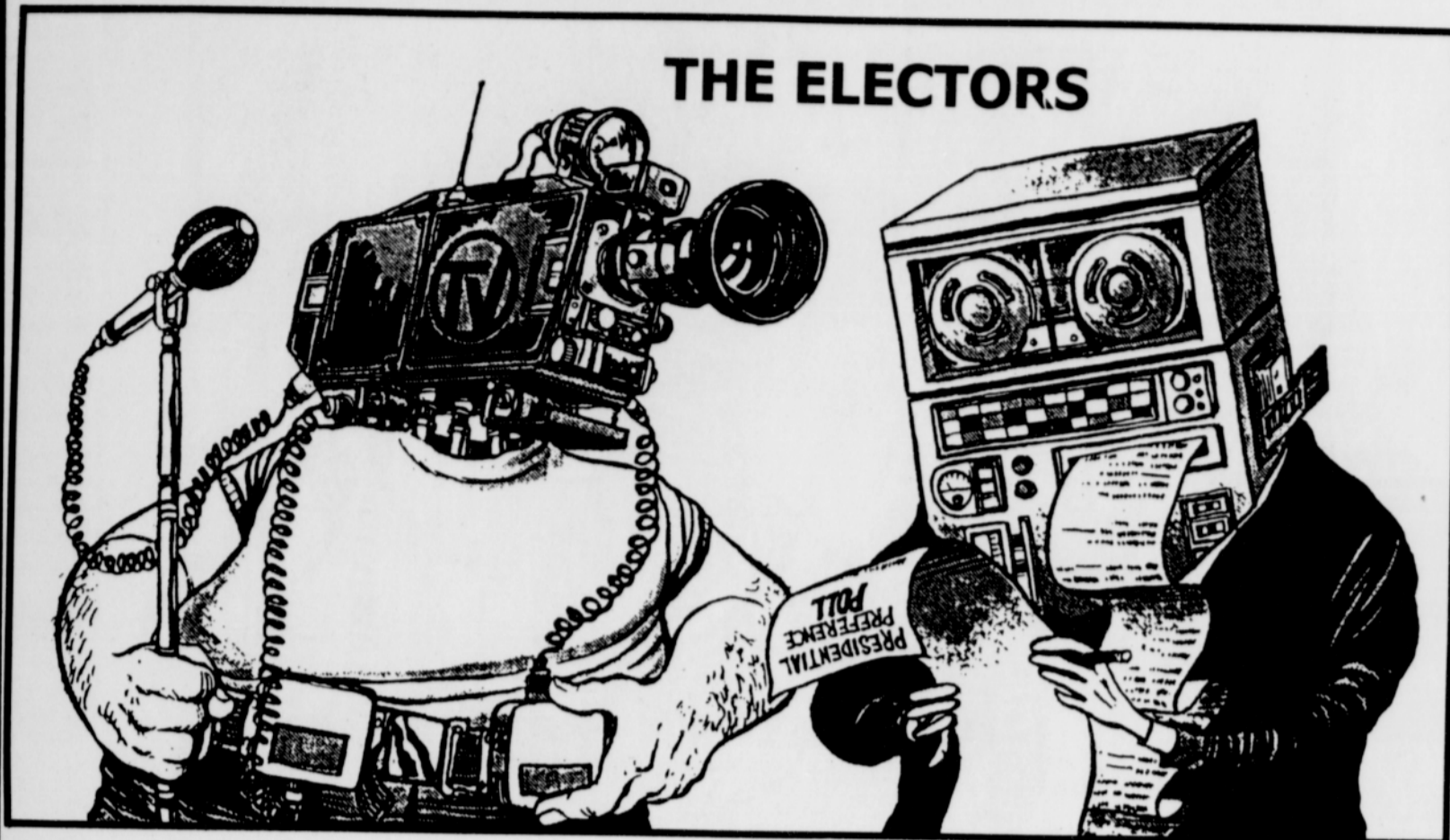


VOTE

FOR LIFE & LIBERTY

THE ELECTORS



DAVID HORSEY

wake of the 2000 meltdown, co-chaired by Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, recommended that election day be a holiday, but Congress ignored their proposal.

Again, states and local governments need not wait for the feds. In odd-numbered years when only local races are on the ballot, local jurisdictions can hold elections any day they wish. And in non-Presidential election years, states can do the same, or even make election day a state holiday.

6. Give 3rd parties a chance

Our current plurality (that is, "highest vote-getter wins") method of electing political representatives hobbles our choices by casting third-party candidates as potential spoilers. The furious battles over Ralph Nader's candidacy in 2004 demonstrated that our system is not designed to accommodate more than two choices, yet important policy areas can be completely ignored by major-party candidates. This situation can be easily redressed through instant-runoff elections. In this system, voters rank candidates in terms of preference. If no candidate achieves a majority, the least popular candidate is axed, and the votes of his or her supporters go to their second choice. The method is repeated until one candidate has support from a majority of voters. Instant run-off (also known as "ranked choice") voting was successfully employed in San Francisco in 2004 for local races, and will soon be implemented in Burlington, Vermont; Ferndale, Michigan; and Berkeley, California. With cross-partisan support, including Arizona Republican Senator John McCain and Democratic National Committee chair Howard Dean, legislative bills for instant-runoff voting were introduced in 22 states in 2003 and 2004, and several more are poised to address the issue.

