



MIDWEST DEMOCRACY NETWORK

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

— BACKGROUND PAPER —

I. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Issue: Presidential Public Financing System

Question I-A:

As President, would you support and work to enact legislation to strengthen, keep the same, or repeal the presidential public financing system?

Question I-B:

If you are nominated for president in 2008 and your major opponents agree to forgo private funding in the general election campaign, will you participate in the presidential public financing system?

Background

In response to the Watergate scandal, a new voluntary public financing system for presidential candidates was established in 1974. The act's three overriding goals included preventing corruption and the appearance of corruption; increasing opportunities for competitive campaigns; and slowing down the money chase through a combination of voluntary spending limits and public grants. In short, the new law sought to take the White House off the auction block, and it succeeded. Between 1976 and 2000, candidate participation in the system was close to universal. During this period, the winning presidential candidates – two Democrats and three Republicans – relied on the public financing system in their general election campaigns, and in three of six races challengers defeated incumbent presidents. Moreover, all the presidents elected in these seven election cycles, with the exception of George W. Bush in 2000, also used public financing to pay for their primary campaigns. Despite this strong track record, the system is now clearly broken, out of date, and in desperate need of repair. The problem: the public financing system has remained largely unchanged since 1974; most notably, the spending limits for primary and general elections and the amount of public funds available to participating candidates have not kept pace with the realities of presidential campaigns. As a result, a number of candidates in 2004, including President Bush and Senator Kerry, opted out of the system, and for strategic and competitive reasons, most candidates seeking their parties' 2008 presidential nominations have thus far chosen to do the same.

Legislation intended to breathe new life into the presidential public financing system was introduced in both the Senate (S. 436) and House (H.R. 776) earlier this year. If enacted, these measures would, among other things, raise the spending limits for primary and general elections; significantly increase the amount of matching funds for small individual contributions made to candidates during the primary election season; provide funding earlier in the pre-primary election period; increase public funds for candidates who face primary and general election

opponents whose spending significantly exceeds the system's voluntary spending limits; and grow the public financing system by increasing from \$3 to \$10 the income tax check off and indexing it for inflation. The effective date for these bills would be January 1, 2009. *The text and Congressional Service summaries for S. 436 and H.R. 776 can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.*

On March 1, 2007, the Federal Election Commission unanimously approved an Advisory Opinion permitting presidential candidates to raise contributions for the 2008 general election without forfeiting the option of returning such contributions and, if nominated by their party, participating in the presidential public financing system during the general election campaign. To date, three candidates—Senator Barack Obama (D-IL), Senator John McCain (R-AZ), and former Senator John Edwards—have pledged to accept public financing and spending limits in the 2008 general election, if they are nominated and their major opponents agree to do the same. *For more information on the Federal Election Commission's Advisory Opinion go to <http://fec.gov/press/press2007/20070301meetinghtml>.*

Issue: Congressional Public Financing

Question I-C:

If elected President, would you support and work to enact legislation creating a voluntary public financing system for congressional candidates?

Background:

On March 20, 2007, Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) introduced legislation (S. 936) that would create a voluntary public financing system for U.S. Senate candidates; on May 3, the Fair Elections Now Act (FENA) was reintroduced as S. 1285. Under the terms of S. 1285, candidates wishing to avail themselves of public grants and media vouchers would have to (1) demonstrate their viability by a raising a set number of qualifying contributions; (2) not accept private contributions – except for modest and permissible amounts of early campaign seed-money; and (3) agree to abide by strict spending limits. The amount of seed money Senate candidates could accept, the number of qualifying in-state \$5 contributions they would be required to raise, and the size of the public grants participating candidates would receive in primary and general election campaigns would be governed by formulas reflecting variations in state populations and media market configurations. Candidates who choose to participate in the program and are either targets of independent expenditures or face opponents who raise and spend funds in excess of the law's voluntary spending limits would be

guaranteed additional public funds. *The text and Congressional Research Service summary of S. 1285 can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.*

Issue: 527 Groups

Question I-D:

Do you believe that Section 527 groups which are organized primarily to affect federal elections should be required by the Federal Election Commission and/or Congress to comply with the campaign finance laws that apply to all other candidate, party and political committees whose goal is to influence federal elections?

