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MARSHALL COUNTY AUDITOR and RECORDER/COMMISSIONER OF ELECTIONS

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**Testimony to the Presidential Commission on Election Administration
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Good morning. My name is Dawn Williams, and I have been privileged to serve the approximately 27,000 voters of Marshall County, Iowa, since 1988.

As the Commission follows your mission “to seek to formulate best practices for the consideration of election administrators around the country,” I’d like to take this opportunity to describe The Election Center’s Professional Practices Program and how it serves the nation’s election administrators. This model best practices program is under the umbrella of the Professional Education Program and has been a part of the Election Center’s National Conference for 18 years. Through my experiences serving on this program committee, I testify before you with a firm belief that the sharing of best practices is one of the most effective ways to improve our profession and the service we deliver.

To those of you on the Commission that are not from the election community, I want to point out an integral part of our culture. Because we are forced to operate in an environment that demands perfection while we are challenged by limited resources and unrealistic timelines, the election community has elevated the C.A.S.E. method, (copy and seal everything), to the highest form of art. Best practices programs provide the perfect platform to do this.

It is my belief that the structure of The Election Center’s program enables election administrators to draw the maximum benefit out of a program of best practices. This open exchange of ideas comes from all corners of our country and from jurisdictions both large and small. Participants are invited to submit papers to be evaluated by a four person panel. Winners are selected and invited to present their paper at the Election Center’s National Convention. In addition to the formal presentations, we sponsor a breakout session “science fair” style where best practices presenters and conference attendees can interact.

A successful best practices program will stimulate new programs. In 2008 we expanded our awards to multiple categories to spark ideas and encourage jurisdictions to submit practices in multiple areas. Our committee will be making additional awards over the next few years to recognize and encourage increased participation from smaller jurisdictions and to address topical subjects.

Practices submitted to our program demonstrate how today's election administrators are in sync with the Guiding Principles of the Commission. These recent best practices are evidence of that.

The guiding principal to **Make Voting Work for Voters** is evidenced as follows:

- Osceola County, Florida, used tablet technology to provide for a more streamlined and efficient voter check-in process at the polls.
- Davis County, Utah, developed "Equipment-Officials-Resources, How Much? How Many? Made Easy!" which provided a simple utility to ensure consistent and efficient resource allocation.

The guiding principle to provide **Common Sense Non-Partisan Solutions** can be found in many best practices:

- Maricopa County, Arizona, developed "GIS Public Redistricting Interface" to provide for public input during their redistricting process.
- Cerro Gordo County, Iowa, developed "Precinct Atlas" and partnered with the Secretary of State to distribute their program free of charge to other jurisdictions.

Focus on providing **Election Administration as Customer Service** can be seen in these examples:

- A Forsyth County, Georgia, submission, "Early Voting Wait Time Dashboard," addressed wait times before "wait time" became buzz words.
- The Contra Costa County, California, best practice "Vote-by-Mail Rejection Reduction Program," demonstrated their commitment of excellence to their voters.

Complete best practices submissions can be found on the Election Center's web site from 2003 forward at www.electioncenter.org/publications.html. I am happy to announce that improvements to how we access our best practices are under way.

It is through the alliance between The Election Center and Auburn University to improve election administration in our country that the team at Auburn has begun a project that will enhance the value of our Professional Practices Program dramatically. Dr. Kathleen Hale, Director of the Masters in Public Administration Program and Election Administration Program at Auburn University, program faculty, and graduate students in the Department of Political Science recognize that the sharing of best practices is vital to the growth of our profession. Their project to scan and index our best practices will establish a clearinghouse for the

18 years of practices submitted. This clearinghouse will be hosted on the Election Center's website.

Best Practices are a powerful resource as long as they are utilized. I've asked and they are. When asked, Sacramento County, California, quickly cited four best practices that they have recently drawn ideas from to develop programs for the benefit of their organization and its voters.

My own experience illustrates that our universal goal as election administrators to promote the public trust and confidence by our conduct of accurate and fair elections is a common thread throughout our practices. It is through that common thread that a best practice designed for a jurisdiction of three-quarters of a million voters is relevant to a county of 27,000.

I was impressed by a practice submitted in 2008 by Clark County, Nevada, that featured an innovative idea to solve a facility shortage for early voting sites with a 48' trailer that they used as a Mobile Early Voting site. When I needed satellite voting stations that I could place in politically neutral locations last year, I remembered the Clark County best practice and I altered it to fit my jurisdiction. Because of Clark County's best practice from four years earlier, I was able to serve my voters in an easily accessible and politically neutral location.

A multitude of examples can be discovered if you match the best practices submitted to our program with what you see in our county today.

I'd like to close with a reflection of how I view this program. I realize that each practice I review finds me feeling like a kid on a new ride at Disney World. It starts with the anticipation of a new discovery and builds to a WOW. Then I wonder how they did it. I want to talk about it and I want the people around me to share my excitement. I think wow again and then I want to do it all over.

How, do you ask, did I get from the black and white world of election administration to the technicolor World of Disney? It is a pretty direct route. They both start with a vision and dedicated individuals. Execution requires that a balance be struck between our ideal world and reality. Both take a little magic. Our guests deserve and we demand perfection. And at the end we want our guests to view it as a pleasant and rewarding experience, and we want them to come back again.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this passion of mine. It is an honor to be a part of bringing the nation's finest ideas to my colleagues on an annual basis and to you today. Finally, thank you for your dedication to improving our system through your service on this Commission.

Included below is a summary of our Democracy Award winners from the past five years to give you a taste of the quality and diversity of the best practices submitted.

Democracy Award best practice of 2009. Montgomery County, AL **The Art of Democracy.** This practice impressed me professionally and grabbed me emotionally. An initiative was launched that captured a historical snapshot of Election Day. It embraced the unique aspects of the community and provided outreach and educational opportunities. This project created outstanding partnerships and promoted civic responsibility.



Democracy Award best practice of 2010. Orange County, CA **Pollworker Pass** provides an interactive format to communicate with election workers. Pollworker Pass allows the election office to save time and money. It also allows for verification that the information is received and that pre-election tasks are performed.

Democracy Award best practice of 2011. Martin County, FL **Check Your Voter Status** is a multi media initiative to increase awareness among all of Martin County's registered voters prior to Election Day. They proved that an investment of resources before an election to have a more informed voter freed up resources for more critical tasks on Election Day.

Democracy Award best practice of 2012. Los Angeles County, CA **Electronic Sample Ballot.** provides a glimpse into our future and is an example of how we will all communicate with our voters in the very near future. As part of this county's effort to make election information more conveniently available to voters, LA County developed an online subscription system enabling voters to easily and securely choose to receive their sample ballot in an electronic format. Once subscribed, voters will automatically receive their election information via e-mail for every election.

Democracy Award best practice of 2013. Denver City and County, CO **iApp, Accessibility Through Innovation.** As part of Denver's effort to make elections more accessible to voters, they developed a program to provide voters with the option to use iPads as ballot marking devices enabling voters with disabilities to mark and cast their ballots privately in their own group residential facility. It also allows for updating of voter registration records at the facility and an immediate option for issuing a ballot to a voter.