

## U.S. ELECTION REFORM THE ROAD AHEAD

by Scott R. Lansell

The U.S. presidential election in November 2000 began what many in the United States consider one of the most tumultuous periods related to election administration in recent memory. While charges of electoral fraud or mismanagement had occurred at local levels or on a smaller scale, not until 2000 did such charges affect the U.S. population as a whole. Along with a new familiarity with “chads,” “dimples” and punch-card machines came an awareness that the election equipment used in a number of states was decades old and no longer up to the task.

Beginning in early 2001 a number of initiatives were launched to address and resolve the problems encountered in 2000. Former Presidents Ford and Carter, among others, stimulated a nationwide debate on electoral reform. Many options and recommendations were discussed, including the banning of specific types of voting equipment, utilizing new voting technologies to assist with out-of-country voting (i.e. military voting), placing federal standards on voting systems and administration, and allocating large sums of federal funding for reform and equipment replacement.

Months of considerable debate recently reached a climactic conclusion in the form of the “Help America Vote Act of 2002,” which many have called the most important legislation in years to address nationwide election reform. In a four-month conference committee effort, the Senate and House of Representatives worked out key differences in their

respective versions of the bill, including the amount of federal funding, forms voter identification required, the federal grant structure and the degree of federal versus state authority. The Act, which will be sent to the White House before the November elections, mandates new federal standards on provisional ballots, statewide voter registration accessibility and greater access for those with disabilities. The Act also proposes an Election Assistance Commission to oversee a program of grants to assist states with the costs of replacing obsolete voting equipment and meeting federal standards. The commitment of \$3.9 billion to this endeavor is a clear sign that the American taxpayer will bear the brunt of the cost of reform.



On October 8, 2002, IFES hosted a “hands-on” exhibition of polling equipment and materials to be used in jurisdictions around the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area on Election Day. Invited guests included key congressional leaders, local disability groups, representatives of the diplomatic community and the media.

Although there have been a number of elections throughout 2002, culminating in U.S. House and Senate elections on November 5, it is clear that the reforms developed in this bill will not have any significant impact until 2004—America’s next presidential election. Many of the improvements, enhancements and assistance efforts mandated in this legislation will certainly have to be in place or well on their way by then. The American people

will be watching the implementation of this Act as it reaches the President’s desk and beyond with the hope that it will renew their confidence in elections that are free and fair—the type of elections that America, through organizations like IFES, attempts to promote globally.

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February: Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo elected president of Nigeria.



March: Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary join NATO.

March: NATO launches air strikes on Serbia to end attacks against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

June: Nelson Mandela retires as president of South Africa; succeeded by Thabo Mbeki.

August: People of East Timor vote for independence from Indonesia



October: Indonesia elects Muslim leader Abdurrahman Wahid president.

IFES organizes the first global meeting of election associations (GEO Network Conference in Ottawa).

IFES obtains grants for disability programming from the governments of Finland and Sweden.



### 1999

President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan launches IFES civic education program on national television.

IFES provides comprehensive technical assistance for Indonesia’s historic elections of 1999.

