Civic Disengagement in Our Democracy

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The McCormick Tribune Foundation advances the ideals of a free democratic society by supporting organizations that help achieve this mission. A high school student involved with the *Mikva Challenge, a McCormick Tribune Foundation grantee, fulfills his civic duty by volunteering at an election polling station.

***Mikva Challenge is a nonprofit organization that encourages young adults to embark on careers in public service and politics.**

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Foreword

As voters across the United States prepare for what many consider a pivotal presidential election in 2008, the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, a member of the McCormick Tribune Foundation team, in partnership with the Center for the Study of the American Electorate at American University, convened a two-day conference in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 28-29, 2007, to consider the root causes of civic disengagement in our democracy.

Collectively, more than 40 participants from across the political spectrum gathered to discuss among other topics, a broken campaign finance system, the frontloaded presidential nominating process, campaign conduct with a specific focus on televised political advertising, election administration and television coverage of politics. There was widespread agreement on obstacles to civic participation in the process, and some common ground on the solutions to overcome them. The hope is to apply the findings of this conference to the actual developments of the 2008 election in order to correct for its defects prior to the 2012 campaign season.

Voting represents the minimum threshold for participation in our constitutional democracy and is an indicator of our nation's civic health. Declining turnout over the past several decades is just one of the signs that *Bowling Alone* author Robert Putnam identifies for the tremendous decline in political capital.[1] An engaged citizenry must not only vote, but also be daily consumers of political information provided by the news media. They must also volunteer, join civic organizations, participate in campaigns and assist with the administration of elections. Our conference, and this report, set out to identify why these elements of political capital have fallen so dramatically.

The mission of the McCormick Tribune Foundation is to advance the ideals of a free democratic society by investing in our children, communities and country. We believe civic health is not only essential to building the real power of society, it is the foundation. For this reason, civic health is our common purpose. It unites all aspects of the Foundation's work, from investments in human services, journalism, citizenship and early childhood education, to investments that deliver programs and services to hundreds of thousands of people through Cantigny—our public park—and the Foundation's three museums.

[1] Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone.* NY: Simon and Schuster.

Through the Foundation's conference series we are able to explore a range of contemporary topics tied to our mission. This conference in particular was made possible through our partnership with the Center for the Study of the American Electorate. Special thanks go to the staff of the Center, and Director Curtis Gans in particular. He was instrumental in recruiting conference participants, crafting the conference agenda and serving as both the moderator and a pivotal participant. We would also like to acknowledge the hard work of his assistant, Dennis Jaffe, who researched and wrote the working papers distributed at the outset of the conference that informed this report. Dennis and Curtis collaborated to write the summary of the conference proceedings that follows.

Elections are nothing less than the instruments of democracy. By making their voice heard on a regular basis, citizens govern themselves through leaders they elect. At the heart of this equation is informed participation, and it is our hope that the deliberations of our conference echoed in this report contribute in a small way toward the restoration of civic engagement in the United States.

Sincerely,

Brig. Gen. David L. Grange, USA (Ret.)
CEO and President of the McCormick Tribune Foundation

Introduction: Seeking Common Ground

A legitimate democracy depends on the consent of the governed, and its health depends on civic involvement. Within that framework, voting is the minimum threshold for participation in a democratic society. Among citizens who don't vote, there is a tendency not to participate—in any sustaining way—in other political or community civic activities.

With the exception of the polarizing elections of 1982, 1992 and 2004—elections characterized by either fear or anger[2]—the level of citizen voting has generally declined since the election of 1960, which scored the highest level of turnout since 1920 when women were enfranchised. In general, the decline in citizen political engagement has been progressive and generational, producing lower voter turnout and decreased involvement at every level of government. One hundred million eligible Americans don't vote in presidential elections, and that number is rising; 120 million don't vote in midterm elections, and that number, too, is escalating. Among the 172 world democracies the United States ranks 139th in voter participation.

The decline in citizen political involvement has serious civic consequences. On one level, the nation is profoundly poorer for the diminished civic involvement; on another level, the more voting rates decline the more American politics become dominated by those with special interests—who seek specific policy outcomes—and the zealous—who are militant on specific issues. Consequently, government in the common interest suffers, and American politics becomes increasingly polarized.

As Robert Putnam has written,[3] disengagement is not limited to voting, but also affects almost every form of civic collective activity and institution, save fundamentalist religion and a rise in temporary volunteerism, driven at least in part by compulsory requirements for service activities in schools and colleges. As William Galston, senior fellow of governance studies at the Brookings Institution has established, civic trust and interpersonal trust are both at low ebb, and there are precious few common frames of reference to help shape rational dialogue and policy by consensus. Fundamentally missing from the present political landscape is the religion of civic responsibility and duty. Sadly, the majority of Americans seem increasingly concerned only about the self and the immediate.

[2] In 1982, due to recession; in 1992, due to a combination of factors including recession, President George H.W. Bush's abandoned pledge, "Read My Lips, No New Taxes," and the unusually vigorous third force candidacy of Ross Perot; and in 2004, due to the polarization exasperated by the two parties.

[3] Putnam, *Bowling Alone.*

Civic Disengagement in Our Democracy

Many causes for the decline in civic involvement and civic religion are obvious. For example, today most children grow up in homes where neither parent (or single parent) votes, nor do a majority of them discuss politics or public affairs. The quality of education has been declining, particularly in urban America—which many middle-class Americans have abandoned—and in the states that have chosen to limit what can be raised and spent on education. As the citizenship oriented educational ideas of John Dewey have receded, there has also been an associated decline in both the quantity and quality of civic education. A growing percentage of young Americans no longer read newspapers nor do they substitute that lack of reading by visiting Web sites that feature news. In reaction to the activities of the 1960s, less emphasis has been placed on mediating and civic development institutions for the young, including student newspapers, student government and various other organizations that serve as citizenship training grounds. In addition, children are growing up in a values' ethos that encourages self seeking, consumerism, general apathy and alienation from government at the expense of community and engagement values. Young Americans are simply not getting civic socialization in the home, schools, curriculum or extracurricular activities.

On a different level, changes in the physical and communications landscape have negatively affected participation. The interstate highway system, suburban sprawl, the replacement of downtowns with strip malls and other profound changes have eroded our communities. Television contends that it brings the global community into one's living room, but its most profound societal effect is it brings Americans into their own living room. This atomizes our society and makes people spectators and consumers rather than participants and stakeholders in the political enterprise. Cable and satellite television provide additional choices, some of them very worthwhile. Unfortunately, the viewing public can watch the overwhelming majority of channels all day, every day, and not encounter even one minute of coverage devoted to politics and public affairs. The result is a fragmented information base for the American people and, consequently, a reduction of their civic knowledge. In addition, the Internet's millions of Web sites further fragment the national information base. Indeed with iPods and iPhones, technology and technological commerce is creating a society isolated individually or in very limited networks.

Many of these profound cultural changes can neither easily nor swiftly be improved (civic education and the restoration of trust), and some can't be changed at all (suburban sprawl, mass media and the growing individualization of communications technology).

Nevertheless, with a bi-partisan will to achieve constructive change, there are issues which affect citizen participation and could be addressed in the near term.

The McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum asked American University's Center for the Study of the American Electorate to coordinate its annual signature conference to look at citizen political disengagement and five (of seven) issues which affect citizen political involvement and might be amenable to constructive bi-partisan public policy and/or programmatic remedy. This year's conference was seen as the first step toward change.

The 2007 conference was an exploration of whether participants had a common analysis of the current problems perpetrating political disengagement and whether there were any commonly shared principles for finding a solution. The second stage would be a combination of approaches using the 2008 election as a backdrop. Where outlines of remedy exist, convening groups will work out the details of those remedies; compile information and data from the election which might help elucidate some of the problems and provide guidance on the directions for program or policy remedy; and, build upon this research and synthesis to develop ideas for new directions. The final stage would be to hold another conference to formulate recommendations for the public, press and policymakers.

