

PARTICIPATE! PARTICIPATE! PARTICIPATE!

21 Ways To Revitalize American Democracy

by Howard W. Hallman

Preface

PART ONE. PREPARING FOR PARTICIPATION

- 1. Put Aside Simplistic Solutions*
- 2. Believe in Government, Our Servant*
- 3. Realize That Consent Is Continuous*
- 4. Commit Yourself To Year-Round Participation*

PART TWO. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ELECTIONS

- 5. Make a Roster, Mark A Calendar*
- 6. Position Yourself To Run For Public Office*
- 7. Influence Positioners And Campaigners*
- 8. Infuse Political Parties*
- 9. Negate Negative Campaigning*
- 10. Reform Campaign Finance*
- 11. Get Out The Vote*
- 12. Use Ballot Measures Judiciously*

PART THREE. PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNANCE

- 13. Understand Who Governs*
- 14. Locate Decision-Making Pathways*

15. *Organize For Grassroots Lobbying*
16. *Lobby Legislators*
17. *Lobby Executive Officials*
18. *Engage in Participatory Planning*
19. *Deal with the Big Issues*
20. *Get In On Budget Making From The Beginning*

PART FOUR. PROMISING TO PARTICIPATE

21. *Renew Our Pledge*

Each chapter will run from 9 to 16 manuscript pages double-spaced. The book will total 70,000 to 80,000 words.

January 1996

6508 Wilmet Road, Bethesda, MD 20817

Mon-Thurs: 301 694-2859; Fri-Sat: 301 897-3668

Fax: 301 620-0232

PARTICIPATE, PARTICIPATE, PARTICIPATE

24 Ways To Revitalize American Democracy

by Howard W. Hallman

SYNOPSIS

Preface

To be written

PART ONE. FUNDAMENTALS FOR PARTICIPATION

1. Put Aside Simplistic Solutions

Term limits....Vote for none of the above....Squawk radio....Balanced budget amendment....Other constitutional amendments....Limitations of instant gratification, fast food politics....Sending a message isn't enough.

2. Think of Government As Servant, Not Enemy

Ideals of government prescribe by the Declaration of Independence.... Purposes of government stated in Preamble to U.S. Constitution....Federal system with tree levels of governments, all serving as our agents and trustees.

3. Make Consent A Continuous Process

How political insiders realized that "consent of the governed" is not merely periodic elections but rather a constinuous, interactive process

going on all year round....Thus, many interest groups are active during all stages of legislative enactment and executive decision makings....Many more citizens should likewise be continuously involved.

4. Commit Yourself To Year-Round Participation

Making the case for continuous involvement....Summary (in form of a check list) of numerous ways we citizens can be involved in politics and governmental decision making with cross reference to subsequent chapters for greater details.

PART TWO. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ELECTIONS

5. Get A Calendar

Elections are much more than voters going to the polls on election day.... They are proceeded by a set of prescribed steps for voter registration, filing of candidacy, primaries and conventions, selection of delegates and political party officials....Those who want to exercise timely influence in these processes need a calendar to keep track of deadlines and events and anticipate crucial steps along the way.

6. Position Yourself To Run For Office

You can't beat somebody with nobody....How to get in position to undertake the long journey to electoral victory....Whether to run as Democrat, Republican, third party candidate, or independent....Identifying gatekeepers a crucial intervals along the way....After testing the idea, deciding whether to run (check list of questions to answer)....Reference to how-to books and manuals on campaigning.

7. Influence Positioners And Campaigners

Identifying persons positioning themselves to run for political office, both challengers and incumbents seeking reelection....Different approaches for influencing challenges and incumbents....Getting involved in political campaigns as partisan supporters, as interest groups, as nonpartisan citizens.

8. Infuse Political Parties

Importance of being a Democrat or Republican (most officeholders are).... Importance beyond elections....Understanding party structure (built bottom up): bonds of identity -- precincts -- local committees -- state committees -- national committees -- party conventions -- legislative units....Infusing political parties: points of entry -- choosing party officers.

9. Negate Negative Campaigning

Increase of negative campaigning....What citizens can do: seek commitment to fair campaign practices -- protest against negative ads....What candidates can do: countering negative ads -- in candidates debates.

10. Reform Campaign Finance

To be developed.

11. Get Out The Vote

12. Use Ballot Measures Judiciously

PART THREE. PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNANCE

13. Understand Who Governs

14. Locate Decision Making Pathways

15. *Organize For Grassroots Lobbying*
16. *Lobby Legislators*
17. *Lobby Executive Officials*
18. *Create New Instruments For Participation*
19. *Insist On Participatory Planning*
20. *Get In On Budget Making From The Beginning*

PART FOUR. THE BROADER PICTURE

21. *Tackle Big Issues*
22. *Revitalize The Federal System*
23. *Maximize Public-Private Cooperation*
24. *Renew Our Pledge*

July 19, 1995

PART ONE. PREPARING FOR PARTICIPATION

Chapter One

Reaffirm Your Faith in Government, Our Servant

"Government of the people, by the people, and for the people" -- this is how President Abraham Lincoln characterized American democracy in his famous Gettysburg Address, given on November 19, 1863.ⁱ Although this positive outlook on government may be our aspiration, nowadays a strong anti-government sentiment prevails in the United States.

This was highly evident in the 1994 election campaign and again in 1996. It is heard in speeches by members of Congress. Talk radio is full of it. Fax and computer networks buzz with anti-government rhetoric. Rather than seeing government as a means for achieving solutions, many insist that government is the problem. Some say, the enemy.

What an astounding loss of faith in government by citizens of the

longest-standing democracy in the world! What a drift from the ideals and aspirations of the founders of the United States of America!

To reverse this trend we need to return to basics, to reexamine what we believe, to reaffirm our commitment to the democratic way of life.

For this purpose our catechism can be our two founding documents: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, especially its Preamble. What they state is what we believe. They set forth our democratic ideals and delineate our goals for government. They establish the standards by which we measure our performance.

Let us then listen to the words of the Declaration and the Preamble with fresh ears. Let us reflect on their meaning for us today.

We can start with the words of the Declaration of Independence. For more than 200 years its inspirational message has been the most profound influence for democracy around the globe.

We hold these truths to be self-evident,

Not "I" but "we" acknowledge truths so apparent that they require no explanation. They are religious and philosophical truths, really matters of belief, not factual descriptions derived from reason and analysis.

That all men are created equal.

(Today we would say "all persons".)

This claim of equality boggles the mind. It seems folly against common sense because it is contrary to our observation that people are not equal in mental and physical capacity. Nor are they equal in wealth, and have never been in recorded history. Abraham Lincoln realized this when he explained:

*"the authors ...did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined tolerable distinctness in what respects they did consider all men equal -- equal in 'certain inalienable rights'."*ⁱⁱ

How do people get these rights?

they are endowed by their Creator

In a nation where religious freedom is fundamental, we use different

names and concepts to identify our Creator: God, Allah, Eternal Thou, Ground of Being, Nature, even natural law. Whatever our perception of Creator, the Declaration insists that our basic rights are found in the very makeup of the Universe.

with certain inalienable rights

A right is something that we have a just claim to. Something inalienable belongs to us with certainty. We cannot surrender it or give it away even if we want to. These rights are ours without asking simply because we are entitled to them as human beings. We may not always have full expression of our basic rights, but they belong to us forever. We can always press our just claim for them.

*That among these are Life, Liberty,
and the pursuit of Happiness.*

Previous writers had used the phrase "life, liberty, and property". So did the "Declaration and Resolves" of the First Continental Congress. But Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues substituted "pursuit of happiness" to

emphasize deeper fulfillment than mere possession of property.

"Life." The right of existence. The right to be born, to grow up, to achieve a satisfactory place in society, to grow old, to die a natural death.

The fulfillment of fundamental human needs. The assurance that life cannot be ended capriciously.

"Liberty." The right to be oneself. Freedom of expression and belief. Freedom from arbitrary use of power by government and private institutions. Not to be treated as a possession of another person. As Jefferson wrote in another context, "The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time: the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them."ⁱⁱⁱ

"Pursuit of happiness." For our founders happiness had a broader meaning than in our contemporary speech. Today we might say self-fulfillment, achieving a sense of human dignity, a feeling of self-worth within a supportive community. Elsewhere Jefferson suggested that schools should teach children that "their own greatest happiness...is always the result

of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits."^{iv}

*That to secure these rights,
Governments are instituted among Men.
(And "Women" we would add.)*

This was, and remains, a refreshing concept of the purposes of government. Not merely to control the unruly and maintain social order, though that can be a purpose. Not to sustain power for the ruling class. Not to protect the interests of property. Rather our government should function to assure our basic human rights.

*Deriving their just powers
from the consent of the governed.*

A government that secures basic rights and also maintains public order can be a powerful instrument. Our founders fully realized this because they suffered from arbitrary power exercised by the British crown. Taxation without representation was one of their major concerns. Accordingly they insisted that the powers of government are just only if they are derived from

the consent of the governed. This is such an important matter that I devote the next chapter to the idea of consent.

How to establish such a government became the task of the American founders after declaring independence and winning the war against the British. This was not easy to accomplish. Those of us nowadays who are so impatient with our inability to find quick solutions should recall that a dozen years elapsed between the issuance of the Declaration of Independence and the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

In the Preamble the Framers clarified the purposes of government to which the people give their consent.

We the People of the United States...

Again, "we".

...do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States
in order to achieve six fundamental purposes.

(1) form a more perfect Union

A major challenge to the Framers was finding a way to balance the need for central authority for certain tasks while retaining significant roles for geographically dispersed units. The product was our federal system with two sets of representative government: state and national. The national government and the state governments are separately accountable to the people. In this sense, Americans have dual citizenship. Moreover, local governments, though legally creatures of the states, functionally form a third set in a kind of three-arena federalism.

(2) establish Justice

Two kinds of justice deserve attention: legal and social. Legal justice emphasizes that government, in enacting, applying, and enforcing public laws, should treat everyone equally and fairly. It means also taking positive actions to remedy unfair and unequal application of the law. Social justice

stresses that government should be responsive to human needs.

Government, as the people's instrument, has a legitimate concern to assure that the fruits of our economic system and other benefits of society are available to everybody in fair proportion.

(3) insure domestic Tranquility

Today we might say "law and order" rather than "domestic tranquility". Laws, enacted with the consent of the governed, help to provide the order that is necessary for a workable society. They give structure to relationships among people and provide stable guidelines for conduct. Without law, fairly observed and enforced, liberty will perish. But order which maintains a status quo of injustice and inequality is tyrannical. Thus, social change seeking greater justice, even with some tumult, is not inconsistent with the broader goal of insuring domestic tranquility.

(4) provide for the common defence

Having just fought the British in order to achieve independence, our

founders realized that they needed unity to defend themselves from any future aggressors. To handle this task the Constitution centralized responsibility in the federal government, designating the president as commander-in-chief and assigning the Congress the power to declare war. The Executive Branch would be in charge of relations with other nations, but Congress would have authority to approve treaties.

(5) promote the general Welfare

In some respects the idea of "general welfare" incorporates the Declaration's commitment to "life" and "pursuit of happiness" into the Preamble. Government is instituted to secure these rights. This is a positive function. Representatives of the people, who run the government, are alert to social and economic problems, to unmet community and human needs. They use governmental authority in response, always conditioned by gaining the consent of the governed.

*(6) secure the Blessings of Liberty
to ourselves and our Posterity.*

Liberty is another of the inalienable rights set forth in the Declaration.

In one sense a concern for liberty limits the powers of government by protecting individuals from laws that take away freedom and from arbitrary actions by governmental officials. In another sense government has a positive role to play in protecting individuals from abuse by other citizens who would curtail their liberty through coercion.

From their own experience as former colonists, the Framers understood liberty to be so precious that they wanted it both for themselves and for future generations. They wanted it for us. We can praise their vision and be grateful for their commitment.

As we reflect on our two founding documents, it's interesting to note that neither the Declaration of Independence nor the Constitution of the United States uses the term "democracy". Yet, there can scarcely be a better description of democracy than the Declaration's formulation of the

why and wherefore of government:

<i>Who?</i>	<i>The people</i>
<i>How?</i>	<i>through their consent</i>
<i>Do what?</i>	<i>institute government</i>
<i>Why?</i>	<i>to secure inalienable rights</i>
<i>Which ones?</i>	<i>life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness</i>
<i>For whom?</i>	<i>equally for all persons</i>

We the people are sovereign. We have the supreme power. Not a king, not a landed aristocracy, not a powerful economic elite, not an uncontrolled bureaucracy, not a military junta, not a dictator. Democracy is a system of government grounded in the sovereignty of the people.

This was the sentiment expressed in the Declaration of Rights adopted by the Virginia House of Burgess in June 1776 three weeks before the Second Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. In words written by George Mason, the Virginians noted "that all power is vested in,

and consequently derived from, the people; that magistrates are their trustees and servants and at all times amenable to them."^v

*A dozen years later in one of *The Federalist* essays written to explain the new Constitution, James Madison spoke of the federal and state governments as "agents and trustees of the people".*^{vi}

These are excellent terms to describe governmental officials in the United States: our agents, our trustees, our servants. We give them their powers and responsibilities. We choose them directly and indirectly. We decide what we want them to do. They are accountable to us. This is the true spirit of American democracy.

This is a much more wholesome attitude than the outlook of those who view government as the enemy and demonize public officials. They are completely wrong, for as President Andrew Jackson insisted in 1832, "There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses."^{vii}

These abuses may be in unjust laws, such as those that once allowed

slavery and mandated racial segregation. There may be occasional misconduct by public officials, sometimes corrupted by private interests. But government isn't inherently bad. Moreover, with rare exceptions those who work for government are good, upright people who are trying to earn a living while performing public service in a respectable job.

As we were reminded by the tragic bombing of the federal office building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, federal employees are human beings, just like you and me. They have husbands and wives. They have children. They are our neighbors, not our oppressors. So are state and local officials. They deserve our respect, not our enmity.

Within the framework of this positive outlook toward our governments, there's still plenty of room for us to argue over the size of government. There's leeway for us to consider whether government should undertake particular activities or leave them to the private sector. There's opportunity to debate about the best assignment of responsibility among national, state,

and local governments. But this debate should be conducted without demonization of government and its employees.

One of the strong features of the American system of government is its adaptability. Each generation has the right to change its configuration. Our forbearers gave initial consent to the original structure. Subsequent generations consented to a variety of alterations. We today can make our contemporary governments what we want them to be. With thorough participation we can join together to assure that our governments function effectively as our agents, our servants.

