

Voting in 2004:
A Report to the Nation on America's Election Process
Tuesday, December 7, 2004
Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Panel 2: Voter Registration

So let me just give a very brief introduction. Our next ... we're starting now with panels who want to focus a little bit more specifically on some of the challenges that we faced on this Election Day and leading up to it. and this panel, as you can see, is on voter registration. The bios of all of our panelists are available to you, and so make sure if you want to know more than what I give you in a brief introduction, you check out everyone's bio, again, because we're fortunate to have people from all over the country, people with tremendous experience, people with great passion for this issue, and with incredible stories to tell.

As you know voter registration we've already heard about quite a bit this morning, it's far more difficult than it should be in this country, and this year, it was made even more difficult in some places, partly because of the challenges of so many voters, but also as you've heard, because many states have yet

to comply with the requirements of HAVA and other concerns that also have been brought to us about why it was so hard to register to vote.

I'm just going to have a quick introduction on our panelists, and I'm going to do it alphabetical order, and then they know the order in which they're going to speak, and we'll just go one at a time.

The first person I want to talk about is Jessie Allen who is the Associate Counsel at the Brennan Center, lead attorney in challenging Florida's disenfranchised ex-felons. Jessie Allen played a key role in fighting the use of the highly flawed felon purge list in Florida, something that we're all concerned about and have heard very much about.

Second panelist, Dr. Randy Brinson, a physician from Montgomery, Alabama, he founded the organization, Redeem the Vote, an organization committed to engaging and empowering people of all faiths to participate in the election process without regard to partisanship. His organization registered over 77,000 citizens.

Our other panel, another panel, Lillie Coney, is a Senior Policy Analyst with the Electronic Privacy Information Center and a scholar on the history of voter registration efforts in this country. Jehmu Green is the President of Rock the Vote, a non-partisan dedicated to empowering young people to participate in the political process, something we've already heard quite a bit about this morning, the incredible participation of young people, in spite of what some people tried to tell us about the numbers. And Rock the Vote was one of the organizations instrumental in registering thousands of young people to vote this year.

And Penda Hair is with us today as well. The director of American Families United, a voter protection project, they led the right to overcome voter registration barriers faced by new registrants in Florida and elsewhere. So we're going to start with Dr. Brinson, and as I said, we're going to try to keep the panel moving and look forward to some questions and as I said, we're going to try to keep the panel moving, and look forward to some questions and participation.

RB: Well thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to come here, to Washington, DC, first of all I want to obviously thank Common Cause, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, and the Century Foundation for putting such a wonderful diverse panel together for this discussion. I think you have some of the most influential people as far as voter registration in the country in this particular panel and it's a great honor to be here and be included.

When I was leaving Alabama, I got here very, very late last night because of the storms. When I was leaving Alabama, I talked to my two ... I have sons, one that's facing graduation from college, who was very helpful with us on our collegiate outreach this year, and I have two sons that are in high school, they're juniors in high school.

And I said I'm going to Washington, I'm going to talk to a lot of people about voter registration and the voter process, and they said, uh, does anybody particularly want me to talk to anything? And he says well, Daniel said, he said, well Dad, first of all I

want you to look up John Stewart on Comedy Central; I know he'll be there.

I said okay, I said who else do you want me to talk to? He said well, I want you to find those guys that came up with jibjab.com. He said that's where they got all their information from, so you know, sometimes we think that we did all these wonderful things, but sometimes young people have a different view, of some of the things that we did. Huh.

Our expense was quite unique. It was something that was almost like a spiritual journey and quite divine, in that we started from scratch. We're kind of the new kid on the block, and when you're the new kid on the block, no one knows where to take you. And as many people, probably you all have experienced also, everybody wants to pigeonhole you.

You know, if you're in the media, they want to say oh, you're on the left, you're on the right, you're this or that. And they had a hard time trying to figure out who we were exactly, you know, because we didn't really jive with everybody on the right, and we didn't

jive with everybody particularly on the far left, so they didn't know how to really pigeonhole us.

But suffice it to say, we got quite a tremendous response throughout the country, with a simple message. And that was, that want to engage all people of faith to participate in the voting process. We didn't care what faith they were. We just wanted people from the faith community to be persistent.