Background:

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA) banned the large and unregulated individual, corporate, labor and interest group donations, known as “soft money,” to national party organizations, most of which – more than \$500 million in the 2000 election cycle alone – was used, in violation of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974, to influence the outcomes of federal elections. In 2004, millions of dollars in soft money contributions that had previously been directed to the parties were funneled into new pro-Democratic and pro-Republican political committees organized under Section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code. These tax exempt organizations – including, most notably, Americans Coming Together (ACT), The Media Fund, and Progress for America Voter Fund – became vehicles for collecting and spending huge sums of soft money to influence the 2004 presidential and congressional elections through so-called “issue ads” and other partisan voter contact and mobilization activities. In the 2004 elections, 25 wealthy individuals contributed \$146 million to groups organized primarily to influence federal elections.

From the beginning, a number of lawmakers and civic groups argued that 527 groups whose primary purpose was to affect federal elections should be treated like all other political committees regulated by the Federal Election Commission; most importantly, they contended that such 527 groups, regardless of whether or not they are operating and spending money independently of a federal party or candidate, should have to comply with the contribution limits and disclosure requirements that apply to other FEC-regulated political committees. During and after the 2004 election, formal complaints documenting violations of federal campaign finance laws and seeking relief in the form of new 527 regulations were filed by both Democrats and Republicans with the FEC. However, in the face of inaction by the agency, the principal House sponsors of BCRA – Christopher Shays (R-CT) and Marty Meehan (D-MA) – filed suit against the FEC in federal court which in ongoing proceedings

continues to press the agency to address the 527 problem. In early 2006, Shays and Meehan introduced H.R. 513 to accomplish what the FEC has to date failed to accomplish. The bill, which passed the House and was sent to the Senate in April, would permit 527 political groups to engage in activities intended to influence federal elections so long as they do so in compliance with the same laws and rules that apply to candidates, political parties and other political committees whose major purpose is to influence federal elections. *The text and Congressional Research Service summary of H.R. 513 can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/multicongress/multicongress.html>.*

Issue: U.S. Senate Electronic Filing

Question I-E:

In the interest of increasing transparency and public accountability, should incumbent Senators, Senate candidates, and Senate campaign committees be required to file their campaign finance disclosure reports electronically?

Background:

Legislation cosponsored by Senators Russell Feingold (D-WI) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) would require sitting Senators, Senate candidates and Senate party committees to file their campaign finance disclosure reports electronically with the Secretary of the Senate; the bill enjoys broad bipartisan support and in late March was unanimously passed by the Senate Rules Committee. Under the terms of S. 223, the Secretary would transmit such reports within 24 hours of their receipt to the Federal Election Commission, which in turn would post them on its website for on-line searching and downloading. Although political parties, presidential candidates, House candidates, political action committees, and section 527 groups routinely file their disclosure reports electronically with the FEC on the dates they are due, current Senate rules require that such reports be on paper. As a result, the data in these reports have to be keypunched by an outside vendor at considerable added cost to the FEC, thus delaying unnecessarily the public's access to this information. In 2006, for example, information on contributions received by candidates in the final five months of the campaign – including information from six of the ten most competitive Senate elections – was not posted online by the FEC until after the November 6 election. Unfortunately, due to an “anonymous hold” by one or more Senators, action on S. 223, which now has 40 sponsors, has been delayed without explanation. *The text and summary of S. 223 can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.*

Issue: FEC Reform

Question I-F:

As President, will you actively support and sign legislation that would replace the current Federal Election Commission with a new and more effective enforcement agency?

Background:

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) was created in 1974 to administer the campaign finance disclosure laws, manage the presidential public financing system, and issue such regulations and advisory opinions as needed to implement and interpret federal campaign finance laws. Due to its structure, limited powers and past performance, the FEC is widely viewed as weak and ineffective. Critics claim the agency was intentionally designed to fail, and that it has succeeded. Its membership – three Republican commissioners and three Democratic commissioners nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate – has often led to partisan stalemates on critically important issues which in turn has fueled suspicions that commissioners are more responsive to their political patrons than to the public. In addition, the FEC does not have the authority to find that violations of the law have occurred or to impose penalties or other sanctions in such cases; so in matters of enforcement, the commission is reduced to negotiating conciliation agreements with alleged violators of federal campaign finance laws or filing lawsuits that may or may not eventuate in court-imposed civil penalties and sanctions. A number of FEC decisions have, in the words of the U.S. Supreme Court, “subverted” and “invited widespread circumvention” of the nation’s campaign finance laws. Particularly injurious to the system was the agency’s decision in the early 1990s to turn on the soft money spigot. Even after a soft money ban was adopted in 2002, the federal courts had to order the FEC to revise its loophole-riddled regulations for implementing the new law. The agency’s casual response to the increased use of 527 committees as vehicles for circumventing the soft money ban has spawned another generation of lawsuits.