To this end, the Freedom Museum, in partnership with the Center, brought together a highly diverse group of leaders representative of the entire ideological continuum to study the five issues identified and develop a set of questions pertaining to them:

- **Campaign Finance:** Are current campaign finance laws limiting access and choice? Is there sufficient accountability and transparency in the laws to provide public confidence in the political system?
- **Campaign Conduct:** As the staple of competitive national statewide campaigns, will the current overwhelming dominance of televised political advertising continue in the face of new media? If so, are political advertising campaigns driving people from the polls and eroding confidence in the political system as a whole?

- **The Presidential Nominating Process:** Is the present system the best way to nominate candidates for the presidency? Have the states—in their individual desire to participate in decision-making—helped create a process whose length, cost, lack of participation and rush to judgment all contribute to the erosion of citizen involvement in politics?
- **Election Administration:** In the aftermath of the 2000 and 2004 elections, do Americans have confidence in the election process? What are the specific issues of concern with respect to the integrity of the process and citizens' trust in its soundness?
- **Television Coverage of Political Campaigns:** Is the nature and quality of coverage for presidential elections sufficient for the citizenry to make informed choices? Does the press make judgments that sway viewers' choices? Do broadcast outlets with the largest market shares and customer reach adequately cover elections for other offices?

In the interest of making the best use of limited conference time, the other two major (potentially resolvable) issues affecting citizen political participation were not discussed, but will be explored at the anticipated follow-up conference. These issues included:

- **Redistricting:** Do the present methods of drawing districts for U.S. House and state legislatures inhibit competition and diminish citizen involvement? Do they also contribute to the polarization of American politics and, therefore, reduce citizens' faith in the efficacy of their votes?
- **The Electoral College:** Does the present method of selecting presidential electors reduce participation by, in effect if not intent, limiting competition to a minority of states? Are there alternate methods which would facilitate contests in all states without the downside risks of direct elections?

An introductory speech by William Galston outlined the nature of the political disengagement problem, including both positive and negative trends. All participants—including those who would be informal presenters on the various issues—spoke from their places around a square table to facilitate group involvement.

What follows is a report on conference deliberations with a brief concluding chapter.

Chapter 1: Campaign Finance

In June 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Wisconsin Right to Life v. Federal Election Commission* ruled in a five-to-four decision that televised advertisements (and, by implication, any advertisement in any medium) by entities other than the candidates or candidate election committees—which did not explicitly advocate the election or defeat of a candidate—were protected by the First Amendment. Therefore, political advertisements could not be restricted during a political campaign. This negated regulations that would restrict ads that mentioned a candidate running for election or re-election within 30 days of a federal primary election and 60 days of a general election.

Since 1971, campaign finance reforms have focused on the issues of corruption—or the appearance of corruption—and have progressively sought to reduce the amount of private money donated to and spent by political campaigns. The most recent legislation, the Bi-partisan Campaign Reform Act (commonly known as McCain-Feingold), essentially built on previous law which placed limits on contributions to candidates and extended similar restrictions to contributions to the parties. But what the recent Court decision made clear was that unlimited campaign funds could be raised and spent by independent groups as long as they did not advocate the election or defeat of a candidate.

While the reformers intended to create a system in which contributions and expenditures would be limited in all aspects of political campaigns, what they actually did was move large sums of money from the accountable—the candidates—to the least accountable—independent groups—who are also the most unyielding elements in American politics and engender the political polarization which Americans decry.

Current campaign finance laws were further undermined by the grouping of more than 20 primaries on one day only four weeks after the first contest in Iowa, mandating enormous sums of money (an estimated $50 to $75 million) to mount a media campaign in all of these states. This, in turn, caused most of the major candidates to opt out of the presidential public financing system whose coordinated spending limits were deemed too low to allow them to adequately compete.

Given these problems, among others, the conference was charged with looking at the current campaign finance laws and their underlying principles, and exploring the question of whether additional or alternative principles might better serve the political process.

The three presenters were Michael Malbin, a long-time student of campaign finance and executive director of the non-partisan and institutionally neutral Campaign Finance Institute; Robert Bauer, the chief Democratic litigator on campaign finance issues; and Mark Schmitt, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation who previously supported the limits-based approach to campaign finance reform but, now, has serious reservations.

Among the presenters, there were areas of agreement, including:

- The long time campaign finance battle between those who favor substantial limits on interested money in campaigns and those who believe that such limits violate the First Amendment is, essentially, a sterile, moot debate. The former contend that entrenched interests undermine democracy via enormous financial contributions to political candidates who are then beholden to them upon election. The latter equate these campaign donations with political speech, suggesting that any limits undermine First Amendment speech protections.
- Political corruption is individual rather than systemic. The majority of candidates and office holders are honorable and balance the interests of those who give with those who don't give, guided by their own personal principles, the views of their constituents and the needs of all Americans. There are, of course, "rotten apples," but they are usually revealed through disclosure, exposure and/or good law enforcement. In general, campaign finance laws have not negatively or positively impacted the number of corrupt public figures.
- Tighter limits on contributions to candidates and parties along with the Court-backed lack of limits on independent groups have made the system less accountable and more polarized.
- The Court's *Wisconsin-Right-To-Life* decision makes it nearly impossible to eliminate private money from political campaigns.
- Limits on coordinated expenditures are nonsensical and unenforceable.
- Other values beyond the limited goal of preventing corruption should underlay any sound campaign finance system, including accountability, transparency, accessibility and systemic flexibility.
- A critical axiom in the discussion of campaign finance is that money does not win elections, but lack of it can lose elections. Candidates with more modest campaign funds can defeat opponents who enjoy a significant

financial advantage if they have, at least, sufficient funds to get their message across—and if that message resonates with the electorate.
- Rather than limiting the advantages of those with more funding, campaign finance policy should be pointedly focused on insuring that qualified candidates without substantial financial resources have enough backing to adequately compete.
- Incumbency has enormous advantages in terms of name recognition, media access, staff and constituent service. Consequently, challengers need to have enough funding to compete with those advantages.

Within these areas of broad agreement, each presenter had his or her own take, augmented by other participants around the table.

Bob Bauer reinforced the idea that the debate between potential corruption and the First Amendment was not useful, and that those using potential corruption as the main basis for their reforms were actually exacerbating citizen mistrust of the political system. He also supported the argument that the limits-based regime has not created equal opportunities and has weakened the parties; undermined competition; reduced grassroots activity; and, perhaps, empowered special interest groups at the expense of the candidates. Bauer argued for lifting some of the giving limits to candidates; for base-level public funding for presidential and congressional candidates; and for directing monies to candidates rather than parties and independent interests.

Ruth Marcus, a member of the *Washington Post's* editorial board, contended that more money would not necessarily produce greater participation. However, Bauer argued that increased funding might produce greater grassroots mobilization which, in turn, could produce more participation.

Mark Schmitt said that economic inequalities should not be replicated in the political system and that though well intentioned, previous reforms—including McCain-Feingold—have not mitigated these inequalities. He acknowledged the increase in small donors as a positive sign in the political system, but argued that base-level public financing, and, perhaps, tax credits and vouchers would be more effective than contribution limits.

Cleta Mitchell, a partner in Foley & Larnder's Washington, D.C., office and a member of the firm's public affairs practice, argued that the reforms enacted since 1971 have created a barrier to entry into the political system, and that the limits-based system is broken and should be repealed. She favors substantially raising contribution limits or eliminating them completely.

Former Congressman Mickey Edwards urged that voters have more information about candidates' fundraising sources, which was, in his mind, an argument against the limits-based approach to campaign finance.

It was clear from this session that there is a broadly based consensus on revisiting the campaign finance issue on the basis of both practicality and values broader than corruption or the appearance of corruption.

