

California Assemblyman Joe Baca is successful in having his proposed legislation enacted, all California students 18 years or older will be registered to vote as part of their U.S. government and civics courses.

This insidious plan on the part of the Mexican government and its American allies to indoctrinate Mexican expatriates in undying loyalty to the country from which they so willingly fled is unconscionable as well as of dubious constitutionality: the Mexican government has admitted its political motives behind the adult and teen education programs, citing concern about the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States still voting at home and influencing events there.

Political motives also lie behind the recent demands of Latino and other ethnic students for "cultural studies" departments. The hunger strike and violent protest (which caused \$50,000 in damage) for a Chicano studies department at UCLA and the demonstration for an Asian-American studies department at the University of California-Irvine earlier this year illustrated that student interest in ethnic studies is not purely intellectual. "It's no longer just an academic question. It has become a symbol," said California Senator Art Torres, who threatened to block state funding to UCLA if the demands of Latino students were not met. As Latinos on campus waved Mexican flags and banners reading "500 Years of Resistance," true Americans had to ask: A symbol of what?

I close with an excerpt from a letter written by historian Lord Macaulay to H.S. Randall (biographer of Thomas Jefferson) in 1857: "As I said before, when a society has entered this downward progress, either liberty or civilization must perish. Either some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reigns of government with a strong hand or your Republic will be as fearlessly plundered and laid waste by the barbarians in the 20th century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth, with the difference that the huns and vandals who ravaged the Roman Empire came from without, and your huns and vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions."

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The Facts and Fiction of Election Reforms

by Steven Schwalm

Two of the Clinton campaign's central promises aimed at reducing the federal budget deficit and "reinventing" government. Unfortunately, President Clinton's recently unveiled campaign finance reform plan will do neither. The most dramatic step the President could take toward accomplishing his goals would be to resist congressmen's desires on the topic closest to their hearts: election laws.

The President's plans to lower the Political Action Committee (PAC) contribution limit of \$5,000 to match the individual limit of \$1,000, to prohibit "bundling" of contributions, and to ban lobbyists from giving or soliciting campaign funds have all been abandoned in the face of opposition from the House Democratic leadership. What remains closely resembles the House and Senate bills H.R. 3 and S. 3, respectively. These bills, similar to last year's campaign finance reform bill, offer tax dollars to ease incumbents' fundraising chores while making it more difficult for credible challengers to mount winning campaigns. These bills will cost hundreds of millions of federal dollars annually and further entrench the status quo in Washington.

Congressmen have a direct stake in election laws. Election reforms should make elections more competitive; instead, past "reforms" have increased the already formidable advantage enjoyed by congressional incumbents. Both of the new election reform bills would continue this trend. Candidate Clinton proclaimed, "You have to be for changing business as usual in Washington." The "motor-voter" bill and Congress's campaign finance reform package both serve only to reentrench the old guard.

Congress intends to pass a campaign finance reform package similar to the bill (also known as S.3) vetoed by President Bush last year. The public financing and spending limits in these bills would reinstate the complete provisions of the original S.3044, upon which our present campaign finance system is based. That bill contained mandatory spending limits, limits on independent

spending by national parties, and contribution limits. The Senate version of the bill included public financing of congressional campaigns as well.

The Senate's public financing provisions were dropped from S.3044 in the House-Senate conference committee, and the bill's mandatory spending limits were ultimately invalidated by the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo*. Still, what remained of the bill was enough to secure incumbents comfortably in elected office. While the 1974 law outlawed corporate donations and severely limited individual contributions, it gave Political Action Committees—then used primarily by labor unions—a fivefold advantage over individual contributors. While PACs could give \$5,000 per candidate, with no overall limit, individuals could give only \$1,000 per candidate and no more than \$25,000 total.

