



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**BOARD OF ELECTIONS AND ETHICS**  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001-2745



**Performance Oversight Hearing on Fiscal Year 2009 - 2010 Budget  
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment**

**Statement of Rokey W. Suleman, II  
Executive Director**

**Tuesday, March 9, 2010**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As we are all aware, the Board of Elections and Ethics struggled through the 2008 election cycle. Although we acknowledge the issues that the agency faced and they are the impetus for many of the changes that we are making, we choose to look forward, not back.

In the nine months since I joined the Board, we have begun to make major changes in how elections are managed in the District. An obvious difference that voters will encounter is new voting equipment in the polling location.

The Board is in the final stages of procuring new voting equipment. We are purchasing new optical scan equipment as well as new electronic voting machines that contain a voter-verified paper audit trail – two years before the mandate presented to us by the Council in the Omnibus Election Reform Act of 2009. Along with this equipment comes new election management software that will eliminate any possibility of a reoccurrence of the problems in reporting vote totals for the 2008 Primary.

I cannot speak beyond this to the solution that we are purchasing but I can say that the Council will be pleasantly surprised by the savings that we will achieve through a competitive bidding process.

Voters will also see the addition of electronic poll books in each polling location. The Board has finalized our technical review of this equipment and we expect a contract award within 30 days. This new equipment will allow the Board to implement several provisions of the Omnibus Act. The electronic voting machines will allow the Board to staff early voting centers with secure ballots and ultimately to achieve cost savings through efficient use of people and equipment. Voters will have a paper trail that they can verify before casting a ballot. These 'paper trails' will be an important component of

audit controls that the Board will be using for the post-election process. The electronic voting machines will also continue to allow voters with disabilities to cast an independent ballot.

By using electronic poll books, we will speed up the validation process, minimize entry errors, and allow voters to cast a ballot at their choice of location throughout the District during early voting. Electronic poll books will allow us to mark, in real time, a voter's status to prevent double voting. We will also use this equipment to implement the same-day registration process required by the Omnibus Act. Registration data will be loaded into the poll book at the polling location and verified by the voter. The data will then be loaded in the voter registration database immediately after the election. Minimizing data entry errors in turn leads to a much cleaner registration database.

Early voting sites have been tentatively identified. The Board is currently planning on five locations: Chevy Chase Recreation Center, Turkey Thicket Recreation Center, Hines Junior High School, and the Southeast Tennis and Learning Complex as well as Judiciary Square. We have also identified alternate sites in case we are forced to move from a preferred location. Early voting will occur on seven days during the 10-day period prior to Election Day, with hours from 8:30 am to 7:00 pm.

We have moved swiftly to implement all of the provisions of the Omnibus Act that affected our office operations; we are already accepting preregistration by 16 year-old voters, have revised the registration application and database to note whether a voter would like to work as a poll worker, have expanded the notice provided for our Board meetings and have changed filing deadlines for recall petitions.

The Omnibus Act also requires certification, additional training and evaluation of poll worker performance. We plan to accomplish this through a combination of in-person and online training, increasing the minimum training requirement to 4 hours. Online training will give workers a tool to become comfortable with the technological changes occurring in the polling location. It will allow the Board to better place workers according to their abilities.

The Board is also working on the study on automatic registration. The goal of this effort is to make our voter registration system and other government databases "talk" to each other so that voter records are automatically updated when a voter moves or makes a change in another government database. We have already begun to build a foundation for this through the online registration tool and DMV interface that the Board has implemented. The Board is also working with the Pew Center on the States on a multistate voter registration modernization project.

The improvements in our office are not confined to those mandated by the Omnibus Act. We have purchased an absentee mail solution that addresses complications that resulted from the outsourcing of absentee ballots in 2008 and also simplifies the implementation of a requirement of the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act of 2009.

First, by controlling the mailing of ballots, we will eliminate the issue of voters receiving wrong ballots in the mail. Other jurisdictions that have purchased this solution have seen the number of wrong ballots mailed to voters reduced to nearly zero.

Second, the software purchased will meet the requirement of the MOVE Act that an overseas voter have the ability to track the status of their ballot. The Board expects to expand this ability to all absentee voters. Each absentee voter will be able to follow their ballot online, from receipt of application to delivery and return, greatly reducing the number of calls to our office as well as increasing transparency and improving customer service.

The MOVE Act brings us to some remaining challenges that the Board faces. One challenge is the requirement that ballots be available to overseas and military voters 45 days prior to an election. Forty-five days prior to the general election is Saturday, September 18th. The Board will not certify the election until September 27<sup>th</sup> at the earliest. Any challenges or recounts in the election will further delay the printing of ballots.

Congress recognized that it may be difficult for some states, such as the District, to change the dates of September primaries in 2010 and is allowing the Department of Defense to provide waivers to those states. However, those are fully expected to be one-time waivers and only justified because of the timetable necessary to procure new equipment and make the changes that are underway to our voting process. The Council will have to select a new date for the 2012 primary. I believe the latest a primary could be held is the first week of August. The Board is looking forward to working with you to make this change.

We are also looking to the redistricting issues that we face in 2011. Redistricting has the potential to add costs in the 2011 and 2012 budget.

The Board is doing more with less. We fully understand the financial difficulties facing the District. The Board is 'watching its pennies' and embraces the importance of being conscientious stewards of taxpayer dollars. In a small example, we saved 40 percent on the printing of our voter registration applications by printing them in black and white rather than in color, and I have directed staff to think about office supply requests as though they are coming out of their own pocket. We are fortunate that the District has not previously spent its federal funds provided under the Help America Vote Act, and are using those federal dollars to make the technological advances that I have discussed. However, the recurring maintenance fees will have to be paid with local funds in future budgets. The Board can gradually implement saving costs from early voting and other technical advances but strongly recommends that any cuts to precincts and polling locations not occur under after the 2012 presidential election.

I would like to tell you about some other exciting things that we are planning. We are currently working with OCTO and GIS to develop web-based applications that will enable voters to go online to find out when the polls have opened and the length of lines

in real time. This will be particularly valuable during early voting, when voters have a choice of location.

In closing, the Board is in the midst of what I call a "hurricane of change" in the election process for the District. We are eagerly implementing ambitious reforms and are moving toward a successful election that will make the citizens of the District proud. With the changes underway in our office, the District of Columbia will assert its rightful place as a model for the rest of the nation.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.