Chapter 2:
The Presidential Nominating Process

In this era of political polarization, there is agreement among politicians of all viewpoints, pundits of all persuasions, practitioners of all political skills and scholars of all schools: The evolution of the presidential nominating system since 1968 and its extreme incarnation in 2008 is not the way to select nominees for the presidency.

Prior to the 1968 election, predictability was inherent in the nominating process. Primaries began in New Hampshire in March, followed by Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Florida, Indiana, Nebraska, New York, South Dakota and Oregon, and ended in June with California, New Jersey and Ohio. Beginning with Minnesota, a few states held caucuses the week prior to the New Hampshire primary.

The primaries were primarily for show—to test the mettle of the presumptive candidates or to reveal their political gifts—or lack thereof—over a period of time. It was once possible for candidates to launch their quest in New Hampshire and then use the results in that primary or later primaries to showcase the candidate's viability which, in turn, inspired donors to fund that candidacy through later contests. It was also possible, but not customary, for candidates to enter the primaries later, particularly if the initial round of contests did not produce a clear choice. However, unless there was a clear winner in a series of primaries (and the other candidates withdrew), the nominees were chosen at the conventions which were dominated by delegates selected by state party leadership via conventions, many of which were held a year before the first contests.

That all changed with the 1968 campaign. Despite the fact that the insurgent candidacies of Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-MN) and Sen. Robert Kennedy (D-NY) won all the delegates in every state in which there was a 1968 primary or caucus, the overwhelming majority of delegates had been selected before those contests. And, as a result, they were beholden to party leadership largely loyal to Pres. Lyndon Johnson and his designated successor, Vice Pres. Hubert Humphrey. All the votes cast against Johnson and his administration's military involvement in Vietnam were, in essence, discarded.

After 1968, the whole process changed in almost every election cycle. The McGovern Commission, established to deal with the procedural issues raised in 1968, voted to have all convention delegates selected by processes started no earlier than the year of the election; mandated that all delegates had to reflect, on a winner-take-all basis, the votes cast in their state; and set quotas for under represented groups—women, minorities and the

young. In 1972, because of the regulatory complexities, most states decided to hold primaries rather than caucuses, and this outpouring of semi-unbridled democracy led to a convention in which the mayor of Chicago and his delegation were kicked out of the convention for violating the quotas on gender and youth representation; and the Democratic nominee, Sen. George McGovern (D-SD) gave his acceptance speech at 2 am.

In order to avoid a repeat of the 1972 convention, the Democratic Party enacted revised guidelines, softening the quota system and providing that a quarter of the convention would comprise "ex-officio" delegates—people who held public or party offices and who might leaven the excesses of direct democracy. As it turned out, their votes were never needed; every contest since then has been decided before the conventions.

After the 1976 presidential primary campaign—during which former Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter, the eventual Democratic presidential nominee, was defeated (in the state primaries) by the late entry candidacies of Sen. Frank Church (D-ID) and Gov. Jerry Brown (D-CA)—the Democratic Party made it almost impossible for late entry by establishing very early filing deadlines.

Our nation's present nominating system was brought about by the reaction of southern Democratic Party chairs to the nomination and subsequent landslide defeat of former Vice Pres. Walter Mondale in 1984. Seeking a candidate with greater appeal in their more conservative region, they collectively chose to move their 1988 primaries up to a date shortly after the New Hampshire primary. What they failed to understand was that the effect of the 1965 Voting Rights Act was to enfranchise African-Americans and drive southern conservative Democrats into the Republican Party, making the newly enfranchised African-Americans a major part—and a very liberalizing influence—on the southern Democratic Party. On the first Super Tuesday, five of the 15 states voted for the Rev. Jesse Jackson, five voted for the northern candidate and eventual nominee, Gov. Michael Dukakis (D-MA), and only five voted for the southern candidate, Sen. Al Gore (D-TN).

But instead of the southern chairs and others realizing the folly of those moves, more states also moved up their primaries so, in the subsequent election (1992), there was a Super Tuesday and a Mega Tuesday—both within six weeks of the New Hampshire primary.

Because both Iowa and New Hampshire wanted to preserve their respective positions as first in the nation, and because an increasing number of states began holding their primaries or caucuses earlier in the election season, the

start of the process—the Iowa caucus and the New Hampshire primary—moved even earlier. In addition, other states increasingly followed suit, for what they saw as the best of reasons—to be an active participant in the decision-making process rather than serving as an "ATM" for other states.

The result is that the following system governs the 2008 nomination process: an electoral season which began with the Iowa caucuses on Jan. 3 followed by New Hampshire's first-in-the nation primary on Jan. 8. Nevada and South Carolina—added by the Democrats to provide ethnic diversity—held a caucus and a primary shortly after New Hampshire. More than 20 states with more than half the convention delegates at stake are grouped for the largest primary day ever—Feb. 5—only four weeks after the Jan. 3 Iowa caucus. Unfortunately, frontloading the primary process and grouping large numbers of states together creates many problems:

- Because 20-plus states, including the large states of New York, California, Illinois and New Jersey are lumped into one gigantic primary day, to effectively compete on that day, candidates need a minimum of $50 million to communicate nationwide via television. This, in turn, tends to limit candidacy to the famous, the rich and those connected to large numbers of donors and bundlers (individuals who solicit contributions from multiple donors on behalf of a candidate).
- The major grouping of primaries, coupled with the $2,300 limit on individual contributions, has made potential candidates launch their campaigns a year before a vote is even cast to raise the $1 million a week it will take to compete.
- This leads to a long, manufactured campaign during which the press has inordinate power to shape public perceptions of the candidates, often focusing on the competition between candidates rather than the content of their advocacy; on the money they raise rather than the inroads they make on public allegiance; and on the trivial—haircuts and cackles. It also allows the media to choose which candidates are worthy of attention, creating self fulfilling prophecies as to which candidates the public should take seriously—this year, most notably narrowing the Democratic race to Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL).
- Grouping the primaries elevates the relative importance of the early contests beyond the influence they should have. It may create not only a rush to judgment in which candidates are not tested over time, but also lead to the selection of an individual who is not suited to guide America

nor earn a leadership role in the world community. Grouping primaries also emphasizes the worst aspects of American politics, since it is impossible to campaign in 20 states without relying almost exclusively on televised advertising, thus depressing citizen participation. In 2004, for example, less than five percent of the eligible electorate contributed to Sen. John Kerry's (D-MA) nomination by the time it was sealed in early March.

It also should be noted that those states who rushed to be part of the large 20-plus state early group are, in 2008, likely to find that this move will not enhance their clout in choosing eventual nominees. If, for instance, early on one candidate emerges as a clear frontrunner, these states will be part of a herd viewing the same advertising campaign as every other state without having any unique effect on the production. Should no clear nominee emerge—as now seems likely in the Republican Party—the group primary day is likely to be inconclusive, and states that have not moved up their primaries are likely to play a decisive role in the outcome.

To discuss the problems with the current process and what principles could guide constructive change, the conference brought together individuals from both major parties who have been working on these issues for several years: former Sen. William Brock (R-TN), who chaired the 2000 Republican Nominating Process Reform Committee; Rep. David Price (D-NC), who co-chaired the 2006 Democratic Party Nominating Schedule Committee, served as executive director of the Democratic Party Charter Commission (from 1972 to 1976) and authored "Stand By Your Ad" provision in the Bi-partisan Campaign Reform Act; Thomas Sansonetti, who chaired the 2000 Republican Committee; Donna Brazile, who co-chaired the 2000 Democratic Committee; David Norcross, the current chair of the Republican Committee; and James Roosevelt, who has co-chaired the Democratic and Bylaws Committee for several election cycles.

Sen. Brock discussed the fact that in 2000, the Republican Party came within one day of adopting a better nominating plan, the Delaware Plan, only to have it scuttled by the Bush campaign in order to avoid a potential floor fight that might interfere with the nominee's coronation at the ensuing convention.

Under the Delaware Plan, the states would be divided into four groups according to population. The smallest 12 states (in terms of population and delegates) would conduct their primaries and caucuses in the first month

(March). In order of ascending populations, each of the next three groups would also have a month to hold their primaries and caucuses. The plan, according to Sen. Brock (and, later, Rep. Price, Norcross and Sansonetti), harkens back to a time when huge sums of money were not a prerequisite for entry to competition; where year long precampaigns didn't exist; and when retail politics—small scale, face-to-face campaigning—and a long testing track produced fully examined candidates.

To Sen. Brock, among others, the hope is to bring the competition back to a contest of ideas rather than one dominated by money and media advisors.

Rep. Price argued that to get a better nominating system, leaders must start laying the groundwork now. He also argued (as did his commission's report) that the primary season starts too early and should start in March or April (which might also enable states to economize by holding their state primaries along with their presidential primary). Though the effort failed, he said that the Democratic Party tried to forestall the rush to be part of an early mega primary by offering bonus delegates to states who would delay their primaries until later in the spring. He expressed hope that the two parties might work together in 2008 to create a nominating system that would embrace the principles underlying the Delaware Plan.

Norcross indicated that his committee was prepared to consider a modified version of the Delaware Plan which would divide the states into three groups (rather than four), to ease the concerns of the larger states that they might be left out of the decision-making. To avoid a repeat of 2000, he also cautioned that any modification needs to be approved by the presidential candidates, pointing out the danger that the winner might be reluctant to change a system that enabled his or her victory. He also urged both parties to start early to develop a common approach.

Roosevelt said that part of the problem is that the approval process for establishing a nominating schedule differs for each party. Republican Party rules make it necessary for any changes in the primary schedule be approved at its national convention, while the Democratic National Committee itself has the power to institute such changes. He suggested that while some may argue that reforms be codified in federal legislation to eliminate the possibility that individual states may act unilaterally to undermine those reforms—as Michigan and Florida have done in the 2008 elections—in the absence of agreement among the states, it is likely that there will be a court case challenging any such law. While the Supreme Court has ruled

affirmatively on the constitutionality of certain federal laws governing elections (e.g., the Voting Rights Act), it is not clear that it would rule in favor of a law governing which are, in essence, private voluntary organizations.

Roosevelt also expressed the hope that both parties find common ground, but warned that at this time there is no consensus among Democratic Party leaders on how to resolve this issue. He suggested that those involved and concerned should re-evaluate the campaign finance laws, observing that low contribution limits and state expenditure limits lead to bending and breaking of the rules.

Sansonetti outlined six criteria that should define efforts to reform the nominating process:

- All states should have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the process.
- There should be a longer primary season which would permit the vetting of candidates' personal backgrounds and issue stances over time.
- There should be an emphasis on "retail politics" and individual primaries.
- The process should be available to "unknown" candidates and not limited to the wealthy and those with access to wealth.
- The parties need to stand up to the individual presidential nominees who might be tempted, as they were in 2000, to use the process to protect their advantages and political needs.
- All efforts should be made to achieve bi-partisan cooperation on similar nominating plans, as well as cooperation among the states in abiding by the rules and schedules adopted. But should the states continue to pursue their perceived self-interest as opposed to the interest of the parties and a sensible nominating process, those involved should consider federal legislation. Bauer suggested that such legislation might be challenged and it was by no means certain that it could survive such a challenge.

Democratic Party consultant Donna Brazile asserted that the system is out of control. She suggested that the best way to proceed would be on a bi-partisan basis, and that consideration might be given to states with higher rates of participation. Her remarks were particularly caustic with regard to the states that moved up their primaries so that some campaign monies—which usually flow out of big states like California to be spent

elsewhere—would be spent in their states. She cautioned that the selection of a president is too important to be misconstrued as a state economic development plan.

Dr. Jerry Hough, professor of political science at Duke University, suggested that there is an inequality in the process—that the delegate votes are skewed to favor the smaller states.

Evan Frishberg, senior strategist for Rock the Vote, put forward the idea that a national primary would enhance participation, involve all the states and balance the currently inequitable small state influences.

Curtis Gans suggested that a national primary would essentially foster a national media campaign; would result in competition between media advisors to determine who was the slickest among them; would dampen turnout and virtually eliminate grassroots activity; and provide no chance to judge candidate qualifications over time.

There was relatively broad consensus that the process should start later; emphasize grassroots and "retail" campaigning, promote individual rather than group primaries and enable others beyond the wealthy or well-connected to have access to candidacy for public office.

Chapter 3: Campaign Conduct/Televised Political Advertising

Political advertising on broadcast television has become the dominant mode of political campaigning. From its simplistic and rough start in the 1952 campaign of Dwight Eisenhower where he answered essentially planted and self-serving questions, the industry has mushroomed.

By 2004, more than $600 million was spent on ads aimed at influencing the presidential campaign in 18 states. Additional funds were spent in other states and for other races, contributing greatly to the unprecedented $4-plus billion dollars spent on all campaigns combined. Several studies[4] conducted under different auspices have shown that in competitive senatorial races, the combined expenditure for television advertising, fundraising and polling necessary to define ad content absorbs between 80 percent and 90 percent of the campaign budget and is the primary reason for skyrocketing campaign costs. The average percentage of the campaign budget devoted to televised advertising for competitive congressional campaigns is only slightly less, owing to the fact that television is not cost effective in media markets around major cities with multiple races. Because of the increased volume of ads, the cost of individual campaigns has skyrocketed, resulting in a competition with a tendency to limit candidacy to the rich, the well known and those connected to large numbers of political donors.

The tenor of campaigns has also changed. The initial advertising campaign, like Eisenhower's, tended to be fairly benign. But subsequent advertising campaigns have increasingly become dominated by attack or comparative (comparing an opponent's record, advocacy and character) advertising. For the viewer, the difference between attack and comparative ads is a distinction without perceived value and, in the majority of later campaign stages, results in a glut of demagogic negativity. Unlike Eisenhower's ads, most advertising today does not feature the candidate speaking to the camera, but rather uses devices such as emotive images, voiceovers and music. As candidates have learned, "rational" responses to these ads aren't very effective, because the opponent's ad engages both visual and auditory senses that reach the viewer at a stronger emotive level.

This has led to responding in kind with a negative and equally emotive and demagogic ad. The viewer is left to choose between a "bad" and an "awful" ad, casting an atmosphere of doubt surrounding the whole political process. In the average political campaign—one not emotionally charged, such as the 2004 election—these ads tend to dampen the impulse to vote because the

[4] "Use of Media Principal Reason Campaign Costs Skyrocket," A report on campaign spending and media spending 1976-1992; Committee for the Study of the American Electorate; Washington, DC; July 26, 1993.

perceived conduct of the campaign and candidates are both so unappealing. According to the consultants who devise them, another purpose behind these ads is, among weak partisans and the undecided, to depress the impulse to vote for the opponent. But, when responded to in kind, these ads weaken the impulse to vote among viewers.

The ads have become the staple of the visible American political campaign because those who create them, the political consultants, say they work; they help define the choices in a light favorable to their candidates (by casting the opposition in a negative light in an emotionally telling manner); and they permit control of the campaign's message. In truth, they work for no more than 50 percent of the consultants in any given race (those who win), while 100 percent of the electorate loses as they get bombarded with an ever growing number of these ads, which cannot help but negatively affect their perceptions of politics.

The volume and virulence of these ads have increased dramatically. Due to diminished broadcast television viewership, the amount of rating points needed to reach the same number of viewers as reached a decade ago has escalated exponentially. In addition, the need to capture the potential voter in the mere seconds these ads are viewed has driven consultants to make them ever more demagogic and emotive, usually resulting in oversimplification and distortion of the message.