July 2, 1996

Notes

-
- i. Abraham Lincoln's address at the site of the Battle of Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. Transcript of oral version. *The World Book Encyclopedia* (1963). vol 7, p. 162.
 - ii. Speech at Springfield, Illinois, June 26, 1957 in *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*. Edited by Philip Van Doren Stern. New York: The Modern Library, 1940. p. 422
 - iii. "A Summary View of the Rights of British America" (1774) in *The Complete Jefferson*. Assembled by Saul K. Padover. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1943. p. 19.
 - iv. "Notes on the State of Virginia" in *The Complete Jefferson*, pp. 667-8.
 - v. Henry Steel Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*. Vol. 1, 9th edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973. p. 103.
 - vi. James Madison, *The Federalist No. 46*. New York: The Modern Library, 1937. pp. 304-5.
 - vii. Andrew Jackson, "Veto Message [regarding a bill to continue the Bank of the United States], July 10, 1832." In *A Compilation of the Message and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, James D. Richardson, ed. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896. vol. 3, p. 590.

Chapter Two

Perceive of Consent As Continuous, Not Episodic

In the rhetoric of dissatisfaction with American government, we often hear virulent attacks on "special interests". Newspaper editorial writers and columnists, radio and television commentators, candidates for public office all rail against interest group representatives who assemble in Washington and state capitals in order to influence government policy for their groups' benefit.

To this criticism I offer two comments in reply.

First, the functioning of interest groups is a natural phenomenon in a democracy, a point I'll return to toward the end of this chapter and later in this book.

Second, there's much beneficial knowledge to be acquired from how interest groups ply their trade. They understand how government works.

They know how to affect governmental policies and practices. Citizens who aren't very active in political life but want to be more involved can properly learn from how interest groups function. Citizens can then apply this practical wisdom for public benefit.

The prize "secret" of interest groups is their recognition that in American democracy consent of the governed -- that crusty old phrase from the Declaration of Independence -- is a continuous process. Realizing this, the most effective interest groups are active all year long. Day in, day out they attempt to influence the outcome of elections, legislation, executive policies, appointment of executive officials and judges, and the inner workings of governmental bureaucracy.

So too should we citizens if want to revitalize American democracy and increase its effectiveness. We should realize that we ought not limit our consent-giving to voting once or twice a year and letting elected officials take it from there. Before we vote we should interact with candidates

throughout the election campaign. After they take office we should keep in touch with public officials in many different ways. And we should expect them in turn to look to us for our opinions on policy issues and to take our views into account in the decisions they make. If they don't, we should replace them. That's what consent of the governed is all about.

By way of introduction to how this can be achieved, this chapter runs through the main elements of the consent process as it occurs in elections and in governance. Later Parts 2 and 3 probe more deeply into how we can make the most out of continuous, interactive consent

IN ELECTIONS

Elections have three main stages: positioning by aspirants to public office, campaigning by announced candidates, and voting by the electorate. The consent process occurs in all these stages. (For ideas on constructing a campaign calendar, see Chapter 4.)

Positioning

Most candidates for public office or reelection position themselves to run during a period of weeks, months, sometimes years before they formally announce their candidacy. This initial interaction with segments of the public is likely to affect how they perform in public office in the future, and it affects present performance of incumbents seeking reelection.

Newcomers. For persons who have never held public office, the positioning period serves as a tryout. They seek name recognition through a variety of activities, perhaps associated with the political party of their choice or in civic endeavors. They explore who might support them in a primary election or in party caucuses and convention. To build this support they start taking stands on public issues. Conversely party blocs and interest groups make contact with positioners who are gaining visibility in order to find out their views on various issues.

Incumbents seeking reelection. Most persons holding public office in the United States at any one time would like to serve an additional term, or

more.

Therefore, soon after election day they start thinking about reelection.

Legislators realize that how they vote on various bills and how they perform services for their constituents will affect their chance for reelection. They cannot rest on the mandate of the last election and totally ignore the views of their constituents. Therefore, their performance as elected representative intertwines with positioning themselves for the next election. Interest groups know this, maintain regular contact, and keep track of voting records.

Elected executives who want to be reelected also keep an eye on the next election in the decisions they make and the programs they initiate. They use the visibility of their office to retain and broaden support among particular interest groups and segments of their party. These groups in turn seek to influence executive policy making.

Incumbents seeking another office. A different set of dynamics occurs when incumbents intend to seek another office, such as a city council member

wanting to become mayor. a state representative wanting to move to the state senate, a U.S. senator or governor wanting to run for the presidency. They have to become known to a broader constituency. This may lead them to vote differently on legislation or make different kinds of executive decisions than they would if they paid heed only to their present constituents.

Thus, in these several ways positioning is the beginning of interactive consent for newcomers seeking election to public office and is a continuation for incumbents seeking reelection. (For more on positioning, see Chapter 6.)

Campaigning

This interaction widens as aspirants for public office formally announce their candidacy. In partisan elections with party labels on the ballot, candidates first seek their party's nomination, determined in a primary election or at a party convention, sometimes in combination. In nonpartisan elections candidates strive to become one of the top two votegetters in the primary election. After that party nominees or nonpartisan finalists

compete in the general election.

The goal for candidates is to win more votes than their opponents at each stage. This is likely to be only a plurality of those voting in a primary election but a majority of delegates in a party nominating convention. In the general election a plurality is sufficient unless state law mandates runoff if no candidate receives a majority. For the U.S. presidency a majority of state electoral votes is required.

Candidates therefore have to figure out how to build support from a sufficient number of voters to emerge victorious. In partisan elections they have to appeal to segments of their party to gain the nomination and to a broader electorate in the general election. In nonpartisan elections the electorate is the same in the primary and general elections, though turnout is usually less in the primary.

Issues. Candidates may have a core of followers based upon personal loyalty, party connections, racial and ethnic identity, and ideological

commitment, but they usually have to find ways of drawing in broader support. Therefore, they stake out positions on public issues to attract the votes of particular elements within the electorate. Party blocs and interest groups realize this and encourage candidates to take favorable stands on their issues. Although every campaign promise isn't kept, this interaction around issues generally tells voters what they are consenting to if they elect the candidate. It forestages public policy decisions the winners will make when installed in office. (See Chapter 6 for more on influencing campaigners and Chapter 8 on how to negate negative campaigning.)

Finance. Election campaigns cost money, sometimes large amounts. (A rare exception is a popular incumbent running for reelection with no opposition.) The larger the territory the greater the reliance on television to reach voters, thus increasing campaign costs. Therefore, candidates and their key supporters often start fundraising during the positioning period and continue it as the campaign progresses. Many incumbents commence raising

funds for reelection soon after the previous election.

Although many candidates do their best to obtain numerous small contributions, most are inevitably drawn toward individual donors and interest groups capable of making large contributions. Interest groups operate political action committees (PACs) for this purpose. In return for their financial support they expect candidates to be sympathetic to their issues and to be accessible to them if elected. (See Chapter 9 for ideas on reforming campaign finance.)

Campaign workers. These days many, perhaps most, candidates have their own campaign organization, separate from the party organization although not necessarily antithetical to it. They have a core of close advisors, volunteer and paid, sometimes including hired consultants, and they try to draw in a widening circle of campaign workers, mostly volunteers. Regular party workers, supporting the entire party slate, are involved. Various interest groups encourage their members to work for candidates favorable to

their concerns.

Many citizens seeking political involvement find that campaign activity is an easy entrance into politics. Some persons get involved because they want to influence the candidate's position on particular issues. Others want to get in line for government jobs if the candidate wins. And indeed winning candidates often look to their top campaign aides and prominent, visible supporters in filling jobs in their office and elsewhere in government.

Voting

Election day is the decisive event. It is then that citizens give their consent to have particular individual represent them in public office. A bundle of factors enter into voter choice, such as party identity, political philosophy, economic interest, agreement on some issues but not all, perhaps dislike for incumbents or other candidates on the ballot, and sometimes race and gender. (See Chapter 11 on getting out the vote.)

The winners receive the most votes but not necessarily support from a

majority of people residing in their election district. Given the level of voter turnout, it is quite likely that those voting for the victors constitute a minority of the adult population. Frequently they are a minority of registered voters. Where the ballot contains three or more candidates, they are sometimes a minority of those voting unless there is a runoff election.

Therefore, in a narrow sense only persons voting for the winners have formally consented that these individuals shall govern. Persons who voted for losing candidates can claim that they did not give their consent to the winner. Hence the bumper sticker: "Don't blame me. I voted for [name of loser]." Those who didn't vote at all can also assert that they did not consent.

But in a broader sense the entire citizenry consents to the electoral system that allows candidates receiving the most votes to take office and govern. We accept the winners and allow them to exercise the powers of government. We consent to the legitimacy of the electoral process even

though we vote for losing candidates or do not vote at all.

IN GOVERNANCE

The winners have their own views on the meaning of consent. After they are installed in office, they might claim that their election gave them a mandate to enact particular legislation or adopt specific executive policies. They explain that they stated their views during the campaign and that by electing them the voters consented to the policies they now seek to adopt.

However, rarely does the vast majority of voters perceive the election of public officials to be a referendum on detailed public policies. Most voters don't read party platforms or candidates' position papers and don't listen to campaign speeches. And even voters who study the issues carefully may disagree with some of the policy positions of the candidates they vote for. Moreover, voters may cast ballots for candidates for different offices, such as U.S. representative, U.S. senator, and president, who themselves disagree on particular issues.

So it isn't clear who has the mandate. The election determines who shall govern, not a whole range of policies they will adopt and carry out. Accordingly, we citizens ought not look upon elections as the only means of providing our consent. Rather we should recognize the necessity of keeping in touch with our elected officials and should seek to influence their decisions during their term in office. That's what interest groups do. Therefore, we must realize that the consent process doesn't terminate on election day but rather moves into the domain of legislative and executive decision making.

Post-election. This interaction commences immediately after the election and before winning candidates take office. Interest groups get in touch with the winners and their staffs to reinforce contacts made during the campaign. They seek commitment on policy issues and offer names of potential appointees to government jobs.

Coalitions of interest groups develop their strategy for the upcoming legislative session, knowing who will be in control. If there is to be a different

legislative majority or a new president, governor, mayor, or county executive, interest groups and coalitions refine their strategy for dealing with the new legislature, the new administration. Thus, the interactive consent process continues.

Legislative Process

Interactive consent is achieved in the legislative process through a combination of outreach by legislators and initiatives of citizens and interest groups.

Stages. The U.S. Congress, state legislators, and the legislative bodies of counties, municipalities, and towns have a regular process for considering and adopting legislation. Typically the stages include bill drafting, introduction of bills, referral to committee, committee hearings (in local government sometimes hearings by the entire council), committee consideration and often modification of the legislation, floor action by the entire body. In bicameral bodies, including Congress and 49 state legislatures (Nebraska is the

exception), the process is carried out in each chamber and differences in bills are resolved through conference committees. After the legislative body approves legislation, the chief executive in many jurisdictions has power of approval or veto. The legislative body may override a veto, usually by an extraordinary majority, such as two-thirds.

Openness. The regularity and openness of the legislative process makes it relatively easy for individual citizens and interest group representatives to follow the course of legislation and seek to influence the outcome. Printed documents are available, such as bills as introduced, committee reports, amended bills, journal of floor action, and in larger bodies transcript of floor debate. Open public hearings provide opportunity for witnesses to be heard. Moreover, most legislators habitually meet with constituents within their districts.

Lobbying. Interest groups and individual citizens closely follow legislation related to their concerns and try to influence the outcome. For

many campaign involvement and post-election contacts serve as a purposeful prelude to lobbying during the legislative session. As the session begins interest groups endeavor to have a hand in drafting bills. They try to obtain appearance for their witnesses at public hearings. They seek to influence committee action and the outcome of floor debate.

Lobbyists perform their work at the capitol, courthouse, city hall, and other places where legislators gather. They also urge grassroots supporters to write and fax their views, contact legislators in their home districts, and send delegations to the capitol. Grassroots organizations not regularly represented by lobbyists take their own initiatives. Sometimes they form coalitions and then retain lobbyists to represent them. (See Chapter 14 on grassroots organizing and Chapter 15 on lobbying legislators.)

Throughout the legislative process interest groups contend with one another for influence, and legislators sort out the conflicting demands placed upon them. In this manner interactive consent is continuously present.

Executive Decision Making

In American government elected chief executives and their principal appointees are active policy makers, not merely passive instruments for implementing legislative enactments. However, the pathways of executive decision making aren't as clearly defined as the legislative pathway, and they tend to be less open. Nevertheless, some executive process are open to citizen involvement, and sometimes interest groups probe and press to influence the formation of executive policies. (See Chapter 13 for more discussion of decision-making pathways.)

***Budget.** The budget contains the most important set of policy proposals made by government on a regular basis. It determines who will benefit from and who will pay for governmental activities. Typically budgets are developed and proposed by the chief executive and then considered and adopted by the legislative body.*

The budgetary process starts with preparation of requests by various

administrative departments. Their requests go to a budget office which in behalf of the chief executive formulates the total budget, including both projected revenues and expenditures. The chief executive submits the budget to the legislative body for its consideration, possible modification, and adoption.

Budget making ordinarily commences mostly out of public view, though some interest groups try to influence departmental recommendations.

Usually budget matters don't become public until the chief executive submits the budget to the legislative body. At this stage interest groups appear at public hearings and otherwise seek to influence budgetary decisions. There are, however, a few local jurisdictions deliberately seek much fuller citizen input in the early stages. (See Chapter 19 for more on budget making.)

Legislative proposals. In addition to the budget, chief executives, their staffs, and administrative departments frequently develop other kinds of legislative proposals. Sometimes this is almost completely an internal

process, but oftentimes it occurs through collaboration with particular interest groups and legislative committee members and staff. Even when not invited, some interest groups seek to influence departmental and chief executive legislative proposals. (See Chapter 16 for more on lobbying executive officials.)

Regulations. New laws set out basic requirements for governmental programs and regulatory matters and usually leave the details to administrative departments. Departments then write regulations and guidelines, publish drafts for comment, make modifications as appropriate, and adopt the final version. Astute interest groups pay as much attention to this process as they do to enacting the original legislation.

Planning activities. Working within the framework of laws, regulations, and appropriations, executive departments plan and implement many different kinds of projects: highways, airports, ports and waterways, water treatment and sewage disposal plants, parks and playgrounds, schools

and other public buildings, neighborhood revitalization, rural development, and many more. Planning has a variety of stages: problem analysis, setting goals and objectives, developing strategies, sometimes site selection, project design, often public hearings, and adoption.

Over the years numerous governmental agencies have developed and refined ways to achieve citizen participation, often starting fairly early in the planning process. Where affected citizens and concerned interest groups don't have this opportunity, they often assert themselves and seek to impact the planning process. (See Chapter 17 for further discussion.)

Thus, in a variety of ways citizens and interest groups are involved in executive decision making as another expression of interactive consent.

INSTRUMENTS OF CONSENT

To facilitate interactive consent American democracy has developed two major instruments: political parties and interest groups.

Political Parties

Political parties began functioning in the 1790s not long after the new U.S. Constitution went into effect. They appeared in Congress and in a number of states and localities and were a major factor in the 1796 presidential election. They have been active ever since in jurisdictions where public officials are chosen in partisan elections, including the federal government, the states, five-sixths of the counties, and one-fourth of the municipalities. Many municipalities and most school boards, though, have nonpartisan elections.