Because there had been so much rhetoric about, you know, if you're a person of faith, or if you have a certain belief system, that you need to check that on the door and not participate in the political process. And I think that's the furthest thing from the truth. I think if you look at all the major political awakenings that occurred throughout the United States, it all started within the church, whether you're talking about the abolition movement, you're talking about the civil rights movement, or any of the other major movements, they all started with the church. And that's where I think because of the spiritual need to connect with making a difference in our culture

from a spiritual standpoint, I think that's why it's so important.

Again, our message was very simple. It was a non-partisan message, to reach out and engage young people of faith to be put, to participate in the political process. And you say that, you say, how did you go about doing this? Here you're a doctor, I mean, I have a very busy practice, I have a very comfortable lifestyle, I was working and taking care of patients - how did you get involved with registering young people to vote?

Well the epiphany for my wife and I, Pam, really occurred last fall. We had three series of events that happened that kind of brought this all to bear that felt like this was our leading to do this. One is that we've been involved with Christian music for about five years, and we saw where Christian music and Christian artists were having a tremendous impact across the United States.

Christian music now accounts for about seven percent of all sales of music in the country, and it's

actually surpassing country music now, and extremely powerful. And in our own experience in Montgomery, we were seeing tremendous growth in Christian radio and the appeal of Christian radio in our own area.

Secondly we hosted a concert that because of this we were asked to host a conference for four major groups that are involved with Christian and contemporary music. And when we hosted it, everybody said ah, you won't have a good turnout or anything like that. It ended up we had to turn people away from the concert, because we had overflow crowds; 1,000 people wanted to see these groups perform.

And it occurred to me, I said gosh, here would be a great place to get young people, to introduce them to voter registration and get them involved in the political process. Later that night, we got a video actually it was a thank you to the troops, that basically summarized what was going on in Iraq and it showed people getting baptized in the desert, and chaplains dealing with troops there. so it was very exciting to do all these different things.

So basically we started a nonprofit organization and we engaged a variety of people throughout the country; we ended up having 2500 radio stations producing our PSAs, we had numerous television stations, interviews, the national media caught wind of it. And in the end, with the festivals and everything, we registered over 77,000 people.

The last week of our email campaign that we did, we saw a tremendous increase of our web traffic, particularly among Hispanic websites. That was very interesting; about 30 percent of our traffic was coming from Spanish websites. So we saw a tremendous improvement in the way we were reaching out to young people.

And the other thing was interesting, because Christians are sometimes looked at as this monolithic vote. The old line, some of the older groups that have been established for many, many years, that were in to voter registration, we registered more people than all of those combined, and yet we had the shortest startup within about six months.

And so I thought that was pretty exciting to do, that we were actually reaching out to people that the traditional pro-family movement was not reaching out to, particularly young people.

One of the difficulties we encountered, I think there were a lot of what has been talked about here. We were doing a lot of registrations online, and what we found was, when you did it online, it wasn't directly online, is that you could register online, but then you have to print off the forms, put a stamp on it, and send it in for registration.

And I think that's something that needs to be refined, because obviously if you can send your taxes in online, you can do income tax online, why can't you register fully online? That needs to be improved.

The second thing I think is important is we need to move monetary awards for voter registration. and I think that's where some of the groups that traditionally may be leftward leaning, particularly 527 groups made a tremendous serious flaw. You cannot pay people to go out and say, okay, I'm going to pay

you if you get this many registrants per day, and that's how you get your per diem.

Because first of all they're going to be registering Mickey Mouse and Mary Poppins and all these other people - that was shown on Ohio. You're going to have things like in Franklin County where you're going to have 830,000 people registered to vote in a country that only has 813,000 people eligible.

So there's things like that, that that is not where you do it. you need to connect them with an education that's important because they believe like you believe to make a change. And that's a very, very important point I want to make.

The other thing that I think is important is when many of us who are involved with voter registration, purely voter registration, we just want people to vote, that the partisan injections into this campaign was tremendously detrimental. We had people denigrating and attacking people registering people voter [unint.] festivals that were clearly partisan, using verbal

language and accosting them, just because they were trying to register people to vote. That's terrible.

There were also ... we saw on the internet people blogging people's sites, whether it be on leftward leaning or rightward leaning, just because they ... and they were just strictly getting people registered to vote. We had an organization that we worked with, like the New Voter's Project, that was blocked out of certain events because they felt like they would not register the right type of people. These are the kind of things that we need to really look at and try to overcome.

What are the solutions? What do I think some of the solutions are? First of all I think we need to educate our young people and start very, very young - high school. I've talked to some of the people here about a civics curriculum to tell about why it's important to vote, who are you elected officials? How do things become law? How is policy enacted? That needs to start at a very young age, probably in junior high school and high school, that needs to start.