Until the 2004 campaign, most of these demagogically emotive and negative ads were limited to campaigns below the level of president. One could point to only a handful of presidential campaign ads that resorted to these tactics. For example, Lyndon Johnson's ad featuring a little girl picking daisies while a mushroom cloud was forming in the background, attempting to paint his opponent, Barry Goldwater, as an irresponsible proponent of using the atom bomb. However, in the 2004 presidential campaign, there was a flood of such ads.

For most of those concerned about the impact of these ads, the problem is not with their negativity; they believe the character, record, issue positions, sources of money, and present and potential advisors are all legitimate fodder for campaign debate. They believe that the problem is that their very nature undermines debate, distorts issues, creates an unnecessarily negative political climate, limits access to candidacy, reduces political trust, diminishes citizen electoral participation and contributes to the poisonous polarization of American politics.

Civic Disengagement In Our Democracy

To discuss televised political advertising intelligently—including its proliferation and development, its impact on American politics, the various attempts to reduce its influence and enhance its accountability and possible future options— participants heard from Douglas Bailey, a former political consultant for the firm Deardourff and Bailey, a founder of the political Hotline and presently an organizer of Unity '08; Rep. David Price and Curtis Gans, who, under the aegis of a commission created in 1981 and chaired by the late Rep. Barber Conable (R-NY), advanced an option for dealing with the problems posed by televised political advertising.

Bailey outlined how televised political advertising evolved to become as dominant, negative and demagogic as it is today. He said that consultants initially feared that negative ads would produce backlash, but that the proliferation of channels and the ability through remote control devices to channel surf, made it imperative to create attention grabbing ads. Other technical advances also increased the ad's impact. In the past, broadcasters sold time blocks of five minutes or longer to advertisers. Today, they sell only segments 30-seconds or less, furthering the drive to demagoguery and oversimplification. The maxim is that an unanswered negative ad was often accepted as true. In the past, Bailey said television ads tried to communicate a candidate's stance on issues, as well as his or her background, personality and vision. Now, ads are simply geared to effectively damage a candidate's opponent.

Rep. Price said that the "Stand By Your Ad" provision was first tried in North Carolina and then enacted in Virginia before becoming part of the McCain-Feingold bill. The aim was to have accountability and to tie the candidates' names to their ads, and it was hoped that this tactic would make the ads more accountable and less virulent. Unfortunately, various studies[5], including one from the Wisconsin Advertising Project, show that there was no decrease in the volume of attack ads under the new regime, nor any evidence of tempering them to help create a more collegial climate.

Gans pointed out that all efforts to contain the contagious and destructive impact of televised political advertising have failed; even when agreed to, codes of conduct have not been honored. Watchdog organizations like FactCheck.org have enhanced the understanding of the veracity and degree

[5] Patterson, Kelly, Gale, Kristina, Hawkins, Betsey Gimbel, & Hawkins, Richard. 2005. "I approve This Message: A Study of Political Disclaimers." *Campaigns & Elections,* 26(4 May), 39-40. Also see: "The New U.S. Campaign Regulations and Political Advertising." *Journal of Political Marketing,* vol. 3(4), pp. 105-110.

of distortion of individual ads, but viewers cannot keep up with the enormous volume of one to two hours a day on every widely watched broadcast outlet. At best, these groups may expose an advertiser espousing egregious lies, thereby tempering the impulse of others to do the same. Additionally, "Stand By Your Ad" has not created more responsible—or answerable—ads. In view of the damage that such ads had on American politics, Gans argued that it was time for the United States to abandon its standing as one of the only democracies in the world that doesn't regulate televised ads by time (limited allocation) or format (limiting the manner of presentation) or—in the case of France—both.

Should the United States emulate other democracies' attempts to subject televised political advertising to some form of regulation, as outlined in past congressional hearings, only three methods would fit within the American political system and still be effective for all potential sponsors of such ads: candidates, political parties and independent expenditure groups.

With the necessary motivation, all televised ads could be abolished, forcing campaigns into other communication media; however, that is not likely to happen. Alternately, the late political consultant Charles Guggenheim once proposed a regulation along the lines of what might have been implied in what Bailey suggested to the group; allow broadcasters to sell only time blocks of two minutes or longer which, of course, would be strongly resisted by broadcasters who would not want to organize programming around odd lot time buys.

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On the other hand, a uniform format could be offered for spot advertising (those ads of two minutes or less that capture the audience in the middle of programs and are the source of the most deleterious political ads) that would mandate that the ad's purchaser or an identified spokesperson speak to the camera for the duration of the ad. It would, Gans said, allow candidates, political parties and independent expenditure groups not only to buy whatever volume they wanted but also whatever content, provided an identified person was the speaker. Gans said this approach would return spot advertising to a debate format with answerability and accountability and, with the exception of responding to a significant issue. It would also reduce the impulse to take a negative approach with the ad. This uniform talking-head format would also likely reduce the temptation to essentially use them as the only

campaign method and, perhaps, move funding toward activities involving people—such as grassroots campaigning.

Gans pointed out that while there are other media avenues for demagoguery, they are all either less damaging (longer ads) or more easily defended by any candidate or committee. He said that this legislation had bi-partisan support and was introduced in previous congresses by the chairs and ranking minority members of both the Senate and Administration and Commerce Committees.

Of all the issues discussed at the conference, this one resulted in the least agreement among participants. Dr. Thomas Patterson, professor of government and the press at Harvard University, was among the few who supported the measure proposed by Gans, believing it necessary in order to address a fundamentally dangerous and growing problem.

Bob Bauer said that with the advent of technologies such as TiVo, people could—and often do—shut out the ads. Gans responded that the consultants' response was to vastly increase the amount of ratings points (number of ads) used—an assertion supported by participating political consultants Ed Rollins and Les Francis.

Norm Ornstein, senior scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, felt that focusing on televised advertising was looking at politics in a rearview mirror, and that other communication vehicles—including the Internet, cable and satellite—would soon make broadcast television advertising take a back seat to other forms of communication.

Andrew Schwartzman, president and CEO of Media Access Project said that there are studies showing that 90 percent of campaign resources are devoted to broadcast television and would likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Current statistics on the 2007 campaign thus far bear out Schwartzman's point that consultants are eschewing cable and satellite in favor of broadcast television for its much greater viewership, despite the fact that it has been losing market share.[6]

Dr. Marion Just, professor of political science at Wellesley College and a research associate of the Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, said that some negative ads go too far and are rejected by viewers, while humorous ads tend to engage people.

[6] Donohue, Steve. 2007. "Presidential Candidates Shun Cable Advertising." Multichannel News (Dec. 15).

Gans pointed out that while some ads are egregious and that the campaign sponsoring them can suffer backlash, it is common for both campaigns to air equally negative and nasty ads. This leaves citizens with equally unappealing voting choices which may force them to sit out the election. Gans referenced the re-election campaign of former Colorado Gov. Roy Romer who, two months prior to the election, announced that he would not resort to televised attack ads; post-election polls revealed that people felt he had kept his promise and that his no-attack-ads stance was a major factor in his substantial margin of victory.

Francis thought that some spot advertising served a useful purpose. Moreover, Lawrence Grossman, co-chair of the Digital Promise Project and former president of NBC News and the Public Broadcast System, was fairly vehement that any content restriction would be a violation of constitutionally protected free speech and would set a dangerous precedent. Gans responded that free speech has never been an absolute and that there are numerous court sanctioned restrictions on speech when the danger of its abuse seems to outweigh the right to free speech.

While most participants believed that advertising posed a serious problem, there was little agreement on how to deal with it.

