

**CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE  
STATEMENT FOR**

**“Preserving Democracy – What went wrong in Ohio?”  
Ohio Voting Irregularities Forum**

December 8, 2004

I am honored to be here today on this distinguished symposium for this important cause that concerns the fundamental rights of the people. The issue of potential disenfranchisement should garner the attention of every individual and elected official.

I would like to thank our distinguished panels of witnesses and recognize my friend the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. who has always been present to fight for civil rights, and this cause is no different. He and I collaborated this past weekend in Columbus, Ohio at the AfroCentric Middle School sponsored by the Citizens Alliance for Secure Elections (CASE) where figures such as Greg Moore from the NAACP and Greg Palast and Lynn Landis of the media shared their input on this important issue.

Many of our guests today were on the scene in Florida to uncover the fraud and we are all fortunate to have him here in Ohio continuing to fight for justice. Many people have likely tried to discourage or obstruct these guests and other advocates on more than a few occasions, but they have proven that they will not flee and that they will not relent until all the votes are counted in the 88 counties of Ohio and for that I applaud them.

It's unfortunate that more Americans are not appalled at the situation we see here in Ohio. It is plain to see that the Republican Party at the local, state and national level is doing everything it can to ensure that all the votes are not counted. They have tried to fool the public, they have ridiculed the opposition, and when that has failed they have tried to bully those who still stand in their way. *Never* have we seen a political party so afraid to do the most elemental of tasks which is the counting of each and every ballot.....*sorry I take that back*, never in the last *four years* have we seen the Republican Party so afraid for every vote to be counted.

While many people will trot out the line that the Election Day results in Ohio have already been determined, the actual truth is that too many questions surround this election. On election night when the race in Ohio was called for Bush, there were still over a quarter million ballots that had yet to be counted, votes which we now know are in overwhelmingly Democratic precincts. The truth is that the Republican Party in this state did all it could to have ballots thrown out, over 93,000 ballots were discarded. The Republican Party did all it could to have road blocks put in the way of legitimate Democratic voters. The Secretary of State here in Ohio, Mr. Blackwell says that this election was a huge success, but you and I know that had Senator Kerry been declared the winner in this state, he would have had done nothing short of having the pockets turned inside out for every Democratic voter trying to find ways to throw out enough votes and change the result. Well we will not stoop to his level, nor will we stoop even further below to the level of his party. We ask simply for the most basic of rights, that all the votes of the men and women of Ohio be counted.

**The sad truth in all of this, the dark secret, which we know all too well, is that with the hundreds of thousands of votes that have gone uncounted or discarded, the great number of them are from African-American voters. Sadly, this is no coincidence; this is just business as usual for the Republican Party establishment. The Civil Rights movement was the culmination of the efforts of so many people in our history who had to endure cruelty and humiliation, but still never relented in their quest for equality. However, while we achieved great gains by the passage of the Civil Rights Act and we have made great strides since, the truth is that we have not yet achieved true equality. We saw it here again in Ohio when the Republican Party announced a plan to challenge "fraudulent" voters on a mass basis, its hardly surprising that the voters they planned to challenge were overwhelmingly African American. The sad truth is that while we have achieved some justice in our society, the greatest right we have in this nation, the right to vote and especially the vote to determine our next President was taken away from us and it was done in a most unjust fashion.**

**Again, I can imagine the voices of those who will claim that this election is over and done with, that we should face the inevitable. Those who make such statements with such certainty need only look back to the 2000 elections in Florida. We were told in Florida as well that the results were in and that no recount was necessary, it was only after it was too late that we found out the truth. The 2000 presidential election revealed a plethora of barriers to voting. In NAACP hearings on voting irregularities we heard testimony from law enforcement, poll workers, educators, civil rights organizations, state and federal legislators, and disenfranchised voters recounting the following:**