Secondly, when you register people, I don't think there needs to be a rush for just one specific election, for example, the presidential election. I think you need to ensure that the governor elections are important, and the mayor election is important, the city council is important. And if you do that, you get people in the habit of voting on every election cycle, then it's much more likely they're going to stay on the rolls, they're not going to be lost rolls, they're not going to have all this problem about trying to register people for one election, and make sure they get on that particular ballot or at least they have their ballots there.

I think there needs to be a lot more uniformity between states, as far as accepting registrations. One of the problems that we encountered was that we were having to go through all these different booklets of all every state that we were in; we were in different festivals all over the country, to comply with that particular state.

And then we'd have people come from other states that were coming to these festivals, that we couldn't register for some reason, because their state had some quirk in their election law. So I think that's another very important thing.

And I think a lot of the young people are out registering people to vote, one of the flaws was, they weren't aware of all those different election nuances that you had to go through to get people to register to vote. And finally ...

FS: You need to wrap up now.

RB: Okay, 30 seconds. Finally the most important thing, and I heard a lot ... I know there's a lot of rhetoric and there's probably a lot of angry people in this room, but you know what I think the most important thing we Americans can do? Let's reconcile to make a difference together. Doesn't matter what your political persuasion is.

Let's find common ground on things that need to be changed. We need to improve our education system. We need to do a lot of things that can empower ... most people, it doesn't matter whether you're left, right,

Democrat, Republican, whatever - let's reconcile to do things, the right things, that are right for the whole country. Thank you very much. ... [applause] ...

PH: Good morning. I think I want to start by asking us to celebrate the fact that there is a lot of good news that came out of this election. I know many people in this room may be disappointed with the results, but one of the things that I believe is historic and incredibly important that came out of this election is the level of investment in voter registration, particularly in communities of color.

I've been a Voting Rights lawyer for more than 20 years, and I have never seen voter registration done this intensively, this early in the cycle. And I think the result is something that we can all be extremely excited about, which is that there were many, many, huge increases in participation, in communities of color, as other people have pointed out by young people.

And we are on a journey in terms of making this country truly democratic by allowing all segments of the population to participate equally. And we made

great progress this year and people of color came closer than they ever have been in the past, in terms of participating at the same level as whites.

And that has happened because voter registration over time in this country has gradually been expanded, starting with the Voting Rights Act in 1965 which allowed African Americans the first time a real opportunity to vote. Then in 1993 Congress passed a National Voter Registration Act which allowed groups to actually take the forms and go out and register people and to do registration online and other creative ways to get around the fact that registrars were still in the 1980s and 1990s putting up a lot of barriers for people registering through the office processes.

And I think we've started the outcome of the NVRA, first in 2000, where there was an increase in participation that year also, and it was reflected in part in the breakdown in Florida in terms of election administration and overwhelming of those polling places and the fact that the state was not ready and

it did a lot of things to intentionally thwart the increased participation.

This year I had the opportunity to serve at America's Families United Voter Protection Project; AFU is an organization that funded voter registration in about 28 states, and at the end of the cycle had a database of about five million voter registration forms that we attempted to make sure actually made it on the rolls.

So the Voter Protection Project along with our partner organization Advancement Project where I used to be, served as the lawyers for voter registration in this cycle. And we tried to encourage voter registration groups to use what we called defensive voter registration practices to anticipate that there would be problems and barriers and to undertake practices that would allow us to overcome those barriers and minimize the problems.

Among other things, for the first time in my experience, there was large scale copying of voter registration forms before they were turned into election officers. That might sound like a small

thing, but in 2000, when we investigated after the debacle in Florida, we found lots and lots of people who said, yes, I registered, I turned it in at a Jesse Jackson rally, I took a bus to the office I DuVall Country and personally turned in my form. We would file our public records request and try to get those forms, and then to be told they don't exist; we can't find them.

So this year AFU had both hard copy and a database of five million forms; we matched those forms to the voter rolls, and we were able to track each voter registration application as it was going onto the rolls, and we're still doing that even now, after the election, because there was such a backlog in processing all these voter registrations, as other people have said; it wasn't even done by Election Day in some places.

I just want to mention one other really important issue which we dealt with in Florida. And we discovered by filing public records request for non-processed voter registration forms that Florida was holding and denying people the right to register, if

they hadn't checked certain little boxes on the form. It was a citizenship box, I am a US citizen. There was a box, I am not mentally incapacitated. There was a box, I have not been convicted of a felony.

And then at the bottom there was a signature block where you also signed and said under oath that you met all the eligibility requirements. A lot of people missed those little boxes. Florida wouldn't process their forms. Advancement Project working with AFU went to court to try to force the states to take those forms; it was immaterial that you didn't check these boxes, because you verified your eligibility.

We were not successful in the court case, but we did convince a number of counties to voluntarily accept forms that did not have a citizenship box checked, and we are still litigating that case, and we'll continue to press that issue which was actually resolved in a procedural issue unfavorably to us before the election.

But I think all of this work exposes the fact that there is still a lot to be done to make voter

registration, to make the registration systems really work, and to bring our democracy to the inclusive place that it should be. Thank you. ... [applause] ...

LC: I'm just going to speak from here. My name is Lillie Coney. I'm with the Electronic Privacy Information Center, and I'd like to talk with you a little bit about the history of voter registration in this nation. I want to make it very clear that African American people had the right to vote prior to the 1960s. after the Civil War, a number of Congressman and Senators of African American descent were in the houses of Congress. They were also present in the state, legislative and Senatorial offices prior to the end of reconstruction.

One interesting thing is that in the state of Louisiana, there were 127,923 black registered voters in the year 1888. At the same time there were only 126,884 white registered voters in the state of Louisiana. After reconstruction, efforts were instituted that would block access to voting rules for people of African American descent across this nation. And it wasn't just African Americans, it was Native Americans, people of Asian ancestry, anyone and

everywhere who was considered to be an outcast, our outside the privileged group that would ultimately participate in the election process in this nation. And it wasn't until the 1960s that a new movement came, to force the doors of access to the polling booth once again.

Many people felt that that process ended by the 1970s, but of course, many of us know in this room that that process continues today. The registration process was never intended to allow the masses to equally participate in the governing of this nation. There is still a struggle between the opulence of the anti-federalist, and the federalist, whether we should let the masses of people equal participate in the selection of leaders in this nation, or whether only selection, privileged individuals, should ultimately make those decisions for all of us.

We need to at this time in our history revisit that argument, decide as a nation, what it means to be a democracy, what it means to be an equal society. Now we know in our society and in our culture, we do not embrace equality in any sense of the word, because of

the materialism, because of education, because of access to things that make the comforts of life easier for some, rather than for others.

But we need to embrace equality in one sense - on Election Day - that we will open the doors of democracy to all, regardless of language of origin, regardless of race, regardless of gender, regardless of education level, regardless of physical disability or ability. And on that day, we will be equal.

On Election Day in this year, we saw the same problems that have been experienced by voters every generation that has existed in this nation. Means and methods for closing the door, to raising the bar, to limiting access - whether it was because of a lack of information about the rules of registration, whether the time limit had been reached for a time for participation in this election year, whether those registrations were actually processed properly by the offices that are in charge of voter registration rolls.

Unfortunately on Election Day the administrators of elections treat their list as if they are flawless, and in fact they aren't, and they know that they are not flawless. We look at multiple registrations on rolls and people registrations on rolls and people say, oh, someone is trying to commit a felony without acknowledging the fact that the history of registration in this country, it's like salmon swimming upstream.

You and I know that maybe the first time you fill out a voter registration application, it may not get processed. And a lot of the problems that arose over voter registration, the bulk of them, I would say collectively, belong to the Department of Motor Vehicles of the states that have not complied with the spirit of the law of the voter registration motor voter registration act, by not making sure their are states, motor voter registration application process is actually transmits that information to voter registration records.

And millions of voters showed up on Election Day, knowing that when they applied for their driver's

license which they have in their possession, they also registered to vote. There are a lot of things that can be done to improve the registration process in this nation, and we should look for one, making sure that fair information practices apply to how voter registration rolls are maintained.

We should look at whether we should have full open access to voter registration records. They provide an opportunity for identity theft. They would use this year to try to disinform voters, to misinform voters, as means of challenging voter's rights to participate even having absentee ballots counted.

We should look at whether we should centralize the voter registration process in computers or not. Will that provide other opportunities for misuse and mis-abuse or other opportunities for other problems to arise that have not been identified? Or will there be outsourced as was the case with the electronic voting technology, that states and counties are not managing that for themselves, they've outsourced it to private industry. I'll allow you to proceed on with the panel

and if you have any questions we can follow-up later.
Thank you. ... [applause] ...