In partisan elections political parties offer a focus of identity for candidates and voters. They facilitate the nomination of candidates for public office and help organize, finance, and carry out campaign activities. In governance party affiliation provides the basis for organizing legislative bodies into majority and minority blocs and is an important factor in filling top policy-making positions in the executive branch.

In Chapter 7 we look more fully at the roles of political parties in the consent process.

Interest Groups

Interest groups have been around as long as political parties, having shown up at the First Congress when it assembled in New York. They provide a group basis for participation in interactive consent.

Interest groups consist of individuals, economic enterprises, and other organizations which share particular concerns and band together to influence public policy. Although some editorial writers, columnists, scholars, and civic activists deplore their existence, interest groups are natural and inevitable in a flourishing democracy. Today virtually everyone in the land is part of one or more interest group, including their critics.

Interest groups focus especially on the legislation process and executive decision making. To strengthen their influence, many of them also get involved in election campaigns and pay heed to selection of executive

policy-making officials. Some interest groups also try to influence public opinion as an indirect means of affecting governmental policies. The roles they play will come up repeatedly in later chapters.

And so we see that continuous, interactive consent is the key that unlocks the door to much greater citizen participation in American democracy.

It can occur in numerous ways.

In fact there are so many ways to participate that getting involved may seem like an overwhelming challenge to citizens who aren't very active but want to be. Voting is fundamental and should be everyone's responsibility. Beyond that it is a matter of choosing which tasks most suit your interests and capabilities. You can't do everything, but others are available to do what you cannot.

The next chapter enumerates the variety of choices available. Later

chapters probe these choices in greater depth.

July 2, 1996

Chapter Four

Put Aside Simplistic Solutions

If we understand that consent is a continuous interactive process in which we can participate all year round, we will be in a better position to resist simplistic, cure-all nostrums that promise quick remedies for complex problems. A number are being promoted these days. They create an illusion of remediation but don't come to grips effectively with underlying problems. We would be well advised to put aside simplistic solutions.

Term Limits

The worst of the simplistic solutions is term limits, a measure designed to restrict the number of terms that members of Congress or legislatures may serve. Pure and simple imposing term limits is an anti-democratic remedy because it constrains voter choice. Voters of each district, and they alone, should be able to determine whether their representative deserves another

term in office.

Term limits violate the fundamental principle of representative democracy. As Alexander Hamilton insisted in 1788 during ratification debate on the new U.S. Constitution, "the people should choose whom they please to govern them."ⁱ In applying this principle, the Framers of the Constitution established *length of terms* for members of Congress and the president of the United States, but not *number of terms* they may serve.

This outlook prevailed for 160 years. Then in 1947 the Republican-controlled 80th Congress, upset that Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected president four times, passed a constitutional amendment specifying: "No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice." State ratification was completed in 1951, and it became the 22nd Amendment. Ironically since then only two presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan, both Republicans, have served two full terms and might have considered a third term.

Now once again Republicans are leading a term limit movement, this time directed toward Congress and state legislatures. The initiators were primarily conservatives frustrated by their inability to produce enough winning candidates to gain control of Congress and many state legislatures. Feeling that they were a permanent minority, they searched for other ways to curtail Democratic majorities. Their solution was to change the rules by instituting term limits. Here and there they gained support of liberals who had lost attempts to unseat incumbents, sometimes described as "sore losers".

Stemming from a motivation to displace incumbents they can't defeat at the polls, term limit advocates have tapped into voter dissatisfaction with government. They place blame on long-term incumbents. So far they have persuaded voters in 22 states to pass measures limiting the number of terms that members of Congress and their state legislature may serve.

However, in 1995 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state-imposed limits on congressional terms violates the U.S. Constitution.ⁱⁱ

For many voters, voting for term limits has been a way to send a message, to express dissatisfaction with the status quo. Interestingly in many Congressional districts a majority of voters have approved term limits, and at the same time they reelected incumbents who wouldn't have been eligible to serve again if term limits were in effect.

Beyond the repudiation of democratic choice, term limit advocates would impose restrictions on experienced service in legislative bodies that we would find intolerable in other fields. For instance, would we want to be treated at a hospital that had to discharge all physicians and nurses after six to twelve years of service? Would we want to put our money in a bank where no one had worked there longer than a dozen years? As Republican Congressman Henry Hyde exclaimed during congressional debate, term limits would lead to "the dumbing down of democracy".ⁱⁱⁱ

Government is a complicated enterprise. It takes time to learn thoroughly how it works. We need experienced legislators to match

long-time administrators of the executive branch. Otherwise members of Congress and state legislatures risk being outmaneuvered by career administrators, manipulated by legislative staff with long tenure, and unduly influenced by lobbyists who have been around a long time. In the competitive atmosphere of policy formulation, solid experience has great value.

The hypocrisy among legislators offering verbal support to term limits contributes to public cynicism about politics. Thus, in September 1994 most Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives seeking reelection signed a Contract with America that included a promise for term limits. The signers argued: "Let's replace career politicians with citizen legislators. After all, politics shouldn't be a lifetime job."^{iv} Yet 90 of the signers, had already served three terms and would be ineligible for reelection if a three term limitation had been in effect. Fifty-four of them had served six or more consecutive terms. Yet, none of these career politicians were

willing to step aside and allow citizen legislators to take their place!

After the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1995, a decisive majority of the House of Representatives protected their careers by voting 297 to 135 against a constitutional amendment that would make term limits apply to past years of service. A measure to limit House members to three terms, but not retroactive, lost 114 to 316. A majority voted 227 to 204 in favor of a version that limited service in the House of Representatives to six terms and in the Senate to two terms (that is, a maximum of 12 years of service in each chamber). But this was far short of the two-thirds vote required for a constitutional amendment. The Senate didn't take up term limits.^v

Term limit advocates intend to make this an issue in the 1996 congressional election and press for a vote on a constitutional amendment again in 1997. If they are successful, at best it would take two to four years to gain ratification by the required three-fourths of the state legislatures.

Since it's unlikely that a retroactive measure could gain congressional approval, it would be 2012 or later until any member of Congress would be affected by term limits.

American voters, though, in actual practice know a better and quicker way to replace incumbents: vote them out of office, district by district. This began to happen in the 1992 election season for 110 seats out of the 435 in the U.S. House of Representatives due to retirement or defeat at the polls, the highest turnover in 44 years. The trend continued in the 1994 election when 86 House incumbents were replaced, 48 by voluntary retirement but 38 through electoral defeat. But at the same time 90 percent of the House incumbents running for reelection were successful, reaffirmed by voters in their districts, who opted to return experienced legislators.

Turnover hasn't been as rapid in the U.S. Senate, but the Republicans picked up eight Senate seats in the 1994 election to gain control. And after the election two senators switched their party affiliation from Democrat to

Republican. In 10 states Republicans replaced Democrats as governor and took control away from Democrats in 19 state legislative chambers (houses of representative and senates).

In the 1994 election no Republican incumbent seeking re-election to Congress or as governor suffered defeat while numerous Democratic incumbents were voted out of office.

In 1996 voters [results to be added]. As in all recent elections, voters had a choice, and they exercised it. Its a much superior approach than arbitrary term limits.

In 1998 and 2000 and the years beyond voters will continue having the opportunity to replace incumbents in office if dissatisfied with them. Or to reelect them. This can be a judicious choice of voters in each district, not the slam-bang approach of term limits.

Undoubtedly in future election campaigns term limit advocates will press candidates to pledge their support for term limits, as they have in the

past. As this occurs, we who believe in full democracy should mount a counter effort to press candidates to commit themselves to free and open choice in elections. Quoting Hamilton, we should ask candidates: "Do you favor allowing voters to `choose whom they please to govern them'?" In this manner we can preserve the voter sovereignty that is an essential feature of democracy.

None of the Above

Going beyond a dislike for incumbents, some dissatisfied citizens don't like any of the candidates offered by the political parties. They don't even care for those running as independents. Their remedy is to add "none of the above" to the ballot so that voters may send a message of their displeasure. Among others, consumer advocate Ralph Nader and conservative political consultant Paul Weyrich favor this approach.

That's another over-simplified solution for American democracy. It's really a lazy person's alibi for not fulfilling civic responsibility. It may send a

message, but it makes no contribution to solutions. Moreover, it violates the old political adage that "you can't beat somebody with nobody".

If you don't care for persons running for public office, you should work to get persons of your liking to run. Or run yourself. Enter the rough-and-tumble of politics. That's the true spirit of American democracy. It's so important that much of Part Two of this book deals with how to achieve far greater participation in the electoral process.

Vigorously pursuing the competitive approach, not term limits, was a major reason that Republicans were in a position to take control of the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years after the 1994 election. Persons of other persuasions must do likewise if they want to get officeholders of their liking. You can choose to compete as a Democrat, a Republican, a third party candidate, or an independent. Forget about "none of the above".

Squawk Talk

Citizen dissatisfaction in recent years has been meat for an expanding array of radio and television talk show hosts. By giving people an outlet for their frustration, these talk show hosts have become major players in the political arena. They have taken single issues, such as congressional pay raises, perks for members of Congress, proposed tax increases, regulation of lobbying, and other matters, and have encouraged citizens to air their views and call or write members of Congress. They have demonstrated a capability to instantaneously flood the capitol switchboard in Washington, D.C.

In contemporary America this kind of squawk talk is another way to send a message to public officials. In a historic sense it is part of the protest tradition, which at various times has featured rallies, marches, teach-ins, sit-ins, and nonviolent civil disobedience. It is an honorable heritage. It helps maintain a healthy democracy, for protest reveals aches and pains that require attention.

Valuable as it is for message sending, though, squawk talk is limited in its ability to achieve solutions for significant public problems. Usually it is negative, attempting to block legislation or repeal a recently adopted measure. Rarely does it bring support for positive, problem-solving legislation. Moreover, squawk talk impacts only a tiny fraction of legislative business conducted throughout the year.

To exercise much deeper, more-lasting influence on a broader range of legislation, much greater stick-to-itiveness is necessary. This is the trait displayed by numerous interest groups. That's why they are so influential as lobbyists with Congress, state legislatures, and city and county councils.

Citizen activists who want to be similarly influential over the long haul can learn from them and apply practices of effective lobbyists for public benefit. This is a matter we'll consider in Part Three.

Balanced Budget Amendment

Another simplistic solution to what ails American democracy is the

proposal for a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution. For many years advocates of reduced federal spending have championed such a measure to require that expenditures not exceed revenues except in cases of national emergency. Among other reasons offered, proponents have argued that Congress and the president need the discipline of a constitutionally imposed requirement to balance the budget.

Both President Ronald Reagan and President George Bush strongly favored a balanced budget amendment. Yet neither of them ever submitted a balanced budget to Congress or offered a long-range plan that would achieve a balanced budget. Rather they pursued spend-and-borrow policies that more than quadrupled the federal debt in their combined twelve years in office, rising from \$700 billion in 1981 to \$3.2 trillion in 1993.

During their presidency, a balanced budget amendment came before Congress several times but never mustered the two-thirds vote in both chambers required for a constitutional amendment. When Republicans took

control of the 104th Congress in 1995, they mobilized a majority well beyond the necessary two-thirds in the House of Representatives but fell one vote short of two-thirds in the Senate.

The balanced budget amendment considered by the 104th Congress would require the federal budget to be in balance by 2002. However, before this amendment came to a vote, Republicans leaders refused to offer a detailed plan on how this objective could be achieved. They explained that "special interests" would mobilize to block a balanced budget amendment if they knew for certain that their programs would be cut. Their unstated message to the American people was: "we don't trust you to know the facts and support us as we act responsibly."

Subsequently, however, both the House and Senate budget committees produced seven-year plans to eliminate the annual federal deficit by 2002. A congressional majority approved a compromise plan in the summer of 1995. At that time President Clinton came up with his own plan to balance

the federal budget in ten years. Then authorization and appropriations committees undertook the challenge of working out details applicable to the fiscal year ending September 30, 1996. Various interest groups did indeed show up to press their case and defend their favorite programs from elimination or excessive cuts. Forces and counterforces swirled around the budget process. [More to be added after FY 96 budget is adopted.] That's as it should be, showing that vigorous pursuit of significant deficit reduction can occur without a constitutional amendment.

It's just as well that the balanced budget amendment wasn't enacted, for balancing revenues and expenditures every year is not necessarily a desirable or necessary objective. Very few households do so. We borrow money to pay for our house and our automobile. If we didn't, the housing and automotive industries would be sharply curtailed. Corporations borrow money, together totaling indebtedness on a level with the federal debt. Even though most state constitutions require a balanced budget, this usually applies

only to operating expenses, and the states borrow money to pay for capital projects, such as highways, public buildings, and other construction activities.

Although the federal government doesn't have a separate capital budget, part of its borrowing pays for long-term projects. Moreover, at certain times federal deficit spending enables the government to counter economic downturn, thus mitigating adverse impact of fluctuations in the economy.

Certainly budget makers need discipline, but it's a faulty solution to impose it by a constitutional amendment. This would remove flexibility to deal with unforeseen circumstances. Budget decisions should be made through the give-and-take of the political process. Furthermore, budget making should be opened to much greater public participation from beginning to end, a matter we'll discuss in Chapter 20.

Sending Messages Isn't Enough

To considerable extent support for a balanced budget amendment and term limits has arisen because citizens have wanted to send messages of

dissatisfaction to elected officials. The desire to vote for none-of-the-above and the quick response to instructions of talk show hosts are ways of expressing frustrations.

As such, there is no harm in sending messages. It is an old American pastime. Yet it's but a fraction of democracy. Democracy is also about elections and governance: voters choosing legislators, executives, and sometimes judges; legislators enacting laws; executive officials making policy decisions and administering national, state, and local governments.

You can't run a government solely with messages. You have to make decisions, sometimes very difficult choices among complex policy alternatives. You have to decide who will pay the cost of government and then enact revenue measures. With finite resources available you have to decide who will benefit most and who the least in budgetary allocations. Lots of hard choices.

You can vote for an independent candidate to send a message, or even

refrain from voting, but somebody's going to be elected. For most of the last 200 years nearly all of these somebodies have been members of one of two major political parties. Occasionally a third party has gained control of one or both houses of a state legislature for a while or become the second ranking party. Now and then some third party members and independents have served as governors and mayors. It's conceivable that in 1996 a third party candidate could be elected president. But these are exceptions. In jurisdictions holding partisan elections the American people have entrusted government mostly to elected officials from the two major parties -- since 1860 either Republican or Democratic.

So if you want to increase your influence on who is nominated and elected to public office across the board, you need to get involved in the Democratic or Republican party. (More on this in Chapter 8.)

You can follow the urging of Rush Limbaugh and other talk show hosts and call your representative in Washington to protest a congressional pay

raise or some other measure. You and other callers might even get your way on that single issue. But the same session of Congress will enact thousands of bills that move through the legislative pipeline with little public attention. This legislation, however, is noticed, supported, opposed, and caused to be modified by interest groups maintaining full-time presence in Washington.

