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**September 21, 2017**

**For immediate release**

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**Secretary Condos Opinion Editorial:  
While Opponents of Voting Rights Follow Exaggerated Claims of Voter Fraud,  
Vermont Continues to Lead**

Since day one of the President's executive order establishing the so-called "Election Integrity Commission," I have worried that at best this Commission is a waste of tax payer money, and at worst a nefarious scheme designed to instill fear in American voters through baseless claims of widespread voter fraud to set the stage for a national effort to suppress voters.

At every turn the Commission has confirmed my worst suspicions. From its rigged membership, to the disturbingly unsupported and biased statements by members, to the slanted choice of speakers and content presented at their public meetings, all make clear that the Commission's true charge is to weaken voter confidence in our electoral system and use that fear to enact barriers and weaken voting rights on a state/national level by promoting discriminatory voter ID laws and encouraging overly aggressive voter roll purging to solve a problem that does not exist.

Let's take a step back and look at the facts, or lack there-of.

Shortly after the November election, the President stated and has continued to claim that 3-5 million illegal votes were cast in the 2016 Presidential Election, which resulted in him losing the popular vote.

This is an unfounded and dangerous claim for which the President has provided zero actual evidence. Non-partisan organizations and both Democratic/Republican state election officials have shown time and again that widespread voter fraud simply does not occur.

Both Vice-President Pence and Kansas Secretary of State Kobach, appointed as co-Chairs of the Commission, have dubious histories of pushing voter suppression laws in their states. VP Pence, when he was Governor of Indiana, signed into law one of the most restrictive voter ID laws in the U.S. Secretary Kobach has been sued, and lost, numerous times over voter restrictions found to be discriminatory and suppressive by the courts. Their appointment as co-Chairs to a supposedly bipartisan panel reveals the Commission's true colors.

The work of the Commission, including communications around its formation, has been relegated to the shadows. Despite federal law prohibiting it, Commission members utilize private email accounts,

then claiming those communications are exempt from being made available as a public record. Voters deserve better, and this complete lack of transparency is yet another major cause for concern.

In advance of their September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting in New Hampshire, Kobach staked the claim that more than 5,000 votes were cast illegally by registered voters who did not possess NH drivers' licenses. Simply, an in-state driver's license is not required to register or vote in New Hampshire, or in Vermont for that matter. No other evidence of voter fraud has been provided. In fact, at the September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting New Hampshire Secretary of State Bill Gardner, a member of the Commission, debunked the claim outright!

As a Secretary of State and attorney with degrees from Harvard and Yale, Mr. Kobach certainly knows better. False claims like this one are irresponsible and dangerous because they create a false perception and undermine confidence in our elections, the very problem the Commission is trying to resolve!

This is the exact kind of rhetoric that certain members of the Commission are using to push strict voter ID laws and aggressive roll purging like Secretary Kobach has done in his home state of Kansas using his own "Crosscheck" system.

Crosscheck, a multi-state voter roll comparison tool created by Kobach, has been shown to be wildly inaccurate, resulting in a large number of false matches which are then used to aggressively purge voters off the rolls by the thousands in some states, despite its lack of accuracy and reliability.

Vermonters of all political stripes should remain skeptical. Don't go down the rabbit hole following the dubious claims, and in some cases outright lies, of this Commission. Voter fraud is a rare but serious crime and will be prosecuted when it occurs, but strict voter ID laws are not the answer. They are an expensive cure in search of a problem and will prevent large numbers of people from voting with no discernable benefit.

Vermont continues to lead the country with one of the highest percentages of registered voters. Our successes with automatic voter registration and same day voter registration should be looked at by other states as a model to increase access to the fundamental right of voting without sacrificing integrity.

September is National Voter Registration Month. All elected officials across the country would do well to remember that voting is a constitutionally protected right, and that it is their obligation to increase access to the ballot box for eligible voters, not to pass laws that chip away at the cornerstone of our democracy.

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