JA: It's great to see so many people here, thanks for coming, and thanks for having me. I'm going to focus a little bit on a topic that I think is fairly narrow but interestingly it encompasses a number of the other problems that you're going to hear talked about in other contexts and that's laws in different states that disenfranchised people with felony convictions.

And this is something that really hit the radar screen after the 2000 election I think for most of us that was the first time that it really became a salient problem, and with the results in Florida and again of course, we saw it there again this year.

But I want to focus here on the fact that it goes way beyond that. Basically in this country we have 50 different laws that refer to the voting rights of people who were convicted of crimes, and the 20th century as we all know was a period of great struggle that basically moved the franchise more and more open and reinfranchise people.

But there's a group of people who remain categorically disenfranchised in different ways for different periods, and that's people convicted of felonies. And because of the way the criminal justice system interacts with racial prejudice in this country, past and present, that means that people of color continue to be disproportionately in that group. It's a big problem. It's almost five million people, that is, as a matter of law, across the country, and it's almost two million people of color.

So the ... whatever you think about the policies underneath those laws themselves, I think it's clear to everybody here that they shouldn't be used to disenfranchise people that the laws themselves don't cover; that is, people who haven't in fact lost their rights because of a conviction or people whose rights have been restored. But there's massive confusion out there, including among electoral officials about what the voting rights are of people who have been convicted of felonies in different states, and in particular what the registration requirements are for people who have lost their rights because of a felony conviction and either have those rights restored

either automatically or through some kind of clemency process.

And so, there's about four or five different ways that these laws interact with registration processes to create problems, and the first which I've just mentioned is, that the massive misinformation, and then in top of that kind of obstructive processes that grow up in registering and re-registering people with felony convictions.

Outside of Florida, this covers states with much more liberal laws than traditionally politically liberal states like New York, where we did a study and discovered that half of the local election boards were completely confused about what the law was, and were requiring all kinds of documentation from people who had been previously convicted and lost their rights when they went to re-register.

In many cases documents that were fictional, or documents that as a matter of law, they weren't eligible to receive. So effectively thousands more people were permanently disenfranchised in a state

where the law was that people's rights were automatically restored when they finish their sentence.

We did studies in other states or saw people by other people in other states, in Louisiana, massive confusion about what kind of documentation was required if any. In North Carolina only about a third of election officials surveyed got the law right, when they were asked whether people were able to vote again after a felony conviction. So Ohio, therefore was a lot of misinformation.

I think the number challenge here is to get the information correct to people as they come out of sentences, so that they know what their rights are, they know their rights to vote, to electoral officials so that they know what has to be done, and that people are in fact allowed to vote. It's not ill will in a lot of cases, although it certainly interacts with stereotypes.

A lot of it is missing confusion, and on top of that, there are the purge processes and you all heard about

the purge that Florida attempted rather unbelievably to do again and that was stopped. But there's a question now about how that's going to go forward, and that's something that as HAVA is implemented and as all 50 states begin to work with centralized voter databases, it's going to become much more of an issue.

And in particular I think we have to work to be sure that just as HAVA requires that people who lose their voting rights because of a felony conviction are automatically taken off the rolls, that every state puts in place procedures so that people when their rights are restored automatically are returned to the voting rolls.

It has to go both ways, and to sum that up finally my comment would be that we have to focus on erring on the side of enfranchisement and voting rights rather than erring on the side of disenfranchised. And I think that's a problem that runs throughout the system but it becomes particularly clear when you're dealing with people with felony convictions because of the stereotypes underneath it. But it's an important rule

of thumb that I think we can learn from that situation. So thanks. ... [applause] ...

END OF SIDE A

JG: Good morning. My name is Jehmu Green and I'm the President of Rock the Vote ... [applause] ... and I just want to thank Common Cause and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and the Century Foundation for inviting Rock the Vote to talk about our successes and our failures this year in registering young voters but most importantly making sure that young people turned out in record numbers.

Rock the Vote is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization that has been working for 15 years to empower young people to participate in the political process. We have done that by using traditional methods of public service announcements, popular culture, targeted marketing campaigns, and I think the one big difference this year was our use of emerging technology, especially our online voter registration tool.

Our street team program, our buss tour, happy birthday card, voter registration programs, our voter

registration kit programs - all of those efforts helped us to register over 1.4 million people, but out of the 1.4 million people that we registered, 1.2 million did it online at RocktheVote.com and with our online voter registration partners, and we're very excited about that.

