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DEMOCRACY AT RISK

How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. DIONNE: Thank you for coming everybody. This is a really important session on a really important book. I think all the authors of this study some of whom are represented here today should be very proud of what they did.

In the first place, this is one of those rare reports that actually include jokes. One of my favorite lines in the whole report, a survey researcher asked a respondent why the American people are so ignorant and apathetic about politics. The citizen replied, I don't know, and I don't care.

[Laughter.]

MR. DIONNE: The beauty of these guys and women is that they know a lot and they care a lot. It's very unusual simply to have political science engaged in an effort like this, actually to care. I think they call it normative which means caring about the outcomes, caring about what happens. And to have all these folks step out and on the one hand use very, very good research and on the other hand say that civic participation is a real issue, that low levels of civic participation is a problem, and then to say here are a

whole of things we might do about it, this is a milestone in political science.

We were joking at the Political Science Convention that the last time political scientists did this was in 1950 with a report Toward a Responsible Party System which suggested that we needed more ideological parties with clearer views. Now we all know how that turned out, and I turned to Steve and I said I don't know whether to wish you good luck by saying I hope everything in this report happens or everything in the report doesn't happen, but in this case I don't think we're running all the risks we were there.

One last point before I introduce the panelists. Imagine any group of political scientists agreeing on even 10 pages, then imagine a group this large, and imagine that they actually agreed on 178 pages with 39 pages of footnotes. That's very impressive, and so Steve, we're sending you to the Middle East when this session is over because they badly need you there.

I'll introduce Steve and then he'll speak, and then I'll introduce the rest of the panelists and tell you what they are planning to talk about.

Steve Macedo is the Laurence S. Rockefeller Professor of Politics and Director of the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. His previous books include Educating Citizens, co-edited with Patrick Wolf and published by Brookings, Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy, and that's only a small selection. Steve as I say deserves a lot of credit for herding this very large group of political scientists.

MR. MACEDO: Thank you very much, E.J., and we're very grateful to Brookings for doing a wonderful job with this and providing this opportunity to speak to you all.

As E.J. said, we're a large and diverse group who were appointed by APSA President Bob Putnam to think about the state of American democracy. The committee that we were appointed under the aegis of was the Committee on Civic Education and Engagement, but we decided not to focus on schools. Most people who think about civic education focus on schools, but in fact it was our conviction that major institutions and policies often have an educative side effect. If we want to think about the various political levers that might be

engaged in order to shape citizenship, we ought not to be thinking only of schools, we ought to be thinking of major public policy institutions that have a formative dimension. So what we've done is to think very broadly about the educative side effects of a variety of political institutions.

We were founded in September 2002 is when we got going. This is our report, as I have said, and we have operated under the auspices of the Political Science Association, but of course we speak only for ourselves.

Our arguments go to the fundamentals of American democracy and we hope that our premises will be shared by small D democrats, all of them. We argue that citizen participation in public affairs is less frequent, less knowledgeable and often on the basis of narrow interests and aims, and far less equal than is healthy for democracy.

Our argument is that American democracy is at risk. Its health and legitimacy are compromised on account of levels of participation and quality of participation that are lower than they should be, and a

distribution of participation, influence and power that are far more unequal than they should be.

What's most original about the book I think is not something that's an account of these problems, but presenting a fair broad agenda for reform. As E.J. said, this is the first time that a group of political scientists operating under the auspices of the APSA has made reforms since 1950, this report, that recommended that the U.S. adopt a more British parliamentary system of government. That was not seen as a wonderfully ringing success, but I think we've been more cautious. Anyway, it will be up for you and others to judge.

Our concerns about participation are threefold, quantity, distribution and quality of participation, and I'll just say a few words about these.

In terms of quantity, levels of political and civic participation are far lower than they should be and many of them are declining. American voter turnout ranks near the bottom among democratic nations. It rebounded in 2004 absolutely, but this was an especially intense national race undertaken during a contentious war, and it rebounded to levels that approximated 1956 when an incumbent Eisenhower handily beat Stevenson for

the second time. So it's actually quite revealing that it took the contentiousness of 2004 to get us back to the levels of 1956. And that's only a small part of the story.

Turnout rates in local elections typically are around 30 percent. To get even further below the level of the usual voting analysis, special districts and authorities which make enormously significant decisions about local development and infrastructure sometimes operate altogether without electoral accountability, or when there are elections with turnouts that are usually around 5 percent. The levee system in and around New Orleans is governed by a special authority which undoubtedly has been too far below the political radar screen there.

And other key indices of political participation, writing letters to the editor, participating in rallies and demonstrations, volunteering in campaigns, fell by about half between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s. Not to mention participation in a host of voluntary civic associations, the sort of stuff that Bob Putnam has written about, falling dramatically over the last 40 years. So fewer

Americans regard politics and important and fewer follow it closely.

Unequal participation. Many Americans don't bother to vote. Those who do are not representative of the American people as a whole. Political participation is far lower among disadvantaged Americans who may, indeed, of course, have the most reason to get involved. Whereas 90 percent of people with family incomes above $75,000 claimed to have voted in presidential elections, only about half of those families with incomes below $15,000 claimed to have voted. I can't remember the years of those income numbers; probably a bit higher.

But there is no question that the voices of the disadvantaged are especially faint in American politics, and there are studies including by my colleague Martin Gillens that argued based on analysis of national legislation that the bottom one-third in terms of income in this country essentially exercises no influence over national legislation. Of course, since blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately poor, they commensurately have low levels of political influence.

Of course, as our politics have become more partisan, participation has declined especially steeply

among independent and moderate voters who should play an especially important centripetal role in keeping the two parties from drifting too far apart. So we're certainly concerned about the ways in which intense elite partisanship, polarization among elites, has energized the political extremes and tended to demobilize proportionately the political middle.

Participation has plummeted especially steeply among the young. From the mid-1970s until recent years, the number of adolescents who said they could see themselves working on a political campaign, for example, dropped by about half.

These factors begin to speak to not just the distribution of who exercises power, but also the quality of their participation. Clearly the quality of participation depends in part on how well informed citizens are.

Since 1960, the number of newspaper subscriptions per household has dropped by about half, and by some measures, at least college graduates nowadays know about as much about politics as the average high school senior did 50 years ago. The number of civics courses taken in public schools has dropped by

two-thirds since the 1960s. Admittedly their place has been taken by social studies courses, but these focus considerably less on the role of the citizen, the role of the citizen in working within the political system. So we believe and have some evidence that they are considerably less empowering with respect to individuals.

At the local level with respect to quality of participation, we regard it as extremely important that Americans live in local political communities that are persistently divided by race and that are starkly and increasingly divided by class, a phenomenon that was vividly on display over the last 10 days in New Orleans, but local institutions that divide people, that have the effect of dividing people, that sharpen and increase class divisions, work relentlessly if far less dramatically in all sorts of insidious ways in our politics. Political institutions should help bridge important divisions, but local institutions too often are structured in a way that they sharpen them.

So declining civic engagement, declining interest in politics, continuing low levels of basic knowledge about politics, in some ways these things are

surprising. Americans are far wealthier; enjoy far more years of formal schooling than their parents and grandparents did, so these declines and these problems are in some ways surprising.

The question is, why care? First, civic engagements, these features that I've described, are important because politics obviously determines who gets what, when and how. Democracy is supposed to promote the interests of the people as a whole, but political institutions are responsive to those who mobilize and act in politics. Secondly, we believe that the quality of democratic governance is improved when citizens make their preferences known. Finally, when important classes or groups of citizens are considerably less active and influential than others, and especially when this is itself the consequence of the design of political institutions, it looks like instead of government by and for the people as a whole, what we have is some people exercising power over other people and the political legitimacy of the system is compromised, and we believe that's where we are as a nation.

So our point isn't that everything about politics is getting worse. Our point is that we can and should do better. In the rest of life, whether it's sports or science or health, Americans expect constant improvement. We shouldn't be so easily satisfied with respect to citizenship.

