

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FEDERAL ELECTION REFORM

ORGANIZED BY THE MILLER CENTER OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, AND THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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National Commission on Federal Election Reform Meets, Outlines Ambitious Agenda to Tackle Voting Problems

Washington, D.C.: The National Commission on Federal Election Reform, overseen by former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, held its first meeting today in Washington, D.C. The Commission agreed on a far-reaching agenda and outlined plans for public hearings across the United States. In the session, which was led by Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler, an extraordinary group of public leaders from across the political spectrum joined the effort to improve the accuracy and fairness of federal elections. Drawing on the talents and experience of the political veterans, constitutional lawyers, and renowned scholars who have volunteered to serve, the National Commission plans to issue a final report in September 2001 that can inform the decisions to be made by the President and the 107th Congress.

This National Commission will bring together six special attributes.

First, the Commission includes leading citizens from across the country and across the political spectrum. In addition to the active honorary co-chairs, President Carter of Georgia and President Ford of Michigan, the following individuals have agreed to serve as Commissioners (listed in alphabetical order):

- Howard H. Baker, Jr., of Tennessee (co-chair)
- William Barr, of the District of Columbia
- Griffin Bell, of Georgia
- William T. Coleman, Jr., of the District of Columbia
- Lloyd Cutler, of the District of Columbia (co-chair)
- John Danforth, of Missouri
- Slade Gorton, of Washington State
- Hanna Holborn Gray, of Illinois
- Colleen McAndrews, of California
- Robert Michel, of Illinois
- Daniel Patrick Moynihan, of New York
- Leon Panetta, of California

Patrick, of New York vice president, and members of Congress. Other problems have also surfaced that were relatively unnoticed because of the commotion in Florida but which also deserve attention.

- There is thus an urgent need for thoughtful evaluation of a great variety of proposals, including those which would address:
- Diane Ravitch, of New York
 - Bill Richardson, of New Mexico
 - John Seigenthaler, of Tennessee
 - Kathleen Sullivan, of California
- Voting techniques and ballot design, whether with suggestions and subsidies or with minimum national and statewide standards;
 - The breadth and integrity of voter registration;
 - The timing of federal elections and release of election results;
 - The problems that have arisen with respect to absentee and overseas military votes;
 - The rules and procedures for contesting and recounting the results of elections for federal offices;

The Commissioners combine insights from many different perspectives and backgrounds, from academia to practical politics. The Commission's executive director is Philip Zelikow of the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs, working in cooperation with Richard Leone of the Century Foundation. Brief biographical profiles are attached.

- New technology for conducting elections; and
- New institutions, such as a national elections commission or a strengthened version of the existing Office of Election Administration of the Federal Election Commission, that would oversee progress toward a more standardized and modernized federal election process.

While it is too soon to forecast the conclusions of the Commission's work, there are obviously some worthy and constructive ideas that deserve consideration. The Commission will not refight the November 2000 election contest. The Commission's focus is on the future.

Third, the Commission will support its work with three task forces to call upon some of the best minds in America, engaging those who have great practical experience but also drawing together outstanding scholarship from the separate disciplines of political science, law, and history.

- A **task force on election administration** to consider new technology and 'best practices,' as well as the relationship between election processes and effective citizen participation. The coordinator for this task force will be David King, of Harvard University.

Second, the National Commission will evaluate a broad range of ideas. Although some machine and counting problems became obvious last year, other serious concerns have been expressed about the way the country comes together to elect the president,

- A task force on the federal election system** to consider the historical background of our institutions, the evolution of the right to vote, past experiences with reform, and options for structural change. The coordinator for this task force will be John Mark Hansen, of the University of Chicago.

force will be Daniel Ortiz of the University of Virginia.

Brief biographical profiles of the task force coordinators are attached..

Fourth, the Commission will elicit views from officials, experts, and community leaders from around the country through a national program of public hearings. These hearings will be held at presidential libraries across America, beginning with a hearing in late March at the Carter Center in Georgia, to be chaired by President Carter. Subsequent hearings will be held at the Ford Library in Michigan, the Johnson Library in Texas, and the Reagan Library in California.

Fifth, the Commission receives no taxpayer money and is not dependent on congressional appropriators. It has been organized by the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs and The Century Foundation. It is being supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. None of these foundations has attached any political strings to its support.

Sixth, because it is a privately sponsored entity, the Commission can move more quickly and flexibly. The Commission has already moved into action. It plans to report in September of this year in order to aid the work of the 107th Congress. The work of the Commission's task forces will inform its report and also help educate the public with Commission-approved materials that will be distributed in print and on the Web.

The opportunity for federal election reform is apparent to most Americans. The goal has been endorsed by President Bush and by leading figures of both parties in the House and Senate. The challenge is to evaluate a great body of knowledge and experience, sift through many different kinds of policy proposals, and -- while this opportunity beckons -- offer a bipartisan analysis to the Congress, the administration, and the American people.
- A task force on constitutional and federal election law issues** to consider equal protection questions, the federal-state relationship, and the implementation and enforcement of existing laws relevant to federal election reform. The coordinator for this task

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