I think two years ago when we started talking about online voter registration we ... our idea behind it was, if we build it, they will come; if we give it out for free to any partner on the web that was interested in registering voters on their website, whether it was MTV or BET or AOL or Glamour Magazine, or Christina Aguilera's website or blackplanet.com, that if we gave it out for free, young people would have greater access to registering to vote, that our databases as far as for follow-up efforts, get out the vote efforts, would be cleaner, and that we would actually be able to stay in touch with the people that we were registering to vote on a much more consistent basis.

And that's exactly what happened. I think if you look at the last two months of voter registration, September and October, we really did see an incredible

surge in our online numbers. Out of the 1.2 million people that used our online voter registration tool, half of them came in September and October of this year, which was just an amazing surge right at the end.

In addition to online voter registration I mentioned our voter registration kits that we sent, where over 700 kits were sent to mostly teachers who wanted to register their classes to vote, and some young people wanted to register their friends to vote, and included everything they needed from the actual national voter registration forms to the instructions for their state and posters, buttons, stickers, and those types of things.

Our voter registration kit program has been the staple of Rock the Vote for 15 years, but again I think as the numbers are showing in this year's election, online voter registration is the direction that we will be moving in, and I think that a number of major voter registration efforts, it wasn't just Rock the Vote that was really successful with online voter registration; Working Assets registered I believe a

million people; Declare Yourself, an organization that Norman Lear founded this year registered over a million young people using online voter registration and that is just a sign again of what is to come.

I think I went over a couple of what the benefits are. It definitely reaches more people. It definitely is less expensive. It builds a cleaner database again for Get out the Vote efforts, state requirements are more likely to be followed. I think we've heard a little bit about the issues of checking the box if you are a US citizen or checking a box if you are mentally competent; you can't move forward through the form unless you agree to those statements; there are things built into the online voter registration system that opt the people who are using that tool out of some of the issues that other people have faced.

Unfortunately not all election officials were able to keep up with the volume of new registrants. We have a number of election officials who would yell and scream and complain to organizers and new people who had just registered to vote because they had too many forms to process. I mean, that's a problem that we face and

hopefully as we see some of the HAVA pieces executed, those issues won't exist as much.

What were the barriers that we faced this year? Voter registration deadlines are a barrier. Not being able to fully register online is a barrier. Questionable practices by city and state boards of election, primarily centered around unconstitutional residency requirements that illegally discouraged or impeded scores of young people from registering to vote or voting in their local elections.

I think the most significant challenge for students who wanted to vote this year was bureaucracy, and the legal or administrative barriers that made it extremely difficult or impossible for them to vote in their college communities. Even though the United States Supreme Court passed in 1979 the right for students to register on their campuses, we saw on scores of college campuses students' rights being denied. We saw misinformed election officials giving them the wrong information, as well as malicious intent from election officials and organizations passing out flyers, telling students they will lose

their college scholarships, telling students that their parents won't be able to claim them as a dependent, and a number of other issues that were brought up.

I think I'm running out of time here. I just want to go through what we think are some possible solutions to this. In all of these issues is one, to make online voter registration truly online, to really endorse same day registration in the seven states that have it, 14 percent increase in youth voter turnout.

Let's have same day registration in all 50 states, college and university involvement, the National Higher Education Act requires colleges to provide voter registration forms to their students. That has to be enforced. It's not currently being enforced.

I think if you look at all of the efforts that Rock the Vote, New Voter's Project, the NAACP, the League of Voter Registration organizations, this job should not be left up to nonprofit organizations. The people who work in this building across the street, in this town have a responsibility to get a voter registration

form in the hands of every single high school student when they turn 18 years old [unint.]. ... [applause] ...

And I think this year's record turnout, we've talked about it. young people turned out 51 percent of young people turned out nationwide in Pennsylvania 64 percent of young people turned out two out of three young people turned out to vote. That is an incredible, incredible feat that should be applauded for all of the young people that came out for the first time.

But again, you know, 51 percent is a good mark, it's a record mark. By actually putting a voter registration into the hands of everyone who turns 18, we could increase that tremendously and I look forward to your questions. ... [applause] ...

FS: Well, I want to thank all the panelists. They were just excellent about keeping to the times, so thank you for doing that because that gives you everybody out there a little chance to participate, and us a chance to get through all the wonderful speakers we're going to have today.

