

# The Century Foundation

*formerly the Twentieth Century Fund*

41 East 70<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10021  
(212) 535-4441

# NEWS

Contact: Christy Hicks  
212/452-7723  
hicks@tcf.org

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## Election Reform Bills Passed by Congress Reflect Recommendations of the National Commission on Federal Election Reform

On April 11, 2002, the U.S. Senate passed S. 565, the election reform bill sponsored by Senators Dodd (D-Ct.) and Mitch McConnell (R-Ky) by a vote of 99-1. The bill reflects many of the recommendations of the National Commission on Federal Election Reform, including the provisions on a statewide voter registration system, provisional ballots, and the establishment of voting system standards.

The bill provides about \$3.5 billion to the states to upgrade voting machines and improve election procedures. It also requires each state to create a statewide, computerized voter registration system, and that voters be able to cast a provisional ballot if their names do not appear on the voter registration list. It requires that voting systems meet the following standards: (1) notification to a voter of a possible voting error; (2) ability to correct errors before ballot casting; (3) voting records with an audit capacity for each vote cast; (4) accessibility for disabled and minority language voters by 2004; and (5) an error rate not exceeding those established by the Office of Election Administration of the Federal Election Commission. In addition, certain first-time voters who register by mail will have to show identification when they vote, such as photo identification, a utility bill, a bank statement, a paycheck or a government document that shows name and address.

In December 2001, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 3295, the "Help America Vote Act of 2001" by a vote of 363 to 63. The bill, co-sponsored by Representatives Bob Ney (R-Ohio) and Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), provided a \$2.25 billion grant program. It requires states to have a statewide registration system; provide provisional balloting or adoption of an alternative that achieves the same objective; make sure overseas military voters' ballots are counted; ensure voter registration lists are accurate and updated; require any new voting machines be accessible to the disabled; require any new machines to have voter correction capability; and create a definition for what constitutes a valid vote. The bill also authorizes \$400 million to replace punch card ballot machines. As with the senate bill, the house bill reflects many of the recommendations of the National Commission for Federal Election Reform.

The Century Foundation and the Miller Center of Public Affairs organized The National Commission on Federal Election Reform in early 2001 in response to the enormous problems that occurred during the 2000 presidential election. The goal of the Commission was to formulate concrete proposals for election reform that would help ensure a more effective and fair democratic process in elections to come. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford were honorary co-chairs of the Commission, and former White House Counsel Lloyd Cutler and former House Minority Leader Robert Michel served as co-chairmen. The Commission released its final report and recommendations in August 2001 at a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden with President Bush.

The Senate and House bills diverge in many respects. The two legislative houses must meet in conference to negotiate a final version for a bill that both houses must vote on before it is presented to the President for signature.

More details are available on The Century Foundation website ([www.tcf.org](http://www.tcf.org)) and Federal Election Reform Network website ([www.reformelections.org](http://www.reformelections.org)). The report authors are available for comment on the bill. For more information contact Christy Hicks at The Century Foundation, (212) 452-7723.

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