Chapter 4: Restoring Trust in Election Administration

As Norman Ornstein asserted, but for the 2000 election, issues of election conduct and administration would not have been a major public concern despite the 37-day wait for final results; the revelation of flaws in ballot design; the methods of voting and counting votes and the way registration lists were scrubbed of those ineligible to vote; the claims of fraud, suppression, intimidation and partisanship; and the highly unusual and still controversial ending to the whole saga via a bitterly divided Supreme Court decision.

Citizens would have continued to cast their ballots, but sometimes—depending on the intensity of their feelings—their decisions of whether or not to vote were influenced by the long voting lines. There would still be the occasional report of possible fraud, intimidation or the selling votes by election officials paid to produce specific results. Occasional machine malfunctions, counting errors, unnecessary registration hurdles and some scattered election official incompetence are unavoidable. Yet, until 2000, these problems never reached the level of a national crisis.

In the aftermath of the 2000 election, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) which mandated, among other things, the elimination of punch card ballots and lever machines. This equipment was eliminated because it was vulnerable to the manipulation of voting numbers; computerization of registration lists; and provisional ballots for those who were not on the registration lists, but believed they should have been. HAVA created the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to provide guidelines for these mandates, but did not give the commission any enforcement powers. It also provided money to help the states computerize their lists and shift to technologically advanced methods of voting, but not quite enough to fully implement the mandates. In theory, all aspects of HAVA were to be accomplished by the 2008 election.

Many states rushed to replace outlawed voting equipment with state-of-the-art touch screen voting machines; others selected optical scan machines as their replacement of choice. Several states missed the deadline for replacing the outmoded and outlawed equipment. Most states worked to computerize their registration lists but, again, there are still states that have not completed that process. Perhaps of equal import, states used different methods of collecting and computerizing their lists; some putting the responsibility in the hands of county officials and others in the hands of

the state. While there was a desire to have this computerization include software that would be compatible with all the states and other locations such as Motor Vehicle Departments, where citizens could register to vote, and the postal service's computerized change of address files, this possibility is not nearly a reality going into the 2008 election. And while all states had provisional ballots in the 2004 and 2006 elections, there were many variations regarding who could qualify for a provisional ballot; how the bona fides of the provisional ballot voter would be verified; and how many of these ballots would be counted within what timeframe.

In the 2004 and 2006 elections, there were many malfunctions of the new voting machinery and, in the case of touch screen machines, there was no way to ascertain whether or how these malfunctions affected the election and counting of ballots. There were claims of partisan administration, particularly again in Florida and in Ohio, and slight evidence of fraudulent registration and more significant evidence of voter intimidation and suppression, in part through phone calls providing false information. Due to concerns about ineligible persons, including illegal immigrants, casting ballots, Congress enacted the Real ID law which mandated that the states require identification for everyone as a condition of voting, but failed to provide the money to implement the law or help citizens get these IDs, making this law perhaps the largest unfunded mandate in history.

Because of equipment malfunctions—particularly with the new touch screen technology—and concerns about the potential for vote manipulation, there was a small national movement not only for paper trails so that voters would be confident that their votes were recorded, but also an audit trail which would provide evidence of the number of voters who had cast ballots. That movement had a champion in Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) and, to a significant but lesser extent, Sen. Diane Feinstein (D-CA), both of whom introduced legislation which mandated a paper trail for all machines. This legislation has not yet been enacted, not only because of the opposition of some in the disability community who found that touch screen machines provided them their first opportunity to vote without assistance, but also because machine vendors have not yet devised a way to retrofit a paper trail into those they have already sold. Factors driving this delay are the fact that no agreement was reached on deadlines for all machines to be in compliance and also the lack of funding—or even an estimate of funding—that would

be required to either buy replacements for the touch screen machines or to retrofit the existing machines.

Conference participants then turned their attention to these difficult issues that must be addressed in order to restore public confidence in the integrity of election administration. Leading the discussion were Rosemary Rodriguez, EAC commissioner; Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, Georgia state representative; Norman Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute senior fellow; and Jean-Pierre Kingsley, chairman and CEO of the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and former chief electoral officer of Canada.

The discussion focused on several issues:

1. **Voting Machines:** In the event of another close election, such as that of 2000, Ornstein described the current situation as "an accident waiting to happen." He expressed his belief that public faith in the accuracy of reported outcomes could be severely undermined without a paper verification of the citizen's vote and also hard copy verification of the number of citizens casting ballots. Because they've already sold their machines, he suggested that vendors have no incentive to retrofit their machines. Ornstein is looking to other players—perhaps Google or Apple—to fill the technological gap. Roosevelt seconded Ornstein's concern, saying that citizens trust automatic teller machines precisely because they know their transactions are secure and because they can verify them with hard copy.
2. **Non-partisan Election Administration:** Rep. Oliver sponsored state legislation to mandate non-partisan election administration. Kingsley described the non-partisan election administration process in Canada and its success in engendering public trust while providing effective election oversight; accurate voting lists; and trouble-free elections. Ornstein expressed his belief that while non-partisan election administration was important, it was not on the immediate horizon in states with partisan administration. Further, he didn't believe it would ever happen in the absence of highly visible instances of partisan abuse by elected state officials—similar to the 2000 and 2004 events in, respectively, Florida and Ohio. David Mikosz, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Election Management, argued not only for non-partisan election administration, but also for non-partisan observers who

would report on the conduct of American elections, much as foreign elections are observed by pro-democracy non-partisan players.

3. **Voter Identification:** While both Rep. Oliver and Ornstein said that registration fraud at the polling booth was either non-existent (Rep. Oliver, with respect to Georgia) or minimal (Ornstein, with respect to the nation), both said that a voter photo identification would not be harmful if the costs were borne by the state and if they were universally easily obtained. Rep. Oliver said that both the recently re enacted Georgia voter identification law and the Indiana law being challenged in the Supreme Court are flawed because identification cards are not widely available—particularly in locations people who don't drive can access. She said that some citizens need to drive as far as 40 to 50 miles to the nearest location providing IDs.

Rep. Reynolds (Mississippi state representative) said that in his state, some citizens were forced not only to travel as many as 40 miles to get an ID, but also to pay $20, suggesting that might be a more onerous burden than the now-abolished $2 poll tax. He said he introduced legislation in the Mississippi legislature which would exempt the elderly and the handicapped from identification restrictions based on inaccessibility to locations offering identification. This legislation failed, but he emphasized his belief that there should be a way to both require identification and make it easily accessible for everyone.

Hough said that it was time for the Democrats to stop opposing and blocking the plan, noting that a national identification card could eliminate registration as a barrier to voting. Since absolute privacy no longer exists, he suggested that concerns for privacy were the equivalent of shutting the barn door after the horse had already escaped.

Gans argued that a mandatory biometric national identification card be provided by the government. The potential benefits of a national ID include:

- Track not only those already in America, but also those entering our country (in the interest of national security).
- Manage the immigration question of how many illegal immigrants are already in the country, who they are and how to determine who should be moved toward a citizenship track.
- Eliminate identity theft.

- Obviate the necessity for enumeration in the census count while providing for greater accuracy.
- Eliminate registration and all forms of fraud or putative fraud associated with the election process (with the exception of election official fraud and buying votes). However, because the upfront cost is $14 billion, such an ID will never be mandated unless it is viewed as vital for homeland and/or national defense purposes.

4. **Voter Outreach and Mobilization:** Allison Prevost, deputy director of the Carter/Baker Commission's follow-up work, said the commission recommended extensive voter outreach efforts and, to encourage registration, linking up agencies beyond Motor Vehicle Departments. Ivan Frishberg described Rock the Vote's efforts at mobilizing the young and suggested more effort be made on the mobilizing side of the electoral-participation equation. Further, he suggested that one project his group had taken on could serve as a model for others: The process includes providing young people with registration forms online, motivating them to send—or bring—them to the registrars and then following-up with get-out-the-vote activities.