So we have time for a few questions. Let me just suggest to you as you can see from the agenda, we have a variety of panels, and so if you can try to keep your questions to the issues that this particular panel is talking about, there will be another panel that addresses the concerns that you have. So it's easier for these panelists if you talk about the things that they're most interested in, and we want to hear all of your comments throughout the day, but please try to keep them to these particular questions, so I'll start over there.

Q: There's a lot of apathy in this country, and I applaud Common Cause, Century Foundation and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights for addressing this and really bringing this to the forefront. This is a non-partisan issue, or a non-partisan question, but it doesn't seem to be addressed anywhere on the agenda, and I have heard people ... there's a lot of anecdotal evidence to it.

But is anybody examining the partisanship in the electoral process, looking at the fact that the apathy that exists in this country as people say, well, it's been done for years; of course, they're Republicans or

they're Democrats that are at the top of the heap in the electoral ... and the Secretary of States and all across the country. Is anybody examining the relationship between that partisanship and events that are occurring and taking it beyond the anecdotal stage, so that we can get some concrete results, and is anybody looking at divesting that partisanship from the process so that elections can be independent and free from people who are holding power in those parties?

FS: So, I'm just going to give you a quick answer, even though the moderator doesn't usually do that. But I would say from Common Cause's perspective one of our recommendations is seriously looking at partisan elected officials. For the first time I think in Florida we thought a lot about what happens when there's a Secretary of State who is also very actively participating in a national campaign; we saw the same thing in Ohio, but it happens in all levels of government and I think for the first time people are starting to say, is that appropriate?

And certainly Jimmy Carter said that he wasn't sure we could bring international election observers into this

country, because one of their criteria is not having partisan elections. So something that's become commonplace, that sometimes we've taken for granted, probably has to be changed.

I don't know if any of the other panelists want to answer it. I do want to get onto registration questions, and if anyone who had a quick comment on this. I think ...

MS: It didn't relate to me for registration. I came from Colorado; I'm flying back here in just a couple of hours, and I'm very concerned. I'm going to talk to some of the individuals - Jessie, I'm going to contact you about the situation in our state in Colorado regarding felony purging on our voter registration lists. So that's ... there is a direct relationship for me, but thank you very much.

FS: I think it is very much related. Let me go over to this side and we'll get you some other questions.

Q: My name is Christine Mondmet [ph.]. I know that in the past, voter registration drives had sort of a bad reputation. It can be difficult to get people to vote for the first time. And I'm wondering if anybody's looking at data about how effective various voter

registration drives were in terms of actually getting people to vote, given all the barriers, given all the ... whatever. Is there data emerging?

PH: Data will be emerging and one average of the AFU database of five million registration forms is that once the voter history becomes available, which is where we are currently requesting that information from all the counties where we did major voter registration and it's not yet available for most places, but in January, I believe we will start getting the voter files with voter history, and then we can match our database against that and tell directly who turned out, where did they turn out, who registered this voter, who was in charge of GOT [unint.] there will be a lot of information available. I think it will be very useful going forward.

RB: I was going to add the [unint.] Foundation has done some interesting research; they did some exit polling, at least [unint.] it's not directly related but at least there's some prints we saw. In the State of Ohio, for example, when we looked at ... it was very interesting, the micropolitan [ph.] areas, these small rural area where there was a heavy turnout of vote.

We saw some of the areas where we did voter registration areas in those counties that the self-identified evangelicals that we were reaching out to, there was a 20 percent increase in their voting participation in those counties between 2000 and 2004.

Now that's not a director association; I don't know who identified this, but essentially in some of the areas that we worked in, in Ohio where we had events that were not planned, they were just part of a tour with some of these bands, that had been playing for a year and a half, that in these same areas there was a high participation of identified evangelicals in those small counties. So that's just some anecdotal evidence we had.

Q: Anything about the youth targeted?

FS: Traditionally voter registration efforts targeted towards young people that registered new voters, you see 70 percent of non-college young people actually turning out to vote and 76 percent of college students turning out to vote after they've been registered for the first time. so I think there definitely is a strong impact on voter turnout that we need to increase those registration numbers.

FS: Over on this side?

Q: Yes, as I understand it, a lot of people are going to be talking later this afternoon about the private companies that are involved in manufacturing these voting machines. But there's also the case who is to be responsible for maintaining the voter rolls. One of the problems with that fake felon list in Florida, for example, was that the purging was done by an outside organization; it was a private company. And who should be responsible for registering, for maintaining, for purging the voting rolls? Is that a government responsibility? I don't think it should be outsourced personally but I'd like to hear your opinions on that.

