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LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2000, the senior staff and trusted advisors at the University of Virginia Center for Governmental Studies gathered to select a topic for the next installment of our annual National Symposium Series. Our deliberations yielded a subject we felt might attract some interest in the spring of 2001—the Presidential Selection Process. We had seen a mildly eventful nominating season, and were in the midst of what appeared to be a back-and-forth presidential contest between Al Gore and George W. Bush. We believed the nation might benefit from a look back at Election 2000 and an examination of ways in which we might improve the process for choosing a chief executive. At that point, we could not have imagined how the events following November 7, 2000, would impact our line of inquiry.

The primary objective of the Center is to serve the public by increasing and improving political education and participation, and our efforts help bridge the gap between academe and the real world of politics. The National Symposium on Presidential Selection brought together some of the top minds in American politics and scholarship for an open discussion of the issues at hand. In the months following the Symposium, we have expanded our findings through extensive research and analysis, and worked to produce a report that is not only practical, but thoughtful and innovative. This report is also supplemented by a website, available at www.goodpolitics.org.

Since Election 2000 and its chaotic aftermath, a great deal has been said and written about the way in which Americans elect their president. With rare exception, this discourse has been focused on or around the act of voting, while largely ignoring the larger issues surrounding our electoral process. While many good ideas have come forward, most of the discourse has been grouped around two poles. Many of the reform proposals have focused on only mundane reforms, while other suggestions stray toward the outlandish. In this report, we have sought to find a middle ground. One cannot meaningfully discuss reform without a sense of what is possible. However, any substantive debate must be open to new ideas. The Center's report seeks to launch further discussion in an atmosphere divorced from the heat of the political moment, yet not imperious to political reality.

We have focused our analysis on three major elements of the presidential selection process—the nominating process, the voting process, and the Electoral College. Our analyses range from very specific to broadly theoretical. We have looked at many of the most popular and notable reform proposals, as well as some that rarely enjoy mention. In the report, the Center cautions against moving too quickly and ignoring unintended consequences of reform proposals that can inflict more harm than good. As academic institutions are intended to do, the Center challenges policymakers and scholars to think about our system in a new light, with proposals regarding the nominating process and Electoral College that are original and thought provoking. This report also stresses the fundamental need to increase civics education on all levels, most noticeably with America's young people.

In all of the efforts and recommendations, the Center's overarching goal is to increase civic engagement and improve public confidence in the electoral process, a lofty goal that neither begins nor ends on Election Day.

Larry J. Sabato, Director, & Alex Theodoridis, Chief of Staff