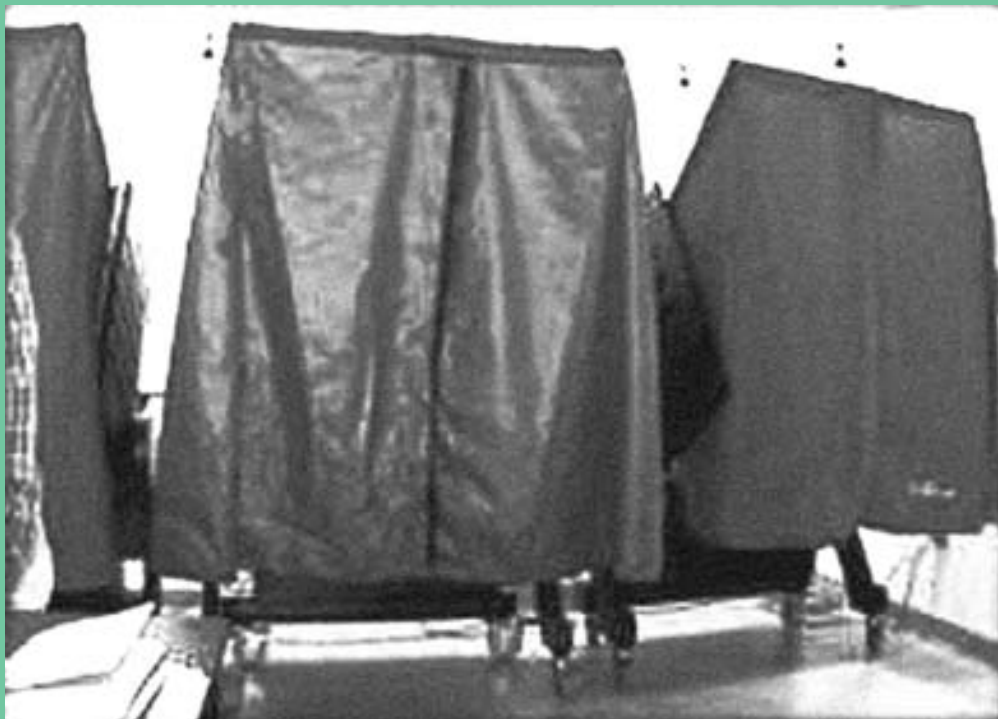


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Low-Wage Justice Project
www.dsausa.org/lowwage



Special Issue

Elections Today



Students learn that "Democracy Matters"
Expanding voting rights for felons
The "Help America Vote" Act
Eliseo Medina on expanding the electorate
DL interviews Mark Crispin Miller

plus

DSA Statement on 2004 elections
Bush's National Insecurity Policy
and more

DSA PAC Statement on the 2004 Elections

It is imperative that we defeat the Bush regime in the 2004 elections.

The Bush regime took power after the 2000 elections against the will of the majority of Americans, and has now achieved domination of all three branches of the federal government. On a host of issues – massive tax breaks for the rich; brutal cuts in spending for pressing social needs; attacks on workers' rights, civil liberties, reproductive rights and racial justice; corporate destruction of the environment; packing the courts with right-wing ideologues; a foreign policy of imperial arrogance and perpetual war – the Bush regime is an unmitigated disaster. Its new National Security Doctrine of “preemptive wars” purports to justify the United States overthrowing any government that gives offense to the US. The Bush regime is perhaps the most reactionary in American history; its program of deregulation, upward redistribution of wealth and income, and imperial global domination threatens to roll back the twentieth century and return us to the McKinley era.

Democratic Socialists of America Political Action Committee (DSA PAC) is not endorsing any candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination at this time. We urge DSA members and our allies, in working for progressive candidates in the primaries, to advance our support for peace, universal health care, workers' rights and a living wage, reproductive rights, racial justice, etc. Only a Democratic campaign that emphasizes a progressive agenda can effectively mobilize the broad constituencies of working people, women, people of color, peace activists, environmentalists and global justice activists that will be needed to defeat the Bush regime.

While there will no doubt be differences within the broad democratic Left over which candidate to support in the Democratic primaries, there should be no doubt of our determination to unite to defeat Bush and the Republicans in Congress. Any such differences in the primaries must not become obstacles to unity in the fight to depose the Bush regime democratically in the fall elections. DSA's strategic goal in the Democratic presidential primaries will be to push the debate – and ultimately the Democratic nominee – to the left, particularly on foreign and economic policy issues. Regardless of who is elected in the 2004 elections, the democratic Left must continue to work together to fight for the progressive agenda.

DSA welcomes the grassroots renewal movement within the Democratic Party, named for the late Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, in which DSA members have taken a leadership role in some areas around the country.

Adopted by the Board of DSA PAC, June 8, 2003

DSA Web Ballot

DSA will be measuring the level of support for different progressive candidate among its members and the broader progressive community by conducting a series of sample ballots on the DSA website (www.dsausa.org).

The sample ballot will measure support for the perspective outlined in the DSA PAC statement as well as support for individual candidates. There will be at least three sample ballots conducted between now and the end of the year.



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Jeffrey Gold, Bill Mosley, Kathy Quinn,
Jason Schulman, Joe Schwartz,
John Strauss

Founding Editor

Michael Harrington
(1928-1989)

Democratic Socialists of America share a vision of a humane international social order based on equitable distribution of resources, meaningful work, a healthy environment, sustainable growth, gender and racial equality, and non-oppressive relationships. Equality, solidarity, and democracy can only be achieved through international political and social cooperation aimed at ensuring that economic institutions benefit all people. We are dedicated to building truly international social movements – of unionists, environmentalists, feminists, and people of color – which together can elevate global justice over brutalizing global competition.

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The Bush National Insecurity Doctrine

By Kathy Quinn

The Bush Administration seems set on taking this country backward, applying nineteenth-century ideas on social policy to a twenty-first century world. Nowhere is this truer than in foreign policy, where the tragic events of September 11, 2001, are being used to justify a new national security doctrine that unilaterally rejects international law on the use of military force and threatens the security both of the US and the world.

The United Nations Charter and many other international treaties prohibit the use of force except in cases of self-defense or of collective security operations. Earlier presidents have generally attempted at least to pay lip service to these international obligations in justifying our military adventures abroad. Also, at least since Vietnam, the use of force by the US has usually been strictly limited in time and scope, if only because of a fear of how the American public would react to a prolonged conflict with heavy American casualties.

Recurring complaints about a supposed "Vietnam Syndrome" made it clear, however, that many among America's elite chafed at these restraints on the use of our military. The Bush Administration is filled with representatives of this point of view. September 11 gave them their chance to break free. Taking advantage of the insecurity of the public following the attacks (and of the understandable, if not laudable, desire for revenge among some), the hawks sprang into action. They enshrined their long-held goals in a new national security doctrine laid out in a document issued in September 2002.

The Bush Doctrine takes one of the major arguments against the use of military force and turns it on its head. To most people, the destructive potential of modern weapons, especially the damage done to civilian populations, is an argument for avoiding the use of military force. According to the Bush Doctrine, it is the existence of some of these weapons (chemical, biological, nuclear) that justifies an expansion of the right to use force. "Rogue states" and terrorists, it argues, might gain access to these and use them against us; therefore, we have a right to use preemptive force *before* such a threat even materializes. This shatters existing international law, which says that preemptive force is only be justified if a threat is imminent.

Although Administration spokespeople later attempted to minimize the extent to which the Doctrine departed from prevailing international law, the world was not taken in. This was evidenced by the massive worldwide demonstrations prior to the attack on Iraq. The world recognized, as many Americans did not, that the effect of the Doctrine would actually be to make the world less safe.

All along, US officials downplayed the extent of the damage to be inflicted on others by the preemptive action taken to keep "us" safe. And, thanks to a compliant media, Americans were largely spared scenes of the bloodshed in Iraq - scenes that people in other countries saw on their nightly news. US news sources also focused more on US military claims about their attempts to minimize civilian casualties than it did the actual number of those casualties. (The website IraqBodyCount.com, using a wide variety of sources, estimates total civilian casualties at between 5,567 and 7,240 and still rising. Most Americans probably have no idea they are that high, just as most Americans apparently believe that we found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Constant repetition of Administration claims in the media has had the desired effect.) And add to the civilian deaths, military deaths, civilian and military injuries, property destruction,

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Low-Wage Justice Project

Take part in DSA's Low-Wage Justice Project. For the latest information on the issues and ideas on how local groups can get involved, see the Low-Wage Economy website at www.dsasusa.org/lowwage

Democracy Matters: Towards a Coalition of the Left

By Jay R. Mandle

The United States possesses its own version of what Russian revolutionaries described as “dual power.” Ours is an increasingly liberal society that has moved conscientiously – if imperfectly – to try to overcome its prejudices. Racism and homophobia are at much lower levels than ever before. But at the same time forces of intolerance are politically ascendant. Aside from the corporate sector, the fundamentalist Christian Right constitutes the Bush Administration’s most important base of support.

What makes this situation threatening is that it is precisely liberalism that has become the focus of the Right’s attention. Conservatives are animated by their opposition to the very diversity, openness, and the acceptance of differences in life styles that social liberalism has encouraged. Right-wing ideologues such as the only recently discredited Bill Bennett claim the moral high ground – protectors of what is said to be good and valuable in the American tradition against the moral relativism of liberalism.

Ironically, it is the very diversity that liberalism has encouraged that has made it difficult to mount an effective counterattack against the Right. The ever-increasing number of ethnicities advancing claims for representation and the multiplicity of issue-oriented organizations – including environmentalists, human and civil rights defenders, and feminist advocates – means that liberalism speaks in many voices, and not always harmoniously. Precisely because each organization and cause on the Left side of the political spectrum has its own agenda, the generic Right rarely

becomes the focal point of political work. While the Right criticizes liberalism generally, liberals tend to address only the specific opponents that they confront in their issue-oriented work.

The cohesion of conservatism compared to the diversity among liberals is at least one of the factors that accounts for the drift to the Right that has occurred in American politics. The Right has found a common enemy that allows it to be successful in coal-

itions they advocate. None of the social activist groups can realistically look forward to thoroughgoing political success in a political system that requires endorsement by private wealth.

Office-seekers in the American democracy require private donors. All candidates, no matter their politics, remain indentured to their funders. The problem is that big contributors represent less than 1 percent of the electorate and are far more conservative than voters as a

whole. Because they literally determine the viability of individual candidacies, the influence of campaign contributors is vastly disproportionate to their numbers. With the private financing of elections, American democracy is systematically flawed.



PHOTO COURTESY DEMOCRACY MATTERS

tion building. Conflict and disagreements abound, but unanimity in opposition to liberalism allows for the creation of an effective united front on the Right. To date, no such lasting common bonding element has emerged on the Left.

Each of the constituent elements of the Left has an agenda that involves political conflict, most often combat with entrenched and wealthy interests. Whether the issue is the environment, civil rights, women’s rights, health care, or education, activists invariably face a nearly intractable obstacle to political success. They lack the resources to become effective political players in an electoral system dependent upon private donors. In none of these areas is it possible for the advocates of social reform to match the funding available to the defenders of the already privileged and the

The rich are more important than everyone else and the policies that are adopted reflect that imbalance. While almost everyone can vote, the interests and needs of the wealthy donor class confine the choices that are presented.

Just as liberalism provides the Right with a unifying common opponent, it might be possible to create a coalition of the Left in response to the very source of Rightist strength: the power associated with wealth. Such a coalition could be forged in the name of democracy. While the Right would continue to attack liberalism, the Left might counter-attack by emphasizing the subversion of democracy that occurs when politicians have no choice but to accommodate to the preferences and

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Voting Rights for All

By Ludovic Blain

Linking voting rights to criminal convictions is at odds with a core American value: the right of citizens to elect their government.

Almost 4.7 million American citizens currently cannot vote because their state laws link the right to vote together with the outcome of criminal prosecution. There is no federal law governing the voting rights of people who have been convicted of crimes. Depending on the state, ex-felons may be barred from voting until they have finished their prison sentence, probation, or parole; paid fines; or completed a complicated and often difficult pardon or clemency process. At least twelve states permanently disenfranchise

those convicted of crimes. In these states, 1.6 million citizens who have served their prison terms, completed probation and parole, paid any fines, and been reincorporated into their communities are permanently barred from voting.