7. Rethink redistricting

Electing one district representative at a time requires periodic redrawing of lines to account for shifts in population. In many states, redistricting is a blatantly political exercise in which the ruling party manipulates the lines so as to guarantee its continued supremacy. In California, for example, Democratic congressional incumbents paid the political consultant drawing the district lines — who happened to be the brother of one of the incumbents — \$20,000 apiece to manipulate the lines to give them all safe seats. Districts are traditionally redrawn every ten years, following the U.S. census. But former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's brazen mid-decade redistricting in Texas — which added five Republicans to the state's delegation — raised the abuse of partisan-controlled redistricting to a new level.

America is increasingly balkanized into red and blue enclaves; Democrats dominate cities and coastlines, and Republicans rule rural areas. When combined with partisan redistricting, this has produced a travesty of choiceless elections. In 2004, 98% of U.S. House incumbents kept their seats; 83% of all 435 races were won by landslides, and 95% by uncompetitive margins of ten points or higher. State legislative elections were even less competitive, with 40% of more than 7,000 seats uncontested. One solution is to have the district lines drawn by independent, nonpartisan commission driven by criteria like keeping districts compact, respecting geographic boundaries, and enhancing competition. While this removes the blatant conflict of interest in having incumbents draw their own districts, the track records of such "public interest" redistricting efforts in states like Washington, Iowa, Arizona, and New Jersey have not been encouraging. Most races remain noncompetitive because regional partisan demographics trump the well-meaning efforts of the redistricting commissions.

But single-member districts are not the only way to elect representatives. Larger multi-member districts can accommodate systems like choice voting, a ranked-ballot proportional representation system already used in local elections in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and national elections in Ireland and Australia. A state with 20 congressional seats, for example, could be divided up into 4 super-districts of 5 seats each. Voters in those districts would indicate their candidates in order of preference, ranking as many (or few) as they wished. The threshold of victory would be set to allow for only 5 winners — thus any candidates winning 17% on the first round would be elected. Any further votes for that candidate would have the voters' second choices counted, and so on, until 5 candidates pass the threshold.

An alternative system, used in more than 100 localities as well as by many corporate boards, is cumulative voting, whereby voters (also in multi-seat districts) cast as many votes as there are contested seats. Voters can give all their votes to one candidate, or split them as they see fit. Like choice voting, cumulative voting tends to foster competition, more choice for voters, better opportunities for pro-environment candidates (for example), and a decrease in regional partisan balkanization.

8. Abolish the Electoral College

The electoral college method of electing the President is an 18th century horse-and-buggy anachronism that enables campaigns to almost completely ignore most states. It allows a shift of a handful of votes in one or two states like Ohio or Florida to decide the Presidency. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Representative Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) have both introduced constitutional amendments to abolish the electoral college and institute direct election of the President. Representative Jackson's includes a requirement that the President win with a majority of the nationwide popular vote. (If that majority were not achieved, a runoff election would be required.)

Democrats already have ample reason to support such a move: After all, the electoral college system denied Al Gore the Presidency in 2000, even though he had the most votes. And in 2004, if a mere 60,000 swing voters in Ohio had changed their minds and voted for John Kerry, he would have won the Presidency while losing the national popular vote by 3 million ballots. That would have made believers in direct national elections out of many Republicans.

9. Make voting a right

As American voters discovered in 2000, we have no legal right to vote directly for President. In *Bush v. Gore*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that, under the Constitution, voting for President is reserved for state legislatures, who decide whether they wish to delegate it to voters. A constitutional amendment spelling out our right to vote could guarantee the franchise to all citizens. It would also guard against practices that can disenfranchise groups such as minority voters, prisoners, District of Columbia voters, and those using provisional ballots. Every member of the Congressional Black Caucus signed on to Representative Jackson's legislation to provide such a constitutional right.

10. Minimize money's role

With political campaigns largely financed by private sources, the views of those with the most money are disproportionately heard. Public financing of elections could open up an increasingly brain-dead political debate, and widen the narrowing spectrum of political ideas. One promising new approach is mandating free airtime for candidates. Broadcasting media is the greatest expense of any candidate's campaign, yet providing free airtime would cost the taxpayers nothing.

As the Supreme Court stated over a century ago, the right to vote is "a fundamental political right, because preservative of all rights." But it's still a right we must fight for. These ten reforms could revitalize American representative democracy in the 21st century. They will not be easy to achieve, because the party in power has little incentive to change the system that has served it so well. Cities, counties, and states will be the laboratories for new approaches, and a number of organizations are already highlighting reform packages, among them Common Cause and the Center for Voting & Democracy.