In early 2007, Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Russell Feingold (D-WI) and Representatives Christopher Shays (R-CT) and Marty Meehan (D-MA) re-introduced legislation – the Federal Election Administration Act (S. 478 and H.R. 421) – to replace the FEC with a new and more effective three-member regulatory agency. If enacted, the FEA’s chairman, serving a 10-year term, would have broad powers to manage and administer the agency; the agency’s two other members, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, would serve for six-year, non-renewable terms and could not be members of the same political party. The proposed agency’s enforcement powers would include the authority to find that

violations of law have occurred, impose civil penalties, and issue cease and desist orders. The new agency, like other federal regulatory bodies charged with providing independent and impartial decisions, would rely on administrative law judges to hear and decide campaign finance enforcement proceedings. The FEA's budget would be submitted directly to Congress rather than through the Office of Management and Budget, as is currently the case with the FEC; in addition, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) would periodically review the operations and financial management of the new agency to determine whether it has the resources needed to fulfill its statutory responsibilities. *The text and Congressional Research Service summary of the Federal Election Administration Act – S. 478 and H.R. 421 – can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.*

II. GOVERNMENT ETHICS

Issue. Executive Branch Reforms

Question II-A:

Because many citizens believe the President bears a special responsibility for setting and enforcing high standards of honesty, transparency and accountability in government, what specific steps, if any, would you take, as President, to:

- (1) Slowdown or close the “revolving door” for high-ranking and influential administration officials who leave their positions to become high-paid registered lobbyists?
- (2) Limit or ban the acceptance of gifts by administration employees from lobbyists and others with an interest in influencing policy?
- (3) End insider abuses in the federal government’s no-bid contract procedures?
- (4) Provide the public with information about the sponsors, purposes and beneficiaries of the special interest-supported appropriation “earmarks” approved by Congress?
- (5) Publicly disclose the content, participants and outcomes of closed-door policy-related discussions involving administration officials and interest group representatives and lobbyists?

Issue: Congressional Reforms

Question II-B:

If you were President now, would you sign, veto, or try to amend S. 1?

Background:

The public has repeatedly signaled its support for lobbying and ethics reform over the past year. A *USA Today/Gallup* poll conducted shortly before the November 2006 election found that corruption in government was a more important issue to voters in the coming congressional elections than terrorism, health care, the economy, the nation’s moral standards, and gas prices—and in terms of top

concerns was tied with the Iraq War. On Election Day, CNN's national exit polls showed that more voters said corruption and ethics in government was more important to their vote than any other issue, including, again the war in Iraq. These concerns can be traced in large part to a string of high profile criminal investigations, indictments and convictions of powerful lobbyists (like Jack Abramoff), House members (like Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) , Robert Ney (R-OH), Tom DeLay (R-TX), Mark Foley (R-FL), and William Jefferson (D-LA), and a number of former House staff members.

In early August and after months of debate and negotiations, the Congress adopted the most sweeping ethics and lobbying reforms in more than a generation. S.1 – passed by the House 411 to 8 and by the Senate 83 to 14 – imposes new regulations on lobbyists; further regulates and restricts the acceptance of travel and gifts by Members and staff; requires disclosure of appropriation earmarks; slows the revolving door; and mandates disclosure of contribution "bundling" by lobbyists. The provisions that apply to the House and Senate are not identical in every respect; for example, the "cooling off" period for former Senators and very senior executive branch personnel who wish to engage in private sector lobbying activities is increased from one to two years while the House retains a one-year "cooling off" period for former Members.

Although the White House has expressed reservations about the bill's "weak" provisions on appropriation "earmarks," the unfairness of the lobbying restrictions for former government employees, and the regulation of noncommercial air travel, it appears that President Bush is prepared to sign the legislation. *The text and Congressional Research Service summary of S.1 can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.*

III. COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Issue: Broadcasters' Public Interest Obligations

Question III-A:

Do you support regulatory and legislative efforts to clarify the public interest obligations of broadcasters, including adoption of new license processing guidelines that would encourage digital broadcasters to (1) air a certain minimum number of qualifying civic and/or election-related programming each week and (2) file periodic reports with the Federal Communications Commission detailing how stations are meeting such guidelines?