Even states that do restore voting rights to citizens with felony convictions often keep it a big secret. Many state voter registration forms have misleading or confusing statements about ex-felon eligibility. State corrections departments and elections agencies rarely advise ex-felons of their voting rights, even in states that automatically restore that right after incarceration. For example, a law recently passed in Connecticut restored voting rights for people on probation, but officials waited almost a year before distributing updated flyers to people on probation.

The Racist History and Impact of Disenfranchisement Laws

Massive ex-felon disenfranchisement deprives many commu-



Linking voting rights to criminal convictions is at odds with a core American value: the right of citizens to elect their government.

nities - especially poor communities and communities of color - of full and adequate representation in our democracy. In Florida and Alabama, for example, almost one-third of black men are permanently disenfranchised.

Disenfranchisement laws are rooted in a long history of racial discrimination. After the Civil War, southern whites were no longer allowed to prohibit African Americans from voting because of their race, so they looked for other ways to exclude them. Along with literacy tests, poll taxes and grandfather clauses, laws were created linking voting rights to criminal convictions. These laws overtly targeted African Americans by making only certain offenses - such as bigamy, theft, arson and vagrancy, for which blacks were more often convicted than whites - punishable by disenfranchisement.

More than a century later liter-

acy tests and poll taxes have been repealed, but disenfranchisement laws continue to remove Blacks and Latinos from the voting rolls.

Blacks are disenfranchised at a rate five times higher than non-blacks. Nationwide, over 13 percent of black adult males are denied the right to vote and black men make up 36 percent of the total disenfranchised population. These laws disproportionately affect Latinos as well: 16 percent of Latino men will enter prison in their lifetime, compared to only 4.4 percent of white men.

By disenfranchising so many of our citizens, and concentrating that disenfranchisement within certain communities, we have drifted far from the ideals

we supposedly share with other democratic nations. The United States disenfranchises more than 1.6 million citizens who have fully completed their sentences, putting us far above other democracies. In contrast, many countries allow their prisoners to vote, including Denmark, France, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Norway, Peru, Sweden, and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, our criminal justice laws are supposed to be based on ideals of rehabilitation and community re-integration. Civic participation is an integral part of an effective rehabilitation process. Voting rights restrictions fly in the face of our criminal justice system's purported goal. Citizens with felony convictions should be encouraged to vote as a part of re-entering the broader society and repaying their debt to their own community.

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A Green for Philadelphia

By John Strauss

Fed up with the corruption and corporate emphasis of the city's Democratic powers-that-be, and with the Party's implosion due to the power struggle between its two (conservative) wings, former Greater Philadelphia DSA co-chair John Hogan is running for Philadelphia City Council – as a Green.

Now, before you explode because of the whole third-party issue, check this out: it doesn't interfere with the Democrats at all. Philadelphia's Home Rule Charter provides for what is essentially a rough form of proportional representation: it reserves two of the seven at-large City Council seats for members of minority parties. In this overwhelmingly Democratic city, those seats have always gone to Republicans; but in such a city, wouldn't people more likely vote for a Green?

And this year provides exceptional circumstances for a third-party challenge: one of the two long-term Republican incumbents, Thatcher Longstreth, died in the spring, leaving an open minority-party seat. At the same time, unfortunately, one of our two true progressive at-large Democrats, Angel Ortiz, lost in the primaries by a very slim (and contested) margin, leaving Hogan as the only other progressive alternative.

While there are some complications in the way that Democratic voters would need to balance their ballots (each gets only five votes for at-large candidates and therefore would need to vote for four Democrats and the Green), Hogan feels that most are already splitting their votes anyway: "A lot more people vote for mayor than for Council – some just for mayor and others just for their favorites, as



PHOTO BY JOHN STRAUSS

The candidate at a Philadelphia anti-war march in April.

they know the Dems are going to win." (In 1999, there was a spread of 40,000 votes between the top and bottom Democratic at-large candidates – and all five won.)

Hogan is a lifelong Democrat who worked in support of progressive Philadelphia Democrats Ortiz and David Cohen and helped get out the vote for Gore in 2000. He's not running as a socialist; that doesn't work in a city "where we're still subject to the same market pressures as everyone else." But one can run on progressive values – especially in local government, because, as Hogan points out, "local government is about public provision, not for sorting out political issues. It's about picking up the trash; about cops showing up when you need them. It's also about how you pay and who pays for corporate benefits... Socialists have generally won on public provision and good government – transparency, quality, responsibility – all those things that are missing in Philadelphia.... I need a message that I can sell either to poor and working-class black neighborhoods in Philadelphia or white

working-class in the Northeast. Something I can sell in both would be the Holy Grail." Some such possibilities are housing (there are tens of thousands of homeless and houses in the city) and economic development based in neighborhoods. There are large parts of the city where houses are falling apart and there are no grocery stores and no bank branches – where check cashing services charge 20 percent.

So how does a DSA member – and relative newcomer to City politics – get elected? First, some background. As chair of the DSA local, Hogan has been taking part in progressive politics for the last four years, testifying at Council hearings, speaking at rallies, and being a leader in activist coalitions. Most significant was his role in the UNITY2000 (a mass demonstration during the 2000 Republican Convention) organizing committee, for whom he spoke at a press conference that was repeatedly televised on C-Span (and strategically excerpted on ABC news to show him ominously telling the city administration, "We're not afraid of you"). He has also been

a union activist with AFSCME District Council 47. People in the progressive community know and respect him.

Hogan describes his campaign manager, Jason Mayland – who worked for Democrat Bill Lloyd for Senate and “in the lion’s mouth” for Gore in Florida in 2000 – as one of his greatest assets because of his experience and progressive values. Labor also has been particularly helpful, with resources and a level of seriousness about the process. He has the backing of his home union, the white-collar city employees’ AFSCME DC47 – which also sent him to AFL-CIO campaign training workshops; Philadelphia and Pennsylvania NOW have also endorsed him and

gotten him leads for supporters and donors; SEIU and the transit workers are also behind him. We have union connections, he notes – “It’s quite a network, DSA.”

He is trying to build campus networks, mostly for volunteers but also for votes, and he will be using the slow time of summer to visit neighborhoods where he’s likely to get support, stopping by to talk, shake hands, and give out palmcards at transit stops during commuting times, meeting with civic and business associations – explaining what he’s about, but mostly listening, rather than preaching, and incorporating their issues into his fall campaign (a model based on Hillary Clinton’s successful upstate New York cam-

paign). He will also be looking at demographics – who is where and what they feel is important.