Is the problem that our knowledge is limited, that we don't know enough to improve the situation? That's a good question for political scientists. Does political science allow us to do no more than bemoan our situation? Do we know enough to diagnose our problems and cast light on solutions? That's the challenge that this book seeks to address. Our aim is not simply to join the chorus of those who chronicle civic decline, the aim is constructive. We believe we can do better.

And our central argument is that levels in distribution of civic activity are themselves an important measure of political artifacts. Patterns of participation are shaped importantly by laws, policies and institutional choices. Of course citizen virtue matters, but citizens' capacities and the level and quality of their political activities are shaped by the institutions within which they live and act, and our

politics turns citizens off by design, whether the design is conscious or not.

If Americans find the presidential primary process long and boring, it's because the process is indeed a lot longer than it should be, and its lengthy and episodic nature discourages sustained attention in political learning. It makes it boring. If Americans find legislative elections, congressional elections, uninteresting, maybe because the redistricting process so rigs elections in favor of incumbents that congressional elections are rarely competitive.

When 50 incumbents ran for reelection in California in 2002, all 50 incumbents won, and in the closest of those contests, the incumbent won with 58 percent of the vote. In 2002, in the congressional midterm elections in general, only 15 of the 435 races were decided by 4 percentage points or less. So why pay attention?

If Americans find partisan politics excessively ideologically nasty, insufficiently focused on practical problem solving, then there's reason to think they're right. American citizens tend towards the middle, but our system empowers the ideological basis of the two

parties who exercise great power at the expense of moderates, intensifying party conflict and making it harder to work across party lines.

And if poorer Americans believe that their local political institutions are incapable of addressing their problems, if better-off Americans seem disconnected from the problems and experiences of poor Americans, this is partly because metropolitan political institutions encourage privileged Americans to move to privileged enclaves that are defined by narrow and exclusive interests, and these institutions defy the promise of public institutions and undermine a sense of shared fate among citizens.

If volunteerism is way up finally, but interest in politics is say down among young people, that's because service learning is too infrequently limited to civic education.

In short, if American civic life is far less vibrant than it should be, if the quality of participation is inadequate, if the distribution of political activity and influence is skewed to the better-off, the responsibility is in substantial measure our own and it's up to us to understand and seek to

correct political institutions that in effect undermine democracy by design.

That's the overall aim of the book. Just as a final point, let me say this book is a collaboration as E.J. mentioned of a diverse array of political scientists, those who are interested in ethics and political theory and those who are interested in empirical evidence and hardheaded analysis, and in effect it's situated in a certain place.

It's often the case that philosophers of democracy, theorists of democracy, but also activists, people who believe in participation, people who are committed to participatory democracy, they offer inspiring, hopeful ideals about democratic aspirations for citizen deliberation and engagement.

On the other hand, if you look at empirical, hardheaded political analysis offered by political scientists and analysts at institutions like this as well, what you find is that much of this empirical literature about actual citizens is just scathing in its depiction of the ignorance and the general incapacity of actual citizens. These two different bodies of work, the hopeful and the inspiring and the hardheaded and the

realistic, create a kind of yawning chasm between what we'd like in terms of ideals and the realities.

If we simply accept the account given by our most tough-minded, sober, empirical colleagues or most-skeptical ones or however you characterize them, then democracy as a system of rule by the people as a whole looks pretty hopeless. We don't underestimate the challenges of making democracy work on the astonishing scale of a nation of 260 million diverse people, but we do insist that the question of whether we should be hopeful or not about the possibility of popular self-rule, about citizens' capacity for self-governance, is not well posed if we simply register and record the shortcomings of citizens operating under deeply flawed institutions.

The question we need to consider is what citizens' capacities would be under well-designed institutions. Our conviction is that the problems of democracy in some measure, this problem of citizen incapacity, should be laid at the feet of poor institutional design, and an important role for political science, an essential role, really, is to seek to understand and help repair faulty statecraft. So

believe that political science casts light, not only political science, we draw on the work of sociologists and even economists occasionally, political science and social science casts light not only on the problems, but on some potential solutions. We describe clearly, I think, and in no technical language the state of our knowledge. We argue that there are things that can and should be done to improve the amount, the quality and the distribution of political and civic activity.

So I'm going to end there. We have 19 distinguished co-authors of wide expertise, and four of them join me here, actually six of them join me here, but four of them will say something about the particular chapters.

MR. DIONNE: I want to thank the two other members of the panel who have agreed to speak later on in the discussion or in response to questions. I'm very sympathetic to this book because I come from Massachusetts, where political participation in certain precincts exceeds 100 percent.

[Laughter.]

MR. DIONNE: We don't believe that someone's death should deprive them of their right to have a

ballot cast in their name. That idea, however, did not appear in this report.

I just want to say, by the way, that in one advertisement for this report, this really doesn't read like a report, there have been some excellent reports we all know, it actually reads like a book. It's an extremely well-written and engaging book, and it's also really well produced.

I am going to introduce the speakers and writers in the order in which they are going to speak, and we have divided it up, this is like a scripture class, we've divided it up by chapter.

Bill Galston is the Saul I. Stern Professor of Civic Engagement and the Director of the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy at the University of Maryland. We are very proud to say that he will join Brookings as a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies on January 1st, and he will be speaking about Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 is so interesting that we divided it in half. Addressing the first half will be Todd Swanstrom. He is a Professor of Public Policy Studies at St. Louis University's College of Public Service. He

is co-author of Place Matters: Metro Politics for the 21st Century.

Also discussing Chapter 3 is Yvette Alex-Assensoh. She is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Indiana University. She is the author of Neighborhood, Family and Political Behavior in Urban America.

Rob Reich is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and Ethics in Society at Stanford University and author of Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in Education.

I'll just take the opportunity now also to introduce Christopher Karpowitz who is a Research Fellow in Democracy and Human Values at Princeton at its Center for Human Values. And Robert Rodgers who is completing his doctorate in politics at Princeton. If you notice a Princeton bias, it may have some connection with my colleague here to my left.

Bill, why don't you start us off, and welcome for the first of many, many, many, and many times at Brookings.

MR. GALSTON: Let me just begin with a brief apology. I will have to leave this panel 10 or 15 minutes early.

I want to call to mind something that Steve Macedo said in his introduction, we are interested in this report in promoting the quantity, quality and equality, or at least distribution, of civic participation.

Chapter 2 deals with national electoral processes, particularly voting, although that's not the only form of political participation that one can imagine or measure. We began by identifying three broad categories of obstacles to the level, the type and the distribution of political participation that seemed desirable.

Number one, characteristics of individuals such as levels of skill, information and motivation. The second obstacle, features of our political institutions that impede participation or raise its costs. The third obstacle, aspects of public culture that tilt against or pull against civic engagement. Our proposals in this chapter are designed to address these obstacles and to

reduce their salience, their impact on individual behavior.

Concerning the characteristics of individuals, we recommend doing better to raise the level of information by, for example, mailing pre-election information about polling places, issues, and sample ballots, to at least all registered voters. There is evidence in this case and lots of others that that will make a significant difference.

With regard to politically relevant skills, we recommend such things as increased and better ESL, English as a second language, classes for immigrants, and also high school classroom-based instruction on the mechanics of voting.

With regard to individual motivation, we recommend restoring something that Steve Macedo noted the lack or decline of, namely, participation oriented civic education as opposed to political science style analysis of institutions and processes. We also recommend greater reliance in campaigns on face-to-face, door-to-door, peer-to-peer campaigning which recent evidence strongly suggests has a powerful motivational

effect. So much concerning the characteristics of individuals.

With regard to institutional structures, our recommendations seek to do three things. First, to reduce the costs of participation. Secondly, to expand the pool of potential participators. Third, to enhance electoral competition. To reduce the costs of participation we propose, among other things, having an Election Day holiday or, alternatively, and timing voting in elections to coincide with weekends or already existing holidays.

We recommend Election Day registration, and we also strongly recommend the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act when it's up for reauthorization in 2007, particularly the sections on bilingual ballots and other language-based forms of assistance.