Background:

According to the Pew Center for the People & the Press, almost six in ten (59 percent) watch local television news regularly, and more than three in four (76 percent) say that TV news is their chief source of election information. However, when it comes to local television news coverage of elections and government, a number of studies strongly suggest that the public, despite its dependence on this medium, is being seriously shortchanged. Example: Based on in depth analyses of the political news broadcast by 36 local TV stations in nine major media markets in the Midwest during the fall of 2006 and the first quarter of 2007, the University of Wisconsin NewsLab concluded: (1) that between the traditional Labor Day kickoff of the 2006 election season and early October, TV stations devoted an average of only 36 seconds to election coverage during the typical early- and late-evening 30-minute newscast; and that horserace stories vastly outweighed issue coverage by a margin of almost three to one; (2) that during the final month leading up to the November 2006 election, local television news viewers received considerably more information about campaigns from paid political advertisements than from actual news coverage; in seven of the nine markets, nearly four and a half minutes of paid political ads were aired during the typical early- and late-evening 30-minute broadcast compared with an average of one minute and 43 seconds of actual news coverage; and (3) that in the first three months of 2007, stations dedicated just one minute and 35 seconds to government news during a typical 30-minute news broadcast compared with five times more airtime devoted to sports and weather. *(The complete NewsLab reports as well as a searchable archive of clips can be found at www.mni.wisc.edu.)*

These sobering findings raise fresh questions about the nature and enforceability of broadcasters' public interest obligations, particularly at a time when the Federal Communications Commission is struggling to formulate rules that will govern digital broadcasting. The conversion from analog to digital broadcasting will allow single-license holders to air programming simultaneously over multiple channels. Although the February 2009 deadline for completing the transition is less than 18

months away, a critically important question remains: Should broadcasters be required to “compensate” the public for their expanded no-cost use of an invaluable public resource – namely, the public airwaves? Or, put another way, will the digital era and the bonanza it represents for broadcasters simply usher in more of the same if-it-bleeds-it-leads news coverage? It is against this backdrop that a growing number of Senators and Representatives, two of the FCC’s five commissioners, and a host of consumer, civic, media rights, labor and public interest groups have recommended that the FCC adopt license renewal processing guidelines similar to those currently applied to children’s programming. They propose that renewal process be expedited for broadcasters which air a minimum of three hours per week of local civic or electoral affairs programming on the most-watched channels they control – and for those stations which in the weeks immediately preceding primary and general elections devote that at least two of the three hour minimum to electoral coverage. The proposed guidelines also specify the days of the week and the hours of the day such qualifying programming must be broadcast, define what qualifies as “civic” and “electoral” programming, and would require digital broadcasters to report periodically and in detail to the FCC on how they are serving the public interest. For more information on this proposal link to <http://www.ourairwaves.org/docs/index.php?DocID+56>.

Issue: Media Vouchers

Question III-B:

In the interest of mitigating the high costs of election campaigns, fostering electoral competition, and enabling more candidates to communicate with voters, would you, if elected President, support and sign legislation that would (1) provide qualifying congressional candidates and party committees with vouchers with which to pay for some broadcast advertising time; (2) impose a modest user fee on broadcasters’ gross advertising revenues to underwrite the voucher program; and (3) allow qualified candidates and parties to purchase non-preemptible advertising time at rates below stations’ lowest unit charges during the final weeks of primary and general election campaigns?

Background:

Despite rising costs for paid political television ads, they remain a key component in the arsenal of most candidates for communicating with and delivering their messages to voters. The trend is particularly obvious at the federal level; in 2004, for example, candidates running for federal office spent more than half their budgets on broadcast media ads. And the amount of money involved is not trivial;

according to the Television Bureau of Advertising, more than \$1.6 billion was spent on political ads in 2004 – more than double the 2000 total.

