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NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE MAJORITY LEADER

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HAITI ELECTIONS

HAITIAN ELECTION PROCESS AT STANDSTILL; MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS DESERVE SCRUTINY

Long-delayed parliamentary elections were held in Haiti last weekend. The long-suffering Haitian people deserve credit in what is a momentous step in their efforts to develop democracy. For many months, it appeared elections might never take place. Since January, President Aristide has been governing by decree because elections were not held in the constitutionally-mandated period.

All reports out of Haiti indicate confusion and chaos in the electoral process. Hundreds of thousands of Haitians were waiting to vote 24 hours after polls were supposed to close. Some polling stations opened very late, and some never opened at all. An election station was burned in northern Haiti. Turnout was low.

Fatally Flawed Election Process

According to information my office received from Haiti today, the ballot counting process is in total disarray. The final results are not yet in, but the early returns indicate deep flaws in the process leading up to the election, deep flaws on election day, and now a complete breakdown of the process. All the signs point to an election process that is fatally flawed.

There are credible reports of ballots being destroyed, and of non-existent ballot security. No one knows when ballot counting will be completed -- or if it can ever be done credibly. Witnesses today cite cases of ballots being shoveled into trash containers, and left in the street.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) documented dozens of shortcomings in the months and weeks leading up to the election. The IRI delegation, headed by Congressman Porter Goss, issued a statement yesterday titled: "Irregularities mar the electoral process." The IRI statement details "grave concerns" with the Haitian elections.

IRI Deserves Credit, Not Criticism

The International Republican Institute deserves credit for its honest and serious effort to expose flaws in the Haitian election process. The international community should not just stand by and applaud a deeply flawed election. As Chairman Goss' statement noted yesterday, "the Haitian people deserve better."

In light of the work done by IRI, it was all the more surprising to see the Washington Post editorialize today against IRI's work. The Post claimed IRI's criticism was not informed or constructive, but misunderstood the "tough effort to rehabilitate" Haiti. I agree the effort to rehabilitate Haiti will be tough -- but it will not be served by turning our eyes from the very real problems in Haiti, or from an election that is fraught with problems. This is not a Republican view -- it is an honest assessment of the facts. The New York Times today reported that the Haitian election "unraveled further" yesterday. The Mayor of Port au Prince, an old ally of President Aristide, said yesterday: "There has been massive fraud. It does not seriously advance the process."

Questions on Haitian Elections

I expect hearings into Haiti's election to begin as soon as the Senate returns from recess in July. Instead of criticizing the monitors of the election, the Post should look for answers to the tough questions:

Why were thousands of candidates rejected by the election council in total secrecy?

Why was an official list of candidates never released?

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Why weren't election administrators trained until it was too late -- despite the availability of millions in international assistance for such training?

What happened to 1 million voter registration cards missing before election day? Why were voter registration records unavailable on election day, and then being destroyed 48 hours later?

Why was there a complete lack of ballot security on election day and subsequently?

Why were thousands of ballots and tally sheets destroyed and discarded before any official count was recorded or finalized today in Port au Prince and other departments?

Are the verifiable cases of ballot substitution part of a national pattern to influence the outcome of the elections?

Why was President Aristide silent on key issues of election integrity in the days before Sunday's balloting?

Who in the government and police force played a role in the undermining of Haitian democracy?

What has happened to the millions of dollars in election assistance given to Haiti -- amid rumors that elections workers will not be paid?

Is the election chaos in Haiti orchestrated, as charged by credible international observers on the scene today?

These and other issues deserve serious scrutiny -- not just cheerleading. The Haitian election process is at a standstill. I believe the election process in Haiti should be judged by the same standard used for other elections in other parts of the world -- the Haitian people deserve no less. The election observers have left the country but IRI is still on the ground asking the tough questions. I am confident Congress will fully examine all issues associated with the Haitian elections in the coming weeks.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 4:05 p.m.