



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF FLORIDA

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Contact:
Deirdre Macnab
407-415-4559
League of Women Voters of Florida
floridaleague@earthlink.net
Maribel Balbin
305-588-2594
Miami Dade League of Women Voters
info@lwvmiamidade.org

VOTER PROTECTION GROUPS CALL FOR ELECTION REFORM TASK FORCE

Tallahassee, FL--In response to Florida's general election disaster, a coalition of voter-protection organizations today called urgently for creation of an election reform task force.

Gathering at press conferences held simultaneously in Miami and Orlando were representatives of the League of Women Voters of Florida, AARP, National Congress of Black Women, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, Florida Institute for Reform and Education, Florida Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Lawyers Committee For Civic Rights Under Law, SantLa Haitian Neighborhood Center, South Florida Jobs with Justice, Florida Votes Count, Equality Florida and the Hispanic Coalition.

Outlining the many problems voters experienced during early voting and on Election Day, League of Women Voters of Florida President Deirdre Macnab said, "A week ago today, Florida voters saw the culmination of a general election process that can be summarized in one word: Unacceptable."

The group called today for immediate and joint action by the Legislature and the governor: "We are formally calling on the governor and the Legislature to follow the example of 2000 and appoint a multi-partisan task force chaired by trusted leaders." The group recommended appointing a cross-section of knowledgeable stakeholders with expertise in elections, supported by adequate budget and staff, to develop a blueprint for successful election reform.

Speaking with one voice, the group urged: "We must finally put Florida's shameful election disasters behind us. We ask that this task force begin its work quickly and deliver its final recommendations to the 2013 Legislature at least two weeks before the 2013 session begins, allowing time for bills to be filed."

The groups cited a litany of problems:

- Cuts in early voting days and lack of standardization in early-voting hours across Florida's 67 counties

- Insufficient election budgets, facilities and equipment throughout the state
- Expanded use of provisional ballots and ill-conceived voter purges
- A record-length ballot overloaded with complex, confusing amendments
- Lines requiring waits of up to 6 or 7 hours, inconveniencing many and excluding many others, including the elderly, disabled citizens, and voters who didn't have the time or stamina to wait in hours-long lines
- The four-day delay in knowing the results.

Cathy Kerns, representing the AARP said, "Voting is one of our most important rights. Florida's elected officials have a responsibility to act to lighten the burdens and lower the barriers that many voters encountered on Election Day 2012. Those barriers were especially high for older voters. Lowering those barriers is important for all, regardless of age or ability."

According to up-to-the minute research, the burden on minority voters was disproportionate. University of Florida Professor Michael C. Herron and Dartmouth College Professor Daniel A. Smith looked at the racial/ethnic and partisan composition of early voters in Florida, along with details about voters who were forced to wait in line on Saturday night in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties, and who ended up casting their ballots after midnight. They found that that minority voters, and in particular black voters, suffered disproportionately from this year's unfair practices and that minority voting was suppressed.

Victor Sanchez from the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, said, "Latino voters in the State of Florida deeply cherish the right to vote. When faced with unparalleled voter suppression efforts, we have chosen to respond by condemning efforts to place obstacles and impede free and fair elections."

Voter activist LaVon W. Bracy added, "The entire nation is again looking at the State of Florida. The voting process from October 27 - November 6 was embarrassing and unacceptable. What Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature did under the guise of protecting the vote is immoral. The total disregard for democracy must be challenged and changed."

Maribel Balbin, president of the Miami Dade League of Women Voters, added, "It is clear that Florida's 2012 election process was shameful and unacceptable. Miami Dade was one of the worst, with some of the longest lines and most lengthy delays in counting ballots."

League President Macnab said, "The state simply can't afford to be in the national spotlight once again--as a punch line for late-night comedy--as this could have a profound and damaging impact on our ability to compete for jobs and new businesses moving to Florida."

After the election fiasco in 2000, a bipartisan task force similar to the group's proposal was assembled by then-Governor Jeb Bush, with almost all of its recommendations implemented under Governors Bush and Charlie Crist.

All this changed in 2011 after the Legislature passed HB 1355, which reduced early voting hours and instituted the other provisions that led to this year's problems.

Macnab stressed that immediate attention is necessary: "We must move forward together to put Florida's election disasters behind us."

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The League of Women Voters of Florida, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. For more information, please visit the League's website at: www.TheFloridaVoter.org.