The predictable result was an explosion in the number and influence of special-interest PACs. In 1974, 608 PACs spent under \$20 million on congressional races. By 1988, there were 4,172 PACs pumping \$150 million into House and Senate races. The overwhelming majority of this money goes to incumbents. A Federal Election Commission (FEC) study found that, despite (or perhaps in response to) the general public's distaste for politicians in 1992, PAC giving was up 14 percent. In House races incumbents received 97 percent of this PAC money; in the Senate incumbents received 92 percent. As one memo circulated at a company that relies on government contracts explained: "Access to these people is theoretically not bought, but if you want to see them in a timely manner, it is expected for us to make a contribution."

The 1974 "reforms" worked like magic. In 1974, less than 88 percent of House incumbents won reelection. By 1988, that figure had risen to a near-perfect 98.5 percent. The margins also widened. Incumbents unopposed or winning by margins of over 20 points jumped from 69 percent to 86 percent during that period.

The new reforms pick up right where the old ones left off. Congress and the Clinton administration have presented plans that still favor special interest money, but they include as well both the public financing and spending limits that did not survive the first round of reforms. In the jujitsu of congressional reform, failure of a portion of the earlier

approach justifies its consummation. Disgust with the special-interest politics engendered by the 1974 bill prompted Congress to promise that a few hundred million more tax dollars will cleanse the corruptive influence of private sector money from elections. Of course, public financing also places the purse strings of election financing in its own capable hands.

Tax money will finance qualifying House candidates with matching funds (equaling the first \$200 of individual contributions) and House and Senate races with postal subsidies and vouchers for television air time. Spending limits are set at \$600,000 for House races and from \$950,000 to \$5.5 million for Senate races. The theoretically voluntary spending limits are expected to pass constitutional muster this time around, but candidates whose opponents exceed the limits receive lavish direct federal aid. The House is now as enthusiastic to use tax money for campaigning as was the Senate's biggest public financing proponent, Ted Kennedy, back in 1974, when he contended that public financing could "end the corrosive and corruptive influence of private money in public life."

The same animus suffused the halls of Congress again when S.3 was debated last year. Public financing combined with spending limits was preached by supporters of last year's campaign finance bill as the way to "end the money chase." This is perplexing because incumbents don't need to engage in a "money chase." Many incumbents begin campaign season with a war chest left over from the previous election that exceeds the entire amount most challengers will raise. This not only scares off prospective challengers, but also, when the going gets tough for incumbents (as with the 1992 elections), enables them to battle their opponents with buckets of money. In 1992, 36 incumbents spent over one million dollars apiece—six times the number of seven-figure spenders in 1990. This includes many eminent advocates of the \$600,000 spending limits in the House portion of last year's campaign finance reform bill. Among these are Democratic Representatives Steny Hoyer and Martin Frost (\$1.5 million each) and David Bonior (\$1.3 million). Indeed, the House sponsor of the campaign "reform" bill, Sam Gejdenson, spent nearly a million. And it is not as though they were backed

against the wall by big-spending challengers. Their opponents all spent less than 20 percent of the money they did.

Public financing will give incumbents the kind of security they now enjoy without the distasteful indignity of grubbing for money from special interests. It would also make them nearly as insulated from the special interests as they now are from the average voter. Congressionally written campaign laws have historically cultivated private money sources favorable to incumbents. Public financing will force taxpayers to spend millions on the election campaigns of every qualifying candidate, while increasing elected officials' control of the money. Having incumbents write campaign laws is certainly a conflict of interest.

While public money eases campaigning chores for incumbents, spending limits will chasten ambitious challengers. Challengers need to raise a threshold amount (at least \$200,000) before even gaining credibility and name recognition. Incumbents begin with both. Given that incumbents start the race with a healthy lead, the reform bill's spending limits could prevent challengers from mounting the kind of campaign needed to overcome it.

