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## *Senate*

# EQUAL PROTECTION OF VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 2001

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I am delighted we finally have the opportunity to consider election reform. I am especially glad we are doing so in a way that is probably as close to bipartisan as anything we will work on this year. I commend Senator Dodd. I commend Senator McConnell and a number of other colleagues from both sides of the aisle who have worked diligently for a year now to hammer out this compromise we are considering today.

As we all know, the 2002 elections brought to light a number of problems in the way we run elections. While Florida got a lot of attention, we found out the problems do not reside solely in Florida but persist in a number of other States as well. The bill that we will, hopefully, adopt this week goes a long way toward fixing not all those problems but a number of them. Let me mention a few.

This legislation sets strong standards that State voting systems must meet so that all voting technology that American voters use allows them to correct mistakes and meet set error rates, acceptable lower error rates. This ensures voting machines are accessible to handicapped voters and voters with limited English proficiency.

Third, this legislation provides for provisional balloting so voters mistakenly left off official registration

lists are still allowed to vote. Fourth, this legislation provides for balanced antifraud measures to ensure voters are not disenfranchised.

Fortunately, in my State of Delaware there were few problems on election day in 2002. Delaware has uniform electronic voting machines with good error rates. All of our precincts are called election districts. The machines were purchased during the time that I served as Governor of our State. Delaware also has a computerized statewide voter registration list put in place under the leadership of our former Election Commissioner, Thomas Cook.

We have some work still to do in Delaware to assure our machines allow the handicapped to vote in privacy and to put a provisional voting system into place. Some States need to do a whole lot more than that. I am happy to see the bill provides the money to enable them and Delaware to do the work that needs to be done. This bill includes no unfunded mandates. This bill provides \$3 billion in grants to pay 100 percent of the costs to States for implementing the voting machines or provisional balloting and for antifraud requirements.

We must work hard to ensure, however, that the money we are promising, the money we propose to authorize, actually gets to the States and that there are enough dollars at the end

for the States to meet the requirements we are placing on them, especially now that a number of States, including my own, are faced with very tight budgets.

According to the National Governors Association, combined State budget shortfalls are at \$15 billion and could go higher if State unemployment, health care, and homeland security costs continue to rise.

Most States have balanced budget requirements in their constitution and face the prospect of having to raise taxes or make budget cuts to cover the budget shortfalls.

Having said that, this is a good bill. In fact, this is more than a good bill; it is a very good bill. I am pleased to urge my colleagues to join me and others to pass it overwhelmingly. I hope at the end of the day if we begin to see in the future that States continue to have problems meeting these new standards for budgetary reasons that emanate more from Washington than our State capitals, we find a way to get those States the resources they need or, if necessary, to amend the timing of requirements so that States can meet those requirements responsibly.