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**Statement by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney
on Voter Suppression Attempts
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It is deeply ironic that Republican operatives are working so hard to tarnish the most dynamic voter participation in our country in decades—apparently to justify and camouflage their most organized attempt yet to deny Americans the right to vote. The right wing in our country is responding to the massive registration of new voters with a despicable, massive assault on voter participation.

The AFL-CIO strongly condemns the coordinated national effort by the Republican Party and allied political operatives to suppress voter turnout and deny ballots to newly registered voters, particularly young people, the poor and people of color.

The assault is taking many forms. By smearing voter registration groups such as ACORN with false charges of voter fraud, the Republican Party hopes to discourage new voters and divert attention from the issues that are motivating so many—the disastrous economic policies of the past eight years.

In state after state, Republican tactics are designed to create confusion and long lines at the polls to discourage and unnecessarily alarm voters.

In Ohio, where 800,000 new voters have registered this year, the Republican Party is filing lawsuit after lawsuit to purge from the rolls people whose information doesn't match other public records—records that are widely acknowledged to be flawed.

In September, Florida's Republican Secretary of State told election officials to reject registrations that do not pass a computer match process that is foiled by typos and other minor errors. In just three weeks, 75 percent of matching problems were found to be the result of administrative errors; others are still being checked.

Also in September, Wisconsin's Attorney General, who co-chairs the state McCain campaign, filed suit against the state election board, seeking to challenge the registration, by his count, of tens of thousands of voters.

Just last week, the Pennsylvania Republican Party filed a lawsuit to force newly registered voters in the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia areas to vote under challenge and cast provisional ballots that would not be counted Election Day.

Registrars in several states have been denying registration to students who give dorm

room addresses. In Maryland, a registrar circulated a memo saying students registering to vote could lose financial aid and tax dependent status.

And in at least one state, the GOP stated it would challenge mortgage foreclosure victims' right to vote when they appeared at the polls on Election Day.

What we are seeing now is just the first wave of voter suppression. We expect it will grow to include false information distributed in communities where Republican support is weak, intimidation and challenges of voters at the polls, lawsuits seeking to throw out voting results and a longer term escalation of the campaign for more voter suppression laws.

It is up to all of us to speak out and soundly reject this travesty. The AFL-CIO and other groups, including the NAACP, ACLU, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law and the League of Women Voters, are responding with our biggest voter protection program ever. Some 1,400 lawyers have joined the AFL-CIO network of labor lawyers to travel into battleground states at their own expense to staff legal command centers and support the thousands of poll monitors who will assist people who have problems voting. In nine states, the AFL-CIO is educating voters about their rights, working with election officials about election administration and recruiting and training volunteer poll monitors and workers. We are referring voters to the toll-free voting rights hotline operated by the Election Protection coalition, 1-866-OUR-VOTE, to check their registration and report problems. The AFL-CIO also is airing radio ads in targeted communities giving voters tips on how to protect their vote.

With vigilance and a major effort by a broad array of organizations, we are determined to make it easy, not hard, for every citizen to vote. We call on the McCain-Palin campaign to do more to stop the suppression of votes by any means, as well as stopping hateful smears and disinformation. And we urge the media to join the effort to make this a free and fair election by increasing careful reporting and editorial comment on voter suppression before, during and after the elections—and to help give voters confidence that their rights will be protected.

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