While he needs at least \$100,000 (a low figure by today’s standards, when some Democrats spent \$200-300,000 on the primaries) to run it properly, the biggest part of his campaign is labor – volunteers, cars, lit drops, canvassing, etc. – which he acknowledges is difficult without a major party organization.

Still, he, we, and the local progressive movement are hopeful.

John Strauss is a member DSA’s National Political Committee, co-chair of Greater Philadelphia DSA, and serves on the Democratic Left editorial committee.

A Minor Party with Major Possibilities

Philadelphia isn’t the only place where local or state law can enhance the role of third party candidacies:

New York is the best of states and is the worst of states. On the downside, the state’s election law does not allow initiative/referendum; it can take up to a year to change your party affiliation, and registering independent locks you in every bit as rigidly as does a party registration.

But New York is one of only ten states that allow fusion. Thus the small Working Families Party (WFP) can cross-endorse the same candidate as the Democrats put on the Democratic line. Votes on both lines are added together on election night. Or the WFP can withhold its support or even run its own candidate against an unacceptable Democrat, just like any third party. Thus, it strategically pressures the Democrats to move left, much as the small Conservative Party has pushed the Republicans to the right.

The WFP won a ballot line in 1998 after garnering just over 50,000 votes for governor. It’s the gubernatorial vote that determines party placement on the ballot. In the 2002 race for governor, the WFP nominated state comptroller H. Carl McCall – the first African-American

to seek that office – who easily won the Democratic primary after rival Andrew Cuomo virtually withdrew. This time the party got 90,500 votes in the general election.

While WFP officials adhere to the technicalities of election law in placing candidates on the ballot, substantive decisions are determined by weighted votes of a coalition consisting of twenty unions, ACORN, Citizen Action, DSA, the Long Island Progressive Coalition, and local WFP clubs. This organization screens candidates and makes recommendations based on the candidates’ positions on living wages, health care for all, fair taxation, and similar issues. The WFP has provided the margin of victory in Assembly, state Senate, and congressional elections.

Many DSA members have registered in the WFP, including former Ithaca Mayor Ben Nichols, who chairs the party in the 125th Assembly District. Many more New York DSAers are active in WFP leadership and club organizations.

–Theresa Alt
NPC Member and Ithaca Local

Changing the Face of Politics

The following article is taken from remarks made by Eliseo Medina, Executive Vice President of the Service Employees International Union, at the Democratic Socialists of America Conference, "The War at Home: Organizing for Economic and Social Justice," on April 26 in Berkeley, California.

You all may not know this, but DSA played an important part in one of the formative experiences of my life. Back in 1967, I was a 21-year-old farm worker who was sent to Chicago by Cesar Chavez to organize the grape boycott. I was scared and alone in the big, cold city. But the DSA Chicago Chapter took me in....

That was a time when we faced great challenges as war in Vietnam drained our resources, divided our society, and distracted our nation from the unfinished business of economic security and social justice for all. And it was a time when we had inspiring leaders - intellectuals like Michael Harrington, organizers like Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, Jr., and political leaders like Robert Kennedy.

Thirty-six years later, those leaders have been taken from us, and their dream for a more just society is still unfulfilled. That is why it is so important that we keep the faith and continue the fight, calling attention to the economic insecurity and inequality in our society, and helping low-wage workers organize and mobilize to improve their lives....

Four hundred and sixty-five thousand workers have lost their jobs in the last two months alone. Two million, one-hundred-thousand workers have lost their jobs since March, 2001 - and that was six months before the 9/11 attacks. And, even for those who are lucky enough to have held onto their jobs, times are tough - and getting tougher.

In this, the richest country in the world, 44 million Americans do not have health insurance. And, just so there is no mistake, these are not students or people who don't want to work - the vast majority are full-time workers with families. Millions of workers work two or three jobs just to survive - jobs without health coverage, jobs without pensions, jobs without paid holidays or vacations, and, too often, jobs without a future. And immigrant workers are also up against great and growing problems.

Only two years ago, we thought we were on the

verge of historic changes in how our country treats undocumented immigrants. Presidents Bush and Fox were talking about immigration reform. The American Labor Movement had changed its position and now favored immigration reform. We were working with business leaders and people of faith. Public opinion polls confirmed broad popular support. And Democrats and Republicans in Congress seemed willing to take on this issue.

But, since September 11th, we have seen a backlash against immigrant workers. We have seen a President and a Congress who, on the one hand, say that immigrants should be seen as an opportunity and an advantage for America,

but who, on the other hand, pass a law prohibiting non-citizen immigrants from working as airport screeners, supposedly because of national security concerns. But at the same time that they are sending a message that immigrants cannot be trusted, immigrants are accepted into the armed forces because apparently they trust us to drive tanks and fly planes, but not to use a wand at the airport.

You know that over 27,000 immigrant non-citizens are currently serving in the armed forces. Another 13,000-15,000 are part of the reserves, subject to being called to active duty, as happened in Iraq. Tens of thousands more are US-born children of non-citizens and undocumented workers. And two of the first Marines to die in Iraq - Corporal Jose Angel Garibay and Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez - were immigrant foreign nationals who lived here in California and gave their lives for this country half a world away. More than ten have died so far in this conflict. Garibay and Gutierrez and several others have been granted posthumous citizenship, but tens of thousands more are coming home to face the same harassment, discrimination, and exploitation that they endured before they risked their lives in combat for this country.

Now, let me be clear: These soldiers love our country every bit as much as those whom America offers



more opportunity, more security, and more respect. But would our Armed Forces draw so disproportionately upon immigrants, people of color, and working class people from every background if our economy offered jobs with regular raises, reliable health care, secure pensions, and promising futures for everyone who is willing to work? Would we still have so many black and brown, green card, and blue-collar soldiers and so few who are the children of cabinet members and corporate executives?...

So how can we build an America worthy of the heroes who fight for us, die for us, and work alongside us?

First, we need to keep working with immigrant workers as they join together and organize unions to

win a stronger voice for themselves and a better life for their families. As we often say in SEIU, the best anti-poverty program, the best civil rights protection, and the

best way to win economic, health and retirement security, is by building and growing the union movement. All across California - and all across this country - health care workers, home care workers, and building service workers are organizing and mobilizing with SEIU and our sister unions. These workers are fighting to turn poverty wages into living wages - and dead-end jobs into decent jobs.