With regard to expanding the pool of potential voters, we underscore the importance of a strengthened Higher Education Act in linking funds to good-faith efforts by colleges and universities to register their students. And we also make a recommendation that I suspect will be among the more controversial, namely,

that every state should restore felons' voting rights after the completion of their sentences.

With regard to enhancing political competition, we have made a number of recommendations that have already drawn a lot of fire at the American Political Science Association Convention, and if they gain more attention, will gain more fire.

We recognize, for example, that many factors contribute to the decline of competitive congressional districts which Steve Macedo noted, including the geographical sorting out of our population. Still, there is a manmade component to this we believe. For that reason we strongly endorse nonpartisan redistricting commissions which a few states have already adopted and which a number of others are considering. With that reform in place, we recommend changing the ways in which Electoral College votes are awarded so that the statewide winner receives two electoral votes and then the winner of each congressional district within that state receives a vote.

Finally, concerning changing our public culture. We recommend a public campaign along the lines

of smoking and drunk driving campaigns to emphasize participation as a duty along with civic education that is more responsibility oriented and not simply rights oriented. In this cultural venue as well, we recommend public recognition of the importance of the first vote in the form of some sort of civic ritual or ceremony that celebrates and in a way fives moral kudos to people who exercise the franchise for the first time.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very, very much. We'll move now to Chapter 3.

MR. SWANSTROM: In Chapter 3, the American Metropolis, as the saying goes, there is some good news and there is some bad news.

The good news is that in American politics there is an extraordinary range of opportunities to get involved civically at the local level. There are almost 500,000 local elected officials in the United States. There are plenty of openings for people to be engaged in the system. One million people serve on the boards of homeowner associations, a new form of civic involvement at the local level. Approximately 24 percent of Americans belong to local civic association of some

sort. So there is a tremendous variety at the local level to get involved with.

The bad news, however, is that we are very far from realizing their potential not because of the quantity of civic engagement. For the most part with some exceptions here, citizens in fact may see a lot, sometimes feel there are almost too many opportunities, too many burdens of civic engagement, but the main problem here is that the civic engagement that is encouraged at the local level is lacking both in its quality and in its equality as we've noted. It tends to promote a kind of narrow and parochial orientation towards civic engagement and too often the poor are isolated and alienated from meaningful local civic engagement.

What we try to do in this chapter is look at how, as the title of my book put it, place matters, that the way people are distributed across space in American metropolitan areas, the way opportunities and jobs are distributed and the way that is overlain with political institutions and boundaries shapes people's civic engagement, their orientation, their inclination to get involved civically.

Usually in political science this is not a topic that I think has been terribly studied or has gotten a great deal of prominence in the profession, but we feel it's important, and the important point to make here is that this is not inevitable. It probably is inevitable that Americans would spread out into suburban landscapes, but it's not inevitable that those landscapes would be fragmented by a whole range of local governments the way they are in the United States.

In our chapter we say that our central question, we phrased it as follows: How can we reshape local institutions, policies and practices to encourage residents of metropolitan areas to work together especially across geographic, racial, ethnic, class and jurisdictional boundaries? I think the experience of Hurricane Katrina, the tragedy of that, has in some sense exposed some of these issues in American politics, that in the city of New Orleans you had poor and often African American people living in the lowest lying areas, and their political isolation certainly contributed in part probably in the long run to them not having the kind of response that was needed. The levees are obviously a public good that we depend upon, that

everybody depends upon, and they must be stewarded, they must be protected.

E.J. wrote a nice column in the Washington Post about how we are dependent upon government that revealed our need to have things like levees which are almost a metaphor for what we talk about in this chapter.

What I'm going to do is talk about what we call the dilemma or the challenge of scale which is this question that having local, small governments does, other things being equal, encourage civic engagement. On the other hand, local, very small governments cannot engage important issues that mobilize people into politics, and their agendas are stunted. So which way do we go? Do we go local or do we go into larger governments? It's been a perpetual dilemma in American politics back to the Federalist Papers.

Following me, Yvette will talk about what we call the challenge of diversity, that diversity is obviously good at one level by reflecting the kind of issues in American policies and engaging people and creating more competitive politics. On the other hand, it can undermine levels of trust and comfort between people at the local level.

Very quickly, what are the trends in American metropolitan areas that we highlight? Basically, what's happening in the United States is that population is both concentrating and deconcentrating at the same time. The population is moving to metropolitan areas and small town and rural areas are emptying out so that now more than 80 percent of the American population lives in metropolitan areas. On the other hand, our metropolitan areas are thinning out. We're absorbing much more land relative to population, and we're sprawling across the countryside.

The other thing that's going on is tremendous fragmentation in American politics at the local level. We have over 87,000 local governments in the United States. In my region of St. Louis, we have 795 local governments in St. Louis; it's absolutely extraordinary, including 300 general-purpose local governments. I've seen the map that they draw that shows all the various jurisdictions, the fire districts and the sewer districts and everything, and it looks like it was drawn by a drunken spider. You cannot follow the borders. Everything is lying on top of everything else. It's an incredibly complicated system.

What we see here is one of the issues we talk about is the growth in special districts. Special districts are of course governments which serve just one function. They've more than tripled in the past half-century to now we have over 35,000 special districts. The motivation for the special districts was to professionalize government, in some sense to take the politics out of government. But our analysis suggests that far from removing politics, all they've done is make the politics less visible. Often, as Steve mentioned, the turnout in special district elections is 5 percent or lower.

Another trend that we highlight is homeowner's associations which we now have over 250,000 homeowner's associations which are essentially private forms of government in which you have certain obligations attached to your deed, and there are more than a million people serving on their boards. That's a place where people can become civically engaged, but we think it's an overly narrow and parochial civic engagement, and we can talk about that in the Q and A if you want.

Finally, we talk about general purpose local governments and the issue that arise by the kind of

sorting of population that has taken place in the great American exodus of suburbanization.

What's happens is that suburbs are actually very diverse now, suburbia is very diverse, but within suburbs it's relatively homogenous and relatively universe. Some political scientists would argue there's a positive side to this, and there certainly is, because it gives people more choice. When you have 300 local general purpose governments in St. Louis, you have great choice. You don't have that many kinds of detergent to choose from. We have many more choices.

On the other hand, we think there is a serious flaw here in terms of civic engagement. It of course does not serve well the poor who are not mobile and can't take advantage of these choices. It's like they only have the bottom shelf of the grocery store to choose from. Secondly, there are certain issues that cannot be addressed by small governments whether it be air pollution, traffic congestion, concentrated poverty, all sorts of issue that cannot be addressed by local governments.

Our recommendation with regard to this is not to form big, top down regional governments, but to

encourage existing jurisdictions to collaborate and engage with each other, to require them to sit down and address some of these issues that cut across the boundaries of local governments, and to experiment with new forms of regional government in which local governments would be represented themselves in these new forms of collaboration.

Finally, I think one recommendation worth highlighting is that we talk about the need to enforce fair housing laws and to provide a mix of housing that meets the needs of the people who work in that area. So long as we have this kind of segregation across race and class in the United States, local governments, at least suburban local governments, are not really miniature republics as Tocqueville would say where leaders can get training for American politics, they become almost like private interests, and until we can create greater diversity, I think it will be difficult to really make civic engagement at the local level what it can be.

With that, let me turn it over to Yvette.

MR. DIONNE: Although don't you love that notion of the drunken spider? I was trying to think

would the lines look any better if the spider had been sober?

MR. SWANSTROM: No. They'd still be exactly the same.

[Laughter.]

MS. ALEX-ASSENSOH: Good afternoon. I've been sitting all day on planes and cars, and I thank you for indulging me as I stand here to address you.

In American cities, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious as well as lifestyle diversity reflects both the blessing and challenges of American diversity and American democracy.

On the one hand, demographic trends across many regions of America do demonstrate that cities and suburbs contain increasing numbers of racial minorities made up of African Americans, Latinos and Asians, all of whom come from myriad ethnic backgrounds, while the percentages of whites continues to decrease. Although these demographic trends have regional tendencies, the invariable flow of immigrants from Latin America, from Asia, from the Caribbean and Africa, suggest that American metropolitan areas will continue to be increasingly diverse.

