

**Statement of Supervisor Frank Principi,  
Woodbridge District, Prince William Board of County Supervisors**

**Congressional Forum: Lessons from Election Day 2012: Examining the Need for Election  
Reform**

**Woodbridge Virginia  
January 14, 2012**

Good morning Congressman Cummings, Congressman Connolly, and guests, I am Supervisor Frank J. Principi, Woodbridge Magisterial District, Prince William Board of County Supervisors. I am pleased to present my first-hand experiences and suggestions for needed election reforms to the Committee for your consideration.

I want to begin by thanking you for your leadership in addressing the barriers my constituents faced here in Woodbridge on November 6, 2012. As you know, Election Day is our greatest expression of American democracy and it is even more so when you consider the demographics of Prince William County. Not only are we among the fastest growing communities in the region, our growth is unique. With 414,000 residents, we are the only majority minority jurisdiction in Northern Virginia. At the time of the election, we had 254,644 registered voters across 76 voting precincts. On Election Day, 181,084 voters cast their ballot representing an amazing 71% voter turnout.

In my travels from precinct to precinct that day, I was truly inspired by the very patient, yet determined citizens waiting in long lines in freezing temperatures to cast their ballot. I was also inspired by all of the hardworking poll workers that came out that day to assist their neighbors and help make a difference. Their public service should not go unnoticed. I will never forget just how remarkable it was to see so many of my neighbors who came out to vote and help each other express their choice for President and the other elected officials on the ballot that day! It was a proud moment for all of us.

My own personal experiences on Election Day mirrored those of my neighbors. I waited over two hours in line to cast my ballot after circling the parking lot several times to find an available parking space. Like others, I stood in line wondering what had occurred to cause the delays and wondering if I had got out of line to go to the restroom, whether residents would let me back in or move to the back of the line. Inside the school, there was no cellular phone coverage and I couldn't call 911 if a life depended on it.

For literally thousands of other residents in my District, the waiting lines at their precincts were considerably longer and the parking even more scarce. At three of nine precincts in Woodbridge (River Oaks, Lynn, and Freedom), voters waited three, four, and five hours to cast their vote. To make matters worse, many voters stood in line outside in freezing temperatures.

The line at the River Oaks precinct was never less than three hours long from 6am when the polls opened to 7pm when the polls closed. I personally witnessed nearly 1,000 voters in a line that snaked up and down several school hallways and then out and around the outside of one school location. Voters came as they were – they wore everything from suits to work boots, many without the needed coats and sweaters, men and women carrying infants and toddlers (many without a snack), disabled voters that didn't have a place to sit and rest.

The roughly 5,000 registered voters in the River Oaks precinct were voting on six (6) electronic voting machines and their identifications were being confirmed using two electronic poll books. Throughout the day, there were empty voting machines as poll workers struggled to keep up with the new state laws requiring voters to show a form of identification. The last ballot was cast at the River Oaks precinct at 10:45pm, meaning the final voter had waited 3 hours and 45 minutes to do so.

What we all experienced on Election Day is unacceptable. Residents in Eastern Prince William County already face one of the longest commutes in the nation. Asking my neighbors to essentially give up a day's work – to give up their day - to cast their ballot is unconscionable. We can do better than this!

In addition to having too few voting machines and too few electronic poll books, there were also two state constitutional amendments, chock full of legalese that only a constitutional lawyer could understand, that contributed to the long waits. These new state identification requirements only confused voters more and added additional procedures for our poll workers to deal with, one at a time. Recent Census redistricting added yet another layer of confusion to the voting experience as voters waiting in line sometimes realized too late that they were at the wrong precinct. I personally witnessed over 100 voters that were in line at River Oaks that eventually got out of line to return home or to work. One frustrated gentlemen looked at me and said that this was "out of control."

Our right to vote on November 6 was made more difficult than it had to be and for others, made it impossible to vote. Last November, there were far too many barriers for voters to overcome and our greatest expression of democracy was put to the test. Given our new political reality – that more Americans are voting more often – it's time for change! Given that Virginians go to the polls every year, voting reform is needed here and now more than ever.

Here in Prince William, the Board of County Supervisors has recently acknowledged the barriers we experienced on Election Day and established a bipartisan Election Commission. The Commission is charged with investigate all that went on leading up to, and including Election Day, and report back the lessons learned and go forward recommendations to ensure we never repeat the November 6, 2012 voting experience.

It seems certain that the Election Commission will have to seriously consider such reforms as the acquisition of new (and additional) voter machines, the establishment of additional polling locations, expanded absentee voting, and considerably more public education and outreach. I hope our Commission also addresses the feasibility of Internet voting – voting from the convenience and comfort of your own home – as one option for Virginians. I believe all of these things are possible when the elected leadership at the federal, state, and local government levels all work together on this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer your questions.