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## **CARDIN LEADS REVIEW OF DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE PREPAREDNESS TO PROTECT VOTER RIGHTS IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTION**

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator **Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)** today chaired a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee to review the readiness of the Department of Justice to protect the rights of all voters in the lead up to Election Day on November 4, 2008. The hearing, “*Protecting the Right to Vote: Oversight of the Department of Justice’s Preparations for the 2008 General Election*,” reviewed the civil and criminal tools in place to protect voting rights, eliminate problems such as the voter suppression and voter intimidation documented in the most recent elections, and options for improving absentee voting among the military.

The Committee also heard from a Richmond woman who was denied her right to vote in the 2008 presidential primary and election experts like Professor Gilda R. Daniels from the University of Baltimore Law School.

*The following is an excerpt from Senator Cardin’s opening statement at the hearing. The full text is available at [www.cardin.senate.gov](http://www.cardin.senate.gov).*

“Less than 60 days out from Election Day, I am concerned about how prepared the Justice Department truly is to ensure that every eligible vote is counted, and to make sure that no eligible voters are denied the right to fully and fairly participate in elections.

“I want to again ask the Justice Department if they have the tools necessary to combat deceptive practices in the upcoming election. If so, they must enforce the law. If not, they must help us enact legislation to provide the tools they need. I chaired a Committee hearing on this issue last year and the Judiciary Committee reported out legislation, the *Prevention of Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation in Federal Elections Act*, S. 453, to address this issue. The House has already passed the bill by voice vote. But the Justice Department has been much too slow to cooperate to help us fine tune and tweak this bill so that it could pass before this Congress adjourns, so that we can clearly criminalize activities that deliberately attempt to suppress the vote.

“What goes beyond the pale is when a campaign uses deceptive tactics to deliberately marginalize and disenfranchise minority voters. Sadly, the tactics we saw in the 2006 elections are not new. These tactics seem to deliberately target minority neighborhoods and are blatant attempts to reduce minority turnout.

“In previous elections we have seen deceptive literature distributed which gave the wrong date for the election, the wrong times when polling places were open, and even suggested that people could be arrested if they had unpaid parking tickets or unpaid taxes and tried to vote. Other literature purported to give a different general election day for Republicans and Democrats. And in at least one state election, deceptive literature was handed out literally on Election Day by the polling places in specifically-targeted minority communities. These ‘voter guides’ were handed out by major candidates’ campaigns, and contained false and misleading endorsements in an effort to diminish the impact of minority voters in this election.

“It is time for Congress and the Department of Justice to once again take action to stop the latest reprehensible tactics that are being used against African American, Latino, and other minority voters to interfere with (a) their right to vote or (b) their right to vote for the candidate of their choice, as protected in the Voting Rights Act. These tactics undermine and corrode our very democracy and threaten the very integrity of our electoral process. I hope the Department of Justice understands the serious obligation it has to fully enforce and carry out the law to protect all voters, as this Congress, the nation, and the world will be closely watching this historic election.”

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