

Passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) was the most significant legislative reform of the federal campaign finance system in more than a quarter-century. However, while this achievement is indeed substantive, its ultimate impact remains unclear. Events that have occurred since the bill was signed into law illustrate the challenges that confront political reform efforts. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) has issued proposed regulations that would greatly limit the law's impact. Many incumbents in Congress, having successfully competed under the existing rules, do not have strong incentives to support comprehensive reform and therefore may not vocally oppose the FEC's clear weakening of the law. Furthermore, opponents of the new restrictions on soft money have brought suit in court, and the Supreme Court will ultimately rule on the constitutionality of the legislation.

Proponents of this round of legislative reform take the long view of the reform process, as well they should. Regardless of how the contests over BCRA are resolved, much more will remain to be done in the cause of political reform. No one ever believed that this legislation alone would or could completely reform our political process. However, with the recent ruling by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals that upheld Vermont's limits on campaign expenditures by state candidates, the legal straightjacket stitched by the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* may be loosening. This should catalyze other efforts to pursue similar reforms. In this possibly more tolerant legal climate, states and local jurisdictions can play an important role in generating new reforms and providing the empirical record by which to assess the effects of those reforms. We do not know enough about what types of reform measures may be feasible, and one way to gauge this is to encourage experimentation on the part of states and local jurisdictions. Following Justice Brandeis's oft-quoted remarks, these laboratories may yield new approaches for realizing the essential end of limiting the influence of money in politics.

One of the things that NCL has learned through its New Politics program is that many citizens are not apathetic; rather, they lack a clear means for getting involved in politics in a way that matters to them. There is a growing level of activity around issues that are close to home, as the success of neighborhood watch programs attests. While engagement in traditional political activities remains lower than we would like, we believe that people become involved in issues they are concerned about when they think they can have an impact on them. We believe that one reason reform at the local level is so important is that it can help create a political climate that is supportive of reform at the state and federal levels as well.

Political reform is at the heart of NCL's mission, so we have once again devoted an issue of the *National Civic Review* to this topic. As noted in the

article by Mark Schmitt, the electorate in this country is closely divided, notwithstanding the results of the 2002 election. Schmitt identifies the key characteristics of our closed and deadlocked political system and highlights opportunities for reformers to make some necessary changes. In an excerpt from his book *The Vanishing Voter*, Thomas E. Patterson analyzes the downturn in voter turnout and proposes remedies to reverse this trend. A set of articles by staff from the Center for Voting and Democracy focuses on the relationships among incumbency, redistricting, and electoral competitiveness in making a case for substantive voting system reform. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer and Steve Brigham, from *AmericaSpeaks*, note the difficulties in conducting town hall deliberations in the modern age and detail the facilitated dialogue they conducted among nearly five thousand New Yorkers about the future of Ground Zero. This deliberative model provides a technologically sophisticated means for renewing the democratic form of the town hall meeting.

It is a personal pleasure to publish the remarks of Leonard J. Duhl, M.D., one of the founders of the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities movement, with which NCL has long been associated. Duhl's address on community was delivered at a ceremony at the Pan American Health Organization, where he received the Abraham Horvitz Award in recognition of his important contributions to improving health in the Americas. We think his remarks and the ideas in these articles will provide inspiration and insight to the political reform community at large as we collectively take up the continuing work of improving our democracy.

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