Gans reported another positive approach—the efforts of Fair Vote and the Mikva Challenge to register youth in high school before they reach voting age.

5. **Other Ideas Put Forward:** Ornstein described the operation of voting centers pioneered in Larimer County, Colorado. Those centers are conveniently located in town centers where computers are programmed to print the ballots of each of the precincts in the county, thus eliminating the requirement that citizens must vote—in person—at a specified voting place.

Gans reported that both the National Association of Secretaries of State and the League of Women Voters now have online software where citizens can input their address and locate their polling places, much the same as when citizens can input addresses at the postal service site to determine zip codes.

Rep. Oliver and Rodriguez raised the issue of citizen distrust of the political process. Rep. Oliver stated her belief that this distrust had two sources: ugly campaign practices—particularly on television—which provide only negative information about the candidates—and the presence of corruption. Rodriguez said only transparency in the process, in election administration and in the course of reform, would reduce that mistrust. Kingsley indicated that there are only three options to deal with money's influence in politics: disclosure, regulation or inaction. He argued that any leadership decision to regulate money to reduce corruption should be made even handedly.

Several people raised the need to have an adequate number of thoroughly trained polling workers, especially since the current cadre of poll workers is aging. Extending polling hours would entail the need for a substantially increased number of trained workers, making the shortage even more acute.

Kingsley suggested that perhaps one of the reasons for the voting decline in his country is a decline in civic education and suggested that might be a factor in lower American voting rates.

An almost universal concern of the group is the failure of Congress to provide adequate funding to address any of these problems—including those already mandated by HAVA and the Real ID legislation.

Francis suggested that a campaign be organized and the best ideas advanced, enacted, funded and implemented.

Chapter 5: Television Coverage of Politics

A healthy democracy depends on an informed and engaged electorate. If democracy's legitimacy rests on the consent of the governed, particularly, but not exclusively, through voting, then that consent is best given—or withdrawn—by an electorate which fully understands the choices it faces. The conveyor belt for that understanding is the mass media, particularly television (both local and national), which is the primary source for information on politics and public affairs for the largest segment of American citizens.

To have an informed and knowledgeably involved citizenry, three conditions must exist:

- Citizens need to be trained to regularly seek and understand news about politics and public affairs.
- The mass media needs to provide that news.
- The content of that news needs to be sufficiently educational to enable Americans to make informed decisions by understanding the issues and the political choices they face.

Part of the reason the political health of the U.S. is declining is because none of the fundamental requirements are being provided. These include:

- **News Viewership:** According to Martin Wattenberg[7], from the late 1950s through the late 1960s, news consumption remained relatively constant and was fairly evenly distributed along the age continuum. Around 60 percent of those aged 30 and over were regular consumers of news and 53 percent below that age were equally regular assimilators of news and public affairs. A 2007 Shorenstein Center study[8] revealed a huge gap between older and younger Americans. On a scale of zero to eight—with the higher number representing avid consumers of news—40 percent of older Americans scored four or higher, while only 17 percent of those 21-29 and 12 percent of teenagers scored at least that high. This study was funded by grants from the Knight Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation and supervised by Dr. Thomas Patterson and included all sources of news—national television, local television, radio,

[7] Wattenberg, Marvin P. 2000. "Is Voting for Young People?" New York: Pearson Longman, p.32.

[8] Patterson, Thomas E. 2007. "Young People and the News." Cambridge, MA: Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy (July).

newspapers and the Internet—indicating that though young people use the Internet more than older Americans, it has not heightened news readership among young Americans.

- **Political Coverage:** Even considering their substantially diminished viewership in the past two or three decades, broadcast television's four major networks have about four times the audience of all the cable public affairs channels combined even though they have been progressively reducing their political and public affairs coverage. While the networks formerly provided gavel-to-gavel coverage of major party conventions—thereby educating every age group about politics and the qualifications and qualities of the present and future leadership of both parties—they now only total three hours of coverage for each party's four-day quadrennial nomination meetings. Formerly, all the major networks provided live coverage of the three presidential debates and one vice-presidential debate. However, more than one network has, on occasion, opted not to cover one or more debates in favor of more lucrative commercial programming. Presidents, formerly commanding prime time for addresses or press conferences, now must hold them in the afternoon in order to secure a few minutes on the nightly news. An ongoing 10-state study by the Center for the Study of the American Electorate[9] of television coverage of non presidential major office debates (U.S. Senate, U.S. House and gubernatorial) showed that every year more than 80 percent of television outlets and local network affiliates did not cover any of these debates held in their media markets.
- **Coverage Content:** A study of 2007 presidential campaign coverage[10]—released in October 2007, jointly sponsored by Harvard's Shorenstein Center and the Project for Excellence in Journalism and supervised by conference participants Dr. Marion Just and Thomas Rosenstiel, executive director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, found that 86

[9] "Debates Held; Debates Not Seen," A report on television coverage of major office debates below the level of President in ten selected states in the 2000 election by the Center For the Study of the American Electorate, May 16, 2002, Washington, DC. See also: "2002 Governor, U.S. Senate and U.S. House Debates Not Televised by 82 Percent of Stations," A report on television coverage of major office debates in ten selected (and identical to the above) states in the 2002 election; Center for the Study of the American Electorate, Washington, DC August 17, 2003. Note: Similar figures have been compiled but not yet published for the 2006 election with similar results.

[10] "The Invisible Primary: Invisible No Longer." 2007. Washington, DC: The Project for Excellence in Journalism (Oct. 29).

percent of that coverage did not contain any information which would help primary voters make reasoned choices; that 86 percent included—horse race coverage, amounts of money raised and trivial issues such as one candidate's laugh and another's haircut. The study also exposed media bias by giving certain candidates substantially more coverage than others and, thereby, imposing the media's judgment on which candidates were serious and which were not. For instance, despite the fact that former Sen. John Edwards (D-NC) was statistically even in the polls in Iowa and was a 2004 candidate for vice president, he received only about a quarter of the coverage Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL) each received. Not surprisingly, the former first lady and Sen. Obama were atop the national polls for the Democratic nomination.

To lead the discussion on these issues, their implications for American democracy and possible approaches to deal with them were Dr. Thomas Patterson, Dr. Marion Just, Lawrence Grossman, Andrew Schwartzman and, in a brief presentation on the day before the discussion began, Thomas Rosenstiel.

Dr. Patterson focused most of his remarks on the meager availability of news coverage and the lack of interest in the news among the young. His studies indicate that only between one quarter and one-third of the younger population are regular consumers of news. He pointed out that regular news consumption keeps citizens engaged in thinking about politics and, perhaps, participating in the political enterprise. He suggested that one of the biggest reasons there is a major generational divide in interest in news between younger and older Americans is due to the fact that, increasingly, today's parents do not watch the news, read newspapers or discuss current events and, therefore, do not transmit the habit of news engagement to their children. And, because of the abundance of entertainment choices, he suggested that even in families whose adult members watch the news, the young are more likely to be in another room watching something else.

Dr. Patterson asserted that thanks to cable, satellite television and the Internet, while there is more news available, there are more ways to avoid that coverage. Radio was once a uniting medium and most radio stations—even those that featured music—would air the news either at the top of the hour or at several points throughout the day.

He went on to discuss two approaches that might lead us out of semi-civic illiteracy. The first is enhancing civic, governmental and political education in the schools. When his generation was growing up, at least three history, government and/or civics courses were required before high school graduation. Now, a student is lucky to get one semester. A return to a greater commitment to civic education—including increased innovation and political hands on experience—might breed greater interest among America's youth.

His second recommendation was to revisit the public affairs responsibility of network broadcast television. He said that while it was true that viewership for network television had declined, it still has the largest single audience of any communication medium. Gans added another point: When he was growing up, schools had weekly news magazines, and students discussed—and were tested on—current events, and he believed that might have served as a stimulus to acquire knowledge and, perhaps, become engaged in civic affairs.

