

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN CONYERS, JR.
FORUM ON
“PRESERVING DEMOCRACY: WHAT WENT WRONG IN OHIO”
DECEMBER 8, 2004

The one question I am asked more than any other about the voting irregularities in Ohio is whether John Kerry was the true winner of the election. My answer is that I do not know. In this country, we gather facts before we reach conclusions, and we ask questions before we get the answers.

I very much want John Kerry to be the next President of the United States. But today I have invited and we are joined by David Cobb, the Green Party candidate for President. I assure John Kerry was not his choice for President.

So this is not about John Kerry, this is about the voters. There were voters who stood in ten-hour lines to exercise their most basic and fundamental civic right. There were voters who worked for days to provide transportation to the polls for the elderly and the poor and to provide assistance to language minorities. As hard as voters worked for the vote, we need to work just as hard to make sure every single vote counts.

In our country, we do not say every vote counts if it would make a difference in the margin between a winning and losing candidate. We do not say every vote counts unless the electoral college has already met. We do not say every vote counts unless Congress has already certified the electoral votes. We do not say every vote counts unless the new President has been inaugurated. We just say: every vote counts.

There are things we already know, things we will find out, and things we will never know.

We know Warren County officials locked reporters out of the vote count claiming that the FBI has warned of a terrorist threat that was a “10” on a scale of one to ten. We know the FBI says that no such warning was ever issued. We don’t know if this affected the counting of votes. But we will find out.

We know there seems to be an unprecedented level of support for the Constitution Party candidate in the most Democratic areas of Cuyahoga County. We don’t know whether this is a machine error, a confusing ballot, or some other problem. We don’t know whether those votes were actually intended for another candidate, but we will find out.

We know a computer glitch in Franklin County gave the President nearly 4,000 additional votes. We do not know whether that also occurred, still undetected in other areas of Ohio, but we will find out.

We know that in Ohio and throughout the nation, voters reported choosing one Presidential candidate on an electronic voting machine only to have the machine indicate a different choice. We do not know why this happened, whether it was intentional or simply the result of a flaw, or how many votes were changed as a result of this glitch. We will try to find out.

We know the Secretary of State of Ohio issued a confusing directive restricting the use of provisional ballots and then partially rescinded it. We know some counties never rescinded the order. We will never know how many voters were turned away from the polls by this ill-considered directive and subsequent miscommunication.

We know there were up to ten hour lines at polling places. We have received reports that there were less voting machines in some areas for the general election than there were for the democratic primary. We will never know how many voters could not stand in line for so long and risk losing their jobs. We will never know how many voters could not afford to stand in line for so long because they had children to take care of. We will never know how many votes were lost. But we will find out why there were so few voting machines in some areas.

There are tens of thousands of voters who have contacted my office, some with words of support, some providing investigative leads, and some who just want to express anger that – once again – their vote did not count.

First, I want to thank each and every one of them. I can't answer every message or email, but every single one is being read by me or my staff and every investigative lead is being pursued. Second, for all of the people who have asked me what they can do, here are my suggestions:

- Contact Secretary of State Blackwell and tell him you want him to answer our questions. As Chief Elections Officer in Ohio, he could be of tremendous service to us. I am disappointed that he is not here today.
- Contact the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and ask him to hold official Committee hearings about these matters, which are so vital to our democracy.
- I would ask that we conduct ourselves in a civil and respectful way. Not everyone who disbelieves or seeks to disprove allegations of voting irregularities is our opponent. Many share our objective of getting to the truth and we should welcome their criticism and scrutiny.