

MS. MADISON: My name is Mildred Madison and good afternoon. I do want to thank the Eisenhower Foundation for having this forum.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization. We do not endorse candidates, but we do study positions. We do study issues which we take positions on. One of the issues that we are very concerned about happens to be voting rights.

In Detroit there are two methods by which you can vote. One is that on election day you can go to your precinct and vote, or you can vote absentee -- with an absentee ballot. Usually this is the -- Detroit has over 128,000 seniors. We mean persons who are over sixty. Fifty-five percent of them vote -- those that are registered. We do not know exactly how many are registered for the simple reason that some -- we do know that fifty-five percent of that 128,000 vote by absentee. We do not know if they vote on the precinct level.

One of the things that I have worked -- the League of Women Voters has worked in partnership with the NAACP because we have been very concerned with the harassment, intimidation that we have been -- that Detroiters get at the polls. We have found out that at the polls.

So the NAACP works with what I call the outside. They work at the precincts. The League of Women Voters, we have been the challenger at Cobo Hall, where they count the ballots. All of the ballots are taken to Cobo Hall on the day of the election where they are then counted.

I started being a challenger for the League in 1999. Between 1999 and 2003 there were about -- I would say about five to ten challengers at Cobo Hall. Our job -- we didn't -- our job was really to make sure that the machines worked and that the count was correct.

But in 2003 something happened. In 2003, which was the year before the Presidential election, suddenly there came to Cobo Hall about 20-some men -- white men who were lawyers who did not live in Detroit. Some lived in Wayne County, but others came outside of Wayne County. They did not stay all day as we would. They came in shifts, and they started harassing the clerks. They started intimidating the supervisory staff of the board of the election.

We did not know what was happening, but we did hear that a remark was made that "If you want to cut down on the vote in Detroit, if you want to really win your issues or your candidates wants to win, the best thing you should do is to cut down the vote in Detroit." In 2004, when we had our Presidential election, over 30-some white lawyers who lived -- who did not live in Detroit -- they were from Wayne County, but they were also from other areas throughout Michigan. When I looked at the sign-in sheet, what it said was that they were lawyers, Republican lawyers for Bush.

At 8:30 -- by the way, during that whole day there was harassment of the clerks. There was also intimidation, I mean, great intimidation of the staff. Those of us who had

worked as monitors and challengers for several years, where we only monitored the clerks to make sure that the vote was correct and the machines were running, that we then decided that we may have to challenge or monitor also the -- those challengers.

I do believe that there was a conspiracy in which they decided that they would then -- to be able to cut down the vote in Detroit, that they would then go in to harass those who were voting at the polls and also harass those that were counting at Cobo Hall. But I think they changed -- if I can just complete this -- I think they changed their strategy in '06. Their strategy was probably to then take it through the courts, to cut down on the vote through the courts, because Mary Beth Kelly, who is the chief judge of the Third Circuit Court, gave a ruling in which she said that no longer could our clerks in Wayne County -- we have 42 -- and our county clerks send out applications for persons to vote absentee.

Even -- and that they were to eliminate what we call the permanent list.

The League of Women Voters did a study about three years before that, in which we then did a study of what we called voter reform. We contacted all of the clerks that we could in the state. And by the way, this was our state league that did the study. And we asked -- one of the questions we asked was "Do you have a permanent list for those who vote absentee?" And the answer that came back from 99 percent of those who answered, "Yes, we have a permanent list, and we want to keep our permanent list." So that meant that, when Mary Beth Kelly made that ruling in 2006, our city clerk, Mrs. Winfrey, and our Board of Elections, then appealed -- they then appealed to the Court of Appeals. They filed a suit in the Court of Appeals, and that was in February of 2006 -- 21 months later.

And that's what -- we're talking about November.

The Court of Appeals has not seen fit to hear that case. So we are very concerned about that.

One other thing -- if I could make one other issue on this. Since the clerks could not send out these applications, the League of Woman Voters, because we are a third party, we raised the money to send out the applications to every person who was on that permanent list -- the list that was from the Board of Elections -- so that senior citizens would be able to get their application, fill it out and send it back so they could vote absentee.

The other thing is that -- as we did our research, we found out -- and we don't have confirmation that it's 100 percent true -- we had too many persons to tell us that Mary Beth Kelly, who is over the jury commission, that they are collecting names of felons. Now, I'm not talking about felons here just in Detroit, not just in Wayne County. I'm talking about across the country.

We all know that we have legislation -- don't we, Mr. Cushingberry -- that says that a felon who has served their time can vote. Now, I'm afraid that what is happening --

and by the way, I understand they are still gathering names of felons here within her office.

I'm afraid that someone in Lansing, in the House or in the Senate, is going to come up with a -- with legislation which will be just like Florida, which will say that if you are a felon, even though you served your time, that you will not be able to vote, and those names that they are gathering across the country that, if you go and if I go in and somebody's name is Mildred Madison and they will say, "You can't vote because you're on this list." So I think we need to be very wary of what is happening here in Michigan as far as our vote is concerned. And I want to say that our senior citizens are one of the strongest and -- I mean largest percentage of voters in Detroit, in fact, that we have anywhere. Between 20 to 50 percent of the vote is from the senior citizens.

When we have a large turnout that we have next year for '08, the seniors -- I believe that if it's -- according to what they've always done, will be 20 to 25 percent of the vote. Last year -- I mean, this year, which was an off year, where you had a very low vote in the primary, our senior citizens and the absentee voting was 50 percent of the vote. In the general election it was 45 percent of the vote. So you can understand that, if you want to make sure that issues that affect us don't pass, what do you do? You cut down on the vote.

And I want you to know that the League is out there. We will continue to send you these applications and raise the money until the Court of Appeals or, Mr. Cushingberry, you all in Lansing pass legislation that says everybody can have -- every clerk can have a permanent list so that everyone will be able to vote.

Thank you.