Dr. Just said that the difference between primaries and general elections is that in primaries one does not have the party label to vote for which makes the media much more influential in the citizens' decision-making. The problem, from her point of view, is that the media gives such excessive coverage to the horse race and the money chase that voters do not get the information they need to make an informed choice. This, she suggests, is primarily due to the media's predilection for conflict. So there is, she said, a conflict between what television thinks is news and what the voters need.

Another barrier which exists is that people are commuting longer and often don't get home for the network nightly news. Additionally, local stations focus on the functional aspect of the news—weather, sports, traffic and other current events—and politics and public affairs issues get much less coverage. Local television news—and to some extent national news—is structured to excel on breaking news and, often, not even to do a good job on the more thoughtful and educational programming.

Grossman said that the biggest enemy of news and political news is the multiplicity of entertainment options and that, perhaps, this resulted in less serious treatment of the news on local television. He suggested that the broadcast industry be restructured so that every local radio and television station would be required to carry at least two hours of public affairs programming or contribute to a fund that would finance others to do so. He

also said that Congress should mandate local political affairs coverage as a condition of license renewal.

Schwartzman said there are studies which show that network broadcast television (as opposed to cable and satellite) will continue to be the most significant contributor to shaping public opinion. Approximately 90 percent of political advertising goes to network affiliated broadcast television. That shows that in the 2007 preprimary season, some 95 percent of campaign advertising budgets was spent on broadcast television advertising. He suggested that there would be an opportunity in early 2009 to make significant changes in how television might be regulated. That period would coincide with two events—a new commission (FCC), probably balanced in a different partisan direction, and the Feb. 2 deadline for all televised broadcasting to be in high definition. He said that at that time it might be possible to revisit the issue of reorganizing -the industry based on market share so that those with the largest share, furthest reach and greatest profitability would bear the burden through "must-carry" requirements to cover certain events and devote a specified amount of time to politics and public affairs.

Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), suggested that even without improvement in the political and cultural dialogue, an effective and longitudinal civic education program in the schools would result in statistically significant increases in the level of people's interest in politics.

Ivan Frishberg observed that young people get information from many sources beyond television and, as a result, ratings are less important.

Hodding Carter, professor of leadership and public policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, argued that while what Frishberg said is true, much of the information on such other outlets as the Internet comes from traditional sources.

Conclusion: Common Ground

This conference was predicated on belief and hope. A belief that all participants shared a common concern about the low level of civic political engagement in America and that they were essentially committed to non-ideological and partisan neutral approaches to addressing the concerns advanced in conference sessions, and hope that across the wide ideological spectrum represented at the conference, the participants might find common ground on those issues. Should these premises not be shared and were there no common ground, no follow-up on the issues discussed—or consideration of others—would be possible.

On this score, the conference was a rousing success. Even on the one issue about which there was substantial disagreement—political advertising and campaign conduct—that disagreement did not break down along ideological lines. In every other issue area, there was some consensus on basic principles, leading to hope that this group—perhaps expanded—could produce some policy recommendations (and, in one case, even possible action) within a year after using the 2008 election as a laboratory to provide substantive support for some of the suggested remedies. More specifically with respect to these issues:

- **Nominating Process:** There was general agreement about the principles that should govern changes in the current presidential nominating process. Any new nominating process would start later; lead with small primaries and individual contests; build some population diversity into the early contests; provide for the possibility of late entrants into the contest; reduce the need for early fundraising and the phony pre-campaign; and, by virtue of that, reduce the influence of the press on the outcome. Progress toward these results is rapidly moving forward in the Republican Party whose committee is likely to endorse a version of the Delaware Plan in January, and there are negotiations in progress with the Democratic Party for a common approach. The assembled group could assist by widening the circle of support.
- **Campaign Finance:** There was widespread support for a review of current campaign finance legislation to explore revisions which would make the system more accountable by putting greater emphasis on providing adequate funds for candidates and less funding for independent groups; more transparent by expanding the aspects of campaigns requiring disclosure and making that disclosure swiftly accessible; more flexible by exploring both public and private seed money for candidates

to enter the fray; and by reducing—and in some cases, eliminating—contribution and spending limits. The first step is to bring together relevant members of conference participants and other appropriate parties to explore some of the ideas proposed at this conference.

- **Campaign and Political Coverage:** Almost without exception, participants agreed that there was a need to revisit regulation of the broadcast industry to recreate the principle that—as a condition of having a broadcast license on the public airwaves—broadcasters be required to provide specified coverage of politics and public affairs, with the largest burden for meeting such requirements to be borne by those with the largest market shares. There was also agreement that the best time to pursue that goal would be after the 2008 election and when the mandates for high definition television will be enforced. Continuing research on the scope of 2008 political coverage was mandated, as was the convening of those who have a stake in—and commitment to—such change. There was also some agreement that more support should be offered to those who are attempting to expand civic education in schools.
- **Election Administration:** While there are many already operating in this field, the participants in this conference and in its follow-up could make some unique contributions to that effort. The need for a biometrically based national identification card was generally supported and any follow-up could explore how to widen the base of support; bring in the elements of leadership—notably the national security community—necessary for its launch; how to deal with the objections raised; and conduct research into appropriate technologies, which would address many of its doubters' concerns. This group could also contribute by popularizing the philosophies of non-partisan election administration; election observers; innovations such as the vote centers which were inaugurated in Larimer County, Colorado; high school registration; and constructive voter mobilization programs.
- **Campaign Conduct:** While there was no agreement on what should be done about the problem, there was general agreement that nothing attempted so far has mitigated either the volume or virulence of the television advertising campaign. This, in turn, mandates the collection of data on that campaign in 2008 and its impact on cost and public attitudes. It also mandates the exploration of new approaches toward controlling excesses.

Conclusion: Common Ground

Not all of these activities will be undertaken by the Center for the American Electorate. Research on campaign advertising is being conducted elsewhere and the role for the Center would be to sift through and compile the work of others to be presented at any follow-up conference. Any follow-up on the nominating process would be in a leadership support role to the parties who are moving toward constructive change. There are many actors in the pursuit of revisiting regulation of the broadcast industry; perhaps the best role for conference follow-up is to convene those actors and help provide a joint statement of principles to undergird new policies.

Nonetheless, the results of the conference suggest certain unique contributions the Center and the participants can make. A representative sample could convene to chart constructive changes in campaign finance law. The Center and conference participants can recruit and convene those who might help bring about the mandatory biometric national identification card. And the Center might collect and provide information with respect to the issues discussed for a potential follow-up conference, and convene necessary pre-conference meetings in order to provide policy recommendations for conference consideration.

This conference provided hope that even across the wide spectrum of participants, common ground could be established on these and other issues. The next phase of this program will test whether the nascent beginnings of common purpose can be translated into a shared vision of a better future with respect to the issues discussed.

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The McCormick Tribune Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to making life better for our children, communities and country. Through its charitable grantmaking programs, Cantigny Park and Golf, Cantigny First Division Foundation and the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, the Foundation positively impacts people's lives and stays true to its mission of advancing the ideals of a free democratic society. The Foundation is an independent nonprofit, separate from the Tribune Co. For more information, please visit our Web site www.McCormickTribune.org.

Center for the Study of the American Electorate

The Center for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE) is the principal source for data and analysis of civic engagement in politics in the United States. Built upon the 30 years of work of the independent, non-partisan Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, this newest addition to the American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management, will continue to provide data and analysis of voter participation and other related issues, hold a major biennial conference on the state of American democracy, conduct forums on various issues relating to civic engagement, create high-level bi-partisan working groups to address fundamental problems underlying the increasing voter apathy and provide research to guide the deliberations of those groups.

The Center is directed by Curtis Gans, a co-founder and director of CSAE and a recognized expert on civic participation issues.