Shortly after the 2004 contentious Presidential election in the United States, Ukraine held an equally charged contest. When the ruling party stole the election through massive fraud, tens of thousands of Ukrainians poured into the streets for weeks on end until the results were overturned. Republicans, Greens, or other, we need that same fighting spirit to rescue our own democracy.

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BILL'S TAVERN

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Once again the United States of America is in need of a revolution to thwart incipient tyranny and the blatant attempt by a few robber barons, whom the framers of the Constitution warned us against, from seizing control of the remnants of government that operate on the behalf of the people.

This necessary revolution is underwritten in the nation's principles and is as sweeping in its implications as the original revolt against English rule, which was as corrupt, despotic and hubristic as the current American government under President George W. Bush and his cabal of pompous theocrats.

This revolution is within the law, it is supported by the law — in design if seldom in practice; and the law not only provides its mechanics, the law in a very real sense depends on it to maintain its integrity.

This revolution is more binding than the ancient right to remove emperors in old China or revolt against kings and Church in medieval Europe.

This revolution is the vote, guaranteed after much struggle and Constitutional amendments to all citizens, which too many abuse by disuse.

On average, less than 50% of eligible voters in this country vote. Disgust and powerlessness — not apathy — alienate millions of citizens from the polls, and are a major source of great public discontent that affects even those who do vote who are discouraged and fed up.

That discontent might be tapped by concentrating on registering to vote the many millions who have either dropped out of the political process or have never been given much opportunity or incentive to participate in it.

If these millions of ordinary people were to rise from their bitter cynicism and phlegmatic despair and use nothing more than their Constitutional right to vote, they will discover they have the power to transform much of what has gone off track in our recent history.

It is time to recognize that the heart of our liberty is disappearing in the despair of the deprived and disenfranchised.

Nonvoters are generally economically impaired and suffer most from inequities and corruption with little chance of prosperity in the existing status quo. Yet the potential of real power lies within these disaffected masses.

There are more grassroots organizations than at any time in the nation's history, all waiting for a real chance to voice their concerns, issues and visions.

All politics are local: while the trend seems to favor high-pressure political professionals funded by large amounts of money, which increasingly fragments the electorate with nasty advertising and PAC-backed candidates, they are vulnerable to the populism of grassroots organizations and campaigning that must be organized at the community level in every community in the USA.

We have allowed the vote to be trivialized and made much less than its true potency. Money has been substituted — the cash candidates accept supersedes the vote (and insures their continuance in power), which is treated as a commodity to be purchased. Securely established incumbents count on fewer people to vote to maintain power and on ever larger contributions from wealthy and corporate sponsors who use their money to turn campaigns into public ordeals of fear and loathing.

Paradoxically, as almost direct cause and effect, fewer Americans voting cheapens the vote as well as makes it cheaper to purchase.

Not voting is a virtual assurance those who do not vote will remain powerless as they become increasing victimized.

The next most necessary thing we must do is ensure that our votes count, which means demanding paper verification of our votes. The best way to do that is replace suspiciously tamper-prone high-tech voting machines with paper ballots — which is the method most world democracies continue to use because it is the most reliable.

Paper ballots are counted by people, not by machines. There are no patent liabilities involved in the process of hand-counting votes, and the checks and balances — and rechecks — to ensure the accuracy and honesty of counting ballots are required by law.

And ultimately, as with juries, the people who count ballots regard their task with grave responsibility — a weighty, passionate and essential sense of the obligation of citizenship that machines do not feel. People can, of course, be manipulated and corrupted, but never so easily as machines, especially machines designed and marketed by the very political/corporate military fraternity that has most to gain from rigging elections.

Oregon currently uses optical scan election systems to count the state's mail-in ballots. In 2004, 98% of Oregon's votes were tabulated on voting machines manufactured by the very corporations implicated in nationwide computer voting fraud.

The Oregon Voter Rights Coalition, which was formed after the 2004 election, says that it is necessary for every voter to be informed about the facts of voting machine use and the possibility of corruption. Suggestions to reduce the possibility of fraud include the demand that "corporations and politicians get out of counting the votes." Also that open-source election software be used for transparency, and scientifically designed election verification processes be used. Methods of ensuring election integrity incorporate logic and accuracy tests, audits of precincts, countywide and/or statewide verification, and recounts of votes by hand-counting all paper ballots for races that are in doubt.

Other suggestions are that volunteer groups take up poll watching, and that election returns be posted at the precinct level. Retain ballots in voting machines in which they are counted for documentation. Publicly display results in precincts because the "audit trail" gets lost once they are transmitted to centralized counting sites.

Most importantly, the Oregon Voter Rights Coalition exhorts voters to not let another election go unchallenged.

We do not have a political system that presents us with the best choices our country can offer. If it did we would have never got George W. Bush as President; he and his confederates would never have got close enough to steal the last two Presidential (and quite probably much of the 2002 mid-term) elections. The nation's political and economic structure needs massive and real change to transfer power and wealth back to the majority of ordinary citizens who are the true leaders of democracy. This November mid-term election can be a start in that direction.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER