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*Us Commission On Civil Rights Concludes That 'No Count' Is Real Issue  
In Florida Vote*

### **Voter Disenfranchisement is at the Heart of the Issue**

**WASHINGTON, DC, MARCH 9** - Supported by approximately 30 hours of sworn testimony from some 100 witnesses, the US Commission on Civil Rights determined that the Florida presidential elections appear to have been marred by voter disenfranchisement.

"It is not a question of a recount or even an accurate count, but more pointedly those whose exclusion from the right to vote amounted to a 'No Count,'" concluded a statement issued today by the Commission. The preliminary assessment was released in a rare departure from the Commission's more deliberative procedures. Commission Chair Mary Frances Berry said she hopes the Commission's findings will hasten reforms.

"In the final analysis," the statement said, "new recounts of old ballots are an academic exercise. Voting is the language of our democracy and, regrettably - when it mattered most - real people lost real opportunities to speak truth to power in the ballot box. This must never occur again.

"Voting technology reforms and the conclusion of recounting procedures alone are insufficient to address the significant and distressing issues and barriers that prevented qualified electors to cast ballots and have their ballots counted. It is our hope that Florida, as well as other jurisdictions, would promptly address these major problems instead of hoping that with the passage of time, the public will forget," the statement continued.

The Commission released the statement at its regular March meeting. It maintained that the evidence points to an array of problems. These ranged from Florida election

officials' failure to provide adequate resources to handle increased voter turnout to at least one unauthorized law enforcement checkpoint. The Commission also flagged the removal of non-felons from the voter registration rolls on the basis of unreliable information collected during a sweeping, state-sponsored felony purge.

The Commission cited other problems in Florida which prevented voters from exercising their franchise, including the assignment of many African Americans to polling sites that lacked sufficient resources to confirm voter eligibility; failure to process voter registration applications under the "motor voter" law in a timely manner; use of defective and complicated ballots that caused many "overvotes" and "undervotes"; early closing of polling places; relocation of polling places without notice; use of old and defective election equipment in poor precincts; failure to provide requested language assistance to Haitian American and Latino American voters; and failure to ensure access for voters with disabilities.

The Commission also found that the state failed to provide adequate training to its poll workers and committed inadequate funds to voter education.

The Commission plans to release a draft report on the Florida voting probe by early April and the final report in early June.

By a unanimous vote, the Commission decided to return to Florida late this summer after the state legislative session, in order to assess what changes have taken place at the state and local level. This vote follows a March 8 letter from Chairperson Berry to Governor Jeb Bush that expressed her disappointment with his statement of priorities to the Florida legislature in which he emphasized voting technology reforms and not the additional barriers that prevented qualified voters from participating in the election.

The Commission also discussed a survey today reviewing election procedures nationwide, including all 50 states and the District of Columbia. That review was aided by State Advisory Committees and the Commission's regional representatives.

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*US Civil Rights Commission Emphasizes Public Testimony  
in Continuing Examination of Florida Voting Problems*  
**February 16 Hearing at Wyndham Miami Focuses on South Florida Counties**

**Washington, DC** - Continuing its investigation into voting problems in Florida during the presidential election, the US Commission on Civil Rights will devote the morning of February 16 to airing the experiences of registered South Florida voters who had difficulties reaching the polls or casting their ballots. In addition, at the conclusion of the formal agenda, members of the public will have the opportunity to share their stories at an open public forum.

The Commission has scheduled a one-day hearing at the Wyndham Miami, 1601 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL. As is its customary practice, the Commission has subpoenaed witnesses and documents for the Miami hearing, which will focus on Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe and Palm Beach Counties. The Commission will take sworn testimony from registered voters, poll workers, elected and appointed county officials, an administrator of the Department of Motor Vehicles and representatives of Choicepoint, the firm contracted by the state to help it ensure that felons did not participate in the November 7, 2000, election.

The Commission's investigation into Florida voting problems began last month with a two-day hearing in Tallahassee featuring testimony by Gov. Jeb Bush, Secretary of State Katherine Harris and registered voters from that area who had encountered problems at the polls.

Among the allegations to be examined in Miami: persons were improperly purged from voter rolls due to erroneous reports of felony convictions; voter lists did not include names of persons who had registered; properly filed voter registrations were processed too late for names to appear on voter rolls; polling places were closed early; polling places were moved without notice; some ballots were defective and confusing; officials failed to provide language assistance as requested; and officials failed to provide access to the polls for persons with disabilities.

The Commission is an independent, bipartisan, fact-finding agency of the federal government with authority to hold hearings and subpoena both witnesses and documents. It has very broad investigative authority in the area of voting rights, even when alleged abuses do not involve discrimination, fraud or other malicious intent.

**WHAT:** The US Commission on Civil Rights' ongoing probe of Florida voting focuses on Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe and Palm Beach Counties

**WHO:** Registered voters, poll workers, public officials, Choicepoint officials

**WHEN:      Friday, February 16              9 am – 5:20 pm              Public forum: 6:30**

**WHERE:      Wyndham Miami, Bahama Room, 1601 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, FL**

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