Moreover, incumbent congressmen already have enormous taxpayer-funded resources at their disposal. Amazingly, the spending restrictions in the new reform proposals overlook all of these. For example, though ostensibly not for campaign purposes, the flood of franked mail peaks directly prior to elections, as near as the law allows. In 1990, the House exceeded its \$44 million-dollar franked mail budget by some \$31 million. The House appropriated a whopping \$80 million for its postage costs for 1992, plus another \$32 million for the Senate's. Former Senator Pete Wilson, who called the extensive use of the franking privilege a "clear case of abuse," estimated that the 800 million pieces of mail Congress sent out in 1988 weighed as much as 746 Greyhound buses. Only about 8 percent of this is in direct response to constituent inquiries. Taxpayers also pay for an incumbent's full-time staff and office in his home district, a television studio on Capitol Hill, travel, and hundreds of other things. Incumbents enjoy lavish free media coverage, and few others can keep receiving their paychecks while running a full-time campaign.

Of course, the complex funding scheme is fraught with loopholes, such as exemptions on fundraising limits for administrative expenses or costs incurred in complying with the bill's complex bookkeeping and legal burdens. And, of course, those who wrote the rules will best know how to exploit the loopholes. The burden of complying with all the administrative minutiae will detract from legitimate political activities, particularly for political novices. And enforcement will run from spotty to nonexistent (the Federal Election Commission, which now only enforces spending limits on the presidential race, was still cleaning up accounts from the 1988 presidential campaign in mid-1992) or else the election bureaucracy will have to be vastly expanded to cover the approximately 1,000 more races every four years. The bottom line: the new campaign finance bill will mean more tax dollars, more government control, and inevitably, less competitive elections.

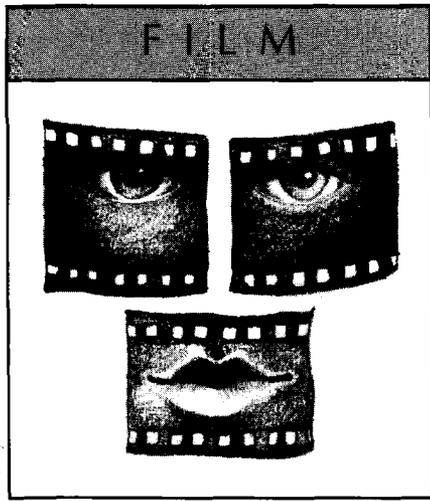
The other election reform bill, already passed by the House and Senate, is the "motor-voter" bill. The bill requires states to: one, register as voters those renewing or applying for a driver's license; two, allow voter registration by mail; and, three, open registration sites at public assistance agencies and at military recruitment offices. In typical fashion, these mandates to the states are not funded. States struggling with their own deficits will have to expend scarce funds to meet the new federal dictates and to keep a lid on the voting fraud that the new processes will encourage. It is almost impossible to prevent fraud with mail-in registration, while the driver's license registration would have insured the gentleman who detonated a rental truck under the World Trade Center of his right to vote. States are *not* allowed to require proof of citizenship of registrants.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that the bill will cost the federal government about \$4.5 million each year. However, it will cost each state an average of \$20 to \$25 million per year for the first five years, plus a possible one-time cost of \$60 to \$70 million to computerize registration lists. The states could also be made liable for lawsuits resulting from state violations of the bill's provisions.

Both the motor-voter bill and the new campaign finance reforms calcify the po-

litical status quo under the guise of reform. President Clinton cannot claim to be a reformer by acquiescing to a congressional desire to rig elections. Rather than “reinvent” government, Congress and the administration appear set to reinstate themselves as our governing elite.

Steven Schwalm writes from Washington, D.C.



Anna Mycek-Wadlecki

Metaflicks

by David R. Slavitt

Jurassic Park

Produced by Kathleen Kennedy

and Gerald R. Molen

Directed by Steven Spielberg

Screenplay by Michael Crichton and David Koepp

Released by Universal

The Fugitive

Produced by Arnold Kopelson

Directed by Andrew Davis

Screenplay by Jeb Stuart

and David Twohy

Released by Warner Brothers

Robert Warshow, one of the best critics of film we ever had (all serious moviegoers should read his collected essays, *The Immediate Experience*), wrote that the most difficult thing about reviewing movies is “admitting that you were there.” I thought I understood that gnomic pronouncement 30 years ago when I realized, one dreary morning in a

Manhattan screening room where I sat drinking coffee, nibbling on a Danish pastry, and watching Annette Funicello cavort in some beach party movie, that . . . I was enjoying myself. One way or another, I would have to contrive a way of admitting that.

