

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

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WAXMAN AND CONYERS CALL ON GAO TO INVESTIGATE LONG LINES AND EXCESSIVE WAIT TIMES AT THE POLLS

Representative Henry Waxman, Ranking Member on the House Committee on Government Reform, and Representative John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member on the House Judiciary Committee, sent the following letter to GAO Comptroller General, David Walker, to request an investigation into the long lines and excessive waiting times experienced by voters in the 2004 election.

January 12, 2005

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We are writing you today about the extraordinarily long time some Americans were made to wait simply to cast a ballot on election day, November 2, 2004.

According to news reports, it was not unusual on that day for American voters to stand in line at their polling places for several hours before finally reaching the voting booth. While it seems most Americans endured this wait where possible, it is clear that in some cases citizens left the polling places without having voted when personal responsibilities or health concerns made waiting exceedingly difficult. Press accounts of that day focused on the lines in some areas, particularly the cities and college towns of Ohio. However, it appears that these incidents were by no means limited to those areas. One nonpartisan voter assistance hotline collected nearly 1,400 reports of excessively long lines from 32 states, with significant numbers of reports coming from Florida, Georgia, Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and other states.

In light of these incidents, we request a GAO investigation into the long lines and excessive waiting times experienced by voters in the 2004 election. Specifically, we ask that GAO:

1. Identify the voting jurisdictions in which voters experienced excessive waiting times and determine to what extent these waiting times involved minority, young, or first-time voters.
2. Assess the cause of these excessive waiting times, including whether they were related to problems with voter registration; voting machines and supplies; or local election officials, including poll workers.
3. Identify the significant issues that need to be addressed to reduce the waiting times in these jurisdictions.

Participating in elections is one of the most basic rights of Americans. Allowing long lines and other barriers to participation to persist threatens that right.

GAO staff should contact Nancy Scola to discuss additional details of this work and the time frame for completion.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member

John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member