If you want to gain greater influence on the course of many important legislative measures, you need to find ways to lobby directly in Washington, through grassroots mobilization, or in combination. Likewise for state and local government. (See Chapter 15 and 16.)

It is not enough to think that you elected change-oriented candidates and that they will take it from there. Almost certainly they will stray in some way or other from the course you thought they would pursue. You need to keep in touch and let them know your views all through their term in office.

Government in the United States goes on all year long. So does the

electoral process, even though it may gain public visibility only during periodic election campaigns. Intermittent participation by voting once or twice a year and sending a message now and then is insufficient. If American democracy is to flourish, citizens need to find ways to achieve ongoing participation in the processes of government. Accordingly, citizen involvement in governmental affairs should occur year-round.

After all, government in American democracy is "us", not a bunch of bickering politicians set apart. Its successes and failures are ours, not those of a separate political class. The challenge is not for "us" to send messages to "them" but rather for millions of citizens to become more fully involved in the ongoing processes of government. What we need is more democracy, not less.

February 18, 1996

Notes

i. Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*. 2nd edition. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1861. vol. 2, p. 257.

ii. U.S. Term Limits, Inc. et al. v. Thornton et al. [complete citation to be added]

iii. *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 104th Congress, First Session*. March 29, 1995. Vol. 141, No. 58, p. H3905.

iv. Republican National Committee, *House Republican Contract with America: A Program for Accountability*. Washington: Republican National Committee, 1994. p. 1.

v. *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 104th Congress, First Session*. March 29, 1995. Vol. 141, No. 58, p. D438.

Chapter Five

Position Yourself to Run for Public Office

If politics is an essential element of American democracy, as I have insisted in Chapter 3, then seeking elective office is a high calling of public life. Winners join the ranks of persons chosen by the people to govern as executives, legislators, and members of elected boards. Persons so chosen gain the opportunity for public service with important policy-making responsibilities.

If this is your calling, you can seek to become one of the 513,200 popularly elected officials in the United States. That's approximately one for every 485 inhabitants.

You may want to become one of the 16,243 chief executives of general purpose governments: president, governor, county executive, mayor. You have even more opportunities to join 356,636 members of the governing

bodies for our 85,006 governmental units: Congress; state legislatures; county, municipal and town councils; school boards; and boards of special districts. Or you can seek to become one of the 36,430 members of other elected boards and or to win one of the other 103,891 elected positions with state and local government. This array of popularly elected officials is presented in Table 5-1 on the next page.

If you feel called to seek one of these elective offices, you must realize that you are embarking on a long journey along a highly competitive pathway. Your quest begins by getting in position to become a candidate. You go public by formally announcing your candidacy. In partisan elections you campaign for your party's nomination (unless you're running as an independent). In nonpartisan elections you compete in the primary without a party label. If victorious in the first round, you move into the general election campaign. It is a venture requiring lots of time and effort.

Table 5-1. Popularly Elected Officials in the United States, 1992

<i>Chief executives of general purpose government</i>	
President, vice president	2
Governors, lieutenant governors	92
County executives	371
Mayors of municipalities	15,176
Mayors of towns	<u>602</u>
	16,243
 <i>Governing bodies</i>	
U.S. Congress	540 ^a
State legislatures	7,461
County	17,274
Municipal	107,542
Town, township	51,770
Public school systems	89,419
Special districts	<u>82,630</u>
	356,636
 <i>Other elected boards</i>	
State	1,164
County	9,268
Municipal	3,211
Town, township	<u>22,787</u>
	36,430
 <i>Other elected officials</i>	
State	9,944

County	30,259
Municipal	8,364
Town, township	48,651
Public school systems	5,214
Special districts	<u>1,459</u>
	103,891
TOTAL	513,200

^a Includes five non-voting delegates from territories and District of Columbia.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1992 Census of Governments, Volume 1. Government Organization, Number 2. Popularly Elected Officials*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1995.

The crucial first step in your quest for public office is positioning yourself to run. Because this process may not be well known to neophytes, this chapter is devoted to the subject. If you have no intent to run for office, you still might gain from learning how positioning occurs, for this knowledge can help you as you go about influencing positioners, the subject of the next chapter.

POSITIONING METHODS

Positioning usually begins long before the deadline for filing a petition of candidacy for public office. Even well-known persons -- sports heroes, astronauts, movie and TV stars, members of famous families, successful corporate executives, public officeholders seeking another office -- usually have to position themselves in order to be appropriately aligned toward the particular office they seek.

Political Party Affiliation

Elections in the United States come in two varieties: partisan where

party affiliation of candidates is carried on the ballot and nonpartisan where it is not. Partisan elections occur for president and vice-president of the United States, all governors and lieutenant governors, 49 of the 50 state legislatures (Nebraska is the exception), and most other state elected officials. Partisan ballots are also used in 83 percent of the nation's counties but in only 25 percent of the municipalities. Most school boards and special district boards are chosen in nonpartisan elections.

If you aspire to an office elected on a partisan ballot, you have to determine your party affiliation -- Democrat, Republican, a smaller party -- unless you choose to run as an independent. Although party labels don't appear on nonpartisan ballots, in some locales slates of candidates gain the endorsement of the Democratic and Republican parties or of local parties not affiliated with the major national parties.

In elections where party labels are a factor, it may be that your party identity is so strong that you would consider running only as a Democrat or a

Republican. But maybe you have only a loose party commitment, or none at all. Maybe you would consider changing parties because you feel uncomfortable where you are now or because you see more opportunities for advancement in the other party. Or perhaps you don't like either of the major parties and would prefer to run as a third party candidate or as an independent.

In you are considering the latter course, you should be aware that persons identified as Democrats and Republicans hold virtually every elective office in the United States chosen on a partisan ballot. You can send a message by running as an independent or as a third party candidate (or by voting for one, as did 20 percent of the voters in the 1992 presidential election and __ percent in 1996). However, long tradition reinforced by state electoral laws give a strong advantage to the two major parties.

Presently Democrats and Republicans compose 99 percent of the 8,063 elected officials serving as president, vice president, members of Congress,

governors, lieutenant governors, and state legislators, as revealed in Table 5-2. Of the remainder, 49 serve in the nonpartisan, unicameral Nebraska legislature and 20 are independents or third party affiliates. Furthermore, in counties and municipalities holding partisan elections for their chief executive and governing body, most winners come from the two major parties.

Table 5-2. Political Party Affiliation of State and Federal Officials¹

Position	Total	Democrat	Republican	Nonpartisan	Other
President	1	1			
Vice President	1	1			
Members of Congress	535	251	283		1
Governors	50	19	30		1
Lieutenant Governors	42	18	24		
State Legislators	7,424 8,063	3,838	3,409	49	18

1. Data are for January 1995, as projected in November 1994 when there were 9 vacancies in state legislatures and one undecided electoral contest. To be updated in final editing

Third party and independent candidates have the important function of sending messages of dissatisfaction with the two major parties and offering new policy ideas, but rarely do they get elected. Therefore, if you want to win a partisan election, your surest route is to run as a Democrat or a Republican. (For more on political parties, see Chapter 7.)

Gatekeepers

As you embark on the quest for public office, you should start with a calendar showing dates of candidate filing deadline, party caucuses and conventions, primary and general election days, and other significant dates, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Then you should draw a road map of the pathway to election, showing successive stages and the gatekeepers who decide which aspirants pass through to the next stage. This will reveal who you must position yourself to impress favorably.

In the beginning you are your own gatekeeper. You decide for yourself whether you want to initiate the quest for office or respond to urging of friends and political associates to run. But you may want to consult with your spouse, other family members, and close personal advisers. Key questions to answer are laid out toward the end of this chapter.

After a period of exploration and positioning you have to decide whether

to become a formal, announced candidate. This usually requires filing a declaration with election officials. It may require gathering signatures on a petition of candidacy, so you will need to recruit workers to circulate petitions and to appeal to enough registered voters to reach the minimum required. (See Chapter 5 for sources of information on the required process in your state.)

This is an open process, so virtually anyone with political ambition may enter the contest. However, to have the best shot at winning party the nomination in a partisan election you may want to have the endorsement of party leaders or of a major bloc within the party. Therefore, an early focus of positioning may be to make a favorable impression on significant endorsers who can ease your passage through the party nominating process. In tightly controlled party organizations their approval might be decisive. In loose-knit parties leadership endorsement can be at least a plus unless you are openly courting support from an anti-leadership faction.

In nonpartisan elections there may also be significant endorsers, such as parent-teacher associations in school board elections and civic leagues, business and labor organizations in municipal elections.

Beyond gaining initial support from key leaders you will want to position yourself to win favor with persons who will participate in party caucuses and conventions or in the primary. You must win approval of a majority, or at least a plurality, of these gatekeepers to get through to the next stage. Thus, you must move from initial positioning activities into serious efforts to get your supporters to turn out for party caucuses or be elected to the party nominating convention where they occur, and vote in the primary election.

On beyond the nominating gatekeepers is the electorate who will determine the winner in the general election by majority vote, or perhaps only by a plurality in multi-candidate elections. And constantly looming in the background are editorial writers, columnists, newspaper reporters, radio and television talk show hosts, and others who influence public opinion.

Thus, in your positioning you need to figure out how to gain support from a widening number of persons as you move through successive gates into different stages of the electoral pathway. One of your challenges is to win support of the smaller number required in the early stage without alienating the larger numbers needed later. You may attract enough zealous partisans on a particular issue to win your party's nomination or to emerge among the finalists in a nonpartisan primary. But in the process you may foster strong misgivings among independent-minded voters so that your chance of winning the general election is greatly diminished.

Accordingly you should sketch out the map of your entire journey as you begin to position yourself to seek elective office.

Gaining Recognition

If you want to run for public office but lack immediate name recognition, you must find ways to become known and develop a favorable reputation in the district where you want to run.

You may decide that your best chance is to build support within your political party or one of its caucuses, with an advocacy organization that supports candidates, or with civic groups active in nonpartisan elections. For the organization of your choice you can take on volunteer tasks, such as stuffing envelopes, handing out leaflets, making phone calls, attending rallies, bringing friends to add to crowd size. You can join special committees to work on issues and plan tactics. Sometimes you can obtain a staff or volunteer assignment with an elected official. To become known more widely, you can go out as a speaker for your organization, write letters to the editor, place phone calls to talk shows, and appear on one yourself as you become better known.

An alternative (or even complementary) approach is to go beyond party and caucus by initiating civic endeavors. You can head a drive to collect food and clothing for the needy or for victims of hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. You can organize a neighborhood crime prevention campaign,

start a mentors program for boys without fathers, form a girls club. You can become active and take leadership roles in nonpolitical organizations, such as church or synagogue, parent teacher association, service club, women's civic group, veterans organization.

It may be that you are already engaged in such activities because of religious or civic motivation with no intention of running for office. Then you find that you get an urge to seek elective office, or you are pushed into running by friends. What you have done for other reasons turns out to have positioned you to enter the political arena.

These civic activities provide you lots of contacts as a potential candidate and offer visibility. They also give you valuable experience in group dynamics and coalition building. The nonpartisan nature of many civic endeavors can be an asset because they show that you are a public-spirited citizen, not narrowly constricted to one party or beholden to a highly-vocal, single-purpose interest group.

Recruitment

Although most candidates for public office nowadays come forth on their own, occasionally a selection committee of a political party, a caucus, or an advocacy organization will reach out and recruit someone to run. This sometimes occurs, for instance, in searching for somebody to run against an entrenched incumbent, perhaps encouraged and assisted by the state or national party committee. It also happens as a result of factional fights within parties when a rising faction tries to wrest control from the dominating leadership. And sometimes a particular caucus, such as for women, African Americans, Latinos, tries to settle on its single best candidate to carry its banner in the primary contest.

The selection committee is likely to look at persons who are already positioning themselves and may also think about other persons who are politically active but haven't made any obvious positioning moves.

Sometimes a party or caucus committee will start grooming particular

individuals for the next election, or the one thereafter. Part of your positioning strategy should therefore be to align yourself for endorsement by a selection committee. Even if not endorsed, you can run, but this kind of endorsement is usually beneficial.

Timing

The best time for non-incumbents to enter the positioning pathway varies according to the office, geographic spread, and renown of the positioner. In recent decades most aspirants to be president of the United States commenced the positioning process more than four years in advance. Persons interested in becoming governor may wait until after a gubernatorial election to position themselves for the next time around, but some make a longer quest. Aspirants for the U.S. Senate may take a two-year lead, and so also for the U.S. House of Representatives. Persons wanting to run for the state legislature, local council, or school board may give themselves a year's lead time, and sometimes longer.

Timing is affected by whether an incumbent is likely to be running for reelection. Where the incumbent won't be a candidate because of term limit or an announced intent not to seek reelection, competition for the nomination is likely to be greater and positioning is likely to commence earlier. But even if the incumbent is running for reelection, some challengers start positioning themselves long in advance.

If you are a new aspirant for public office, your timing decision is crucially important. If you don't enter the positioning pathway soon enough, your chance of winning is greatly diminished. If you wait until a month before the filing date to get into position to seek the nomination, you may find that one or more aspirants have already preempted your most likely set of supporters.

Succession of Offices

It is common in the American political system for elected officials to move from one office to another. Often the second office serves a larger

territory than the first: going from the state house of representatives to the state senate, from city council or the state legislature to Congress. Of it may be a move from a legislative post to the executive branch: from city council to becoming mayor, from the state legislature to being governor. Some governors run for the U.S. Senate, and some members of Congress become governors. A majority of the U.S. Congress previously held elective office. So did every president of the United States of this century except Herbert Hoover and Dwight Eisenhower, and both of them held prominent appointive positions.

This means that if you would like to become a member of Congress, mayor or governor, you might first seek another office. Party leaders and party blocs recruiting candidates for wider offices often look among elected officials holding other positions and who therefore are already known to voters. In this manner the positioning process extends across offices and governmental jurisdictions and may stretch over the course of several

elections.

DECIDING WHETHER TO RUN

If you think you may want to run for public office or if you are approached to run, the positioning process can help you determine whether you really want to enter the political arena. It can also help you assess your chances of winning. Here are some questions you can answer:

- What office do I want to seek? What are the district boundaries?

(This may affect choice of residence.)

- Is there a succession of offices for reaching my goal? If so, what are they?

- What political party should I affiliate with? Or should I run as an independent?

- For the office I want, when will there be an opening when the incumbent isn't seeking reelection? At the next election or a subsequent one? (Because of term limit, announced intent of

incumbent not to seek reelection, prospect that he or she will be running for another office.)

- *If the incumbent is likely to seek reelection, what are my prospects?*

If she or he is from the opposite party, can I win my party's

nomination? If from my party, should I challenge the incumbent in the primary?

- *Even if the incumbent seems assured of reelection, should I run to raise*

issues or to build an initial base for a second try?