But I have been reconsidering Warshow’s reviewers’ koan, because I have come to understand that it is more complicated than I thought—perhaps even more complex than he thought. The tricky word is “there.” Where? The obvious answer is in the theater (or screening room) up on the screen, where a work of art is filtering down through the enlivened motes in the air from the projectionist’s booth behind us.

But the moviemakers know better. The movie, the big movie anyway, is everywhere, in the snippets we see on the *Tonight Show*, or in the trailers and ads, or even on the giveaway novelties at MacDonald’s. A big movie floats through the ether, and much of its transaction occurs before the patron has entered the theater. The producers and the writers have bet millions of dollars on the accuracy of their reading of our dreams, which is what they are manipulating and selling back to us, and above and beyond the commercial hype there is a kind of Jungian collective unconscious on which the movies draw and to which they also of course contribute.

In the case of two of the commercially successful films of this past summer, the dream is easily definable, a clear theme on which the screenplay and the direction were mere embellishments. In the case of *Jurassic Park*, what we have is an elaborate revision of *Frankenstein*—which is to say, an expression of the ordinary person’s suspicion (and resentment) of the arrogance of scientists and intellectuals. On the one hand, there is the scientists’ belief in progress; on the other, there is our commonsense understanding of the inexorability of the operation of Murphy’s Law. Something will go wrong. The clumsy assistant will produce the wrong brain, or the vernal and disloyal assistant will—most implausibly—turn off the electrical fences and the computerized security devices. Then there’s carnage, which is the fault of the overweening pride of these guys in their white coats. And then order is restored.

Spielberg’s film is not very interesting, not even very amusing to watch. There are a few impressive special ef-

fects, but those don’t sustain our attention for more than a few minutes. But to talk about what was up on the screen is to miss the movie’s presence, a strange phenomenon that ranged up and down the cultural scale from the Dino-sized fries and the Jurassic Park souvenirs for the kiddies to pompous intellectual pieces in prestigious journals—like Stephen Jay Gould’s in the *New York Review of Books*, which tells us not to worry, that you can’t really graft strands of dinosaur DNA into frog embryos and produce a triceratops. (Who really thought so?) There was even an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* to explain that Crichton’s book and screenplay hadn’t allowed enough time for animals of such size and tonnage to have matured from these manipulated ova and to have reached their fighting and maiming weights.

The bothersome part of it, though, is at the other end, the lucrative world of the kiddie toys, tie-in books, and souvenirs. The Jurassic Park souvenirs are like trinkets from the Titanic, after all. As the film makes clear, the park is a disaster and is destroyed. But the kids mostly don’t know this, or they oughtn’t. I was pleased to hear that one of my children had gone to check out the movie to see whether it was too violent for his seven-year-old son (and he decided that it was—even gratuitously so, mentioning in particular the shot in which the fleeing girl feels a hand on her shoulder, thinks it means that she now has an ally and savior, but then discovers it to be a discarded morsel from one of the technicians: an altogether cheap and contrived horror-show gesture). Many parents, I should expect, made such a judgment. They may have been able to protect their children from the movie, but there was no way on earth that they could shield them from the metamovie.

In *The Fugitive* there is the memory of the television series of the 1960’s. . . . But no, not just the 60’s, for the series and David Janssen’s Dr. Richard Kimble are still running on A&E every afternoon at four o’clock Eastern time, as energetically and absurdly as ever. With the passage of the years, the show seems woe-fully clumsy: each program begins with a teaser, a small snippet from the climax, and there is crudely intrusive narration to explain to us what they have already shown us vividly enough. The dream—or nightmare—which is hardly subtle, is that the government, the Establishment,