Second, we need to make immigrant workers' rights the civil and human rights issue of the 21st Century. In the tradition of the Freedom Rides of the 1960s, this September and October, busloads of immigrants and their allies will travel by bus from eight cities, including San Francisco, and visit cities throughout this country on their way to Washington, DC, and New York City, for massive rallies for Immigrant Worker Justice. The Freedom Ride will be about legalization for undocumented workers. It will be about recognition and respect for our contributions to this country. And it will be about registering and turning out the vote for the 2004 elections....

So, third, we need to educate, energize, and mobilize immigrant workers to become immigrant voters. To win legislation on immigration reform, health care, and other issues important to immigrants and all working people, we need three things: a Congress to pass it, a President to sign it, and the political power to make it all happen. That is why - together with churches, media groups, community organizations, immigrant-sending countries, and unions and businesses - SEIU is launching a national, non-partisan immigrant voter education and mobilization campaign called "My Family Votes 100 percent."

We don't want to keep breaking even with the

existing electorate. We want to win - and win decisively - by growing and turning out an expanded electorate - an electorate that reflects the true face of America.

Next year, we will turn out this new electorate in key electoral states. When we add up the states where immigrant communities are strong - here in California and in New York, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and others - we can win a majority of the Electoral College. And, we can elect a president and a Congress that will represent our hopes, our dreams, and our aspirations - not the greedy few in the corporate boardrooms.

We also want to increase the participation rate of

Asian Americans/, Pacific Islanders, and Latinos - the fastest-growing ethnic groups in this country and also the two lowest-participating voting groups. Only 25

percent of Asians and Pacific Islanders and 27 percent of Latinos participate in the political process.

If each and every one of you gets involved in this campaign and goes home resolved to register unregistered citizens, and helps legal permanent residents obtain their citizenship, we could potentially grow the electorate with 5.5 million new Asian/ Pacific Islander voters and 14 million new Latino voters. Together, APIs and Latinos alone could account for almost 20 million new voters. Among African Americans, there are potentially 8.7 million new voters. Add it up: People of color by these census categories - Asian, Latino, and African American - together could represent almost 30 million new voters. Can you imagine what we could accomplish with this new, organized, and more progressive electorate?

We can change the face of politics - from the voting booth to the halls of Congress and the corridors of the White House. And we can bring America closer to the noble ideals of liberty and justice for all that bring immigrants to this country and brought you to this conference.

Is this a difficult endeavor? Yes! Is it an impossible task? No! I believe we can do it if we unite to fight for our common agenda. We all remember the lives, the legacies, and the ideals of those who inspired us to get involved in the action and the passion of our times. Whatever the injustice, we can hear Mike Harrington urging us never to give up on the America he loved. Whatever the obstacle, we can hear Dr. King reassuring us, "We shall overcome." Whatever the problem, we can hear Robert Kennedy reminding us, "We can do better." And, whatever the challenge, we can hear Cesar Chavez telling us, "*Si Se Puede* - yes, we can!"

We can bring America closer to the noble ideals of liberty and justice for all that bring immigrants to this country.

Voting Rights for All

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The Momentum is Building

Despite tough-on-crime rhetoric, voting rights restoration advocates are winning policy changes. As mentioned above, in 2001 Connecticut restored the vote to 36,000 citizens by extending voting rights to citizens on probation. New Mexico and Nevada recently repealed lifetime voting bans for some persons with felony convictions. Pennsylvania restored the right to vote to thousands of ex-felons. Policy changes that lower barriers to voting for ex-felons have also been enacted in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Nebraska and Washington, and legislation is pending in about a dozen other states. Diverse statewide coalitions headed by local advocacy groups like DemocracyWorks-CT, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, and the Virginia Organizing Project are working for change.

This groundswell of activity is also forging an emerging bipartisan national consensus. In August 2001 the National Commission on Federal Election Reform, chaired by former Presidents Carter and Ford, recommended that all states restore voting rights to citizens who have fully served their sentences. Thirty-one US Senators recently voted for a measure introduced by Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) - both former district attorneys - to grant voting rights to ex-felons in federal elections. Many members of Congress, including Representative John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), have sponsored voting rights legislation in recent years.

The public overwhelmingly supports restoration of voting rights. According to a July 2002 Harris Interactive poll, 80 percent of Americans believe that all ex-felons who have completed their sentences should have the right to

vote. The same poll found that over 60 percent believe that citizens on probation or parole should be able to vote. Newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Christian Science Monitor* have editorialized in support of voting by ex-felons.

What You Can Do

Get informed. Some state laws are confusing and complex. To find out about your own state's law, visit the Dēmos Voting Rights website at <http://www.demos-usa.org/votin-grights>.

Network locally. Reach out to local civil rights, voting rights, low-income, criminal justice reform and social justice organizations. Faith-based community leaders can be influential allies. The National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, Women of Reform Judaism, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Richmond, VA, among others, have called on lawmakers to restore voting rights to ex-felons. Transitional service providers, law enforcement officials, agencies that work with prisoners, parole and correctional officers' unions, and others in the criminal justice and community re-entry system may also support re-enfran-

chisement. Disability advocates are also potential allies; many current and former prisoners suffer from a variety of disabilities.

Launch a campaign. There are a number of projects to restore voting rights to citizens with felony convictions. Contact Dēmos for information about successful models for action. You can work with local civic leaders to sponsor a community forum, work with your state legislators to expand the vote to all citizens, including those with criminal convictions, make sure that voter registration drives reach eligible citizens, including pre-trial detainees, and make sure that your state's corrections department and elections agency are providing accurate information to prisoners and ex-felons about their voting rights.

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DC Coalition Wins Award

On December 10, the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, of which DC/MD/NOVA DSA is an active member, was awarded the United Nations Association of the National Capital Area's prestigious Human Rights Community Award.

At the awards ceremony in Washington, Stand Up! was recognized for promoting "international human rights at home in the District of Columbia" through lobbying, rallies and demonstrations, and petition campaigns, as well as by speaking out in the halls of Congress" - the latter action leading to the arrests of seven members, all of whom were subsequently acquitted at trial.

