

**Statement of U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson
Senate Judiciary Committee
December 19, 2012**

Chairmen Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley, thank you for holding this hearing on “The State of the Right to Vote After the November 2012 Election.”

Our goal is get to the bottom of why many places around the country, including my home state of Florida, experienced embarrassingly long lines at the polls and encountered unacceptable roadblocks to voting during this year’s November election.

I want to take this opportunity to share what we’ve learned so far with regards to attempts to suppress registration of new voters and voting itself in Florida.

Since Sen. Durbin brought his subcommittee to Tampa in January 2012, some new information has come to light.

As it turns out, we now know that a key individual behind Florida’s controversial voting law was none other than the general counsel of the Florida Republican Party - Emmett “Bucky” Mitchell IV.

According to testimony he gave in April as part of a federal voting rights lawsuit, Mr. Mitchell said he was asked to draft the original version of the legislation by state Republican Party leaders, including its executive director and two state GOP campaign operatives.

I would like to submit Mr. Mitchell’s full testimony from that lawsuit as part of the official congressional record on this matter.

And I would also note this isn’t the first time Mr. Mitchell’s name has surfaced with voting-related controversy.

In 2000, he was at the center of the State of Florida’s efforts to purge possible felons from the voter rolls. That misguided effort led to thousands of eligible voters being turned away at the polls during the presidential election because their names were removed from voter rolls.

The latest election law was introduced and passed in spite of vehement opposition from a wide array of groups because the law, among other things, reduced the number of early-voting days and canceled voting on the Sunday right before the Tuesday election. The law also made voting harder for people who recently moved to another county and had a different address, because they couldn’t change their address anymore at the polls.

Practically every one of the concerns of these groups – possible long lines, an avalanche of provisional ballots, court challenges – have come to pass.

Mr. Chairman, this committee will have to draw its own conclusions, but for me it's pretty straight forward: Florida's 2011 election law changes were politically motivated and clearly designed to disenfranchise likely Democratic voters – and, not, as its Republican sponsors contended, to prevent voter fraud.

Those who asked for the voting restrictions in Florida – including reduced early voting - held jobs with the sole aim of electing Republican lawmakers.

The attorney who obliged them, the lawyer who wrote the bill, represented the state Republican Party. He's the same lawyer who is identified in separate testimony before the U.S. Civil Rights Commission as the person who created the 2000 purge list that led to thousands in Florida being erroneously identified as possible felons.

And let's not forget that this effort in Florida took place against the backdrop of a broader Republican-led campaign to restrict voting. Leading up to the 2012 election, at least a dozen states controlled by Republicans approved new obstacles to voting as part of a campaign linked to the American Legislative Exchange Council, which receives substantial funding from the Koch brothers.

Singling out Americans, stopping those who want to vote from going to the polls, and all the other solutions in search of non-existent problems must be stopped. Not because of politics, but to protect the founding document of our nation, the Constitution.

So, thank you Mr. Chairman for this opportunity. I look forward to continuing our work together on these issues that are critical to my home state of Florida and the country.