- 1. That citizens who were properly registered were denied the right to vote because election officials could not find their names on the precinct rolls;**
- 2. That registered voters were denied the right to vote because of minor discrepancies and clerical errors;**
- 3. That first-time voters who sent in voter registration forms prior to the state's deadline for registration were denied the right to vote because their registration forms were not processed;**
- 4. That African-Americans voters were singled out for criminal background checks at some precincts and that one voter who had never been arrested was denied the right to vote after being told that he had a prior felony conviction;**
- 5. That African-American voters were required to show photo identification while white voters at the same precincts were not subjected to the same requirement;**
- 6. That voters who requested absentee ballots did not receive them but were denied the right to vote when they went to the precinct in person on Election Day;**
- 7. That hundreds of absentee ballots of registered voters in various counties throughout the nation were improperly rejected by the Supervisor of Elections and not counted;**

8. That African-American voters who requested assistance at the polls were denied assistance; and
9. That African-American voters who requested the assistance of a volunteer to translate the ballot for limited proficient voters were denied such assistance.

We see all the same signs of voter suppression here in Ohio. In the words of "Freedom," a poem by Langston Hughes we hear the threat to our national existence, *"freedom will not come today, this year nor ever, through compromise and fear. I have as much right as the other fellow has to stand on my two feet and own the land. I tire so of hearing people say, let things take their course. Tomorrow is another day. I do not need my freedom when I'm dead. I cannot live on tomorrow's bread. Freedom is a strong seed planted in the soil. I live here too. I want freedom just as you."*

So the question facing us, is what do we do now? We will not wait until it is too late; we will stand in unison and demand that all votes in Ohio be counted. First, there must be an investigation of the entire election process here in Ohio. This investigation must account for all the known cases of fraud, malfeasance and voter suppression. Congressman John Conyers, Ranking Member of the Judiciary Committee has called for a Congressional investigation into these serious issues and yet we don't hear a single Republican even whisper about the idea of finding out the truth. We don't hear a word from Judiciary Chairman Senebrenner or from Speaker Hastert, we don't hear a word from Governor Taft and we most certainly won't hear the word investigation from President Bush. Up and down the Republican Party they would be delighted to never hear the words 'Ohio election investigation', no matter how serious the allegations, they want this issue to just die and it's simply shameful. Second, there must be an independent audit of election results, especially in the case of all the discarded and provisional ballots. As well, there must be independent testing of the voting machines used here in Ohio. While we welcome technology, the right to vote is one of our most sacred privileges and we must ensure that these voting machines are accurately counting each and every vote. There have been too many cases here in Ohio where someone tried to vote for Kerry, but the machine registered a vote for Bush, truly that is unacceptable. Finally, there must a full and accurate recount of all the votes here in Ohio. And to ensure that this count is fair and non-partisan Mr. Blackwell must recuse himself from this recount. Only a fool could be made to believe that a man who served as the State Chairman for the Bush/Cheney campaign doesn't hold a bias in this case.

In the end, this all boils down to one simple statement: **COUNT EVERY SINGLE VOTE IN OHIO.** If the Republican Party is so certain of victory, then why do they consistently block every effort to have every vote counted? What are they so afraid of?? If there is no fraud and no voter was turned away, then why is no investigation being done?? Mr. President if you believe yourself to be rightly reelected, then why do you defy our Constitution and our rights and not call for every single vote to be counted?? Sadly, I can ask question after question about this election and hear nothing but silence from the Republican Party. The reason for this silence is evident; they fear the truth is not in their favor. Truth is the friend of those who are righteous and the devil of those who seek injustice. It was the great civil rights leader Malcolm X who stated: *"I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for*

*justice, no matter who it's for or against.” And it was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who said: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.” We my friends will take comfort in the truth because it will always lead us to justice.*

Because the Republican Party will not seek the truth, we must take this action upon ourselves. Let me state it here for all to know that **WE AS CITIZENS OF THIS GREAT NATION WILL NOT REST UNTIL THE VOTES IN ALL 88 COUNTIES OF OHIO ARE COUNTED!** We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to the untold number of voters who stood for hours on end to have their voice heard, we owe it to the people of Ohio, but most of all we owe it to every man, woman and child in the United States because the integrity of each vote is the integrity of this nation. We come together today to ensure that integrity and we will not be denied.

Thank you.