The coalition was formed in 1997 to advocate for full democratic rights for the District, including full voting representation in Congress and for local control over DC budgets and legislation. The District currently has only a non-voting delegate in the House and no recognized representation in the Senate (although the District has elected volunteer "shadow" Senators to lobby for DC statehood). In addition, a congressional appropriations act is necessary for the District to spend even its own locally raised funds, which comprise 75 percent of the local budget. (Submitted by Bill Mosley).

HAVA *continued from back cover*

the bill, it is still far more than some observers believed would be possible. It will likely take an annual battle to ensure that Congress comes up with all the necessary funds. Already, for instance, the level of funding for the portion of the bill dealing with access for disabled people is far less than originally called for.

In order to apply for federal funds, each state must develop a plan detailing how the state will comply with HAVA. This plan is to be developed by a commission, appointed by the chief election official in each state, which must include the chief election officials of the two largest jurisdictions in the state, representatives of the disability community, and "other stakeholders and citizens." The commission must offer opportunities for public comment prior to submitting the plan to the federal government. Thus far, many states have had non-inclusive commissions. In many other states the commission is not yet formed, and there is still a great opportunity for reformers to be on the commissions and to respond to the initial plans. However, the most important part of the process is the legislative enactment of each state's HAVA implementation plan.

What should election-reform advocates be seeking from this planning and legislative process? First and foremost, to make sure that the machine replacements and other procedural fixes maximize participation. The second major challenge is to ensure that the newly created identification mandates do not create obstacles for eligible citizens to register and vote. It is especially important that state laws explicitly provide for acceptance of the kinds of identity documents that poor people use, such as Social Security check statements, Section 8 rent statements, homeless shelter ID cards and Electronic Benefit Cards. In addition, because many of the databases used to verify a voter's identity are acknowledged to be inaccurate, it is crucial that the ID requirements be implemented in a scrupulously nondiscriminatory way.

But reformers also have an opportunity to raise broader issues of participation. For instance, the federal funds available for "voter education" could be used to create a program to ensure that the millions of eligible citizens with felony convictions know their voting rights. Federal funds can be used to pay for the additional poll workers needed to implement Election Day Registration, which would allow voting by citizens who want to register after their state's deadline (usually 15 to 25 days before election day). States with EDR have turnouts 8 percent to 15 percent higher than the national average. There are also other issues, like ensuring that both the hardware and software of voting machines are compatible with instant run-off voting, proportional representation and any other electoral reform that might be enacted within the decades-long functional life of the voting system.

The jury is still very much out on what the long-run impact of HAVA will be. But it is crystal clear that this is a moment when state-level work can truly lead to real reform. Effective organizing for an expansive and inclusive democracy over the next several months and years will take advantage of genuine new opportunities to expand the vote. There is no time to waste.

For more information on the implementation of HAVA in various states, check out the Dēmos webpage (www.demos-usa.org/HAVA). For activist tools, go to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights website (www.civilrights.org).

Miles Rapoport is the President and CEO of Dēmos. He formerly served as Secretary of State for the State of Connecticut, where he also spent 10 years in the legislature. This article is adapted from a recent article in American Prospect.



DC Presidential Primary

By Bill Mosley

While New Hampshire has historically hosted the nation's first presidential primary, in 2004 that distinction will belong to the District of Columbia. Legislation enacted by the DC Council earlier this year sets the local primary for January 13th, two weeks before New Hampshire's. The purpose is to focus national attention on the fact that residents of the nation's capital lack the democratic rights enjoyed by other Americans. The District, alone among capital cities of the world's democracies, has no voting representation in Congress. In addition, its budget and laws are subject to congressional oversight.

The idea of an earlier primary was first proposed by Sean Tenner of the DC Democracy Fund at a meeting of "Team Democracy," a working group of local DC-democracy organizations. Although New Hampshire law requires it to be the first state in the nation to hold a primary, an earlier DC primary would not conflict with this law since the District is not a state.

While the early primary has strong support from local elected officials and pro-DC democracy activists, it was opposed by the local Democratic Party. The date falls earlier than national Party rules allow for a nominating primary. As a result, the local Party will select its convention delegates at a caucus in March, making the January primary a "beauty contest." (The DC Republican Party will not participate in the primary, while the Green Party may, depending on how many candidates are seeking the nomination.) Nevertheless, supporters are counting on the primary to raise national awareness of the District's disenfranchisement and force candidates to offer their views on achieving full democratic rights for the citizens of the

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DL Interview: Mark Crispin Miller

*The news media, and, today, television in particular, have a profound effect on the electoral process in this country. DL interviewed Mark Crispin Miller, author of *The Bush Dyslexicon* and a professor of culture and communication at New York University, about the effects of television on the election of George W. Bush and about his expectations for the future.*

DL. Ever since the Kennedy/Nixon debates, commentators have been debating the effect of the medium of television on elections. In your book, *The Bush Dyslexicon*, however, you seem to stress the effect of the way in which the medium has developed, rather than characteristics inherent to the medium. You even make a distinction between “television,” the medium, and “TV,” the medium as we know it. What, in your view, are the important characteristics of TV as we know it? How have these characteristics come about and why?

MM. Television as a medium has certain formal properties, which TV as an industry must often counter-act. With its flat, “cool” vision of the world, for instance, television is inherently deglamorizing, which requires the networks (and the spinners in the White House, and the Pentagon’s PR flacks, and the corporate advertisers *et al.*) to hype up the spectacle through all means possible: fast cutting, digital effects, music pumped out like a drug, etc. Such cybernetic/cinematic touches are essential to the TV industry, which is primarily promotional.

Of course, television has always been commercial in this country, but since the Seventies we have witnessed an inexorable commercialization, and “sensationalization,” of the spectacle. This is largely the result of the deregulatory moves made by the Reaganites (and then reconfirmed by Clinton/Gore). In the Communications Act of 1934, Congress stipulated that all radio stations, while they could make money off the public airwaves, must compensate the people for such exploitation by doing a broad range of public interest shows: news, children’s shows, educational programs, religious broadcasting, etc. Gradually all those requirements (which carried over from radio to television broadcasting) were wiped out as the mammoth media lobby came to win out over everybody else (primarily because most people haven’t known what’s going on in Washington behind the closed doors of the FCC).