- *Who can I get to support me? What individuals, caucuses,*

organizations?

- *Where can I raise campaign funds? Who can help me?*

- *Who else is interested in running? What are their strengths and*

weaknesses, their support and public appeal? How do I compare?

- *What opposition will I face from elements within my party or from*

advocacy organizations involved in electoral politics?

- *Should I form a slate with candidates for parallel offices? (Such as persons running in neighboring city council or state legislative districts.)*
- *What is my chance of winning -- excellent, fair, poor? How can I improve my chance?*
- *Do I want to commit the time required for campaigning and holding public office? (Even a part-time office demands a lot of time, and full-time positions may take 60 to 80 hours a week.)*
- *Can I afford to work for the salary? (Some salaries for elective officials may seem high, but there are a lot of hidden expenses.)*
- *How will it affect my family? Such as possible negative publicity? The long hours I will put in? The possible economic burden?*
- *Are there skeletons in my closet that the opposition will reveal?*
- *Can I stand the heat of campaigning? The prospect of invasion of my privacy by the media? Attacks by opponents? Do I have the right*

temperament for competitive politics?

Thus, the positioning period is a time for self-analysis. If you contemplate seeking an elective office but discover enough negatives, you may decide not to run now, and perhaps never. In this manner a certain amount of self-screening out occurs during the positioning period.

If you conclude that you have the desire to run, you can announce your candidacy and enter the competition. Through your positioning you have prepared yourself to gain approval of the gatekeepers of the nominating process: political leaders, caucus participants, convention delegates, and primary voters who will determine whether you will win the nomination. Then you will move into the general election campaign.

HOW TO CAMPAIGN FOR ELECTION

Discussion of detailed techniques of political campaigns is beyond the scope of this book, but there are many sources to assist you.

Usually the most readily available source of practical knowledge is the

advice of persons in your vicinity who have previously run for office. Local political party officers and staff might help you, though they often stay neutral until the party's nominees are determined. There are also experienced campaign consultants available for hire.

The national committees of the two major parties publish how-to-campaign manuals for congressional, state, local candidates of their parties. These national committees and the congressional campaign committees of both parties provide training for party nominees and offer assistance in fundraising. Contact:

Democratic National Committee	202 863-8000
430 South Capitol Street, SE	
Washington, DC 20003	

Republican National Committee	202 863-8500
301 First Street, SE	
Washington, DC 20003	

Many state Democratic and Republican party committees do likewise. Some smaller parties and independent organizations that nominate or

support candidates for public office also have available how-to-campaign material for their members.

Information about state election laws and campaign financial reporting requirements can be obtained from the state elections officer at the state capital in your state.

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) provides oversight of campaign financing for congressional and presidential elections and has information on rules and reporting requirements.

Federal Election Commission
999 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20463

202 219-3420

A number of books are available that offer detailed advice on how to campaign. Among them are the following:

Cathy Allen, *Political Campaigning: A New Decade*. Washington: National Women's Political Caucus, 1990.

Ann Beaudry and Bob Schaeffer, *Winning Local and State Elections: The Guide to Organizing Your Campaign*. New York: Free Press, 1986.

Judge Lawrence Grey, *How to Win a Local Election: A Complete*

Step-by-Step Guide. New York: M. Evans and Company, 1994.

Sandy Huseby, *How to Win an Election.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Jewel Lansing, *101 Campaign Tips for Women Candidates and Their Staffs.* Saratoga, CA: R & E Publishers, 1991.

Edward Schwartzman, *Political Campaign Craftsmanship: A Professional's Candid Guide to Campaigning for Public Office.* 2nd edition. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1984.

July 2, 1996

Chapter Seven

Infuse Political Parties

Since the 1790s political parties in the United States have been important factors in elections and in governance. Therefore, another important calling for persons wanting to revitalize American democracy is to become involved with a political party.

If you feel this is your calling, this chapter describes opportunities available to you. Even if direct party participation is not for you at this time, you may want to understand better how parties fit into the American political system.

First, you should note that political parties have impact mainly in jurisdictions where public officials are chosen in partisan elections, that is, where the ballot indicates party affiliation of candidates. That covers a lot of territory: the federal government, the 50 states, 83 percent of the

counties, and 25 percent of the municipalities, including most of the larger ones. The remaining municipalities and counties, most school boards, and numerous special district boards rely on nonpartisan elections, but even there localized, quasi-parties sometimes function. Also, 14 states elect all or some of their judges on partisan ballots.

Second, you should realize that political parties contribute to elections and to governance in different ways.

In elections political parties:

- Offer a focus of identity for candidates and voters.
- Facilitate nomination of candidates for public office.
- Organize, finance, and carry out campaigns in general elections.

In governance party affiliation:

- Provides the basis for organizing legislative bodies into majority and minority blocs and working out legislative policies.

- *Is a significant factor in recruiting persons to fill top policy-making positions of the executive branch.*
- *Helps form connections between elected chief executives (president, governor, mayor) and legislative delegations of their parties.*
- *Sometimes opens up channels of influence on executive policies, regulatory matters, and awarding grants and contracts.*

The political parties -- Democratic, Republican, and smaller parties -- are organized primarily to compete in elections. In American government a political party as such doesn't govern, as occurs in parliamentary systems. Rather legislators with the same party affiliation join together in majority and minority blocs with their own structure and authority. Elected executives and their political appointees form a separate bloc, though ordinarily not structured as a distinct party unit. The president, governors, and mayors have liaison staff to facilitate their party relationships and sometimes pick the party chair in their jurisdiction.

If you are an ordinary citizen and not an elected official, your greatest opportunity for direct involvement in a political party is in its electoral roles. That's the main focus of this chapter. In Part Three we'll pay more attention to the roles of political parties in governance and how you can use that channel of influence.

Extent of Two Party Dominance

For most of its history the United States has featured two major parties competing for and claiming most governmental offices filled in partisan elections. Since the early days the Democratic Party has been one of these, and since the 1850s the Republican Party has been the other.

Smaller parties have come and gone, capturing some offices in state and local government for a while and occasionally a few seats in Congress.

Independent candidates have entered the contest and sometimes won. But the Democratic and Republican parties have retained their dominance, reflecting habit, tradition, and momentum and aided by state election laws

that give advantage to established parties.

Therefore, if you want to associate with parties that produce most of the winners, you should become active as a Democrat or a Republican.

But instead you may choose to get involved with a smaller party or support independent candidates. They don't often win, but they offer additional choices of candidates and often present a clearer policy focus than the big parties. This enables dissatisfied voters a way to send messages, as they did in 1992 when 19 percent of those voting in the presidential election cast their ballots for Ross Perot. Subsequently Perot's United We Stand America transformed itself into the Reform Party in order to nominate a candidate for president but not necessarily a full slate of congressional candidates. The candidate, _____, got __ percent of the vote in the 1996 presidential election.

If you decide to forgo any kind of party involvement and function as an independent voter, you will be part of 20 to 30 percent of the electorate who

act as the swing vote in numerous elections. Because of this magnitude, major party candidates will frequently appeal for your support. But you will also find that independent voters alone don't make up a large enough bloc to elect candidates unaffiliated with a major party unless they get lots of help from Democrats and Republicans. Thus, political affiliation is always a factor in the electoral equation.

In governance the dominant position of Democrats and Republicans in filling elective offices is significant, but political affiliation by itself isn't all-controlling. Interest groups frequently make significant impact on governmental policies, and citizen use other channels than party connections to influence legislators and elected chief executives, matters we'll explore in Part Three. Thus, there are other ways for political participation than working as part of the Democratic and Republican parties. But active affiliation with one of the major parties remains an important channel for involvement in the workings of American democracy.

Focus of Identity

Beyond functioning as organizations to compete in elections, political parties serve as a focus of political identity. Party labels of candidates helps voters during election campaigns to sort out their choices. Among persons identifying themselves as Democrats and Republicans, party loyalty at the polls ranges from strong (nearly always voting a straight ticket) to weak (often splitting the ticket). Among persons identifying themselves as independents some lean towards the Democrats, others toward the Republicans, thus adding a flavor of party identity to nominally independent voters.

If you decide to get involved with one of the major parties, you will discover that you don't actually join the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. You don't pay membership dues or sign a pledge of creedal adherence. The closest you come to formal affiliation is by stating your party preference in voter registration or at the primary polling place, and at that

in only three-fourths of the states. You become an active Democrat or Republican simply by being active in party affairs.

As you do, you will learn that neither the Democratic nor the Republican party maintains ideological purity, though now and then some party leaders make the attempt. In neither party can party officials order legislators and executives from their party to adopt party-approved policies. Instead legislative bodies, as we have noted, are controlled internally by legislators sharing a common party affiliation. Party identity provides bonding, and legislators so united are a power unto themselves. Likewise elected chief executives and their appointees form separate blocs within their party. Thus, the Democratic and Republican parties each have numerous nuclei rather than a single command center.

Individual or Bloc Involvement

You can become involved in the party of your choice individually or as part of a bloc of persons sharing a particular political ideology. Ofttimes the

latter course is associated with a particular leader.

Thus, liberals who supported George McGovern in his losing bid for the presidency in 1972 moved heavily into the Democratic party structure in many states and worked for changes in rules for the national party convention. In 1974 they were a dominant force among a large group of newly elected members of Congress, who changed the way Congress functioned.

During the 1980s Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas and other Democrats styling themselves as moderates formed the Democratic Leadership Council to offer policy alternatives to those of liberals. It formed one of Clinton's bases when he ran for the presidency in 1992.

Also in the 1980s Rev. Jesse Jackson formed the National Rainbow Coalition to advance his candidacy for the presidency and to influence Democratic Party policies. The Rainbow Coalition continues to function as a bloc within the Democratic Party even though Rev. Jackson has occasionally

flirted with the idea of running for president as an independent.

In 1989 Rev. Pat Robertson formed the Christian Coalition to strengthen his base among evangelical Christians in his quest for the Republican presidential nomination. After he lost that bid, the Christian Coalition increased its issue focus but its supporters have continued to be involved in the Republican party. They have pushed candidates to support particular policy positions, moved into the Republican party structure, and by 1996 had become a dominant force in 18 states and a substantial influence in 13 more.

In 1994 a broad band of conservative activists with strong anti-government feelings, sparked particularly by the House Republican Campaign Committee, worked together to produce a Republican majority in Congress. This resulted in changes in congressional structure and operations and a flood of conservative legislative proposals.

Such efforts of party influx and takeover, full or partial, are fair game

for any ideological group within a party which wants to organize and take advantage of party rules and procedures. It is also something to resist by persons of other persuasions.

Points of Entry

Whether you are acting individually or with a bloc of like-minded persons, you'll find that in most localities and states the Democratic and Republican parties are remarkably open to those who persist. You don't have to have an invitation to participate, but you do need to know how the parties are organized, how they function, when and how best to be part of party activities. With this knowledge and a strong commitment you can infuse the political party of your choice.

The most readily available entry points for party involvement are found at the local level. The easiest entry is to serve as a party volunteer and choose from a wide variety of necessary tasks to perform. If you don't have a ready contact, just ask around or look up the party committee's number in

the phone book.

The next level of involvement is to attend party caucuses and other meetings that are open to all party members. In some states such gatherings play a role in the nominating process by recording preference among candidates or selecting delegates to nominating conventions.

A more competitive entry is to seek election as a precinct leader, some other officer, or a delegate to a party convention: local, congressional district, state, or national. No one knows for sure the total number serving as party officers and convention delegates, but perhaps between them the Democratic and Republican parties have close to half a million. Thus, there are numerous opportunities for interested citizens.

PARTY STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

If you want to get involved in party machinery, to participate in selection of party officers and convention delegates, to become one yourself, you must first learn about your party's structure and procedures. This

varies from state to state, though there are similarities. You'll have to search out the precise pattern for your state.

Often (but not always) the party's state central committee publishes a manual describing party structure and rules of operation. The secretary of state at the state capitol may have such information, especially if it is codified in state law. If the latter is the case, laws related to political parties will be found in the state statute book.

Nonpartisan organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, may have publications about party political organizations and operations. Some partisan organizations -- such as labor unions, business and trade associations, ideological groups -- have handbooks available for their members.

From this information you can determine what, who, when, and how of party operation.

Precincts

The operational base for American political parties is the approximately 175,000 local voting districts, often called "precincts", sometimes "divisions" or some other name. Each has a precinct leader (or a similar title), or can have (for in some precincts this office is unfilled by one party, sometimes both). Depending upon the state, they are chosen by party members voting in the primary or general election, by party caucus, or through appointment by a city or county party official. This is the best point of entry. To be successful you need to find out when and how precinct officers are chosen. Some ideological groups, such as the Christian Coalition, understand this well these days as they try to take control of state parties.

Precinct leaders recruit and direct the activities of block workers and other volunteers. They reach out to voters in their precinct, distribute campaign literature, collect funds, and get out the vote. In some cities precinct leaders come together in ward committees. In many states they play a role in selecting members of city, county, and state party committees

and in choosing convention delegations.

Local Committees

Local party committees are built upon the precinct foundation. The Democratic and Republican parties have committees in virtually all of the 3,043 counties in the United States and in a large number of cities, New England towns, and township with strong governmental powers. They usually operate under rules specified by the state central committee or state law, but in their operations they are basically autonomous.

Typically county and city committees are composed of all precinct leaders. They elect the chairperson, who directs local party activities and may represent the county on the state committee. Thus, a county chairperson is an important figure in party politics.

For the primary election local party leaders in some locales offer a slate of candidates for local and state offices, sometimes even for Congress. A more common pattern nowadays is to let candidates compete, and then the

local party supports the winners in the general election. Frequently candidates direct their own campaigns but welcome political workers drawn from the regular party organization.

Local committees are free to take positions on public issues on their own. They cannot be forced to follow a party line issued by the state committee or national committee, but more often than not they are loyal to these broader entities. If local party officials don't like the candidates offered by their party's state or national unit, they usually sit on their hands rather than oppose them outright.

Legislative District Committees

Where a state legislative district or a congressional district encompasses more than one local governmental jurisdiction, local party committees come together in the nominating process. In some states they hold nominating conventions to select the party's candidate. In other states the candidate is chosen in a primary election, and the aggregate of local committees supports

her or him in the general election.

State Committees

Because each state may establish its own political party structure, state party committees vary greatly around the United States. They range in size from fairly small to quite large. Most commonly state committee members are elected in the primary election or by local party conventions, but in some states county chairpersons form the state committee. The committee formally elects the state chairperson, but in many instances the governor or the last gubernatorial candidate determines who it will be.

State committees play a role in selection of party nominees for state office: governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and other elected executive officers. In yesteryears party leaders in many states decided their party's nominee and got it ratified by the state convention or in the party primary election. This happens less frequently now because candidates usually come forth as self-starters, but sometimes party leaders have a hand

in recruiting who they think will be a strong candidate and then issue an endorsement. In several states the state committee is responsible for organizing and conducting a nominating convention for state offices and candidates for the U.S. Senate.