LC: Well that's one thing we're very concerned about at EPIC. The trend of using more and more technologically advanced means for managing elections has lent itself to governments outsourcing our elections process. And there are states like Michigan that has contracted with a company to manage their centralized voter registration rolls.

This will be problematic. These companies are not responsible to the voting public. You're not going to

be able to do public records requests, making them accountable for the things that they do or don't do, they compound the problems on Election Day.

And yes, you're right, private companies did participate in the building up of these purge lists with their inaccuracies; in 2000 it was Choice Point who provided 8,000 names supposedly of Texas felons who now, at that time, resided in the state of Florida. That was inaccurate, and it cost people their right to vote on Election Day. I would say states and localities, people need to be very cautious about outsourcing key components of the election process.

FS: I wanted just to add one thing to that, particularly since we've gone to Florida and the felon question a couple times in this, and that is, I want to say that, I don't really think the problems there were generated from the private companies. In fact, the investigations seemed to indicate that the private company had somewhat higher standards in that case, than the government. Not that I'm advocating shifting to private sources, but I just want to be clear that

that would not have solved the problem there; it wasn't the source of the problem.

But I also think whatever the relationship is, I think it's important, Lillie mentioned here, for example, the idea that private companies wouldn't be responsive to public document requests. That cannot be the case; that cannot be the law, and we would certainly litigate to enforce another rule.

To the extent that private companies become the agents of government agencies in the electoral process, they have to be susceptible and accountable at least to the level that the governments that use them are, that must be the standard. ... [applause] ...

FS: Over on this side.

Q: The question is primarily for Dr. Brinson, but the panel, if you all would like to comment as well. I heard you invoke one of the great buzz words of this political season, and that was pro-family. And also given the nature of your organization and its religious affiliation, I wonder if you think there might be a danger to the separation of church and

state when organizations such as your own, begin to meddle within the political process.

RB: Well I think there's always a danger of that; it depends on what you're actually doing. And I think the thing, the problem is, is that there's organizations on the left on the right, that were saying that they were advocacy groups when they were clearly partisan, clearly partisan ... [break in tape]

Q: ... ministers in those organizations begin politicizing their sermons to the extent that it has an impact on our political [unint.].

RB: Yeah, I think there is, and I think again that happened on both sides. I think there were people, when you have Presidential candidates talking from the pulpit of churches, I think that's inappropriate, I think that's totally inappropriate. And on the other side, on the right, are people [unint.] supporting the President that were making overt pretty partisan statements, and I think yeah, I think there is a danger to that.

But going back to what we were saying, I think again, we have seen that the participation among the evangelicals had dropped tremendously. There were six

million Evangelicals that evangelicals that had voted in '92 that didn't vote in 2000. That means, and that made up about 14% of the vote. This year it was about 23 percent of the vote, which is more reflective of how they were represented in the population.

And that's what we saw. I was on a debate with Atheist America on CNN with Paula Zahn one time, and the atheists were saying, well we need to get more people represented to vote, because we feel like they're underrepresented. I said yes, I agree with you. I think you need to go out and get it. If you think there's 25 million atheists out there that aren't voting, by all means, go out and get them to vote.

So that's the thing. It depends on ... everybody needs to have a right to vote. Everybody needs to be participating. We need to encourage that, rather than discourage that. But I think again, I think your concerns about partisanship are absolutely on track. I think again, I go back to think where there were presidential candidates talking from the pulpit, where

ministers are directly saying, telling people who to vote for - that's wrong.

And again, the evangelical vote again is not monolithic either. There's a lot of issues that drive all evangelicals. And some things are more important than others; it's not a monolithic vote.

FS: Now I hate to do this, but we need to get onto the next panel, and I know there's a lot of good questions out there. We have two things we want you to do: Put your questions on a card so we can get back to you, any questions that aren't answered at each panel, and put specifically who you want to hear from; we'll make sure it happens, and then please try again at the next panel to get your questions asked. I just want to thank your panel for being so articulate, on time, taking on challenging issues and being here with us today. Thank you all very, very much. ... [applause] ...

FS: All right remember, the sooner we get started, the more time we have for questions. I think there were a few, just three or four seats up here in the front row, so anybody who is still looking for a place to sit or tired of standing, feel free to come up in one

of these few empty seats. ... Okay, well thank you very much, thank you again for this panel, for being with us here today.