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May 21, 2008

Hillary's Remarks on Counting Every Vote at a "Solutions for America" event in Boca Raton, FL

It's exciting to be with some wonderful supporters and friends. I thank your senator and my friend, Ted Deutch, he's a real leader. He and I have talked about the issues that matter to you over many years, and I'm so grateful to have his support. Commissioner Burt Aaronson, who has also led the way in so many important things here in Palm Beach County. I want to thank Jean Enright, one of your port commissioners. I want to thank Anne Gannon, the tax collector who is here, Representative Kelly Skidmore. And I am especially pleased to be accompanied today by a longtime friend of mine, Congresswoman Corrine Brown, who is a real fighter and a champion. She has a tremendously important position in the House of Representatives, where she does work on behalf of veterans and the needs, not only of her constituents in the Jacksonville area, but indeed all of Florida and America.

Now, this year's presidential election is like none other in history. And we have had more people engaging and volunteering, casting their ballots, than ever before. Everywhere I go, people tell me, "I've never given money to a campaign in my life; this year is different. I've never followed an election before; this time I can't stop watching." And there's a reason for that. With our economy in crisis, and with two wars and our children's future in the balance, more people than ever before are taking politics seriously.

I happen to welcome that because this is a democracy, and we've all got to participate. In fact, we want more democracy, not less democracy. We want more people taking a part in the selection of their president.

Here in Florida, more than 1.7 million people cast their vote, the highest primary turnout in the history of Florida. And nearly 600,000 voters in Michigan did the same. And not a day goes by that I don't meet someone who grabs my hand or holds up a sign, no matter where I am, in Kentucky or anywhere else, and says, "Please, make my vote count."

I receive dozens and dozens of letters and emails and phone calls, every couple of hours it seems like, all making the same urgent request: please count my vote. We used to be worried about voter apathy, didn't we? We worried why Americans didn't participate. Now, people are worried that their participation won't matter.

I believe the Democratic Party must count these votes. They should count them exactly as they were cast. Democracy demands no less.

I am here today because I believe that the decision our party faces is not just about the fate of these votes and the outcome of these primaries. It is about whether we will uphold our most fundamental values as Democrats and Americans. It is about whether we will move forward, united, to win this state and take back the White House this November. That has to be the prize that we keep in mind.

Because here in America, unlike in many other nations, we are bound together, not by a single shared religion or cultural heritage, but by a shared set of ideas and ideals, a shared civic faith, that we are entitled to speak and worship freely, that we deserve equal justice under the law, that we have certain core rights that no government can abridge and these rights are rooted in and sustained by the principle that our founders set forth in the Declaration of Independence. That a just government derives its power from the consent of the governed, that each of us should have an equal voice in determining the destiny of our nation. A generation of patriots risked and sacrificed lives on the battlefield for that ideal.

The union they ultimately formed was far from perfect. It excluded many of our citizens: people like Congresswoman Brown, me, my daughter. But it was an ideal that set forth a goal that we have consistently worked for.

Fortunately, in each successive generation, this nation was blessed by men and women who refused

Statement from the Clinton Campaign
6/3/2008

HUBdate: Election Day in South Dakota and Montana
6/3/2008

Wyoming Automatic Delegate Backs Hillary
6/3/2008

Response to VP Inquiry
6/3/2008

Louisiana Democratic Party Chair and Automatic Delegate Chris Whittington Endorses Hillary
6/2/2008

Statement from Hillary Clinton On Gay Pride Month
6/2/2008

New York Automatic Delegate Endorses Hillary
6/2/2008

to accept their assigned place as second-class citizens. Men and women who saw America not as it was, but as it could and should be, and committed themselves to extending the frontiers of our democracy. The abolitionists and all who fought to end slavery and ensure freedom came with the full right of citizenship. The tenacious women and a few brave men who gathered at the Seneca Falls convention back in 1848 to demand the right to vote.

It took more than 70 years of struggle, setbacks, and grinding hard work and only one of those original suffragists lived to see women cast their ballots. There are women here today – as with my own mother – who were born before the Constitution granted us the right to vote. This is not something lost in the mists of memory and history; this is real. The generations here in this room have seen change. The men and women who knew their Constitutional right to vote meant little when poll taxes and literacy tests, violence, and intimidation made it impossible to exercise their right, so they marched and protested, faced dogs and tear gas, knelt down on that bridge in Selma to pray and were beaten within an inch of their lives.

