

**Statement of Election Assistance Commission nominee
DeForest B. Soaries, Jr. to the United States Senate
Committee on Rules and Administration – October 28, 2003**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of this committee:

It is a high honor for me to join my fellow nominees and appear before this committee today. I seek your support of my nomination to serve as a Commissioner of the Election Assistance Commission.

A few months ago I met an old friend who gave me a picture of our eighth grade class trip to Washington, DC. When I saw our photograph standing on the steps of the United States Capitol, it occurred to me that in 1964 I had never dreamt that I would one day return to this place as a Presidential nominee. I am humbled by this opportunity and, if confirmed, pledge to serve the country with integrity and passion.

I was the Secretary of State of New Jersey in November 2000. I paid careful attention to the challenges that stemmed from inadequate voting systems in various places. I became even more aware at that time that my own state still had counties that used punch card voting devices. Although as we wanted to continue upgrading and updating our voting equipment, fiscal limitations restricted our ability to complete that work.

When Congress passed the Help America Vote Act in 2002, I was thrilled to learn that the federal government would offer resources to all states to assist them in enhancing the voting process in America.

Voting is the foundational act that breathes life into the principle of the consent of the governed. When public access to voting is impaired or when public confidence in voting is diluted, democracy suffers and our freedom is less secure. The Election Assistance Commission represents a major, unprecedented commitment from the federal government to sustained freedom and vibrant democracy. I am humbled by the prospect of being one its charter members.

If I am confirmed by the United States Senate, I pledge to work diligently to create a commission that is user friendly and accessible to those who are depending upon its efforts. I further pledge to always remember that my mission is to serve and to never allow personal ambition to usurp my

responsibility as a public servant. I pledge to put the nation's needs above partisan loyalties and to work cooperatively with those whose political affiliation or views may differ from my own. I pledge to carry out my duties in a manner that is consistent with the legislation that created the Commission and to resist the temptation to expand or reduce the legislative intent.

If confirmed by the Senate, I pledge to judiciously use the resources provided by the Congress to promote the best election practices, meaningful election standards and the importance of voting throughout the country. My goal will be to help America vote and to believe that every vote is counted and does count.

After answering any questions that you might have, I would be honored to receive your endorsement for this high and noble mission.

Thank you.