Like local committees, state party committees are autonomous and are not directed what to do by the national committee. However, during the past 20 years many state committees have received technical assistance and financial contributions from their national committee. They in turn have offered assistance to local party committees, such as computerized lists of registered voters, training for candidates, and sometimes financial donations.

Choosing Local and State Party Officers

As you get involved in your local and state political party, you may want to participate in choosing party officers or to be one yourself. To do so, there are a number of questions to answer.

What political party offices are elected? What offices are appointed?

They may include precinct leaders, county committee members, county chairperson, state committee members, state chairperson, delegates to party conventions which meet to nominate party candidates and perhaps to choose party officials.

Who elects these officials? Registered party members? Anyone who shows up at a caucus or at the primary polling place and declares party affiliation? Members of a party committee choosing members of the next level committee (such as county committees electing state committee members)?

Who chooses persons to fill appointed party position? Are they confirmed by some committee?

When does selection occur? This is one of the most important things to know and provides another use for your political calendar. Election for particular party positions may occur every two or four years. If you miss one election or get started too late to mount an effective campaign, you'll

have to wait until the next round two to four years later.

Where election occurs through a bottom-up process, such as precinct leaders electing county committee members, who in turn elect state committee members, you have to anticipate the sequence. Thus, groups trying to take over a state committee first must get their people elected as precinct leaders and then county committee members. Controlling factions trying to block takeover must compete in the same party election. If the process has several stages, it is likely to stretch out over many months.

How does election or appointment occur? Does a candidate for a party office have to file a petition of candidacy? Or merely show up at a party meeting and be nominated from the floor? In the case of an appointed position, is confirmation by a party committee required?

National Committees

The Republican National Committee is composed of 165 members: the party chair plus a committeeman and a committeewoman from each of the

50 states, District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The Democratic National Committee consists of approximately 400 members, who include the chair of each state and territorial party, the highest ranking officer of the opposite sex, additional positions assigned each state on a population basis, representatives of Democratic elected officials, Young Democrats, and Democratic Women. Each national committee selects its own chair, but usually they accede to the choice of the incumbent president or the party's presidential nominee.

The central task of the national committee is to organize and run the quadrennial national convention to nominate the party's candidate for president. As an extension of this responsibility, the national committee establishes rules for selection of delegates from the states, such as when state primaries may be held and the gender composition of delegates. Court rulings have affirmed the right of the national committee to adopt binding requirements that state party organizations must observe even if it means

changing state laws.

Presidential campaigns these days are controlled by the candidates and their staffs while the national committees play supportive roles. Within various states there may also be candidate-centered campaign organizations with state party committees in support.

The national committees of the two major parties sometimes issue policy statements on public issues. Their chairs make speeches, appear on TV talk shows to discuss policy issues, and grant news interviews. However, the chairs and the national committees as a whole lack formal authority to order the president, if from their party, to adopt specific policies. Nor can they tell party members in Congress what legislation to enact or how to vote on specific bills. Often, though, the national committee and party units in Congress have effective working relationships, but as co-equals, not one ordering the other what to do. When the national chairs communicate their views to elected officials, they are more like lobbyists with good connections

than party commanders.

Nor can national party committees command state and local committees how to act. They do, however, get involved in state and local party affairs by making financial contributions to candidates, offering technical assistance and training to party officials and candidates, and in some instances helping to obtain a strong candidate to run for an open seat in Congress or against an incumbent of the other party.

Party Conventions

Both major parties hold national conventions during the summer preceding the presidential election. Fourteen states provide for some permutation of a party convention for nominating for state officials and candidates for the U.S. Senate, usually in combination with a primary election. Some of these states feature conventions in congressional districts to select candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives, and sometimes for nominations to the state legislature and local offices.

Whereas precinct officials and members of local, state, and party committees serve for specific terms, delegates to party conventions are chosen just for that event (though many hold other party positions). In 1996 the Democratic National Convention had 4,290 voting delegates, and the Republican National Convention had 1,990. In one cycle of local and state nominating conventions for local and state office, approximately _____ [to be determined] persons serve as delegates. So here's another spot for political involvement.

Party members usually seek election as convention delegates in order to support a particular candidate or slate of candidates. The candidates themselves often decide who may run in their behalf for delegate positions.

Delegates to national and state conventions adopt party platforms, specifying policy positions on a broad range of issues, but these platforms aren't binding on officeholders elected on the party ticket. Although disputes over platform language may produce a lot of heat at the party

convention, the adopted document rarely enters into campaign debate and is quickly forgotten after the election.

If you want to get involved in selecting convention delegates or to become one yourself, you'll need to answer a similar set of questions that we addressed in choosing party leaders. They include: What positions as delegates are available? Who selects them? When does this occur? (Another use for your calendar.) How is it accomplished?

Here, too, a realistic sense of timing is essential. This requires knowing the schedule and looking ahead to what must be done by particular deadlines. As aspirants for public office position themselves to run long before election day, so also aspirants to become party delegates may want to position themselves well ahead of the time when delegate selection takes place.

Party Units in Legislative Bodies

Democrats and Republicans serving in Congress and state legislatures compose separate, self-contained units within their parties. Party members

meet as a caucus in each house of the legislative body, decide what kind of operating structure they want, elect officers, sometimes select chairs or positions of ranking minority of the various legislative committees, and adopt legislative policies and strategies. Each party unit within each house is a power unto itself, not beholden to the unit from the same party in the other house or to the state or national committee. There is usually communication with these other units, often cooperation, and sometimes strong collaboration. But this is a relationship of co-equals, not a hierarchical command system.

Thus, in 1994 Republicans members of the U.S. House of Representatives acted on their own in drawing up and proclaiming their Contract with America. Although they received financial support from the Republican National Committee to publish it in *TV Guide*, they spoke only as Republican candidates for the House of Representatives and not for the Republican Party as a whole.

In addition to legislative policy committees, Democrats and Republicans in each chamber of Congress have their own campaign committees -- a total of four. These committees raise money to help with campaign expenses of the more vulnerable incumbents seeking reelection and to assist candidates challenging incumbents of the other party or running for open seats. They offer consultation to non-incumbent candidates. Sometimes they work with political leaders in particular districts to recruit strong candidates to run against the other party's incumbents or to contest for open seats. During the two year period prior to the 1994 election, the House Republican Campaign Committee was particularly active and contributed substantially to Republican success in that election.

Like many other aspects of year-round democracy, infusing political parties requires long-range planning and steady involvement over many weeks and months, even years. In the four year cycle of presidential

elections, it should commence soon after an election is over, that is, almost four years before the next one.

If you don't like party nominees, you can send a message by voting for independent and third party candidates. But if you want the parties to nominate persons more to your liking, you will need to get involved in party activities in greater depth and longer duration.

There are many callings in American democracy. If yours is for political party activity, there are numerous opportunities. They take effort. But that's true of all citizenship responsibilities.

February 19, 1996

Chapter Nineteen

Get In On Budget Making From The Beginning

The biggest issue of all in American politics these days is government spending and taxation. This was abundantly clear in late 1995 and early 1996 when a contentious budget dispute between the Republican-dominated Congress and President Clinton's Democratic administration twice resulted in shutdown of a big chunk of the federal government. It wasn't a pretty scene.

Nevertheless, the federal budget process was the right arena to sort out profound differences over governmental priorities and alternative visions for America. That's because the budget is the most consequential set of policies adopted on a regular basis by our governments, national, state and local. By allocating resources the budget determines what various public agencies will do in the coming year and who will benefit from their services. By

demarcating revenue sources the budget indicates who will pay for services, capital improvement projects, and other governmental activities.

Budget making isn't an easy process. It forces agonizing choices among competing programs. It pits worthy cause against worthy cause, interest groups against interest groups. Proposals to expand services evoke the specter of tax increases to pay for them. Proposals to lower taxes generate the possibility of cutbacks in popular programs. The process is made more difficult by the contradictory messages we citizens send to our chief executives and legislators: cut taxes but don't touch our favorite programs.

But for all its importance, the budgetary process receives a scant amount of public participation. Most citizens are mere spectators in the annual struggle over federal, state, and local budgets. We assume that budget making is too complicated for us, or we don't know how to gain access to the process. So we defer to our elected representatives and their staffs of technical experts. Moreover, in most jurisdictions public officials are content

to handle the budget by themselves. Citizen involvement is quite limited except where well-organized interests force themselves into the process.

This should change. We citizens need to be thoroughly involved in budget making from beginning to end. After all, it's our money they're spending.

THE BUDGET PATHWAY AND ITS SOJOURNERS

If we citizens are to achieve fuller participation in governmental budget making, we first need to know the budget pathways of our local, state, and national governments. We need to learn who the usual sojourners are. We need to understand where and how we can be part of the annual journey. We must and insist that we accompany our public officials all along the budget pathway.

The budgets of most governments in the United States are developed by the office of chief executive, that is, under the direction of the president, governor, county executive or administrator, mayor, city or town manager,

superintendent of schools, chief administrator of a special district. The budget is then presented for consideration and adoption by the legislative body: Congress, state legislature, county commission or council, city and town council, school board, special district commission.

Usually the chief executive is assisted by a budget officer and staff. The budget office seeks requests from operating departments, modifies these requests with guidance from the chief executive, and then produces a comprehensive budget. The chief executive submits the budget to the legislative body and publishes it for public review. The legislative body holds public hearings to take testimony from departmental representatives and citizens and then makes revisions it deems appropriate. If the legislative body is controlled by members of a political party different from the chief executive's party, it sometimes draws up an alternative budget of its own. Legislative modifications or replacement of the executive budget leads to negotiations between the two branches. Then the legislative body adopts the

budget.

The president, governors, and many mayors have authority to approve the adopted budget, or to veto it. Most governors are able to veto particular items without disapproving the entire budget.

In this typical process citizens usually don't enter the budget pathway until fairly late. After the budget is published, some citizens and interest groups analyze it, testify at public hearings of the legislative body, and lobby legislators to support certain items or to adopt particular amendments. Only very sophisticated interest groups are involved earlier by contacting specific departments and asking them to seek funding for a particular service or project in the departmental budget requests. These interests may even carry their advocacy to the chief executive while the budget is still being developed.

In this pattern citizens may be able to affect certain aspects of the budget, but they have very little influence on overall budget priorities.

Because most local and state budgets have to balance expenditures and revenues, it is difficult to make major changes after the budget has been published. An increased expenditure for one item has to be balanced by a decrease elsewhere or by revenue increases. That's hard to accomplish that late in the budgetary process.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We citizens can and should claim a much larger role in budget making. We should be more assertive and force our way onto the budget pathway early in the process. And we should insist upon changes in the budgetary process to achieve citizen involvement all along the pathway.

In practice we should pursue both courses simultaneously: asserting ourselves into the budgetary system as it now exists while seeking transformation to a much more participatory approach.

LOCAL BUDGET MAKING

For most of us, local budget making is most accessible because the budget

makers are near at hand. So we can start there in seeking to increase citizen involvement. But it is also possible, and highly desirable, for citizens to have much larger roles in federal and state budget making, a matter we'll take up later.

Ordinary Local Budget Pathway

Counties, cities, and towns tend to follow the pattern of executive-initiated budget making. The typical local budget pathway has seven stages, as follows:

Stage One: Advanced Preparation

Chief executive and budget office projections

Departmental anticipation

Budget office issues instructions

Stage Two: Departmental Requests

Develop requests

Submit to budget office

Stage Three: Budget Office Review

Review departmental requests

Confer with chief executive

Prepare budget documents

Stage Four: Chief Executive Determination

Make key policy decisions

Prepare budget message

Submit budget to council

Stage Five: Council Adoption

Public hearings

Executive sessions

Adoption

Chief executive approval or veto; possible override

Stage Six: Implementation

Allocations and allotments

Goes into effect

Transfers and amendment

Stage Seven: Audit

If you want to influence a local budget, you should begin by undertaking

three preparatory tasks:

- (1) Draw a decision pathway of the budgetary process.
- (2) Make a calendar showing when the different stages of budget making must be started and completed.
- (3) Develop a roster of key participants along the way.

Because the budget must be adopted by the beginning of the next fiscal year, the calendar is especially important. Some of the dates may be established by state law, others by local practice.

With these tools in hand, you can offer your input to the right person at the right time. The earlier you are involved the better. (A booklet listed in references at the end of this chapter presents in-depth discussion of techniques on how to impact typical local budget making.)

Exemplary Local Experience.

While you are working within the framework of the typical local budgetary process, you can also press your local officials to adopt new approaches that provide much fuller citizen participation. There is a solid

body of experience in such cities as New York, Dayton, St. Paul, and Portland, Oregon on how this can be achieved. In these places the city governments actually invite and encourage citizens to participate from the earliest stage as working partners. They even allocate public funds to make this possible.

These exemplary local budgetary processes have several common ingredients.

- Citizens have their own organizations to work out priorities and make budget recommendations. Most frequently these are neighborhood associations or district councils of neighborhood representatives, but sometimes citywide organizations and coalitions with a particular focus, such as social welfare, economic development, and environment also get involved.
- These citizen organizations have staff support. This might come from their own staff, consultants they hire, or personnel assigned by a public agency.

- *City government has an office designated to receive citizen budgetary proposals, to transmit them to the budget office and city departments, and to provide feedback to citizens on departmental response. This citizen liaison office sometimes provides technical assistance to citizen associations or allocates funds for their use.*
- *City departments accept the idea of citizen input early in the budgetary process and work within that framework.*
- *This process is scheduled over a sufficiently long period to allow time for meaningful citizen involvement to occur.*

Participatory Budget-Making

How it works can be illustrated by going through the stages of the budgetary pathway and considering how neighborhood organizations (which are among the major participants) are involved.

***Stage One: Advanced Preparation.** The neighborhood organization either has a neighborhood plan upon which to base its recommendations or*

has a system to determine residents' priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

This might occur through citizen surveys, neighborhood meetings, committee meetings, or a combination. Citizens are doing this at the same time that city departments are engaged in their own advanced preparations.

Stage Two: Departmental Requests. Just before city departments start working out their budget in detail, neighborhood organizations submit their proposals to the city liaison agency, which transmits them to the respective departments. In this manner city departments consider neighborhood proposals simultaneously with proposals from their own bureaus.

Departments inform the citizen liaison office how they respond to neighborhood requests, and that office provides feedback to the neighborhood organizations.

Stage Three: Budget Office Review. The budget office receives departmental and citizen requests, reviews them, and puts them together in a total budget. Similarly a citywide citizen advisory committee or a set of

citizen task forces reviews budget requests that have come from departments, neighborhood organizations, and other citizen organizations. The budget office takes into consideration comments and recommendations from the citizen advisory bodies in making its composite recommendation.

Stage Four: Chief Executive Determination. As the earlier stages have proceeded, the mayor or city manager is kept abreast of citizen recommendations as well as departmental requests and provides guidance to the budget office on how to respond. The chief executive takes into consideration these varied requests in making final decisions on the budget to submit to city council.