As the findings for Chapter 3 illustrate, the blessing of diversity provides an opportunity for a rich intermingling of citizens to deliberate and subsequently shape policy and improve the quality of American life as well as the quality of democracy in our country.

Yet, as Chapter 3 also demonstrates, the unfortunate fact is that in metropolitan areas across America, we have dismissed, ignored and buried the blessing of diversity. That is because research has shown that in the short term, diverse environments are sometimes hotbeds of political conflict. At the same time, research has also shown that homogenous communities, especially those that are economically stable, tend to promote more social trust and ease.

As a nation of cities, we have become too complacent in our respective comfort zones, and this is our challenge. American citizens and governmental units have simply not invested enough time into the worthy effort of facilitating meaningful political deliberation across social, economic, racial, ethnic, religious, and lifestyle cleavages. Instead, our metropolitan areas are largely characterized by racial, ethnic, and class segregation as well as

political fragmentation, a constant theme that is characterized in the book.

These patterns of segregation and fragmentation are not new but historic in nature, dating back in some respects to policies formulated as well as promulgated by our federal government. One recent example of these cleavages is the aftermath of the hurricane-induced floods in New Orleans, Louisiana--Louisiana being my home state--which exposed the existing but often ignored aspects of class and racial cleavages in American cities. The tragedy of New Orleans demonstrates the dangers associated with narrow definitions of political interests and community, as well as the problems that derive from governmental fragmentation whereby precious lives and possessions are lost because governmental units are not equipped to work effectively together.

Certainly there are viable examples of metropolitan areas whereby constituents and governmental units, neighborhood associations and community organizations deliberate meaningfully across

class, racial, and religious lines. However, such deliberations occur too infrequently and they are often no replicated in other metropolitan areas. As a result, democracy in American cities is at risk, because we have not attended sufficiently to managing the tradeoffs associated with size, diversity, and civic engagement in our American cities.

Democracy is also at risk because we have not created the opportunities that facilitate engagement in metropolitan areas, even though research has shown that Americans of all racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds participate when opportunities are perceived to be meaningful and available.

Despite the fact that democracy in American cities is indeed at risk, there is still hope, because as Americans we are blessed with a constitutional democracy that is old enough, tested enough, tried enough, and capable enough to be revived if we are willing to work hard in the following ways. Our recommendations are as follow:

First, since geographic separation reinforces political, economic, and social divisions and

encourages citizens to narrowly define political interests, we must reduce concentrations of rich and poor, as well as the segregation of races.

Secondly, we must provide better opportunities for immigrants who wish to become naturalized citizens in order to participate viably in American politics.

Thirdly, we must encourage citizens to participate directly, actively, and expectantly in decisions that affect their lives.

And finally, we must devise structures of metropolitan governance that overcome the fragmented nature of many American metropolitan areas without suppressing opportunities for local civic engagement.

Thank you.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very much.

This chapter, by the way, is really important because I think we tend so often to look at presidential elections and national elections when in fact participation for the most part, with the exception of a few parts of the country, is much lower at the local level where, presumably, people might

think they could exercise more control. So thank you both.

And Rob is going to take us to the community and not-for-profit sector.

MR. REICH: The fourth and final chapter is on associational life in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector. At the heart of civic engagement is associational life, and the chapter that I'm going to say a few things about discusses volunteering, the nonprofit and philanthropic sector, and the potential of national service programs as well.

This chapter sails somewhat against the prevailing tide within scholarly discussions of civic engagement kicked off by Robert Putnam several years ago. The general picture, of course, is of an overall decline in civic engagement. But we put our fingers on and focus on two of the more promising trends within associational life--the rise of volunteering and the continuing vitality and burgeoning growth in the nonprofit sector.

So a couple of data points. Americans volunteer, 84 million of them a year in some capacity.

If there's any warming story to grow out of the Katrina disaster, it's certainly the response around many parts of the country, both in terms of money and time that people have volunteered. And the nonprofit sector in the United States is growing at a very quick rate, more than 1.5 million registered nonprofits now; of that number, more than 1 million are public charities.

A couple of things about the recommendations. The aspiration here was to say something about how the institutional arrangements that structure volunteering and the nonprofit sector could be used to get more politically out of those two areas of life. So with respect to philanthropy and public charities, we ask that the IRS offer an explicit definition of what's call the substantial standard for legislative and grassroots advocacy, clarifying exactly under what conditions nonprofits can engage in political activity, especially in light of the fact that the large number of public charities that exist that deliver social services have as their primary clientele those Americans who are on the bad end, the

less hopeful end of the distribution of political engagement. So since they're already involved in public charities, in nonprofits, is there a way that nonprofits can be a vehicle for them for more engagement. And we also ask that the IRS clarify and make public the so-called H standard that allows for a certain amount of political advocacy.

Second area, nonprofit accountability in governance, we recommend that the institutions maximize the transparency of finances and governance of all types of nonprofits and to ensure that the boards of directors are broadly representative of the community.

And finally, with respect to national service, we recommend--and here we're one voice among many--that the U.S. government adequately funds the National Service Program; that the government ties student aid, in certain respects, to public service; and, most importantly, or very importantly, that volunteer programs are structured so that political engagement isn't directly tied to them.

Now you can go to the slide.

One of the more curious trends you might think about, especially for those of us on the panel who teach in higher education, it's a well-known fact that rates of volunteering, especially among young people, are going up. Here's a graph that shows the number of incoming college freshmen who report having done volunteer work in high school. You can see that trend line going up since the 1990s at an astonishingly high rate of about 80 percent. On the other hand, you also see graphs that indicate a decline in political interest or political activity.

And so one question the political scientists and others have begun to come to terms with is whether or not volunteering--working at the soup kitchen, doing tutoring at the elementary school, et cetera--is somehow a substitute for political engagement. And we find that volunteer activities, service learning programs, even when mandatory, if they are well-organized--and in the report we detail what better rather than worse organization is--can in fact have healthy and substantial effects on political engagement. So we don't want to suggest that the

relationship here is one of substitution, but rather that volunteer activities can be a harbinger of better and more L: engagement over time, especially amongst that sector of Americans who participate least--young people.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very, very much.

Did I just do something? A light just went out. Oh, the board, okay. I thought we were shedding light here, and then some of the light disappeared.

I want to make two quick points and I want to open it up to the audience right away. I have a long list of questions which I will keep going back to.

For myself, I studied this report a lot and I find myself in utter agreement with almost all of the recommendations. There are two--one I take exception to and one I still don't understand, but Rob, I don't want you to have to explain it all. The one I don't understand is this H business and the IRS. I have a feeling there are some hidden issues under there that I don't understand.

The other, of course, is the question of moving to the election of the president through

congressional district electors. My own view is that would actually substantially increase the chances of someone winning the popular vote and losing in the Electoral College. We did that once. That's enough for a lifetime, at least for me. And I think there are alternatives.

But I salute the report for raising it, because the report is absolutely right that the current configuration of the Electoral College really discourages political participation. When you wake up on Election Day in Washington, D.C., I can absolutely assure you that you have absolutely no doubt how Washington, D.C. is going to vote. You don't need to be a political scientist to know that is a kind of disincentive toward casting your ballot.

So I think this is a debate that should be begun and anyone else who wants to raise it--this was probably the recommendation that drew the most fire at the political science convention. After thinking about it, I decided you still did a good thing because we hadn't heard this argued in so long that it's very good that you provoked us all that way.

Who would like to kick off our discussion here?

QUESTION: My name is Ed Powers. I really liked everything that I've heard so far, but it struck me early on, the first speaker Steve, in portraying that to a large degree there's less interest, there's less interest in the public in presidential elections and the conventions and all that kind of stuff. And I thought back, that I've been following this stuff about 50 years. I first got involved in the early '50s and I've been interested ever since. And there's no way that I can relate to that, that there's really less interest now than there was then. I think the presidential elections kind of hop up and down, but percentages--Truman's percentage was probably bordering around 50.