Such heavy reliance on paid advertising has had four notable effects. First, when candidates devote more and more time to raising money to meet the escalating costs of television advertising, they have less and less time to talk with and listen to voters about the issues they care most about. Second, candidates who are not well known, or are not independently wealthy, or do not have a well-developed donor network are at a decided disadvantage in this system; without access to television, whether paid or earned, they cannot hope to reach, inform and mobilize voters – especially if they are running against incumbent officeholders who typically have significantly greater resources at their disposal. Third, there is evidence that some broadcasters capitalize on candidates' dependence on paid political ads by increasing the cost of commercial advertising time in the final weeks of elections, a practice which gouges candidates who are desperate to be heard – and deserve to be heard. (A study conducted by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University found that during the 2000 election cycle the average cost of a 30-second political ad tripled during the critical late-August to late-October period.) And finally, the revenue generated from the sale of political ads is significant; such sales help account for the healthy profit margins typically enjoyed by local television stations, whether they operate in a large urban or smaller media markets.

Like the earlier proposed Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Act of 2003 (S. 1997), the Fair Elections Now Act – S. 1285 – seeks to address these problems by providing federal candidates reduced-cost access to the nation's publicly-owned airwaves in two ways. First, stations would be required to provide participating federal candidates and political parties advertising rates at 20 percent below the lowest unit charge (LUC) during the 45 days before a primary election and 60 days before a general election. Such airtime purchased by a federal candidate could not be preempted by stations. (If enacted, this provision would significantly change current law which only guarantees candidates lowest advertising rates for the same class, amount of time, and day part that a broadcast station, cable system or DBS provider offers to its commercial advertisers.) Second, S. 1285 would create a communications voucher system that would permit qualifying federal candidates and parties to purchase political advertising. Such a system would be financed through a two percent user fee on the gross advertising revenues of broadcast license holders. Eligibility for these benefits would be limited to Senate candidates who chose to participate in the voluntary public financing system that S. 1285 would establish and who satisfied the law's threshold requirements for public grants. *The text and Congressional Research Service summary of S. 1285 from the 108th Congress can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>.*

IV. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Issue: Federal Funding for Election Reform

Question IV-A:

Do you support ongoing federal funding to improve the conduct of federal elections in exchange for better information from state and local election authorities on how they are administering elections and whether they are complying with federal law?

Background:

The 2000 presidential election exposed serious problems with the United States' system of election administration, ranging from unreliable voting machines to incomplete registration lists. While the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) resulted in improvements in some facets of election administration, it is clear that the work of election reform is far from complete. The 2004 election resulted in serious disputes, most notably in Ohio, where 153,000 provisional ballots were cast and the election was ultimately decided by less than 119,000 votes, amid allegations of partisanship on the part of the state's chief election official. More recently, it has become clear that state and local election systems are in need of continuing improvement when it comes to their voter registration databases and voting technology.

Traditionally, federal elections have been conducted by state and local officials with little assistance or support from the federal government. Although HAVA provided a one-time source of funding for improvements, this has proven insufficient to deal with the manifold weaknesses in our election administration system. At the same time, the poor quality of information provided by state and local election officials makes it difficult to diagnose problems before they erupt into full-blown crises for election officials. Although the United States Election Assistance Commission (EAC) conducted surveys in both 2004 and 2006, much of the data provided by the states were either incomplete or inaccurate. Information necessary to support election reform thus remains a critical unmet need. Although ongoing federal support to state and local governments to conduct federal elections is essential, future assistance, in the view of many experts, should be conditioned on the willingness of state and local election officials to provide the kind of information needed to objectively evaluate the performance of their systems.

Issue: Voter Protection

Question IV-B:

As President, will you insist that the Department of Justice vigorously enforce the Voting Rights Act and other federal laws in order to curtail practices and procedures that have a disproportionately negative impact on the political participation of minority, low-income, disabled, and elderly voters?

Background:

In recent years, legislatures in several states have attempted to enact stringent identification laws that would, as a practical matter, exclude many eligible voters. Three states – Georgia, Indiana and Missouri – have enacted laws requiring voters to present government-issued photo identifications. These laws were enacted with virtually no evidence of voters going to the polls pretending to be someone else, the only type of fraud that a photo-ID requirement would prevent. However, these same states have liberalized absentee voting while simultaneously making it more difficult to vote at the polls; ironically, most evidence of voting fraud arises from absentee rather than polling-place voting. What the evidence does show is that certain groups of voters, including racial minorities, would be disproportionately burdened by laws requiring photo IDs. In Georgia, for example, African American voters are less likely to have a car and, therefore, less likely to have a driver's license which is the most common form of photo ID. In Wisconsin, only 22 percent of African American men between the ages of 18 and 24 have driver's licenses, compared with over 80 percent of the population as a whole. This same study also shows that other groups, including students and low-income people, are less likely to have a driver's license. For these and related reasons, a federal court later invalidated the Georgia law on the grounds that it amounted to a discriminatory poll tax and violation of the Voting Rights Act. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Justice – often against the advice of career lawyers and staff within the Civil Rights Division – has done little to discourage states from creating barriers whose effectiveness in deterring voting fraud remains unproven. As a result of the Department's casual approach to this issue, challenging stringent ID laws on voting rights grounds has been left almost entirely to private litigants