Stage Five: Council Adoption. As in other cities, neighborhood organizations and other citizen groups send representatives to council hearings on the budget. But having been intimately involved during earlier stages, this is a less crucial moment for them. They are likely to be supportive of the total budget even though not everything they requested is

included. Sometimes, though, they will propose adjustments and upon occasion will oppose certain elements. City council retains its authority to amend and adopt the budget. In some of the sample cities the mayor has final approval or veto of the budget, subject to override by city council with an extraordinary majority.

Stage Six: Implementation. Citizen organizations are less involved in the implementation stage, but a citywide advisory committee may be consulted about proposed major changes in big ticket items, such as capital improvement projects.

Stage Seven: Audit. Although citizen organizations usually don't get involved in the financial audit project, neighborhood organizations may have an evaluation system of their own to watch over the projects they proposed and to provide feedback for the next budgetary cycle.

In cities providing significant roles for citizens throughout the budgetary process, there is constant interchange between citizens and public officials at

all stages. Final decision-making authority remains with the chief executive and city council, but there is strong citizen input early in the process when it can be truly influential.

The cities cited -- New York, Dayton, St. Paul, and Portland, Oregon -- have 15 to 20 years experience with participatory budget-making. The process in New York is built into the city charter, in St. Paul is local elaboration of a state law, and in the other cities is established by local ordinance. Citizens and local officials elsewhere could benefit from studying this experience and adapting it to their situation.

FEDERAL BUDGETARY PROCESS

In contrast to this exemplary local experience, citizens are mostly shut out of the federal budgetary process the way it now works. But that could change if we insisted on it.

Current Federal Practices

The federal budgetary process starts in summertime about fifteen months prior to the fiscal year that begins October 1 of the following year.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issues guidelines to federal departments and lays out a schedule for submission of requests.

Departmental proposals go to OMB in the fall. Working under guidance from the president, OMB makes cuts (rarely increases). Cabinet members have the right to appeal to the president but use this right sparingly.

By December the budget is nearly complete. A few leading supporters of the president in Congress may be kept informed on some aspects of the emerging budget, but most members of Congress are in the dark on details. Final adjustments are made in January, including economic projections and decisions on revenue measures. The president submits the budget to Congress toward the end of January or in early February.

If members of the president's party control Congress, they will usually wait for the president's budget and work from it. If the opposition is in

control, they are likely to start developing their own version before receiving the president's budget. This, for instance, was the case with the Republican-controlled 104th Congress in 1995 and 1996.

Each house of Congress has a budget committee. They hold hearings in February and March, inviting witnesses from the administration, some outside economists, a small number of other experts, but hardly anyone from citizen advocacy organizations. In a break with this established pattern, in February 1995 the House Budget Committee under new Republican leadership held hearings at several locales around the country on general budget alternatives, though not on a precise budget proposal. Later, however, the Republicans kept the budgetary process as closed to full public participation as had their Democratic predecessors.

By May or June Congress adopts the budget resolution, which establishes spending levels for 18 major functions of government and outlines the revenue package to pay for the budget. Usually the House of Representatives

and the Senate pass different versions. The differences are ironed out in a conference committee and brought back to each chamber for passage. Being an internal document of Congress to provide guidance to authorization and appropriation committees, the budget resolution isn't subject to presidential approval or veto.

Even while the budget resolution is under consideration, authorization committees commence their work. Each committee deals major sets of programs (such as agriculture, labor and human resources, national security). They start holding hearings on what expenditures to authorize for the coming fiscal year. Meanwhile subcommittees of the appropriations committees in each chamber begin hearings on how much money to appropriate. At the same time the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee start working on revenue measures and "entitlement" programs, such as social security, medicare, welfare, and medicaid.

These committees and subcommittees hear both government and civilian

experts, generally with a broader range of witnesses than the budget committees. But they usually don't bring in many representatives of membership-based, citizen advocacy organizations. Nevertheless, advocacy organizations busily undertake direct lobbying and mount grassroots campaigns to influence decisions of authorization and appropriations committees. Only at this advanced stage is citizen input very strong.

The budget becomes law through passage of 13 appropriate bills, each covering different sets of governmental activities, and a reconciliation bill assuring that all revenue measures, appropriations, and entitlements achieve budgetary objectives. These bills often deal not only with financial matters but also substantive changes in governmental programs, especially the reconciliation bill. The president may approve or veto any or all of these bills. If a bill is vetoed, Congress may override by a two-thirds vote in each house or can modify the bill to meet the president's objections.

This entire process is supposed to be completed by September 30, the

day before the new fiscal year begins. But if all appropriation bills and the reconciliation bill aren't passed by then, Congress has to pass a continuing resolution to keep the government going until all appropriations are enacted.

The budget crisis of 1995-96 came about because the Republican-controlled Congress was exceptionally tardy in passing all appropriations and the reconciliation bill. To keep the government operating, Congress passed a short-term continuing resolution. When it was about to expire, the Republicans used a second continuing resolution as leverage to force President Clinton to accept Republican budget priorities, which he refused to do. When he vetoed it, the unfunded part of the government closed for four days until Congress passed an acceptable stop-gap funding resolution.

Congress next presented President Clinton with a huge reconciliation bill that laid out the Republicans' plan to balance the budget in seven years. Because of disagreement over spending priorities and taxes, Clinton vetoed

this bill. When temporary funding expired, part of the government closed for another 23 days while the Clinton administration and Republican leaders in Congress attempted to negotiate a compromise, seven-year balanced budget plan. After negotiations broke down, Congress reluctantly passed another continuing resolution. [To be completed with further developments beyond this writing (February 19, 1996).]

Ways to Increase Participation

This breakdown in federal budget making calls for changes in the process, especially substantial increase in citizen participation. This is something we citizens should demand and insist upon.

***Citizen lobbying.** Part of the solution requires us to be more assertive under the present system. To influence the federal budget the way the process now works, we can apply the lobbying techniques discussed in Chapter 15 (for Congress) and Chapter 16 (for the Executive Branch). We can seek as early involvement as possible, beginning a year before the fiscal year begins*

when departments are commencing work on the following year's budget (even before next year's budget has been enacted). We can find out who develops budgets in various departments and offer our views to them. We can contact the Office of Management and Budget, which makes up the budget for the president. Then when the budget goes to Congress, we can follow it step-by-step through the budget resolution, authorization, appropriations, and the reconciliation bill.

This kind of citizen-initiated input can come about through a combination of lobbying organizations based in Washington and grassroots mobilization, activated through legislative alerts. In this manner citizens all around the country can make their views known on particular issues at crucial moments during the budget process .

Beyond such initiatives by interest groups and individual citizens, we should insist that provision for much greater citizen participation is built into the federal budget process. One way would be to achieve broader public

discussion of national priorities of expenditures and taxation and to feed these citizen views into budget formulation. A second way would be to obtain greater citizen input to different parts of the budget during the early stage of budget preparation and continue through subsequent stages on a systematic basis.

Setting national priorities. The federal budget of 1995 and 1996 focused on efforts to adopt a plan for balancing the federal budget in seven years. Even if President Clinton and Congress had come to an agreement, the issue of budgetary priorities would remain on the table for annual consideration. It would remain before us because each year a new budget has to be developed and approved. Because of the budget is a process to set national priorities, we citizens need to have a greater role. After all, they are our priorities.

What is urgently needed is a thorough-going national dialogue on the federal budget with everything on the table: defense, tax breaks, tax rates,

interest payments, social security, agriculture and business subsidies, other entitlements, and every governmental program. Many of these were left off the table by Congress and the president in 1995 and 1996 in negotiations over a seven-year balanced budget plan.

As one means of achieving wider participation in federal budget making, citizen budget forums could be held on an ongoing basis in every congressional district in the United States. These citizen bodies could use the methodology of issue forums we discussed in the previous chapter.

To be truly effective, citizen budget forums should examine budget choices that include alternatives not considered "political feasible" by conventional wisdom. Here are some examples.

The present military budget is based upon an assumption that the United States might have to fight simultaneously two regional wars without allies: one in the Korean peninsula, the other in the Middle East. Respectable organizations, such as the Committee for National Security, the Center for

Defense Information, and the Federation of American Scientists, have questioned this assumption and have developed budgetary proposals with substantial reductions in defense spending for the post-Cold War era. A variety of citizen advocacy organizations and peace/justice offices of a number of religious organizations also favor military cutbacks. The alternatives they propose should be seriously considered.

The federal budget contains "entitlements" for individuals, such as social security, medicare, medicaid, welfare assistance, and subsidies for segments of the economy, such as agriculture. There are also what are called "tax expenditures", that is, tax deductions beneficial only to certain taxpayers, such as homeowners, real estate investors, and business corporations.

Although the budget for the 1996 fiscal year dealt with medicare, medicaid, and welfare, most of the other entitlements and tax expenditures were kept off table. Congress, the president, and even a special bipartisan commission haven't been able to develop acceptable limits to these high-cost items.

Citizen budget forums could come to grips with these significant expenditures in the federal budget and offer recommendations.

Taxes should be considered, including the possibility of tax increases and forgoing of tax cuts in order to help lower the federal deficit. Fairness of the tax structure should be discussed.

Interest on the federal debt must be paid, so it is usually off the table of budgetary discussion. But perhaps some citizens would come up with ideas on public debt financing which would lower interest costs. Maybe not, but the matter should be on the table.

And so should every single program in the federal budget. Nothing should be left off the table.

These citizen budget forums should be ongoing enterprises, not merely one-shot affairs. They could be encouraged and facilitated by a group of national organizations working together. This national consortium could prepare and publish nonpartisan background material on a range of budget

choices. To reach a widespread audience such material could be distributed through supplements in daily and weekly newspapers, in special tabloids sold at supermarkets and drug stores, and through computer networks. Public and commercial television could put on programs with discussion of the main budget issues by experts and representatives of a cross-section of interest groups.

A regular intervals citizen budget forums would invite U.S. representatives and senators to meet with them for an exchange of views on budgetary issues. Well-informed citizens would articulate views that go beyond narrow interests most often heard in Washington. Although final decisions would remain with the president and Congress, these elected officials would discover that citizens, if given the opportunity, have capability for working out recommendations on national priorities based upon what they conceive is fair and best for the nation as a whole.

Annual participation. In addition to citizen budget forums dealing with

broad national priorities, citizens should have ample opportunities to be heard each year during preparation of the president's budget and later as Congress takes up the federal budget.

Thus, in September and October when the departments are working on their budgets, the cabinet secretaries could hold public hearings so that a cross-section of interests and the general public could offer recommendations for the departmental budget. Regional and area directors of various departments could conduct similar hearings around the country. The president could also hold several public hearings that focus on overall budgetary issues, such as deficit reduction and taxation. Witnesses before the president could include representatives of state and local government, business, labor, consumers, social welfare, environmentalists, religious organizations, and other broad interests.

At these executive budget hearings the president, cabinet secretaries, and regional and area directors could ask all witnesses to respond to three

questions:

- *What expenditures do you want included in the budget?*
- *If you recommend increased spending, what expenditure reductions elsewhere in the budget will you publicly support?*
- *What revenue measures will you publicly support to get the federal deficit under control?*

This approach would not only provide citizen input early in the federal budgetary process, but it would also encourage persons representing various interests to broaden their horizon and look at the total picture. It would seek to develop support for difficult measures needed to achieve deficit reduction.

The congressional budget committees, when their turn comes, should hear from a broader range of witnesses than they do now. This can be accomplished not only through conventional hearings in Washington but also by satellite television linkage with witnesses situated in other locales around

the nation. All witnesses could be asked the three key questions: what expenditures do you propose, what expenditure reductions and revenue increase do you favor to pay for it? Citizens could be asked not only to make recommendations on expenditure cuts and revenue measures, but also to pledge to support these measures, no matter how unpopular. Computer networks could also be used to obtain more citizen input.

In this manner the voice of the people would be stronger in this crucially important, annual policy-making process.

OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Our discussion has dealt primarily with budget making in local and national government. Citizens also need to pay heed to the budgetary processes of other governmental jurisdictions.

State Budget Making

In scale state governments stand between federal and local government. In budgetary practices they are more like federal than local. The state

budget office pulls together requests from state agencies and under the governor's guidance prepares the annual state budget. The governor presents the budget to the legislature where it goes to committees in both houses. [more to be written]

State governments could embark upon their own processes for early and continuing citizen involvement in budget making. Citizen budget forums could function around each state. Governors, department heads, and district directors could hold hearings well in advance of finalization of the governor's budget. State legislative committees could hear from a wider range of witnesses than they do now. They could use television linkage to hear from witnesses scattered around the state and could conduct field hearings. They could use computer networks.

School Districts

To be written.

Special Districts

To be written

Because many crucial public policy decisions are made in the course of developing federal, state, and local budgets, it is highly important that citizens be involved in the early stages of budget making. Although executive budget makers and legislators might find this an intrusion into what they have considered their exclusive domain, it would bring much greater democratic participation into this highly important process of governmental decision making. Most likely it would result in superior budget decisions and would gain greater public acceptance of tough budget choices.

REFERENCES

For ideas on how to exert influence in typical local budget making, obtain

Citizen Involvement in the Local Budget Process from

*Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20007.*

For information on how to conduct budget forums, contact

*Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget
220½ E Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002*

For information on how to conduct issue forums, contact

*Kettering Foundation
200 Common Road
Dayton, Ohio 45459.*

July 2, 1996

PARTICIPATE! PARTICIPATE! PARTICIPATE!
21 Ways To Revitalize American Democracy

by Howard W. Hallman

July 1996

6508 Wilmett Road
Bethesda, MD 20817

Phone: 301 897-3668

Fax: 301 896-0013

PARTICIPATE! PARTICIPATE! PARTICIPATE!

21 Ways To Revitalize American Democracy

by Howard W. Hallman

Preface

PART ONE. PREPARING FOR PARTICIPATION

- 1. Reaffirm Your Faith in Government, Our Servant*
- 2. Perceive of Consent As Continuous, Not Episodic*
- 3. Commit Yourself To Year-Round Participation*

PART TWO. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ELECTIONS

- 4. Make a Roster, Mark A Calendar*
- 5. Position Yourself To Run For Public Office*
- 6. Influence Positioners And Campaigners*
- 7. Infuse Political Parties*
- 8. Negate Negative Campaigning*
- 9. Reform Campaign Finance*
- 10. Get Out The Vote*
- 11. Use Ballot Measures Judiciously*

PART THREE. PARTICIPATING IN GOVERNANCE

- 12. Understand Who Governs*
- 13. Locate Decision-Making Pathways*
- 14. Organize For Grassroots Lobbying*

15. Lobby Legislators

16. Lobby Executive Officials

17. Engage in Participatory Planning

18. Deal with the Big Issues

19. Get In On Budget Making From The Beginning

20. Become A Public Servant

PART FOUR. PROMISING TO PARTICIPATE

21. Renew Our Pledge

The book will total 75,000 to 80,000 words.