So I think that's hopped up and down. You would have thought that perhaps the conventions are too long and boring now--

MR. MACEDO: No, not the conventions, the presidential primary process. The presidential selection process.

QUESTION: Well, its still--I mean, how does that compare to the public interest in the back room, smoke-filled rooms?

And in terms of--one other point about maybe nasty politics is influencing people nowadays. There was really nothing nastier than the McCarthy era in the '50s in terms of politics.

So I just don't quite get that as a rationale, even though I believe everything that should be done here should be done in the best interests. But are worse off than we were in most of these areas 30, 40, 50 years ago? It's not clear to me as an observer.

MR. MACEDO: I'll let Bill say something about the national election turnout. I'll just say something about the presidential selection process. And it's a good point, what about comparisons with the point at which citizens participated less, in which party professionals played more a role.

Let's just think about the presidential election process. This should be an educative experience in which citizens learn things through campaigns. And they do pay attention in January and

February and early March, in the early primaries and so on. The problem is they have a long hiatus after that if the nominee is selected in March. It's a long process of forgetting for citizens, who just forget a lot of what they learn. And it's much harder to hold candidates responsible for the positions they do take.

So this is a--it seems that we draw on the work of Thomas Patterson, his book here, but it does seem to us to be a--

Whatever the comparison to the 1950s is, normally when we think about cars or health or something, saying we're no worse off than we were in the 1950s is not taken to be a ringing endorsement. So this is certainly an area where, while we know there are political hurdles to reform in this area, this is clearly an area where we can think that there would be considerable improvements if this process were shortened so that there weren't such an absurdly long period in which--

And again, part of the problem here is we have a tendency to blame citizens: Why don't citizens pay more attention? Why don't they find it more

interesting? And so on. But if a system is crazily organized, in a way, and if it has this episodic and excessively long system, in part we should blame the process and find it understandable that citizens who have some reasonable level of attention and interest but have other things to do will not benefit from the campaign, will not find it as educative a process, and will not be as good for holding candidates accountable and for learning about positions as they would if it were more sensibly organized.

I think that's the crucial point. Particular comparisons with points in the past are also important, but the question is: are we doing as well as we should reasonably expect to do, I think is the crucial point.

MR. DIONNE: Could I parenthetically--I want to turn to Bill, but I also want to ask a question. How much of that difference between 1956 and now can be explained by the fact that we broadened the electorate, we broadened the eligible electorate, and in particular we put the voting age from 21 down to 18. And we know that the 18-to-24 group has always

been a lower participating group. It's when people are most mobile; there are a lot of different reasons why young people don't vote as much as older people. And we've effectively doubled the size of that particular group, more or less.

So I'm curious how much that and other expansions of the franchise--we made the denominator bigger than it used to be, which on the whole is a good thing. In fact, as far as I can tell, it's entirely a good thing, but it could have a depressing effect on that number.

MR. GALSTON: Well, it could, but there are so many things that should have pulled in the other direction. For example, the median years of education have gone way up. Political information available to average voters effortlessly, much more diverse, much more pervasive. It's now 24/7. The enfranchisement of African Americans, so many of whom were disenfranchised, and that was a much more a part of the denominator than it was the numerator. I could go--

MR. DIONNE: Although did they count--see, that's what I'm concerned about. I think they were so disenfranchised, they never even counted in the denominator, and so therefore, you know--because they weren't eligible to vote.

MR. GALSTON: Yeah, it's part of the denominator. Eligible electorate. Sure.

MR. MACEDO: They were eligible.

MR. GALSTON: Sure.

MR. DIONNE: I'm pretty sure a lot of these studies kept them out of -- because they weren't eligible to vote.

MR. GALSTON: If the denominator is voting-age population, then they are part of the voting-age population.

At any rate, if you aggregate all of the trends of American society over the past 50 years, there are many more that should have pulled participation up than should have pulled it down. And that makes it analytically all the more puzzling that it has gone down.

Now, to your question specifically, you're right about 1948, but you're not right about 1952, 1956, 1960, 1964, or '68. It was a two-decade period during which what I regard--perhaps because I grew to maturity in it--the beginning of the modern age, during which the normal level of political participation was at a point that we reach only at very exception moments, like the bitterly contested election of 2004. That, I think, requires some attention, that requires some explanation, and it also suggests that there is nothing about contemporary society in principle that makes it impossible to reach those levels of participation again, particularly given the strong correlation between levels of education and levels of participation.

So I take your point that you can certainly find points in the 20th century when levels of participation were about where they were in the depths of the 1996 and 2000 elections, but I don't think we should take that as our base line.

MR. DIONNE: Could I ask you a quick question, also on what the gentleman raised? You worked on a lot of political campaigns.

MR. GALSTON: Yes.

MR. DIONNE: How realistic is a call for shortening the campaign, and how would you actually do it if you could wave a magic wand, even if it isn't realistic?

MR. GALSTON: Well, what we talked about, if memory serves, is compressing the presidential primary period, where you have an early rush to judgment followed by what some have called the silent spring of politics, and a period during which newspaper coverage of candidate positions subsides to zero at a time when it actually might start to make some difference. And so having your first primary election in January and the general election in November is a formula for peaks and valleys of public attention. And a more compressed period, which would require some cooperation from the political parties, I think would be all to the good. And it is not clear to me--I mean, this is part of a longer discussion, but it is

not clear to me why the first presidential primary is or has to be in late January or early February.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you.

Well, let's bring a couple of people in at a time.

QUESTION: My name is Jim Colmoos [ph].

You have looked at pretty much the kind of process/infrastructure issues that are impediments to participation. I'm wondering if there is something else at work here, too, and I'd appreciate your thoughts, is that the rise of conservative thinking and influence in our political discourse really has a focus on anti-government, anti-tax, small-is-better, get-government-out-of-my-hair, and so as a result maybe a lot of people are taking that message one step further and saying if it's this bad, why should I participate.

Have you any comment on that particular train of thinking?

MR. MACEDO: That's a great question. Somebody I know has a T-shirt that says "Don't vote, it only encourages them."

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: Two questions, first an open-ended one and then a precise one.

What did you choose not to include in the book? You've got a lot of recommendations there, but I would not say that they're radical recommendations. They're fairly safe compared to last time the APSA did that, where they went out on a limb and did something radical.

MR. MACEDO: Maybe you answered the question.

QUESTION: You could have proposed a change in the electoral system.

Which brings me to my second question? Some people believe that, say, proportional voting would really enhance civic equality. I didn't hear that type of recommendation. In other words, our electoral system tends to oppose the very values that you're seeking to achieve. Did you discuss that? And why did you discard that? What do you think about that particular argument, which I hear quite frequently?

MR. MACEDO: For the political scientists in the audience, it sounds like he read EE

Schattschneider and the Mobilization of Bias. Wanting to know what was kept off the agenda is a more interesting question. I think that's a great question. The two questions, actually, fit together. Do you want to start -- and also our colleagues who haven't joined us yet?

MR. : I'll make a quick comment--and your question about the sort of ideological attack on government, let's say, or the tendency to view government as the problem not the solution, and all of that.

At the local level, it's really kind of a different phenomenon. It's not so much that there's been some sustained ideological attack on government. There's been an effort to bring more private-market-like processes at work in local government, and some of that, I think, is very healthy. I think there's a place for choice, a place for vouchers, a place for contracting out, and a place for these private efforts. But in the case of local government, I think it really has carried over to treat general purpose local governments almost as if they were a private

government. In other words, in many metropolitan areas, if you have enough money, you can afford to go to a certain suburb and have your children in a very well-funded, well-performing school system, but it's almost like a private school system that way.

So we have a lot of choices in American metropolitan areas. In some sense, we've tried educational vouchers for decades now and what we've found is we have a kind of sorting going on, a kind of class sorting.