Thus, we now have a spectacle that’s dizzyingly tawdry, crude and trivial, functioning more like a drug than

like a sector of the Fourth Estate (and most of its entertainment too is base, hypnotic, brainless). It’s taken some time to “evolve” from what it was to what it is. The standard propaganda line is that “we” have infinitely more “choice” today than, say, in 1957 or 1969, and while there certainly are far more channels than there were, there are, in fact, fewer owners than there used to be considering how many outlets are available. One could also argue that a number of once-worthy genres have largely disappeared. Network news documentaries, for example, have gone from *Harvest of Shame* and *The Selling of the Pentagon* (extraordinary works in their own time, admittedly) to “documentaries” on Laci Peterson, *et al.* Talk shows like Les Crane’s, Dick Cavett’s and Mike Douglas’, which included genuinely interesting guests, have largely been displaced by noisy plug-a-thons and Roman entertainments such as Jerry Springer. (Bill Moyers’ program is a miracle, and Charlie Rose has worthy guests, but those aren’t network shows.) And the pace and number of commercials, as well as the amount of “stealth advertising,” has increased exponentially, while the length of time for sound-bites has been growing ever briefer.

(Also, as the media cartel has grown in size and influence, it has grown closer to the federal authorities, so that “the media” in this country might as well be managed outright by the White House and the Pentagon.)

So what we have today is TV pure and simple: non-stop selling, endless stooping, and no information of the sort that citizens require.

DL. You also say that Bush and TV were “nat-

ural allies,” while at the same time you say that Bush plays badly on “television”? Could you elaborate on this? In what ways?

MM. Natural allies in that Bush’s very ineptitude as a TV performer – his mangled language and his ill-concealed resentment – is itself perfect for TV, because it gives the telejournalists something to get (occasionally) “critical” about. More important, Bush addresses “us” in exactly the same way that TV does: as pliable amnesiacs, emotionally over-wrought and with no memory of the recent past. Bush’s utterances are, therefore, highly televisual, even though he isn’t polished or convincing. Like TV, Bush makes no sense, reacts crudely, deals in *non sequiturs*. After hearing him or watching it, you know a little less than you had known beforehand. Thus, it and he are allies.

DL. Do you think the relationship between Bush and TV has implications for future elections?

MM. My God, it already has! The next “election” is already shaping up to be a farce, because those electronic touch-screen voting machines are now in more than thirty states – and they are manufactured by two private corporations (Diebold and ES&S) that are dominated by Republicans. (Chuck Hagel, R.-Neb., was himself the CEO of one of them for several years!) These machines are very easy to subvert; indeed, there’s striking evidence that they were thus misused in the 2002 elections. But this crucial story isn’t getting told because it would be inconvenient for the White House if it were and the media cartel’s top managers and shareholders do not want to upset the gravy train.

As it is, TV has failed completely to inform the people of this country about Bush, his background, his alliances and his agenda. They gave him a free ride the moment he began to run, and there is little reason to believe that wouldn’t happen in 2004 – unless, of course, things fall apart so radically that they will have no choice but to report on

it (as happened in the early Seventies).

As long as money calls the shots, both in the media and in our politics, there will be no way out of this colossal mess.

DL. Do you see any hope for changing the way television relates to elections?

MM. I have endless faith in the judgment of the people – if they’ve got the facts, as Madison and Jefferson assumed that they would have. The press as they envisioned it does not exist, however, so it’s

hard for people to think clearly and make sound decisions, when often all they hear is what the White House has to say. And, as things worsen, it is possible that people will learn more for purposes of self-defense. (Everyone distrusts the media, although there’s plenty of confusion as to what the problem really is).

I have a radical idea for the improvement of our politics: A much-shortened campaign

season (as in Britain) – say, six weeks, as opposed to 18 months – and, especially, a *ban* on all produced campaign ads for any candidate. This would not infringe the candidate’s First Amendment right to speak to us (which is, as well, our First Amendment right to know what’s going on), because it would be perfectly permissible for candidates to use their TV time the way that Ross Perot did: talking to the audience. That would be very cheap, and so it would no longer cost so much to run for office. Without the need for all that radio and TV time, the electoral process could shift back from its current capital-intensive character to its former labor-intensive practices (which would, of course, require that all contending parties have their soldiers on the ground). Without campaign finance reform, the picture is a bleak one.

Otherwise, the growing gap between what Bush & Co. say and what is really happening out there *will* necessarily redound to Bush’s disadvantage. Thus it always has been, and thus it always will be in this world, where propaganda has its limits. There’s only so much spinning you can do right



PHOTO BY BOB FERTIK

Mark Crispin Miller speaking at an anti-war rally in New York, September 12, 2002.

Democracy Matters

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interests of their wealthy patrons. In forging a progressive coalition, it would not be necessary to pre-judge the specific policies that would be acceptable to the American people in a political environment in which wealth was not predominant. Instead, the argument would be that, under the current system, public policy does not reflect the preferences of most of the people and would more likely do so if the role of private money in politics were eliminated.

The cement binding such a leftist coalition would be a common recognition that virtually all members would likely do better in a political system of fairness than in one dominated by wealth such as the one we presently possess. The common goal would be elections in which all ideas and candidates are judged solely on their merits, not on whether they attract the support of the affluent.

Democracy Matters, a two-year-old campus-based campaign-finance reform organization, was created with the intention of fostering such a progressive coalition. Provided with seed money by the NBA player Adonal Foyle, Democracy Matters now has chapters on more than forty campuses nation-wide. Each of these groups works to advance the cause of democratic reform by organizing students and then establishing links with off-campus organizations. The organization is open-ended with regard to both the kinds of activities engaged in, and the specifics of the reform that is sought. But most Democracy Matters students on most campus see "clean money," the full public financing of electoral candidacies, as the most attractive goal to which they can direct their energies. The feasibility and consti-

tutionality of a voluntary full public funding system has already been demonstrated in Maine and Arizona. In the latter, a "clean" candidate has been elected Governor, and in Maine more than half the legislators are "clean," free from dependence on wealthy donors and special interests. Among

Only when the political system is considered as a public good will the political system truly be democratic.

Democracy Matters students it is generally believed that only when the political system is considered as a public good – a service needed by everyone but which should not be available for purchase by only a few – will electoral choices be sufficiently wide for the political system truly to be considered democratic.

