STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN

CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

ON ELECTION REFORM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 2001

- Good morning. As we begin to unravel the consequences of the closest and most contested election in our nation's history, we need to keep in mind that our primary goal should be restoring voters' confidence in the electoral process. We can accomplish that goal only if we carefully and thoroughly determine the lessons learned from this past November to ensure that every future vote cast in this country is counted and recorded as accurately as possible.

- On February 15, Senator Hollings and I introduced the American Voting Standards and Technology Act to address the overwhelming number of precincts who reported serious flaws in their state and local voting systems. This is an unfortunate embarrassment to our democracy. Our bill, S. 368, was written to directly confront the root cause of these voting controversies – the actual voting machines and how they operate.

- In the 2000 election, pre-scored punch-card ballots were used by one in three voters. These archaic "votomatic" machines, engineered in the 1960's, continue to be employed throughout the country, yet their ability to accurately record votes is questionable. Even more egregious is that pre-scored ballots cards continue to be used, even after the National Institute of Standards and Technology, or NIST, recommended their elimination in 1988.

- Compounding the problems of pre-scored punch cards, numerous studies reveal that throughout the country, ballots cast by African Americans were nullified at a much higher rate than those of Caucasians. Our witnesses will offer similarly disturbing statistics regarding the disenfranchisement of many segments of our population, particularly Hispanic Americans, elderly Americans, and Americans with disabilities. How can we encourage young Americans to vote if they believe their vote may not be counted? We must modernize our voting machinery and improve our voting process without barraging the states and local governments with excessive rules and regulations.

- Senator Hollings and I do not profess to have all of the solutions to solve this issue. We do, however, believe that the states' voices need to be heard, as do the voices of many civil rights groups who represent disenfranchised Americans. Surely, the 2000 election was not the first time in our nation's history when large segments of our population were systematically shut out of the electoral process. We hope to learn from the experiences of some of these interest groups today.

- I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.