

Keynote Political Reform with ‘Citizen Statesmen’

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In the last election cycle (1989-90) for U.S. Congress, New York State had 34 winning Congressmen raising a total of \$14,257,367 with \$6.8 million from out of state.

New York represents a typical example. Who does your Congressman represent? For that matter who do any of our elected officials represent? A majority of Americans now feel they are not represented and they are right.

As the population of America grows and voter turnout declines, the public's perception of politicians is at an all-time low. Apathy has turned to despair.

Emphatic resolution of the problems facing America seems impossible. Graduate schools in public administration use a phrase regarding government resolution of our problems — "muddle through." Why are the politicians muddling through the quagmire of America's problems, reaching no real solutions?

The answer is relatively simple.

Most of America's politicians are working to keep their job and not working to do their job. Indeed, it has become quite obvious. Before we can get to educational reform, welfare reform, tort reform, resolution of the medical crisis, solving the problem of drug abuse, crime and violence, solving major environmental and ecological concern, improve the economy, etc., we must first have political reform.

And that reform must be geared to return America to representation by ‘**citizen statesmen**’ and end the era of ‘professional politicians’. It should be noted that professional politicians are not solely responsible for all the problems that we face. All those pushing the secular humanist agenda, along with those who do nothing, can certainly share the blame.

People in public office must return to being leaders and not followers, and the following summary of concepts for political reform is designed to do just that. Please note that all the following reforms relate to every public office, at every level, with the single exception of certain necessary differences for the Office of President of the United States. The reason for this exception is that the office of the President of the United States is the only countrywide elected office. All other offices are state or local.

Three steps must be taken to deal with the election cycle itself. Candidate filings for the 1992 election in Illinois began in December 1991, and the primary election is in March. This puts all candidates campaigning literally for over a year for all the offices to be decided in the 1992 November election.

To correct this kind of situation:

1. All primaries would be seven weeks prior to the General Election.
All filings of candidate petitions to run for public office would be made 10 weeks prior to the primary election date, and within three weeks of that date the appropriate election boards would certify the slate of candidates that can validly run in the primary election in their respective areas.
2. Contributions for any campaign can only be accepted 60 days prior to the date of filing petitions. If a candidate chooses not to run in the primary election, all donations must be returned if possible, and the money which is not returnable must be dispersed within 90 days of the decision not to run to acceptable charities within the district in question.

These three steps would create a complete election cycle in a six month time frame which is certainly ample time for the public to gain the proper knowledge about the candidates and most important — the elected officials would have more time to do their job, as opposed to year round campaigning

In many states a voter may take any ballot the voter wishes in a primary election which means members of one political party may vote in another political party's primary. This crossover voting is obviously unfair and should not be allowed.

To correct this:

- All voters must, at the time of registering to vote, designate the political party of their choice or register independent, as is done in New York State. A voter could then only vote in the primary election of the group for which the voter registered.

Proper financing of elections is extremely important and therefore all decisions regarding campaign finance must first insure that all the voters are truly represented by the persons that they elect, and second, insure that there is a fair competition for each elected office in question.

Total political reform must be achieved if we expect to see our elected officials act more responsibly.

Cutting the length of the primary campaign, elimination of cross-over voting and campaign finance reform are practical ways of breaking the cycle that perpetuates 'professional politicians,' and eliminates incumbency protection.

There are other important changes needed to achieve true representation for the voters and fairness for all of the candidates in every primary and general election:

- 1) A standard budget amount would be determined by the population of the candidates District (i.e. \$5.75 per voter in that District). U.S. Census Bureau statistics would be used to determine the population of all Districts at all levels. There would be a minimum budget allowable set at \$2,500 for lower level elected offices.
- 100 percent of all money raised must come from within the District that the candidate is running in.
- 2) The maximum amount of money allowable to be raised in any campaign shall not exceed 100 percent of the amount of the budget determined by the District voting population.
- 3) Personal funds used in any campaign may not exceed 25 percent of the amount allowable for that campaign.

Personal funds are defined as any donation rendered to the campaign from the candidate, the candidates spouse, children and parents of the candidate or spouse, grandparents, aunts, uncles, great-aunts, great-uncles, first cousins, brothers and sisters of the candidate or spouse (or their families), or any grandchildren of the candidate or spouse. Any relatives of the candidate or spouse can only donate in accordance with established limits, and the relatives must reside in the District of the election.

- 4) No borrowing for any campaign is allowable.
- 5) All money raised for a candidate can only be used for that candidacy with no exceptions and no out of state expenditures

All monies remaining in a campaign account after winning or losing an election can only be spent in the following manner:

- a) The winner of a primary election, may carry over the balance of the campaign account for the general election, thereby reducing by the amount carried over that which can be raised for the general election

Those losing in a primary election, and winners and losers in the general election, must spend any remaining campaign monies on any acceptable charities of the candidate's choosing within the boundaries of the particular candidacy. The money must be totally dispersed within 90 days of the Election Day. The reason for this is to end 'campaign war chests' from being accumulated which gives the incumbent office holders an unfair advantage.

Limits must be set at all levels on the size of contributions.

- The maximum limit for any individual donation at the Federal level would be \$1000. At the state level would be \$500, and for County Office or below \$250.

The maximum Political Action Committee (PAC) and at Federal level would be \$5,000, at State level would be \$2,500, and for County Office or below \$500. Any PAC money given must have been raised from the District of the candidacy in question.

No corporation contributions allowable at any level

Any known and approved campaign expense that is separately approved will be a part of the total budget of a campaign.

Paying for signature taking for any campaign is not allowable.

No public financing of any election, and the Reason: Public Financing of an election is to force a voter to finance a candidate which the voter may find totally unacceptable. This is certainly a violation of one's rights and is Unconstitutional.

Other aspects of political reform that must be acted on in order to achieve complete reform are:

- No elected official at any level may hold a full time or part time government job at any level including teaching at public institutions, with the single exception of military reservists.

Elected officials may hold only one elected position at any given time

Elected officials can only vote themselves a cost of living pay increase. If more pay is desired, the question must be put up to public referendum in the area in question. Term limitation at each level of government for all offices. This would create far more competition for the higher elected offices.

Add '**No CANDIDATE OF MY CHOICE**' at the end of the list of candidates for every office to be decided in the voting booth. And if the most votes for any office are cast in this category, then the two Political Parties placing second and third for that office have 30 days to put up another candidate, after which there would be another election. The sitting, elected official in the office in question would remain holding that office until the new election is completed. When this process is used in a Primary Election, and 'No Candidate of My Choice' receives the most votes, then that Political Party would not have a candidate for that specific office in the General Election. This concept would surely have all of our elected officials more responsive to those that elected them.

- Comprehensive legislation must now be enacted at all levels in order to achieve real political and election reform. A failure in this area will simply give us more of what we presently have.

And the last and most important point of any Political and Election Reform requires that: ***Every citizen should be a constructive participant in the whole political process.***

Editor's note: Robert Byrne is a self-employed business consultant with offices in N.Y., and IL. Byrne is a long-time participant in civic and political affairs.