



International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers

GLOBAL ELECTORAL ORGANIZATION (GEO) CONFERENCE
FOURTH CONFERENCE
WASHINGTON, DC, USA
27 - 29 MARCH 2007

“PROFESSIONAL ELECTION ASSOCIATIONS”

By: Tony J. Sirvello III
Executive Director, IACREOT
International Association of
Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers
United States of America

Greetings, the Honorable Richard Soudriette, President of the International Foundation for Election Systems and host of this year's GEO, the Honorable Dr. Zoltan Toth, Secretary General of the ACEEEO, and host of the 2005 GEO, the Honorable Luis Carlos Ugalde, President of the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico, and host of the 2003 GEO, the Honorable Jean Pierre Kingsley, incoming President of IFES, former Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, and host of the first GEO in 1999, distinguished panelists, delegates and guests. I am honored to participate on this panel and bring you a perspective on the structure of my organization, the International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers (IACREOT) and its adherence to the “every vote counts” doctrine that serves as the theme of this GEO.

Before I begin, let me tell you a few words about my background. Before assuming the position of Executive Director of IACREOT in 2002, I served as the Administrator of Elections for Harris County, Houston, Texas from 1973-2002, a jurisdiction of 1.8 million voters and the third largest county in the United States. As such, I feel very much at home among election officials from around the globe. I am very proud to have served as an Elections Administrator for over 25 years, bringing the most precious freedom we all enjoy – the right to vote – to the voters of my jurisdiction. The highlights of my career include serving on the Federal Election Commission Advisory Panel, testifying before the United States Congress on election legislation,

being the first election official in the United States to email a ballot to an astronaut aboard the Space Station in 1997, which did count by the way, served as an international observer for the first democratic elections in Albania in 1997, serving as Past President of IACREOT in 1998-1999, and currently representing IACREOT as a member of the Board of Advisors of the United States Election Commission. I am also honored to have represented IACREOT at the three previous GEO Conferences.

The International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers was founded in 1971 by a small group of government officials who wanted a professional organization which would provide a forum for the free exchange of information, resulting in improved standards for serving the public, and an organization which would speak with a unified voice on matters of importance to its members. Over the past 36 years, IACREOT has grown in both membership and purpose. Professionalism in public service, openness and good fellowship are hallmarks of our organization.

Today, IACREOT is one the most successful, well-respected organizations in the United States, with over 1500 members, representing local, state, provincial, national and international associations and agencies. Our members are government officials whose responsibilities fall into one of our four divisions – finance, land records, courts and elections. The elections division is the largest of the four divisions, as many of our members represent more than one of our divisions in their respective positions within their jurisdictions.

As an association, IACREOT is governed by its By-Laws, Policies, Procedures and Guidelines. Our Executive Board consists of 10 elected and 10 appointed positions. The Executive Board meets three times annually – in the fall, Mid-Winter and at our Annual Conference, held each summer in a city voted on by our delegates at a previous conference. Our Board of Directors consists of an elected representative from each of our member states and our international representatives. At our Annual Meeting, all delegates participate in the business of the organization, elect officers, and attend educational workshops and seminars.

One of the highlights of our Annual Conference is our Trade Show, open for two full days, with a display of the latest technology available to government officials, with a heavy emphasis on the elections industry. At our meeting in San Francisco in July of 2006, over 80 companies exhibited in over 110 booths, including vendors from Canada, Japan, Ireland, Spain and the Netherlands.

In addition to our regularly scheduled seminars, which include topics such as “Finding, Training and Retaining Poll Workers”, “Interaction with the Media” and “A Forum on The Help America Vote Act”, IACREOT offers its members a program of graduate studies in cooperation with the University of Missouri, called the Chancellor’s Certificate in Public Administration.

IACREOT’s annual dues are \$145.00 for membership; Conference registration fees range from \$350.00 - \$400.00 per delegate and include training, social activities, entry into the trade show and voting rights. As a member of IACREOT since 1979, I feel that our strongest attribute is our networking – the ability to contact a member of your peer group and discuss any problem or possible solution. This is one of the key roles of our organization. In addition, let me mention that IACREOT is mostly a volunteer organization, with only two paid employees.

Another role that our organization plays is providing up-to-date information on news that might affect the office operations of our various members and keeping our members informed of any new developments in their respective field. We accomplish this through a newsletter, which is published three times a year, our website, blast email messages, conference calls, fax notices and special called meetings.

IACREOT has had a major impact in the field of elections in the United States. We have two appointees to the U.S. Election Assistance Board of Advisors and several members appointed to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission Standards Board. A few of our members participate on the Technical Guidelines Standards Committee of the National Institute for Standards and Testing, providing input on the daunting task of establishing national standards for the voluntary voting systems guidelines. Many of our members have testified before the United States Congress, and as such were instrumental in the final product that became the 1993 National Voter Registration Act and the 2002 Help America Vote Act. Many of our members serve as officers in their respective state associations, thereby impacting the effect of elections on a local level. I might remind the delegates at this point that the majority of election law and policy remains in the hands of state governments and not the federal government, emphasizing the importance of local participation. Many of our members have served as observers in elections abroad and many others have hosted international election delegations.