July 1996

6508 Wilmet Road, Bethesda, MD 20817

Phone: 301 897-3668

Fax: 301 895-0013

Chapter Four

Put Aside Simplistic Solutions

If we understand that consent is a continuous interactive process in which we can participate all year round, we will be in a better position to resist simplistic, cure-all nostrums that promise quick remedies for complex problems. A number are being promoted these days. They create an illusion of remediation but don't come to grips effectively with underlying problems. We would be well advised to put aside simplistic solutions.

Term Limits

The worst of the simplistic solutions is term limits, a measure designed to restrict the number of terms that members of Congress or legislatures may serve. Pure and simple imposing term limits is an anti-democratic remedy because it constrains voter choice. Voters of each district, and they alone, should be able to determine whether their representative deserves another

term in office.

Term limits violate the fundamental principle of representative democracy. As Alexander Hamilton insisted in 1788 during ratification debate on the new U.S. Constitution, "the people should choose whom they please to govern them."ⁱ In applying this principle, the Framers of the Constitution established *length of terms* for members of Congress and the president of the United States, but not *number of terms* they may serve.

This outlook prevailed for 160 years. Then in 1947 the Republican-controlled 80th Congress, upset that Franklin D. Roosevelt had been elected president four times, passed a constitutional amendment specifying: "No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice." State ratification was completed in 1951, and it became the 22nd Amendment. Ironically since then only two presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan, both Republicans, have served two full terms and might have considered a third term.

Now once again Republicans are leading a term limit movement, this time directed toward Congress and state legislatures. The initiators were primarily conservatives frustrated by their inability to produce enough winning candidates to gain control of Congress and many state legislatures. Feeling that they were a permanent minority, they searched for other ways to curtail Democratic majorities. Their solution was to change the rules by instituting term limits. Here and there they gained support of liberals who had lost attempts to unseat incumbents, sometimes described as "sore losers".

Stemming from a motivation to displace incumbents they can't defeat at the polls, term limit advocates have tapped into voter dissatisfaction with government. They place blame on long-term incumbents. So far they have persuaded voters in 22 states to pass measures limiting the number of terms that members of Congress and their state legislature may serve.

However, in 1995 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state-imposed limits on congressional terms violates the U.S. Constitution.ⁱⁱ

For many voters, voting for term limits has been a way to send a message, to express dissatisfaction with the status quo. Interestingly in many Congressional districts a majority of voters have approved term limits, and at the same time they reelected incumbents who wouldn't have been eligible to serve again if term limits were in effect.

Beyond the repudiation of democratic choice, term limit advocates would impose restrictions on experienced service in legislative bodies that we would find intolerable in other fields. For instance, would we want to be treated at a hospital that had to discharge all physicians and nurses after six to twelve years of service? Would we want to put our money in a bank where no one had worked there longer than a dozen years? As Republican Congressman Henry Hyde exclaimed during congressional debate, term limits would lead to "the dumbing down of democracy".ⁱⁱⁱ

Government is a complicated enterprise. It takes time to learn thoroughly how it works. We need experienced legislators to match

long-time administrators of the executive branch. Otherwise members of Congress and state legislatures risk being outmaneuvered by career administrators, manipulated by legislative staff with long tenure, and unduly influenced by lobbyists who have been around a long time. In the competitive atmosphere of policy formulation, solid experience has great value.

The hypocrisy among legislators offering verbal support to term limits contributes to public cynicism about politics. Thus, in September 1994 most Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives seeking reelection signed a Contract with America that included a promise for term limits. The signers argued: "Let's replace career politicians with citizen legislators. After all, politics shouldn't be a lifetime job."^{iv} Yet 90 of the signers, had already served three terms and would be ineligible for reelection if a three term limitation had been in effect. Fifty-four of them had served six or more consecutive terms. Yet, none of these career politicians were

willing to step aside and allow citizen legislators to take their place!

After the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1995, a decisive majority of the House of Representatives protected their careers by voting 297 to 135 against a constitutional amendment that would make term limits apply to past years of service. A measure to limit House members to three terms, but not retroactive, lost 114 to 316. A majority voted 227 to 204 in favor of a version that limited service in the House of Representatives to six terms and in the Senate to two terms (that is, a maximum of 12 years of service in each chamber). But this was far short of the two-thirds vote required for a constitutional amendment. The Senate didn't take up term limits.^v

Term limit advocates intend to make this an issue in the 1996 congressional election and press for a vote on a constitutional amendment again in 1997. If they are successful, at best it would take two to four years to gain ratification by the required three-fourths of the state legislatures.

Since it's unlikely that a retroactive measure could gain congressional approval, it would be 2012 or later until any member of Congress would be affected by term limits.

American voters, though, in actual practice know a better and quicker way to replace incumbents: vote them out of office, district by district. This began to happen in the 1992 election season for 110 seats out of the 435 in the U.S. House of Representatives due to retirement or defeat at the polls, the highest turnover in 44 years. The trend continued in the 1994 election when 86 House incumbents were replaced, 48 by voluntary retirement but 38 through electoral defeat. But at the same time 90 percent of the House incumbents running for reelection were successful, reaffirmed by voters in their districts, who opted to return experienced legislators.

Turnover hasn't been as rapid in the U.S. Senate, but the Republicans picked up eight Senate seats in the 1994 election to gain control. And after the election two senators switched their party affiliation from Democrat to

Republican. In 10 states Republicans replaced Democrats as governor and took control away from Democrats in 19 state legislative chambers (houses of representative and senates).

In 1996 voters [results to be added]. As in all recent elections, voters had a choice, and they exercised it. Its a much superior approach than arbitrary term limits.

In 1998 and 2000 and the years beyond voters will continue having the opportunity to replace incumbents in office if dissatisfied with them. Or to reelect them. This can be a judicious choice of voters in each district, not the slam-bang approach of term limits.

Undoubtedly in future election campaigns term limit advocates will press candidates to pledge their support for term limits, as they have in the past. As this occurs, we who believe in full democracy should mount a counter effort to press candidates to commit themselves to free and open choice in elections. Quoting Hamilton, we should ask candidates: "Do you

favor allowing voters to "choose whom they please to govern them?" In this manner we can preserve the voter sovereignty that is an essential feature of democracy.

None of the Above

Going beyond a dislike for incumbents, some dissatisfied citizens don't like any of the candidates offered by the political parties. They don't even care for those running as independents. Their remedy is to add "none of the above" to the ballot so that voters may send a message of their displeasure. Among others, consumer advocate Ralph Nader and conservative political consultant Paul Weyrich favor this approach.

That's another over-simplified solution for American democracy. It's really a lazy person's alibi for not fulfilling civic responsibility. It may send a message, but it makes no contribution to solutions. Moreover, it violates the old political adage that "you can't beat somebody with nobody".

If you don't care for persons running for public office, you should work to

get persons of your liking to run. Or run yourself. Enter the rough-and-tumble of politics. That's the true spirit of American democracy. It's so important that much of Part Two of this book deals with how to achieve far greater participation in the electoral process.

Vigorously pursuing the competitive approach, not term limits, was a major reason that Republicans were in a position to take control of the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years after the 1994 election. Persons of other persuasions must do likewise if they want to get officeholders of their liking. You can choose to compete as a Democrat, a Republican, a third party candidate, or an independent. Forget about "none of the above".

Squawk Talk

Citizen dissatisfaction in recent years has been meat for an expanding array of radio and television talk show hosts. By giving people an outlet for their frustration, these talk show hosts have become major players in the

political arena. They have taken single issues, such as congressional pay raises, perks for members of Congress, proposed tax increases, regulation of lobbying, and other matters, and have encouraged citizens to air their views and call or write members of Congress. They have demonstrated a capability to instantaneously flood the capitol switchboard in Washington, D.C.

In contemporary America this kind of squawk talk is another way to send a message to public officials. In a historic sense it is part of the protest tradition, which at various times has featured rallies, marches, teach-ins, sit-ins, and nonviolent civil disobedience. It is an honorable heritage. It helps maintain a healthy democracy, for protest reveals aches and pains that require attention.

Valuable as it is for message sending, though, squawk talk is limited in its ability to achieve solutions for significant public problems. Usually it is negative, attempting to block legislation or repeal a recently adopted

measure. Rarely does it bring support for positive, problem-solving legislation. Moreover, squawk talk impacts only a tiny fraction of legislative business conducted throughout the year.

To exercise much deeper, more-lasting influence on a broader range of legislation, much greater stick-to-itiveness is necessary. This is the trait displayed by numerous interest groups. That's why they are so influential as lobbyists with Congress, state legislatures, and city and county councils.

Citizen activists who want to be similarly influential over the long haul can learn from them and apply practices of effective lobbyists for public benefit. This is a matter we'll consider in Part Three.

Balanced Budget Amendment

Another simplistic solution to what ails American democracy is the proposal for a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution. For many years advocates of reduced federal spending have championed such a measure to require that expenditures not exceed revenues except in cases of

national emergency. Among other reasons offered, proponents have argued that Congress and the president need the discipline of a constitutionally imposed requirement to balance the budget.

Both President Ronald Reagan and President George Bush strongly favored a balanced budget amendment. Yet neither of them ever submitted a balanced budget to Congress or offered a long-range plan that would achieve a balanced budget. Rather they pursued spend-and-borrow policies that more than quadrupled the federal debt in their combined twelve years in office, rising from \$700 billion in 1981 to \$3.2 trillion in 1993.

During their presidency, a balanced budget amendment came before Congress several times but never mustered the two-thirds vote in both chambers required for a constitutional amendment. When Republicans took control of the 104th Congress in 1995, they mobilized a majority well beyond the necessary two-thirds in the House of Representatives but fell one vote short of two-thirds in the Senate.

The balanced budget amendment considered by the 104th Congress would require the federal budget to be in balance by 2002. However, before this amendment came to a vote, Republican leaders refused to offer a detailed plan on how this objective could be achieved. They explained that "special interests" would mobilize to block a balanced budget amendment if they knew for certain that their programs would be cut. Their unstated message to the American people was: "we don't trust you to know the facts and support us as we act responsibly."

Subsequently, however, both the House and Senate budget committees produced seven-year plans to eliminate the annual federal deficit by 2002. A congressional majority approved a compromise plan in the summer of 1995. At that time President Clinton came up with his own plan to balance the federal budget in ten years. Then authorization and appropriations committees undertook the challenge of working out details applicable to the fiscal year ending September 30, 1996. Various interest groups did indeed

show up to press their case and defend their favorite programs from elimination or excessive cuts. Forces and counterforces swirled around the budget process. [More to be added after FY 96 budget is adopted.] That's as it should be, showing that vigorous pursuit of significant deficit reduction can occur without a constitutional amendment.

It's just as well that the balanced budget amendment wasn't enacted, for balancing revenues and expenditures every year is not necessarily a desirable or necessary objective. Very few households do so. We borrow money to pay for our house and our automobile. If we didn't, the housing and automotive industries would be sharply curtailed. Corporations borrow money, together totaling indebtedness on a level with the federal debt. Even though most state constitutions require a balanced budget, this usually applies only to operating expenses, and the states borrow money to pay for capital projects, such as highways, public buildings, and other construction activities. Although the federal government doesn't have a separate capital budget, part

of its borrowing pays for long-term projects. Moreover, at certain times federal deficit spending enables the government to counter economic downturn, thus mitigating adverse impact of fluctuations in the economy.

Certainly budget makers need discipline, but it's a faulty solution to impose it by a constitutional amendment. This would remove flexibility to deal with unforeseen circumstances. Budget decisions should be made through the give-and-take of the political process. Furthermore, budget making should be opened to much greater public participation from beginning to end, a matter we'll discuss in Chapter 20.

Sending Messages Isn't Enough

To considerable extent support for a balanced budget amendment and term limits has arisen because citizens have wanted to send messages of dissatisfaction to elected officials. The desire to vote for none-of-the-above and the quick response to instructions of talk show hosts are ways of expressing frustrations.

As such, there is no harm in sending messages. It is an old American pastime. Yet it's but a fraction of democracy. Democracy is also about elections and governance: voters choosing legislators, executives, and sometimes judges; legislators enacting laws; executive officials making policy decisions and administering national, state, and local governments.

You can't run a government solely with messages. You have to make decisions, sometimes very difficult choices among complex policy alternatives. You have to decide who will pay the cost of government and then enact revenue measures. With finite resources available you have to decide who will benefit most and who the least in budgetary allocations. Lots of hard choices.

You can vote for an independent candidate to send a message, or even refrain from voting, but somebody's going to be elected. For most of the last 200 years nearly all of these somebodies have been members of one of two major political parties. Occasionally a third party has gained control of one

or both houses of a state legislature for a while or become the second ranking party. Now and then some third party members and independents have served as governors and mayors. It's conceivable that in 1996 a third party candidate could be elected president. But these are exceptions. In jurisdictions holding partisan elections the American people have entrusted government mostly to elected officials from the two major parties -- since 1860 either Republican or Democratic.

So if you want to increase your influence on who is nominated and elected to public office across the board, you need to get involved in the Democratic or Republican party. (More on this in Chapter 8.)

You can follow the urging of Rush Limbaugh and other talk show hosts and call your representative in Washington to protest a congressional pay raise or some other measure. You and other callers might even get your way on that single issue. But the same session of Congress will enact thousands of bills that move through the legislative pipeline with little public attention.

This legislation, however, is noticed, supported, opposed, and caused to be modified by interest groups maintaining full-time presence in Washington.

If you want to gain greater influence on the course of many important legislative measures, you need to find ways to lobby directly in Washington, through grassroots mobilization, or in combination. Likewise for state and local government. (See Chapter 15 and 16.)

It is not enough to think that you elected change-oriented candidates and that they will take it from there. Almost certainly they will stray in some way or other from the course you thought they would pursue. You need to keep in touch and let them know your views all through their term in office.

Government in the United States goes on all year long. So does the electoral process, even though it may gain public visibility only during periodic election campaigns. Intermittent participation by voting once or twice a year and sending a message now and then is insufficient. If American

democracy is to flourish, citizens need to find ways to achieve ongoing participation in the processes of government. Accordingly, citizen involvement in governmental affairs should occur year-round.

After all, government in American democracy is "us", not a bunch of bickering politicians set apart. Its successes and failures are ours, not those of a separate political class. The challenge is not for "us" to send messages to "them" but rather for millions of citizens to become more fully involved in the ongoing processes of government. What we need is more democracy, not less.

February 18, 1996

Notes

i. Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the*

Adoption of the Federal Constitution. 2nd edition. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1861. vol. 2, p. 257.

ii. *U.S. Term Limits, Inc. et al. v. Thornton et al.* [complete citation to be added]

iii. *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 104th Congress, First Session.* March 29, 1995. Vol. 141, No. 58, p. H3905.

iv. *Republican National Committee, House Republican Contract with America: A Program for Accountability.* Washington: Republican National Committee, 1994. p. 1.

v. *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 104th Congress, First Session.* March 29, 1995. Vol. 141, No. 58, p. D438.