

CONFIRMATION HEARING OPENING STATEMENT  
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION  
REGARDING THE ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

*Submitted by* Nominee Gracia Hillman  
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Good Morning Mr. Chairman, Senator Dodd and members of the Committee. It is my great privilege to have the opportunity to appear before the Rules Committee as a nominee to the Election Assistance Commission. I am honored that Leader Pelosi recommended me as a candidate and I am honored to have been nominated by President Bush.

I use this opportunity to thank the President and the Leader for their expressions of confidence in my abilities and integrity. Words alone cannot adequately describe how honored I am today.

Mr. Chairman, I am proud to have had the opportunity to submit my credentials to the Committee in advance of today's hearing. I have also submitted my written answers in response to questions posed by the Committee that address the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), its focus and administration, including the responsibilities of the Election Assistance Commission.

Rather than repeat the information previously submitted, I would like to tell you a little more about why I am so honored to have been nominated and excited about the possibilities that HAVA presents for democracy in America.

Congress worked hard in a bipartisan fashion and gave thoughtful consideration for about two years to the creation of HAVA and an appropriate role for the Federal government in the administration of Federal elections. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has the responsibility of implementing HAVA as intended by Congress. The EAC will work to accomplish that task in partnership with state and local election officials and the many thoughtful groups that Congress consulted with as it crafted HAVA. I am prepared to follow the law and ensure the full and complete implementation of HAVA.

But for me, this is not just an exceptional career opportunity. It is an extension of a life passion that I have pursued at every occasion.

Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that beyond updating voting systems and correcting problems, when we look at HAVA, we are also looking at yet another opportunity to preserve the very fiber of American democracy – the greatest democracy in the world. America has tirelessly provided for and protected the right of the franchise for its citizens. The right to vote is the essence of our democracy and it is through the franchise that citizens participate in shaping the direction of our country and the future of our families. HAVA, the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, and the Voting Rights Act as extended in 1982, were constructed to reaffirm these rights for all of our citizens.

HAVA cuts through partisanship and electoral politics and that is how it should be. HAVA caresses the very heart of our democracy and the soul of our constitution. The Election Assistance Commission will have an unprecedented opportunity to provide leadership on setting the tone that HAVA is for all of America. And it will set this tone in partnership with many other groups, including the Standards Board, the Board of Advisors, state and local election officials and the many thoughtful organizations that worked on HAVA, including those that represent the civil rights and disabilities communities.

As Americans, we are so extraordinarily fortunate to be able to guarantee for our children and grandchildren and all future generations, the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we do that by assuring, confirming and codifying, to the maximum degree, the right of all eligible voters to an equal opportunity to cast a vote and have that vote counted. And we do so knowing that there are many people in the world who are not so fortunate as to have the simple but precious right to vote. Especially in light of those around the globe who have to be ever so vigilant to protect their rights.

The EAC is a product of a carefully balanced bipartisan and bicameral Congressional compromise. It is the responsibility of the commissioners to work together to implement HAVA as intended by Congress. I have met with and have enormous respect for Messrs. DeGregorio, Martinez and Soaries. I look forward to the opportunity to work with them and have every confidence that we can accomplish the task at hand.

Mr. Chairman, as I conclude my remarks this morning, I take a brief moment to read the following quote. *"I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have a taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."*

That is a quote from Nelson Mandela but I think it could have been a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Caesar Chavez, or Justin Dart, or perhaps Mr. Chairman, anyone in this room, including myself, who is committed to making certain that every eligible voter has a full and equal opportunity to vote and to have his or her vote counted.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Dodd and Members of the Committee, it is in this spirit that I present myself to the Rules Committee today. I thank you for your time this morning and look forward to answering your questions.