So I do think that there is a kind of private--you know, the private methods of decision-making have penetrated into the local level, including homeowners associations, all these kinds of phenomena, which I think have not cultivated voice. They've cultivated exit over voice, to use Hershman's distinction, that people, when you're dissatisfied with things, you get out, go to another place. I would never want a system where you didn't have the right to leave. On the other hand, the fact that we have privileged exit so much and not really nurtured voice the way we could, I think is a problem.

MR. DIONNE: That's very powerful. We have vouchers distributed by real estate agents, is what it amounts to in the education system.

Yvette, do you have a thought on this?

Who else wants to come in? I'm curious what you left off. I was thinking, inspired by the gentleman, you don't--compulsory voting. Did you talk about that? Proportional or single transferable vote system. Mail ballots. None of those are in here. Was there any discussion of any of those?

MR. : There was discussion of all of them. And so I want to distinguish between what was on the agenda and what made it into the book. And we had very vigorous arguments in the subcommittee and the full committee as to what recommendations should be included and which not.

We do talk about mail ballots as a possibility. And we note with interest that a former president of the American Political Science Association less than 10 years ago did recommend mandatory voting. We go on to cite a lot of political science literature that suggests that there may be

downsides as well as upsides to mandatory voting, and in the end we returned a Scotch verdict of Not Proved. That being the case, we didn't go there.

I could give you similar footnotes to each one of the points that you raised. We tried, for the most part, to ground our recommendations on something approaching a consensus among political scientists. We didn't always succeed, and where we didn't, we reproduced the debates but we did not offer concrete recommendations. And mandatory voting is a classic example of that. I am personally in favor of it. And, you know, I read the evidence somewhat differently, but -- my colleagues that that was the right way to go.

MR. DIONNE: Any other thoughts either on the ideological or the--

MR. : Well, the ideological point, if the anti-government ideology was demobilizing, then the Republicans should be pretty demobilized. But that doesn't seem to be the case. Republicans have been pretty mobilized.

MR. DIONNE: That's an excellent empirical point.

MR. : Thank you.

MR. DIONNE: This gentleman over here--wait, that lady was waiting. The lady in black. And then that lady over there, and then I'll go over to this side again.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Sana Saffee [ph]. I'm a recent graduate from the master's program at Georgia Tech. I wanted to thank you all for your findings.

I have two points that I would like to make. I think that one thing is that you've mentioned that there's an institutional argument here, the institutions aren't organized well, and they aren't representative. But I think the real question is the norms behind the institutions are kind of what we need to look at, maybe more of a constructivist look at what's going on at the local level of American politics.

I think that Mr. Reich noticed that the volunteering had--more students were volunteering than

they were interested in political activities. And I think the reason is because they see an immediate result from that, they get immediate satisfaction from that. But most people I think that you would talk to either don't know about what's going on, because there's not enough information on it, or they say what's the point, I have a wasted vote. Like this gentleman was noticing, the [inaudible] system isn't as effective as maybe a single transferable vote or the proportional representation.

So maybe there needs to be an electoral reconstruction based on the norms that include the poor, the unable, and the people that right now we call unwilling. And I think the reason that they're unwilling is because of this lack of results that they can see from their participation.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very much. Rob, if you could hold for a second. There was somebody right behind there. The service point is very good. I'd also like Bill to give us his duty lecture that I've heard that's very good--a lecture, in this case, I admire good lectures. That's a positive. Over here.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Katie [inaudible]. I'm an intern here at Brookings and a student at UC Berkeley.

I was wondering if you had considered new forms of civic engagement facilitated by a new media. I'm thinking particularly of the proliferation of Internet blogs and electronic action groups which have been sort of revolutionized by the Move-On model. I known Robert Putnam actually considers this to be part of the civic disengagement, but it seems to me that the technologies and the uses of this technology have changed rapidly in recent years and perhaps permit new forms of civic engagement.

I was just wondering if you had considered that.

MR. DIONNE: Katie, thank you.

Rob, do you want to go, and then anyone else who wants to chime in.

MR. REICH: Sure. Two quick responses to the first question. As a political theorist you won't get any argument from me about the importance of focusing on the norms behind the institutions. There's, I

think, an admirable attempt in this book to show the relevance for political theory to institutional design. These are not separate questions. We try to bring, the authors try to bring the best of our knowledge with respect to institutions to bear on questions of values and norms.

The service question, again I'll just reemphasize that the data appear to be telling at first glance. It may seem as if there's political disengagement and instead engagement with volunteering because, as you say, there's an immediate payoff. But as I mentioned, but only briefly, I think well-designed programs of service learning, well-designed national service programs, could have a much better payoff, a much larger effect of political engagement if they were well-designed. And again, that's of a piece with the larger argument of the book that institutional design is of great importance.

MR. DIONNE: Bill?

MR. GALSTON: Yeah, two quick comments. First of all--and this doesn't make much of an appearance in the book--there is a substantial literature on who's

participating in these new ways, and it looks as though people who feel especially intensely about politics are especially likely to be part of these Internet politics networks. So it allows that intensity to be more effective in politics, but the evidence at this point suggests that it's not widening the circle of participation. Those who already feel very strongly are doing it.

Now, there's nothing in principle to say that that may not change over the next 10, 20 years as this becomes normalized. And I certainly hope that the circle does widen, but there's not a lot of evidence for it right now.

As to the first questioner, you made a very important point with which I agree completely, but I will turn it on its head. I absolutely, having studied this in a research center I direct, I absolutely agree that young people are attracted to volunteering because of the immediacy and the rapidity of the effect as compared to working through political institutions.

Well, let me introduce a reality principle here. Politics is slow work. It is the antithesis of instant gratification. Max Weber, the great sociologist--

MR. DIONNE: I knew you were going to say this.

[Laughter.]

MR. GALSTON: --called politics, you know the slow boring of hard boards. He's right. And so let me inveigh for a minute against the culture of instant gratification. If instant gratification is what you want, then electoral politics is not what you want. And I don't know of any way of squaring that circle. I think we need a more patient, far-sighted culture than we have, and everything in American culture today tends towards impatience and short-sightedness. That's a deep problem for politics, and I have no solution for that.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you.

Yvette? Or Todd?

MR. SWANSTROM: Given--not to undercut Bill's point, but--

MR. DIONNE: That's okay. You can.

MR. SWANSTROM: --but with regard to immediate gratification--

MR. DIONNE: It's a free country.

MR. SWANSTROM: Yeah, that's right. What the heck. You know, I think people are looking for results, and electoral politics does take a while to show whether one can have an impact. But we talk about in the book the political participation that can take place between elections, which is to say, in the area of urban politics, there's a whole range of neighborhood government, community development corporations, neighborhood associations. Perhaps the best example is community policing, where we talk about the co-production of local services, services that are produced through the cooperation with citizens who can then feel that those services are much more effective because they participate. The research on community policing in Chicago and involvement in school reforms in Chicago shows that low-income people in fact participate at just a high a rate, if not a higher rate, than middle-income

citizens, suggesting that this is an arena where they see, when there's an immediate impact, they are willing to get involved.

And in fact, you know, beginning in the '60s, these experiments were begun in neighborhood governance and they've kind of moved off the radar screen, but they're still sort of bubbling along out there. And I think they need to be recognized and the best examples brought forth. We don't over-promise what they can deliver, but I think, once again, if nurtured, and if best practices could be brought out, these do offer a promise of more civic engagement at the local level with some immediate results.

MS. ALEX-ASSENSOH: I think it's important to consider the myriad ways that people can participate in politics. And indeed, it's relevant also to look at the importance of the Internet in that respect. At the same time, we have to recognize that there are inequalities that will be exacerbated when people participate in those ways, because we know that socioeconomic and racial differences exist with respect to computer ownership. So the question for

political scientists, then, becomes how that affects our deliberation process and the extent to which those people who are excluded will then be able to participate in other ways that are equally as meaningful.

MR. DIONNE: Let me just throw a personal question to you, Steve that comes from [inaudible].

