

Opening Statement of Senator Barbara Boxer
Full Committee on Commerce
Hearing on Election Technology Reform
March 7, 2001

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today to explore ways that we, as elected officials in Congress, can help make sure that every person's vote counts in this country. Last year's election opened all of our eyes to the fact that our election system, while designed to give each person the ability to cast a vote, often fails in part because of antiquated voting equipment and confusing ballots.

While no system will ever be perfect, we should make it a top priority that no voter be disenfranchised, as they were in Florida this past November. Looking at how new technologies can help in this effort is a great start. We certainly need to know how the different voting systems impact voter turnout and election results.

In fact, last November after the election, I asked GAO to study how various voting and balloting systems compare in terms of fraud, error rates and other voting irregularities. I also asked them to discuss the feasibility of voting on the Internet, and whether such a system would be more or less susceptible to these problems. GAO plans to complete this report by the summer.

Since we are talking today about the range of voting technologies

currently available, I am pleased to report that in the 2000 election, Riverside County in my home state of California acted as a test bed for a new high-tech computerized touch-screen voting system. This system proved to be very user friendly and was able to tally its votes in record time, with a high degree of accuracy. I actually heard stories from some of my elderly constituents, that while they were nervous before using these new computer voting systems, they left the polls raving about how easy these new machines were to use.

Again, I am very pleased that we are looking at how new technology can help our election system, but we should also keep in mind that old voting machines and “butterfly” ballots are only part of the problem. We must also look closely at other factors that affect our election process such as how states educate people manning the polls and whether voters understand the registration process. Recruiting qualified poll workers, and making sure they are trained, is difficult for local authorities to do and yet a crucial component of whether any system works. Simplifying the registration process, as we did with the Motor- Voter Act in 1993, is also essential if we truly want our constituents to exercise their right to vote.

Mr. Chairman, we are now truly living in the information age, and I hope that we do whatever we can to encourage the innovation and use of

technology that makes it easier to vote, reduces fraud, ensures the privacy of voters and, most of all, guarantees that all votes count.