen petitions.
- And these are just a few examples.

In addition to the steps taken at the statewide level, I intend to hold local officials publicly accountable if they do not meet the needs of their constituents.

- The local administration of an election is a key component to the success of an election.
- All of Florida's supervisors have a responsibility to ensure fair elections.
- One county that doesn't properly serve its voters does a disservice for the entire state and has the potential to cloud the positive steps taken by the rest of the state to conduct a fair and accessible election.

The bottom line: voter confidence needs to be restored and maintained.

Voters are relying on us to ensure their elections are accessible, efficient and fair.

- In a decentralized election system like we have here in Florida, Supervisors of elections and county commissions must take it upon themselves to oversee elections through responsible leadership and efficient administration.
- Similarly, the Florida Legislature must ensure Florida has the best election laws possible in which supervisors of elections may operate.
- And of course, the Department of State and the Division of Elections have a responsibility to the voters as well.

Technology changes, needs change, voter behavior changes and experience encourages more innovation.

- But I am confident we can do a better job for our citizens, because every election can be improved upon.

Florida is soon to be the third largest state in the nation.

- We do not intend to settle for good elections.
- We have a responsibility to conduct great elections.

- Elections are a symbol of our nation's freedom, and we need to show the world how great it is to live in a country with a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to improving our nation's election systems.

- I am now happy to take any questions that you may have.