Steve and I grew up near each other, in towns very close to each other, although he's lucky enough to be younger. And where we come from, I'm from a place called Fall River, Massachusetts; he's from New Bedford. And these were towns which had low average education levels, on the whole lower income levels, with extraordinary levels of political participation. It's always struck me that there was partly an ethic of it, there was partly a matter of one ethnic group not being able to understand the other, and so you vote for your guy instead of their guy--that was always part of it, too. But there was also a sense that a lot of sociability was organized around politics and politics was organized around sociability. I mean, I think I am sitting here

because I grew up thinking politics was fun. And I am perverse enough still to think so.

I'm curious how much in your deliberations, how much of that came up. Because when I say the very idea that politics is fun, a lot of people would look at me funny. And yet that was not a perverse or unusual assumption where we were and in a lot of other parts of the country.

MR. MACEDO: Yeah, well, Massachusetts politics is full of personalities and intensive conflict, and I certainly remember that from the local level.

I mean, the fun part, we didn't exactly think of how to make politics more fun. That would be Chapter 6 in the second education. But we did focus on ways in which it's a lot harder than it should be. So for instance, Americans have to vote far more frequently than citizens in other countries. We have lots more elections. Citizens go to the polls far-- where we have staggered elections, spring elections for local offices and so on. Now, there are some tradeoffs in those sorts of things. We make the local

elections coincide with state and national elections. Some citizens will come to the polls who aren't motivated specifically by the local election. But nevertheless we judged on balance it would be better to have more concurrent elections.

So one of the things we do focus on is--[inaudible]'s last chapter in his book "Cultural Wars" is terrific. His worry about participation is that if you put a lot of burdens on citizens, it's going to be the cranks and the zealots that show up and exercise a lot of political power. That's important. That means that you have to try to organize politics in a way that it's relatively user friendly, that citizens aren't over-burdened, and that it's realistic to expect citizens to show up so that you'll tend to get a representative sample showing up so that you'll tend to get voters who represent the middle of the political spectrum.

So it's true that there are sort of more radical reforms that we didn't focus on, including proportional representation. We tried to stick within the parameters of our politics--you know, basic

political institutions and some political judgment--but we do spend a lot of time trying to think about ways in which the burdens of citizenship can be made realistic so that more citizens will get involved.

MR. DIONNE: Sir?

QUESTION: Thanks, E.J. Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report. Two things--one an observation and then second a question.

The observation that I would make is that whenever I find myself in conversations of this sort, meaning on this subject matter, I'm reminded of that elegant observation some decades ago by Sam Goldwyn. When asked about the movie business, he said if people won't go to the box office, you can't stop them.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: And it occurs to me that one of the things that we never talked about but has some role here is that among other ways of looking at politics in America today is its pretty bad theater. That's the observation.

The question is this.

MR. DIONNE: That's why actors started going into politics.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: And when it isn't such bad theater, we get blips on the radar screen.

The question is this. In looking in that panoply of recommendations that range from, you know, make election day a holiday or a weekend, to fair housing, to you name it, I was thinking to myself, What is it that will keep this effort--not just the book, but keep this book from being credenza ware? And was any thought given in this process to, if you take each of these recommendations, what is it that needs to happen to enact or enable these things? What's the degree of difficulty and who's going to do the work?

MR. DIONNE: That's a great question. I want everybody to think about this. Actually these guys are exhausted after two years and they never want to look at this-- No, that's not true, but this was a lot of work. But I think that's an excellent question. By the way, your Sam Goldwyn reminded me the goal of

this is in the Yogi Berraism, Nobody goes to that restaurant anymore, and it’s too crowded.

QUESTION: Hi. I'm Nancy Tate. I'm with the League of Women Voters. I'm very happy to know that the Political Science Association is going to take some positions on reforms and improvements. It's a long time since 1950, or whenever.

So my question is really another implementation question, and that is what, if anything, specifically is the American Political Science Association going to do about these recommendations--or is that mostly in the book?--of those of you on the committee? So it's sort of a what-next-step for this reform agenda?

MR. DIONNE: Actually they're going to assign the responsibility to the League of Women Voters, I think.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: Hi. Debbie Chasman [ph] of George Mason University. I'd like you to comment on to what extent participation may be lower because citizens believe that they can't affect important decisions

through participation in the political process because of the growing power of PACs, lobbyists, and lots of money. And insofar as that may be a factor, how do your recommendations deal with that?

MR. DIONNE: Those are great questions. And we will have time for one more round.

Who wants to start off, I think with the implementation question, and that's an excellent question, too.

MR. GALSTON: Well, since I have to dash out the door, let me very briefly comment.

Linking the Fall River-New Bedford question to Mr. Mitchell's first question, and that is that--and there's actually been a very good book written on this subject. Politics as entertainment stood out when other forms of entertainment were much less well-developed than they are now. And so politics as entertainment now encounters a lot more competition than it used to. And I do think that that has an effect on political participation, all other things considered.

MR. DIONNE: And by the way, I must admit that I think that's even true in Fall River and New Bedford at this point.

MR. GALSTON: I'll bet it is.

Secondly, with regard to the implementation issue, as Steve Macedo said in his introductory remarks, we are of the association but we're not representing the association. This book does not have the formal imprimatur of the American Political Science Association, and the association will certainly not be in the business of "implementing" its recommendations.

In the first instance, implementation begins with public discussion, and we're hoping to spark that. And then, you can go through each recommendation and figure out who the principal agent of change has to be. It's going to vary from different levels of government, the public schools in the case of civic education, and the media in the case of public education campaigns. So there's no single answer to that question. Each one of these will require a different form of public action. But

without public interest sparked through public discussion, nothing will happen.

MR. DIONNE: I think you just go the job, is what that means.

Anyone else want to--

MR. : Chris could say something about money and politics.

MR. KARPOWITZ: Well, I guess what I would say about money and politics is the APSA has also done another report on money and politics that I suppose we would defer to, and I think that's exactly right.

In terms of what needs to happen, I suppose what I would add to Bill's comment is that one of the things we hope from this book is that civic engagement becomes a value that is considered by policymakers, that it's on the table as something that can be managed in better and worse ways and that can be affected by the actions of policymakers. So I hope, if nothing else, we've put that on the table as something to be considered as policymakers are making decisions.

MR. DIONNE: I was just thinking as you were asking the question, paying people to vote might be a more efficient disbursement of all the money than--in terms of just if your goal was to increase participation. But that's also a very old-fashioned and, I guess, illegal idea.

There were several hands up here. If you could come in, the gentleman over there, the lady in the back, and then I think we're going to have to close it down. Please.

QUESTION: My name is Andrea Meyerhoff [sp]. I'm with [inaudible] Group here in Washington.

MR. DIONNE: With the...?

QUESTION: [Inaudible] Group. Here in Washington.

I am hearing some very compelling observations and recommendations, and I thank the panel. It's very interesting. I can't help but think of my own professional area, which is the natural sciences, where I think the gap between the academy and public life is much, much wider than what I'm seeing here today. And particularly in the last several months,

any number of issues in public life have really cried out for scientific expertise and scientific input.

I wonder if in the process of this panel's efforts if you all have looked at that in any way. Where do the academics in some of the other areas of expertise fit into this spectrum of civic engagement?

MR. DIONNE: That's a great question. Thank you.

QUESTION: My name is Joe Minerik [ph] from the Committee for Economic Development.

To answer an earlier question, how is this going to happen, I think the answer is how any reform in a political system can happen? I think it will happen the same way that reform in some of our problems in some of our economic institutions is going to happen, which is to say "in crisis." And I say that because, having heard walking in the door that the group at the dais in the course of its deliberations considered talking even to some economists, I felt like I had to defend my profession.

[Laughter.]

QUESTION: But I've heard two things that sounded very different from the panel so far. One was--unfortunately, that Bill had to leave--raising the point that the Internet spreading the communications might widen the circle some day of people involved in politics hasn't happened yet, and he hoped it would. The second was the recommendation in the book that we should emphasize door-to-door politics because that motivates people better.