The Help America Vote Act, which revolutionized the U.S. election process, remains today an act in progress. The U.S. EAC Commissioners, the four Presidential appointees responsible for the implementation of the HAVA, have traveled across the United States, participating on panels, answering

questions, holding seminars and speaking to election officials one-on-one. In the short time they have been on duty, they have done a tremendous job in creating a harmonious and trusting relationship between the federal government and local officials. IACREOT has been very active in providing information for HAVA studies and serving on HAVA panels. We have also joined other U.S. election organizations in petitioning the President and Congress for adequate funding to facilitate the smooth implementation of the Help America Vote Act. The current Chair of the U.S. EAC, The Honorable Donetta Davidson, is among the delegates to this Conference. IACREOT has been very active in providing information for HAVA studies and serving on HAVA panels.

Since the U.S. Presidential Election of 2000, election administration in the U.S. has been under increased scrutiny – by the media, public interest groups, university faculty, hackers, election organizations, and to a lesser extent, the American public. The idea that “every vote should count” has long been the standard of operation by the thousands of dedicated individuals in the U.S. responsible for the conduct of elections. However, because of this heightened interest in the conduct of elections by the aforementioned groups, the U.S. Elections Administrator has had very little margin for error. In the five years since the passage of the HAVA, the American landscape has changed significantly, with new voting equipment and a large number of mandatory procedures. And yet, perceived voter confidence remains an issue we must deal with on a daily basis. Post election audits, during which machine totals from electronic voting equipment are manually counted, re-checked or otherwise put under additional scrutiny is one tool being employed to assure candidates, voters and political parties of the integrity and transparency in the system and that “every vote counts”.

The Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail is at the top of the wish list of the skeptics of the direct recording electronic voting machines. Several states have already adopted such a system and Federal legislation to mandate same in all Federal elections was the subject of testimony before the U.S. House Administration Committee just this past week.

Legislation affecting the conduct of elections in the U.S. seems to be on the minds of many members of Congress, as bill after bill has been filed, all with the intention of ensuring that “every vote counts”. One particular bill, sponsored by Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, seems to incorporate most of the agenda. Senator Clinton’s bill, which is captioned “The Count Every Vote Act”, asks for more accountable and accessible voting systems by establishing new security standards for voting equipment manufacturers, including a ban on using undisclosed software and wireless communication devices in voting systems; more opportunities for citizens to register to vote

and cast a ballot by allowing voters to register and cast their ballot on election day; discourage partisan manipulation and deceptive practices in elections by providing for the prosecution of those who engage in deceptive practices to keep people from voting in federal elections; and by ensuring that all votes are counted by allowing voters who cast provisional ballots in a wrong precinct to still have their votes counted for all eligible federal races.

All of the filed and to be filed pieces of legislation face, of course, partisan discussions of their effect on the conduct of elections, and their debate and ultimate passage or defeat are running head first into what most likely will be one of the most contested Presidential elections in the history of the U.S. in 2008. There will always be an issue of “counting every legitimately cast vote” as opposed to just “every vote counts”.

IACREOT is at the forefront in this animated debate over the security and accuracy of today’s voting systems. As an organization, we join with other U.S. election organizations in petitioning Congress for adequate funding for the implementation of these mandates, which require increased local spending and budgets out of control. Our members testify individually before Congress and their respective state legislatures, offering their grass roots expertise on what will and will not work, all the while ensuring all who will listen that “counting every vote and having every vote count” is part of our preamble.

IACREOT today continues to offer our members an association that fulfills their needs and requests. Because of the diversity of our membership, in that some of our members are based in states that conduct all mail ballot elections, while other members are based in states that currently permit Election Day registration, it is challenging for IACREOT as an organization to put a united face on our approach to election reform. We are able to accomplish this through our communications network and keeping our members informed.

IACREOT is a large organization, with many personalities. And yet, in many respects, we are like a family. In response to the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina along the U.S. Gulf Coast, IACREOT established a relief fund to aid counties and parishes that have been devastated. We accepted donations of cash, office equipment, office furniture and the like from our members to distribute through the various local associations in the affected counties. Each year at our Annual Conference, we present five college scholarships to deserving children or grandchildren of our members. This extends our legacy and builds our database for the future.

IACREOT welcomes new members with an orientation breakfast at our Annual Conference. We encourage our new members to join one of our many committees and become actively involved. Our theme for this year, set by our President Rockne Clarke, of New Philadelphia, Ohio, USA, is "Winning the Race for Excellence, Fueled by Love, Friendship and Loyalty". I would like to introduce distinguished officers of our organization who are in the audience today – our President, The Honorable Rockne Clarke; our 2nd Vice President, The Honorable Bill Cowles, Supervisor of Elections, Orlando, Florida; our Secretary, The Honorable Robert T. Saar, Executive Director of the DuPage County Board of Elections, Wheaton, Illinois; our Director-At-Large for Election Officials, The Honorable Elizabeth Ensley, Election Commissioner, Topeka, Kansas; and our Trade Show Chair, Ms. Margaret Sparks, Life Member, Houston, Texas.

I welcome all of you to join our family and to our 36th Annual Conference, to be held in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, from July 17 – 21, 2007. I was most pleased that my invitation to the delegates in Siofok, Hungary resulted in new international members in attendance last year in San Francisco; these representatives from Nigeria, Australia, Albania and the Philippines are now members of our Board of Directors.

I welcome any questions from members of the panel or the delegates assembled and I thank you for your time and attention.