Some gave their lives to the struggle for a more perfect union. There is a reason why so many have fought so hard and sacrificed so much. It is because they knew that to be a citizen of this country is to have the right and responsibility to help shape its future, not just to make your voice heard, but to have it count. People have fought hard because they knew their vote was at stake and so was their children's future. Because of those who have come before, Senator Obama and I and so many of you have this precious right today. Because of all that has been done, we are in this historic presidential election. I believe that both Senator Obama and myself have an obligation as potential Democratic nominees - in fact, we all have an obligation as Democrats - to carry on this legacy and ensure that in our nominating process every voice is heard and every single vote is counted.

This work to extend the franchise to all of our citizens is a core mission of the modern Democratic Party, from signing the voting rights act and fighting racial discrimination at the ballot box, to lowering the voting age so those old enough to fight and die in war would have the right to choose their Commander-in-Chief, to fighting for multi-lingual ballots so you can make your voice heard no matter what language you speak. I am proud of our work today. We are fighting the redistricting initiatives that would dilute African American and Latino votes. We are fighting efforts to purge voters from the rolls here in Florida and elsewhere. We are fighting voter identification laws that could wrongly keep tens of thousands of voters from casting their ballots this November.

We carry on this cause for a simple reason, because we believe the outcome of our elections should be determined by the will of the people - nothing more, nothing less.

We believe the popular vote is the truest expression of your will. We believe it today, just as we believed it back in 2000 when right here in Florida, you learned the hard way what happens when your votes aren't counted and the candidate with fewer votes is declared the winner. The lesson of 2000 here in Florida is crystal clear. If any votes aren't counted, the will of the people is not realized and our democracy is diminished. That is what I have always believed.

My first job in politics was on the 1972 presidential campaign registering African-American and Hispanic voters in Texas. That work took me from home to home in neighborhood after neighborhood. I was determined to knock on every door and sign up every voter I could find. While we may not have won that election, I have never given up the fight. It is a fight I continue to this day.

Because I think it is appalling that in the 21st century, voters are still being wrongly turned away from the polls, ballots are still mysteriously lost in state after state, African-American and Hispanic voters still wait in line for hours while voters in the same state, even in the same county can wait just minutes to cast their votes. That's why I've been working since 2004 with my dear friend Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs Jones to pass the Count Every Vote Act; comprehensive voting rights legislation designed to end these deplorable violations. It will ensure that every eligible voter can vote, every vote is counted, and every vote can verify his or her vote before it is finally cast.

I will continue to fight for that same principle every day in this campaign. The fact is, the people of Florida voted back in January. You did your part. You showed up in record numbers and you made informed choices. But today, some months later, you still do not know if these votes will help determine our party's nominee. You still don't know if this great state will be represented at our convention in August. It is time you knew, because the more than 2.3 million people who voted in Florida and Michigan exercised their fundamental American right in good faith. You watched the news. You went to the candidates' web sites, you talked to your friends and neighbors, you learned about our records and policies so you could make informed voting decisions. You didn't break a single rule, and you should not be punished for matters beyond your control.

Now, I know that Senator Obama chose to remove his name from the ballot in Michigan, and that was his right. But his choice does not negate the votes of all those who turned out to cast their ballots, and we should not let our process rob them and all of you of your voices. To do so would undermine the very purpose of the nominating process. To ensure that as many Democrats as possible can cast their votes. To ensure that the party selects a nominee who truly represents the will of the voters and to ensure that the Democrats take back the White House to rebuild America.

Now, I've heard some say that counting Florida and Michigan would be changing the rules. I say that not counting Florida and Michigan is changing a central governing rule of this country - that whenever we can understand the clear intent of the voters, their votes should be counted. I remember very well back in 2000, there were those who argued that people's votes should be discounted over technicalities. For the people of Florida who voted in this primary, the notion of discounting their votes sounds way too much of the same.

The votes of 1.7 million people should not be cast aside because of a technicality. The people who voted did nothing wrong, and it would be wrong to punish you. As the Florida Supreme Court said back in 2000, before the United States Supreme Court took the case away from them, as your Supreme Court said, it's not about the technicalities or about the contestants. It's about the will of the people. And whenever you can understand their intent, it should govern. It's very clear what 1.7 million people intended here in Florida. Playing a role in the nominating process in a two-party system is just as important as having a vote in the presidential election on Election Day count.