And I'm wondering isn't it possible that what we get over the Internet and in instant communications is most often the person who speaks first and loudest and is sometimes the coarsest and sometimes the most ill-considered of opinion? Is it possible that instant communications is turning people off to politics and creating some of the lack of civility that might cost people their interest in the political process?

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very much.

I want to include one more. As somebody who gets a lot of angry e-mails from readers, I'm sympathetic to that last point.

I just want to throw in a thought before we go on, just on the Internet question. The meet-ups that have been organized are a way in which the Internet--and I agree, I think it was Bill who said it's probably the case that you are still bringing in the most intense. But that is clearly a case where the Internet has been promising in pulling people out of isolation and into community--God; I haven't quoted the Port Huron statement in a long time. But that's what has happened through the Internet, so it's not entirely simply a story that only a narrow pool of activists--it is at least possible in principle that this could happen with the broader community. But I've jumped out of my moderator role.

QUESTION: Hi. Susan Hyde. I'm here at Brookings as a research fellow in governance studies. I just had a quick question about something that I thought would come up in relation to barriers to participation that have sort of institutional fixes. And that is maladministration of elections because it's done at a local level. And that's something that--I come at this from a perspective of

international election observation and universal standards for democratic election, and that's definitely cited the most frequently as something that the U.S. does wrong relative to other countries. And that can be correlated with income level and that sort of thing. So I just wondered if that came up.

MR. DIONNE: That's a great question, too.

Should I sort of start at the end and let everybody come in on this question? Or do you want to say anything on any of those?

MR. KARPOWITZ: Let me just say one thing about the Internet. I think some of the most interesting work, to continue the Princeton connection, is by a Princeton graduate student named Matt Heinman [sp], who's done a great dissertation on the Internet and politics. One of the things he finds is that, although there is this democratic potential of the Internet that right now we're certainly quite a ways from it. And in fact, the very structure of the Internet--things like Google search engines--tends to concentrate our attention on a small number of sites. The blogosphere, for example, is dominated by a small

number of writers who tend to be quite elite, in fact, somewhat opposite of what we normally think of when we think of the democratic potential of that form of communication.

I think in general our report is, as you point out, quite positive about face-to-face, door-to-door sorts of politics. It really does seem to make a big difference.

MR. SWANSTROM: My concern with regard to the Internet is it has this sorting effect. You know, 20, 30 years ago we all watched the same evening news and you got to work the next day and you talked about this, and there was some engagement across issues and across different groups of people. But now increasingly people get their news from niche Internet sources that allow them to, I think--Sunstein has written a book called "Republic.com," which discusses this. So in some ways it's parallel to our discussion of the kind of sorting and lack of diversity in local governments.

Just a quick comment on the maladministration of elections. Elections in the United States are

controlled at the state and local level. Counties usually administer elections. For example, there is no national database on elections. You'd think that this would be--you know, election results would be electronically stored and we could, as political scientists we could examine them at the local level and break them down by precinct. Uh-uh. It doesn't exist because, you know, you have all these counties across the United States.

To get at the sub-county level and to have--you know, just from a research point of view, it seems ridiculous that we as a 21st century nation don't have the results of elections recorded electronically for scholars to study.

MS. ALEX-ASSENSOH: In terms of the roles of various individuals in rectifying some of these issues and problems that we've highlighted in the book, I'd like to point out that we're sitting before an audience of people who have access to the media. And we're at a time in America where one of our major cities is faced with a great crisis, with a book of recommendations that are applicable to those crises.

So in terms of input and in terms of helping and resolving some of these issues, one of the things that we can do is make sure that the word gets out that the recommendations that have been made, that the political scientists who do work in these areas are consulted in times of crises, in issues of maladministration of elections.

So this report is important in this respect and I think all of us play an important role in making sure that those findings are taken seriously.

MR. DIONNE: Amen. Thank you.

MR. MACEDO: Just one other point about feasibility, enactments, and so on. A year ago, when we had a-- Oops. Talk about feasibility.

MR. DIONNE: This was put together by FEMA. I'm sorry.

[Laughter.]

MR. MACEDO: We had a meeting and we highlighted--there was one recommendation that had to do with national electoral process that we could especially highlight, so what would it be, and it was nonpartisan redistricting. We feel that the lack of

competitiveness in congressional elections has a consequence. And the craziness of letting the incumbents draw the district lines would be the one thing that we would highlight.

But then everybody else said you're absolutely right, that would be terrific, but also impossible.

Well, then, about a month later, Arnold Schwarzenegger comes out for it. And just in today's New York Times, in Ohio various groups are calling for a variety of reforms having to do with the administration of elections but also nonpartisan redistricting reform.

So I think, you know, we're educators, maybe have something to do with writing and publicizing and so on, but leadership has got to come from politics and from potential leaders who can exercise some power. Who knows where it will come from? We're not experts on that.

MR. : Back to the point on the Internet, one of the things that is clear at this stage is it's so early on in the process that we don't really know exactly what the consequences are of the

Internet in terms of civic engagement. Todd mentioned the Sonstein book. Chris also mentioned Matt Heinman's work at Arizona State. They disagree. So it's unclear at this stage what the Internet is going to do. But what is clear is that we're open to alternative avenues, alternative ideas to spur civic engagement.

One of the things that we discuss in the book is new deliberative opportunities. There's a lot of discussion right now about these. These are the types of things that we are embracing. Our book's not the final say on any of these. There are a number of issues that we didn't cover that we would have liked to cover; either the political science research isn't out there yet or we couldn't come to consensus among ourselves. But the hope is to spur discussion, get you all talking about civic engagement and get some reforms implemented in the long run.

MR. REICH: Just one final quick thought on implementation. The title of the book, "Democracy at Risk," is no accident. It's an echo, of course, of the famous 1983 report, "A Nation at Risk," on the

plight of American schools in the early '80s, which had a galvanizing effect on public policy. You can trace the No Child Left Behind Act directly back to the 1983 Nation at Risk report. Now, if anyone knows the formula for actually leading to such change from a book or a commission, we welcome hearing about it. But at the very least, we aspire to actual change rather than just considering ourselves removed academics whose only responsibility is to work things out in theory, analyze the data, and then sit back and let the rest of the world do with it what it wishes.

MR. DIONNE: Thank you very much.

I just want to say three quick things. First, I want to salute the person who raised the whole issue of electoral administration. We've had two elections in a row now where problems came right at us in the face. We can argue about what happened in Ohio this time; we have no doubt about what happened in Florida the last time. And there is something badly wrong there. I think that would be a useful area of study.

Second point, just--the lady raised the question of professional associations. I'm going to

do something I very rarely do, which is to say something nice about George Bush's campaign last year. And the nice thing I'm going to say about George Bush's campaign is that one of the smart things they did is to figure out how to organization through institutions of civil society. And Democrats used to be very good at that and are in certain sectors still good. The labor movement and the African American church are still areas of strong civic as well as political engagement on the Democratic side.

What the Republicans did in the last campaign is they organized the conservative churches directly; they didn't leave it to the Christian Coalition. They organized business groups, they organized gun clubs. And I think there is--and this goes to your professional associations--I think we may be seeing a kind of lack of fit between the political process and our broader civic life, and that I think there are some lessons to be taken out of this last campaign. Obviously, from my point of view I would hope that the liberal side of the political spectrum learns some political lessons from what Bush did. But I do think

that is really worthy of study because it was a very smart and, in its broad sense, a civic thing to do.

The last thing I want to say, in closing, is I want to thank our entire panel and in particular Steve. One of the co-authors of this study, Wendy Raun [sp] and I became friends at a lunch that Sheila Mann organized some years ago, when we both realized that we both believed that one of the problems with political science is it is often one long argument against political engagement. You know, political science showing that it's not worth the time to vote, that the system is hopelessly corrupt, that it can't be changed. And so I want to salute all the people who worked on this project for kind of switching, if you will, the mobilization of bias within political science in favor of broader participation, democratic participation. That is already a good thing.

Thank you all very much.

[Applause.]

[END OF TAPED RECORDING.]

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