Issue: Voter Registration

Question IV-C:

As President, would you work to ensure that every eligible citizen can easily register to vote by vigorously enforcing the National Voter Registration Act's requirements that registration services be

provided at motor vehicle facilities, public assistance offices, and agencies serving people with disabilities?

Background:

In 1993, Congress enacted the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which was designed to make it easier for all American citizens to register to vote and maintain their registration. Specifically, the law requires that voters be given the opportunity to register at motor vehicle agencies, public assistance offices, and agencies providing services to people with disabilities. There is disturbing evidence, however, that many states are failing to comply with the NVRA. A 2007 report by the federal Election Assistance Commission found that the number of registered voters actually *decreased* between 2004 and 2006. From 1995 to 2006, there was an 80 percent nationwide decrease in voter registrations from public assistance agencies, with nine states reporting decreases of 90 percent or more. But despite requests from voting rights groups, the U.S. Department of Justice has taken few steps to ensure that states are providing registration opportunities as federal law requires.

V. REDISTRICTING

Issue: Once-A-Decade Redistricting

Question V-A:

As President, would you support federal legislation prohibiting states from redrawing valid congressional district lines more than once a decade?

Background:

In the absence of applicable federal law, each state sets its own procedures for redrawing congressional district boundaries. Though the U.S. Constitution demands that every state redraw its congressional districts at least once per decade, only four states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, and New Jersey) explicitly prohibit redrawing lines more often. As a result, across most of the rest of the country, state legislatures may redraw their congressional districts whenever it is politically suitable. This can encourage political power plays like the highly controversial 2003 Texas re-districting, in which the legislature reconfigured the valid district lines adopted just two years earlier.

The ability to tweak district lines repeatedly increases the likelihood that redistricting will be used to create or lock in an advantage for a party or incumbent officeholders. The procedure can be used by lawmakers to exploit outdated population figures or updated voting histories with an eye toward diluting the voting strength of disfavored communities or surgically banishing promising or popular challengers from their districts. Many experts claim that such practices are not cost-free; shuffling constituents in and out of districts can, among other things, weaken their ties to elected representatives from one election to the next and undermine political accountability. In response to these problems, Representatives John Tanner (D-TN) and Zack Wamp (R-TN) have introduced the Fairness and Independence in Redistricting Act (H.R. 543) and Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) has introduced the Redistricting Reform Act of 2007 (H.R. 2248); both proposals would limit redistricting to once a decade (barring a court decision striking down the districts) and require the states to create independent commissions to conduct congressional redistricting. *The text and Congressional research Service summaries of H.R. 543 and H.R. 2248 can be found at <http://thomas.gov.loc/>.*

Issue: Independent Redistricting Commissions

Question V-B:

As President, would you support federal legislation requiring states to form diverse, transparent, and independent redistricting commissions to redraw congressional district boundary lines?

Background:

In all but four states, state legislatures are responsible for drawing congressional districts. This creates a natural temptation for self-dealing. For example, individual state lawmakers interested in higher office are often in a position to bend district lines in order to secure their own future congressional election prospects. Other legislators see redistricting as an opportunity to maximize party advantage. Beyond these temptations, creating districts that favor one party, or one set of candidates, or some constituents over others reduces public confidence in the system. Such practices fuel the perception that elected representatives are choosing constituents rather than constituents choosing their representatives. Congress has the power to change this. Indeed, several pending federal bills (including H.R. 543 and H.R. 2248) would require that congressional lines be drawn by state commissions that would be independent of the legislature. While there is no guarantee that independent commissions would in all cases draw better or less self-interested congressional districts than legislators, many experts believe such panels, if properly organized and structured, could enhance and help restore public confidence in the diversity, accountability, transparency, and fairness of the districting process.