What is fascinating about the success of Democracy Matters to date is that its members seem not to come only or even predominantly from the ranks of already self-identified progressive students. Indeed, a good number of conservative students are members. But more typical are students who, though generally on the left of the political spectrum, have not found a political home in the organizations that have sought to attract them. Very often, these individuals are as concerned with the structure of democracy as they are with the outcomes that emerge from the political process.

It is too soon to tell whether Democracy Matters will be able to act as a catalyst for a rejuvenated political Left. So far the organization has demonstrated that it is possible to interest and to attract the current generation of students to the cause of deepening the democratic content of the American political system. The two national summits that the organization has convened for its leaders have been

sites of intense political dialogue among open-minded participants. Those summits were nothing if not inspiring. At a minimum, therefore, the cause of campaign reform – the need to go beyond McCain-Feingold – has been strengthened by the presence of a student activist element that has long been needed but has been conspicuous by its absence.

Politics is about linkages and alliances. And because this is so, a relatively narrow success in one area has the potential of triggering advances elsewhere. As Democracy Matters becomes a nationally recognized campus presence, it is possible to envision the cause of democratic reform becoming the framework for a broad coalition of young political activists and groups who at present are deprived of a fair chance to influence the content of politics because they cannot match the power of wealth.

In the meantime, Democracy Matters is schooling college students in the skills of organizing and the content of real democracy. Its alumni/ae almost certainly will become a constituency advocating political egalitarianism in the future. But an even more ambitious future is possible as well. What that would require is for leftists to see the importance of working together to achieve a political structure that also encourages choice and diversity. Such a politics can only be achieved if there is a concerted and successful effort to reduce the role of private money in the political process. That represents the Democracy Matters agenda, an agenda that may make it possible to mount an effective political challenge to the power of the Right.

Jay R. Mandle is the W. Bradford Wiley Professor of Economics at Colgate University and a co-founder of Democracy Matters.

Bush Doctrine

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refugees, homelessness, orphans – the list goes on. These are the foreseeable outcomes of war.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many Iraqis don't like us. They may welcome the fall of Saddam, but they have already made it clear that they don't want to replace a dictator with an army of occupation. Thus, Iraqi and American deaths keep piling up in confrontations between our troops and angry crowds. Claiming that the problems are being caused by die-hard Saddam supporters, the US military has launched "Operation Scorpion" to root them out. The operation involves widespread searching of homes and detention of suspects – duplicating the worst aspects of US police policy in some minority communities in this country.

One of the most affecting scenes from Iraq that I saw on American TV was a film of armed troops with M-16s bursting into a house on the outskirts of Baghdad and marching out a family of four with their hands in the air. It was like nothing so much as an episode of *Cops* done in camouflage. The camera lingered on the face of the last family member, a girl of about six, her eyes filled with tears. This is not the picture that Americans like to have of themselves and their troops, but an occupying army is forced to treat large portions of the population as suspect. Is this likely to make us safer? Or is it likely to create even more anti-American terrorists? Considering the reaction throughout the Arab world, the latter seems more likely.

The extreme militarism of the Bush Administration is clearly not a comfortable policy even for large segments of the US elite. Although criticism of the Administration receded after the actual invasion, opposition to the attack on Iraq spanned all social classes in this

country. The Bush Doctrine may benefit the weapons and oil industries, but other elites have reason to fear a policy that has already destabilized international ties and whose costs threatens the stability of the world economy jeopardizing profits. As usual, though, it is middle- and lower-income Americans who have the most to lose from the pursuit of imperialism by military means. We pay the costs, both in taxes and lost social services, while the very rich have their taxes cut. Low-income communities also provide the bulk of the soldiers who do the actual killing and dying. And we're not buying any greater safety. In fact, it appears that the Bush Administration is bent on keeping us insecure so that it can pursue its anti-democratic policies with a minimum of dissent.

Two and one-half years of the Bush Administration have already inflicted more damage on American democracy and international relations than many of us would have thought possible. The challenge is getting the truth about the results of that policy out to the American people so that they can

make a truly informed choice in the next presidential election.

Kathy Quinn is on the Democratic Left editorial committee and is a member of the National Political Committee.

DC Primary

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nation's capital. The move has already generated numerous national news stories. The result of the primary in DC, the only majority African-American jurisdiction in the nominating process, could serve as a bellwether for minority and progressive votes in the states.

At this writing, candidates Joseph Lieberman, Carol Moseley Braun and Al Sharpton have committed to campaigning in DC. The others are undecided.

Bill Mosley, a member of the Democratic Left editorial committee, represents DC/MD/NOVA DSA in the Stand Up! for Democracy in DC Coalition, which is a member of Team Democracy.

West Coast Activist Conference



DSA Honorary Chair Dolores Huerta with National Director Frank Llewellyn at the DSA Conference in Berkeley, California, in April. The conference also featured speakers Gus Newport, Holly Sklar and Bob Wing and workshops on building economic justice campaigns.

HAVA Moves Election Reform Struggle to States

by Miles Rapoport

With the passage of the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in October of last year, the action on election reform has shifted to the state level. State governments are charged with implementing HAVA's mandates, and that offers advocates of election reform the best chance in a long time to improve the way elections are carried out.

The mandates of the HAVA legislation present many opportunities, but also some problems. A prime concern is the law's onerous identification requirements for first-time voters who register by mail, which Republicans insisted upon as the price of a bipartisan bill. These provisions will heighten the opportunities for voter confusion and intimidation. Some states have already introduced bills to enact even more rigid identification requirements in the guise of complying with HAVA.

But HAVA also contains elements that should improve the election process greatly. These include requirements that states allow voters to correct mistakes in their ballots, and allow them

to cast provisional ballots if their names do not appear on the registration list or if they do not have IDs when required. HAVA also requires that polling places have at least one fully accessible and private voting machine for voters with disabilities. Also, it requires polling places to have machines that will allow voters to utilize an alternative language where required under Sec. 203 of the Voting Rights Act. The bill requires states to lower the frequency of machine errors in counting ballots below specified levels, and to create integrated, computerized, statewide voter registration lists. It also allows federal funds to be spent on better training of poll workers and voter education.

Of course, the key to successful implementation is the carrot of federal funding. For the first year of the bill's implementation, \$1.5 billion has already been appropriated. While this is only 70 percent of the first-year funds called for in

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