



U. S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
1225 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC. 20005

**Statement by EAC Chair Rosemary Rodriguez
January 17, 2008**

I take the position of Chair of the Election Assistance Commission with a great deal of appreciation, anticipation, and respect.

First of all, to the Commissioners who have preceded me, I express my appreciation for your dedication, commitment, and hard work. I can only imagine how hard it was to create an organization from the pages of HAVA. By starting this institution from scratch, you blazed a trail. I include the staff of the EAC in this recognition for you have been with the first Commissioners every step of the way. I take this moment to honor your work with applause.

Secondly, I am filled with anticipation. This election year should mark the evolution of the EAC from a new organization to an institution. We must be prepared to deal with the hardest, most complex issues of the day in a thoughtful, responsive manner. Nothing new for the EAC, but the weight of our advice and guidance carries heft and I am mindful of how careful we must be in order to be authoritative and relevant.

Finally, I am filled with respect. Respect for the Congress that created the EAC, for the people who conduct elections all over the country, for the people who vote in every election and for those who will vote in 2008 for the very first time. It is the voter whom the EAC was designed to serve. Voter access and confidence was deemed by Congress to be of the utmost importance and so they ventured for the very first time into the election process, establishing the EAC to provide funds, standards, testing and certification for equipment and guidance, and research for administration.

The role of the Chair is to conduct meetings, to speak for the Commission's consensus viewpoint and to make committee assignments. Each Commissioner has expressed a willingness to serve in a capacity that will most benefit the EAC. I thank them for their earnest desire to help the Commission succeed. The three assignments that the Chair must fill are the EAC's liaison to the TGDC, the liaison to the Board of Advisors and the liaison to the Standards Board.

To serve on the TGDC, I ask immediate past Chair Donetta Davidson to continue. As the EAC completes the next iteration of the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines,

continuity on the TGDC is vitally important. It is also important for other Commissioners develop skill in this area. I will speak more to this point later.

The Board of Advisors will serve in an especially critical role in the coming year. The Congress, in establishing the Election Data Collection Grants, has tasked the Board of Advisors with the extra duty of reviewing the grant program report before it is submitted to the Congress. Therefore Commissioner Gracia Hillman will serve as the liaison to the Board of Advisors. This program holds enormous promise if it achieves its goal of “improving the collection of election data.” Commissioner Hillman’s service on the research subcommittee leads me to expect that she will be an excellent liaison to the Board of Advisors.

In order to develop that skill with on the TGDC that I mentioned we need to nurture among other Commissioner, Vice-Chair Caroline Hunter will serve as the Standards Board liaison. This board, made up of election officials, will comment on the VVSG. This role will prepare Commissioner Hunter to lead the Commission in adopting guidelines that are measurable while also being accessible to election officials. She has already demonstrated leadership in ensuring that election officials are as familiar with the proposed guidelines as is humanly possible, and I know her contributions will continue to be valuable.

As chair, I am also committed to continue to build a responsive relationship with Congress, election officials, our advisory boards, and the voters. I will continue my brown bag lunches and plan to conduct field hearings across the country seeking venues recommended by election officials and advocates. I will seek their help to highlight jurisdictions that are doing a particularly good job with voter registration and NVRA, provisional balloting, post-election audits, providing access to voters with disabilities and providing access to the minority language voter. I also think it will be important to showcase those jurisdictions that do a good job serving our voters in the military and citizens overseas.

I took my installation oath this morning on a bible that holds special meaning for me. I purchased this bible during a trip to Virginia ten years ago. I was deeply immersed in reading about the Civil War at the time. When I saw this bible, I was attracted to it by the cover, well worn and tattered. When I opened it and read the inscription, I was overcome. It reads: “from a Yankee.” The Civil War sprang to life before me. The division, conflict, indeed the very idea of a nation so divided that an American would take arms against a fellow American still creates a deep sorrow in me. But for me this bible represents conciliation—you see, the person who received this bible and the giver shared something, agreed on something.

It is division, not near the magnitude of the Civil War, but division just the same that we are charged to work through in the EAC. Surely we have our partisan orientation. But when we are doing the work of the EAC, we are asked to try to achieve consensus. On certain issues, consensus seems impossible. So sometimes our work may take a little longer than expediency requires. I ask you to bear with us and I assure you that we will

consider every possible resolution of the issues placed before the EAC. Because at the end of the day, regardless of what party labels we wear, all four of us have the same goals – increased voter participation, confidence in elections, and assistance and support for election officials in their quest to deliver accurate, accessible, and secure elections.