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\* THIS WEEK IN HAITI \*

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#### AS NEW PARLIAMENTARIANS ARE ANNOUNCED AND SWORN IN: RUN-OFF ELECTION DISPUTES CONTINUE AROUND HAITI

Although Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced winners of the April 21, 2006 legislative run-off elections on May 8, dozens of candidates that lost their bid for Senate and Deputy seats continue to demand new votes in several districts, charging fraud and irregularities.

The Senate candidate for the West Department of Serge Gilles' social democratic Fusion party, Marie Denise Claude, claims that there was massive fraud at several voting centers around the capital, Port-au-Prince. Finishing in fourth place according to final CEP results, Claude charges that most of the irregularities took place in Building 2004, where Cité Soleil residents voted. (Cité Soleil, Haiti's largest and poorest slum, was a stronghold for former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.) Claude is calling for the vote at this center to be reheld and for a recount at the other centers where she charges there was fraud.

Fusion's candidate for deputy from the southern district of Port-au-Prince, Yolette Mengual, accuses her victorious rival from President-elect René Préval's Lespwa party, Jean Myrtil Clédor, of having bribed voters and members of electoral offices to fix the vote in his favor. Mengual is backed in her protest by the "Network of Women Candidates to Win," which is affiliated with the USAID-supported Haitian Coalition of Women Leaders (COHFEL). Mengual, who garnered only 24% of the vote to Clédor's 76%, has called for annulment of that district's election.

Also in the West department, the losing candidates for the Fonds-Verettes/Ganthier district near Croix des Bouquets, which was won by MODEREH's P. Jude Destiné with 20% of the vote, have marched in front of the CEP's headquarters to denounce what they claim was massive fraud on April 21.

On the island of La Gonâve, the candidate for deputy of Evans Paul's Alyans party, Marie Ginette Galliotte, charged that there were flagrant irregularities. She said she was the victim of sexual discrimination and is calling for a new vote.

In the Artibonite, partisans of the Senate candidate of Leslie Manigat's

Assembly of National Progressive Democrats (RDNP), Willy Jean-Baptiste, called for annulment of the vote in certain districts. They even held protests blocking the southern entry to the city of Gonaïves to show their anger. However, one would expect Jean-Baptiste to simply concede the race because Manigat, to protest the CEP's ruling that Préval won in the first round where RDNP placed a distant second, asked all his party's candidates to withdraw from their races.

Similar cries of foul are coming from Fusion's candidate for Deputy for the district of Marchand-Dessalines, Wouldi Simon. He claims that voters and his poll watchers were brutalized by supporters of Jean Pressoir Dort, his adversary from Youri Latortue's Artibonite in Action party (LAAA) who won with 56% of the vote. In Desdunes, the candidate for Deputy of the Struggling Peoples Organization (OPL), Beaudelaire Noelsaint, has accused a local group called Base 32, which supported the Fusion's winning candidate Levailant Louis-Jeune, of mistreating his partisans and preventing them from voting for him. He is calling for annulment of the vote.

In the Northwest department, the Senate candidate of the Bridge party (PONT), Evalliere Beauplan, placed second with 39.42% of the vote, thereby winning a four-year Senate term. But he rejected the CEP's results which proclaimed Alyans' Eddy Bastien victor with 41.56% of the vote, which nets a six-year seat. Beauplan says he has evidence to prove fraud and has called for cancellation of the elections at certain voting centers, like that in Saint Louis du Nord.

Meanwhile, the MIRN's candidate for Deputy for the district of Jean Rabel, André Joseph, called the CEP to carry out a serious investigation before publishing its final election results. Joseph accuses Gerard Thérémene, his adversary from the party Konba, of having his partisans stuff ballot boxes.

In the Southeast department, one of Lespwa's Senate candidates, Frantz Large, curiously came in fourth after having placed second in the first round. "The people in charge of the polling stations stuffed the ballot boxes in favor of other candidates," Large declared. "In communes like Belle-Anse, Thiotte and Cayes-Jacmel, the number of the citizens who voted is much greater than the number of people registered." At least Large brings verifiable charges. Two other Lespwa candidates - Joseph Lambert and Laurent Féquiere Mathurin - won the first and second Senate seats for the Southeast. The OPL's Ricard Pierre, who finished well behind Large in the first round, won third place.

In the Nippes department, Anglade Jacob, one of Lespwa's Senate candidates, accused CEP secretary general Rosemond Pradel and director general Jacques Bernard of carrying out under the table maneuvers which favored Fusion's candidate, Huguette Lamour, who finished third, securing a two-year Senate seat. Jacob is protesting his fourth place finish, which denies him any Senate seat. Another Lespwa candidate, Nenel Cassy, finished in first place, winning a six-year Senate seat.

Frantz André Féquiere, the ADEBAH's candidate for deputy for Anse-B-Veau, has also called for new elections in his district, charging fraud which favored Fusion's candidate Frantz Robert Mondé, who got 62% of the vote.

In Haiti's westernmost Grande Anse department, the police arrested Sorel Yacinthe, Fusion's candidate for Deputy for the district of Moron/Chanbellan. They charge that he assassinated a Lespwa partisan. However, according to the CEP's partial results, it seems the accused murderer is winning the race with 52% of the vote.

As one can see, there are no shortage of disputes, and unfortunately some which might be very justified will be lumped together with frivolous challenges and dishonest maneuvers. Despite the jostling, the fact remains: Préval's Espwa party is far from having a majority in either house of the Parliament.

On May 8, the Haitian state's official journal, Le Moniteur, published the official results of the run-offs for 27 of 30 senators and 86 of 99 deputies. The elected rushed the same day to the "newly renovated" Legislative Palace to register for Haiti's 48th Legislative session.

The registration process continued on May 9, and the new parliamentarians also prepared to hold their first National Assembly. Three Senate seats and thirteen lower house seats are still vacant because of the vote was annulled in thirteen districts in the Northeast department for obvious cases of irregularities and fraud.

The Deputy elected from Maissade, Willio Joseph, had been arrested and imprisoned in January on charges of stealing cars and criminal conspiracy. But a judge set him free, and he was sworn into the Parliament.

Meanwhile, the vice-president of the Parliament's Maintenance Commission, Alix Richard, said that there is still a great deal of renovation work to be done on the Legislative Palace, which means that the new legislators will be working in less than ideal conditions.

Préval is scheduled to be sworn in before the Parliament on the morning of May 14.

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