NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

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Now, the counties do have the flexibility, some of our bigger counties, if they want to have an additional Saturday, they could -- they could have early voting. The first Saturday -- they cannot do it the Saturday before the election, because the local election officials would throw me out of office if I allowed voting on Saturday before the Tuesday election. They really need that day to deal with absentee ballots, to get their poll workers and their equipment organized and ready to go out, and that's the reason we don't allow that Saturday before the election.

REP. LEWIS: Thank you very, very much for your time, Mr. Secretary, and for your very good presentation.

At this time, the Chair is pleased to recognize Mr. Ion Sancho. Mr. Sancho is the Supervisor of Elections for Leon County, Florida. As I did with the Secretary, I will not read his very extensive bio; I will point out a few things. Mr. Sancho was -- has been director since 1989. He was asked by -- he was actually appointed by the Florida Supreme Court in December of 2000 as the technical expert to oversee the Florida recount. He has also testified before the U.S. Congress, the
U.S. Election Assistance Committee and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. So we are very, very glad that you are here, sir, and you have the floor.

MR. SANCHO: Thank you very much. The state of Florida has a very, very different scheme in terms of its voter registration and voter identification procedure. We had been toying with the idea of setting up a database in the late '90s. The election of 2000, which opened the door to the Help America Vote Act, simply allowed us to decide to put this into play, and so our regime really doesn't look like most of the states. In fact, we check the eligibility at the front end of the process, in a process called no match, no vote.

We do this through a statewide voter registration database, such as was required by the Help America Vote Act. But it's a live time, not a batch system, with portals available to every user who needs it, including the Department of Corrections, Department of Health and Vital Statistics, every Supervisor of Elections is connected to it. So, no matter where you're the Supervisor of Elections from, all 11-1/2 million registered voters are available to be seen on my computer.
which changed the election laws. We have had to
address the long lines that were pertinent to
Florida's 2012 election. Florida, according to the
Pew Center on the States, had the longest wait
times of any state in the nation. We averaged 45
minutes' wait on Election Day, and as we can go
into our computer, our Florida voter registration
database, and see the last voter actually voted
Miami-Dade at 2:03 a.m., some seven hours after the
poll closed on election night.

So, what the legislature is doing now in
House Bill 7013 and Senate Bill 600 is restoring
the cutbacks to early voting, which in fact was the
pressure relief valve to accommodate Florida's
voters. Florida has fewer polling places today in
2012 than we did in 2000. Our population grew 18.3
percent in the last decade. We simply lost the
ability to build enough electrical infrastructure,
i.e., precincts, which is the number one difficult
job that a local official has, finding accessible
polling locations.

We basically gave our hands -- threw our
hands up in surrender on that issue. Early voting
is where the extra voters have to go. That's the
only way we can accommodate them, and reducing
early voting from 14 days to 8 days in 2011 caused 225,000 voters not to be accessed that were accessed in 2008, and it caused a huge overflow on Election Day. So both election bills restore, on a permissive basis, the local supervisor of elections, the ability to go back to 14 days of early voting and including voting on the Sunday before the Tuesday election. Again, that's permissive, but the majority of the urban supervisors of elections testifying before the House and Senate said that if they were given the choice, they would provide Sunday voting before the election.

So, the bills are now in that position in the state of Florida, and our session ends the end of this month, so hopefully we will reform our laws to make them a little bit more accessible, because the issue of accommodating voters is critical to elections and has now caused Florida to become the laughingstock twice in a decade, and we're not really proud of that. And again, we want this process to be accessible. That is our number one, number two and number everything priority, and that's where we are in Florida today.

REP. LEWIS: Thank you, sir. I know
effort looking at efforts by citizens to manipulate
the system, our evidence is, and we have right now
prosecutions occurring across the state of Florida,
they're all related to two areas: absentee ballot,
and individuals manufacturing fraudulent voter
registrations so they can get paid by their
companies for doing work on a fraudulent basis.
Those two kinds of ongoing criminality we see on a
regular basis in elections, but not individuals
bringing fraudulent ID's to vote.

REP. LEWIS: Yes, sir, you are
recognized.

REP. MICHAX: And yet, one other --
going to the area of early voting. As I understand
it, you in Florida initially had 45 days early
voting -- no, I'm sorry; you had 21 days early
voting -- I'm -- I'm thinking of Georgia.

MR. SANCHO: Actually, we only had 14
days --

REP. MICHAX: You only had 14, and that
was cut back to what?

MR. SANCHO: Eight.

REP. MICHAX: And what was your
experience with that?

MR. SANCHO: It was a nightmare in that
the same type of -- the same people, and we track
this, we've been doing early voting in Leon County
since 1994. We actually have maps that which
every -- identifies every household of every early
voter, so we can identify where that location's
going to be placed.

And early voting, really is, in my
opinion, the safest form of voting in the state of
Florida currently, because it is -- unlike the
precincts, all early voting sites are live-wired
directly to the databases of the counties, and that
way, we can actually do the instant updates that we
cannot do unless you're using electronic poll books
at the precinct. So, we like early voting, and
early voting has been the way that we can
accommodate the huge numbers of citizens that are
now in Florida sort of trained to vote.

We really got into early voting in Leon
County in 1994, and we had an 82 percent turnout in
that Presidential race in '92, and I had two-hour
lines in the precincts, and I realized that if I'm
pushing voter registration and I don't have enough
precincts for them to vote at, I'm looking at a
disaster. And so, we started using early voting as
a way to deal with these large turnouts and not add