We know it was wrong to penalize voters for the decisions of state officials back in the 2000 presidential election. It would be wrong to do so for decisions made in our nominating process. Democrats argued passionately. We are still arguing, aren't we, for counting all the votes back in 2000, and we should be just as passionately arguing for that principle today, here in Florida and in Michigan. It is well within the Democratic Party rules to take this stand. The rules clearly state that we can count all of these votes and seat all of these delegates, pledged and unpledged, if we so choose. And the rules lay out a clear process for doing so.

With this process, I hope we will honor the will of those who came out to cast votes. Think of how that day was. Workers who rushed to the polls between shifts; students who came between classes, parents who rearranged their family's schedules, senior citizens who arranged transportation to the polls, all so you could have your votes counted. And whether you voted for better schools for your kids or a secure retirement for your parents, for jobs you can raise a family on, for health care you can afford, to bring your son, your grandson, your daughter or your granddaughter back from Iraq or bring back America's reputation in the world. Whether you voted for me or Senator Obama or Senator Edwards or someone else, each vote you cast is a prayer for our nation, a declaration of your dreams for your children and grandchildren; a reflection of your determination to ensure that our country lives up to its promise. Each vote is a tool, one used throughout history to break barriers, open doors, and widen the circle of opportunity.

I remember when President Lyndon Johnson addressed the Congress and the nation urging the passage of the Voting Rights Act. He declared, "I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy." It was urgent, elevated language, but it was not hyperbole. Now, as back then, those are the stakes. That's why here in Florida, even when you were told your primary might not count, you voted anyway.

A Floridian I know from Tallahassee told me about his mother's canasta club. It's a group of women in their golden years who gather every week to play cards and visit. They talked about that Florida primary every week as they gathered around the card table. They followed the news closely. They discussed the candidates and their positions on the issues. They knew about the dispute over the primary schedule and the question of seating delegates. And when it came time to vote, like so many other good citizens of this state, the ladies of the canasta club dutifully cast their ballots for the candidates of their choice. They made informed choices. They did nothing wrong, and they should not be punished for doing their civic duty.

You knew then what Americans know, that this political process of ours is about more than the candidates running, the pundits commenting or the ads blaring. It's about the path we choose as a nation. If anyone ever doubted whether it mattered who our president was, the last seven years with George Bush should have removed every single doubt from anyone's mind.

That's why you voted, and that's why I'm running. And that's why you've been organizing and raising your voices, hoping to have your votes count. You refused to stay home then, and you refuse to stay silent now. Because you want to change America's future and you have faith that your party, the Democratic Party, will give you that chance. I'm here today because I believe we should keep that faith, listen to your voices and count every single one of your votes. If we fail to do so, I worry that we will pay not only a moral cost, but a political cost as well.

We know the road to a Democratic White House runs right through Florida and Michigan. And if we care about winning those states in November, we need to count your votes now. If Democrats send the message that we don't fully value your votes, we know Senator McCain and the Republicans will be more than happy to have them. The Republicans will make a simple and compelling argument. Why should Florida and Michigan voters trust the Democratic Party to look out for you when they won't even listen to you?

Now, if you agree with me, I urge you to go to my website, HillaryClinton.com, and join the more than 300,000 who have already signed our petition asking the Democratic National Committee to count your votes. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the territories will have a chance to play a role in this historic process. Now is not the time for our party to have a dialogue

about which states and which votes should count. The people of Florida are all too familiar with where that discussion can lead. In the end, we cannot move forward as a united party if some members of our party are left out. Senator Obama and I are running to be president of all Americans and all 50 states. And I want to be sure that all 50 states are counted and your delegates are seated at our convention.

So will you join me in making sure your voices are raised and heard so that your votes can be counted? Because remember, it's been the mission of the Democratic Party, guided always by the understanding that as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "the ultimate rulers of our democracy are not the president, the senators, the members of Congress and government officials, but the voters of this country." In this Democratic Party, the voters rule. So let's make sure your voices are heard and your votes are counted.

Thank you, and God bless you, and God bless America.