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Project #2 Electoral Reform Analysis  
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*Electoral Reform Analysis*

After all the turmoil that the 2000 presidential election created, there was some organization done by the Constitution Project to the election reform that was to promote bipartisan consensus on badly needed reforms. For weeks after the November 7, 2000 election, our nation was dealing with the drama of the Florida recount. All of the extraordinary events, the very intense media and the public scrutiny of the whole process caused many Americans to wonder and ask different questions concerning their votes. Some wondered if their vote was counted or if there was any way to improve the accuracy and integrity of elections. There were sweeping electoral reforms passed by the U.S. Congress and the State Government of Florida to make sure that what happened in the 2000 election would never happen again.

In October of 2002, Congress passed H.R. 3295, which is called, "Help America Vote Act," which was intended to address the problems revealed in the 2000 presidential election. Taking the task of implementation are state and local election officials, voting rights advocates, state law makers and others. This bill paves the way for significant improvements in our electoral system. The law establishes federal standards for voting systems and election administration, it authorizes three billion dollars in federal grants to help states meet the new standards and creates a new federal agency to oversee the process. On January 17, 2002, a conference was held when four organizations joined

together, the Constitution Project, the Advancement Project, the Caltech-MIT Voting Technology Project and the Century Foundation. Their main focus was to take stock of progress that was already made and to look ahead to the implementation of reforms both at the federal and state level. This conference sponsored by a grant given by the Carnegie Corporation, which was called, "Federal Election Reform: Action and Reaction."

There was a lot that was changed and accomplished in the year following the 2000 election. Florida, Georgia and Maryland all went ahead and didn't wait for any Congressional action and implemented their own reforms and passed comprehensive election reform laws. As one of the bill's lead sponsors, House Administration Committee chairman Bob Ney (R-OH), acknowledged, the process took some time in order to allow legislators the benefit of the "insights and experience of individuals who have experience with and care passionately about how elections are run in this country."

There are four key areas that have been and will continue to be the focus of debate during implementation. These are as followed; the federal role in elections, improving technology, improving registration, and safeguarding the rights of voters.

This election served as a wake-up call for election officials throughout the entire nation, including Georgia. Just like Florida, different counties in Georgia have the different methods of counting their votes and different voting technology. In May 2001, Jeb Bush signed into law a sweeping package of election reforms six months after the chaos brought on after the 2000

Presidential election. Bush stated, "My hope is that people will see that we have resolved the problem. Other states ought to look at this as a model because if there is another close election in another state, I guarantee you that they will not be able to withstand the incredibly scrutiny that occurred in Florida" (CNN 5/01).

While under this new law the counties will be required to quit using voting systems that use punch cards, mechanical levers or paper ballots. In place counties were required by 2002 to have optical scanners where the voter fills in a bubble and it is read by machines. "The state will provide counties with a \$32 million to buy the new equipment and beef up voter education and training of poll workers"(CNN 5/01). The new law also requires a uniform ballot design statewide that extends the date in which counties must certify their election results by four days. The new law also creates uniform statewide standards for assessing ballots during manual recounts. During the dispute over the 2000 presidential election, Republicans complained that elections officials in each of the state's 67 counties were setting their own standards, which differed from county to county. (CNN 5/01)

"This is certainly the most comprehensive bill that has been passed in any state this year," said Jennie Drage of the National Conference of State Legislatures. "They really quickly got together, they put out excellent reports, they were thorough, they thought about it, and they came up with a really ambitious package of reforms that touches on everything" (CNN 5/01). I feel the electoral reforms that were passed by the US Congress and the State Government of Florida show they have put a huge effort in changing their voting systems and

preventing future problems. I personally feel that they should have been done sooner before the 2000 election got out of hand.

In conclusion, during 2001-2002, the U.S. Congress and the State Government of Florida passed sweeping electoral reforms that we designed to prevent and fix the problems that were created during the 2000 Presidential election and to prevent it from ever happening again. These are just some of the initiatives and major features that are contained in each law, along with the ways that this election gave a "wake-up" call to other states, including Georgia, that could have the same thing that happened to Florida happen to them. I think this election was a warning for every state to look at and fix any upcoming problems that we may have in the future elections and to prevent it from occurring in any other states.

<http://www.globalexchange.org/democracy/news2001/washpost050501.html>

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