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THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE AND THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION LAUNCH JOINT ELECTION REFORM PROJECT

Senator Barack Obama (D-Ill.) Gives Inaugural Remarks

Today, two of America's key policy research institutions—the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) and the Brookings Institution—launch the new AEI-Brookings Election Reform Project. The program is a joint effort to monitor the implementation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and to develop a bipartisan policy agenda for further improvements in the administration of elections.

Introduced in the wake of the contested 2000 presidential election, HAVA was passed by Congress in 2002. The law provides funds to the states to enable them to replace punch card voting systems. It has also created an Election Assistance Commission to help administer federal election laws and has set standards for the administration of federal elections by states and local governments.

The new AEI-Brookings Election Reform Project will encourage constructive changes in HAVA and its implementation. It will also synthesize election-related research and strengthen the link between the research and policy communities. The effort began today with the initiation of a new website, www.electionreformproject.org. The site will be regularly updated and will include information on voter registration, technology, access, early and absentee voting, provisional balloting, election administration, and voting integrity issues.

Said AEI president Christopher DeMuth: “The best way to preserve democratic institutions and good government is to ensure that elections are executed freely and fairly. As the United States spreads democracy throughout the world, we must do all we can to protect the democratic system at home. I look forward to another successful partnership with the Brookings Institution as we move forward with this important research.”

Strobe Talbott, president of the Brookings Institution, also noted the importance of the new project: “Excessive partisanship has had a poisonous effect on political discourse and American governance,” he said. “As Brookings celebrates its ninetieth anniversary, we’ve

rededicated ourselves to making sure that what we do and how we do it is an antidote to destructive polarization. I'm particularly pleased that we can partner with AEI this year to help ensure that future elections are administered consistent with the very highest standards Americans expect of their democracy."

The public launch of the Election Reform Project will culminate in a half-day session at the Brookings Institution on February 8, 2006, featuring inaugural remarks by Senator Barack Obama (D-Ill.). Following this address, public officials and election experts will participate in two panel discussions to evaluate the progress made under HAVA and identify areas needing improvements. More detailed information on the February event, including a registration form, can be found at <http://www.aei.org/event1252>.

"The extraordinarily lengthy and controversial resolution of the 2000 presidential election provided millions of Americans with a national civics lesson and revealed that our electoral system is in serious need of reform," said project co-director Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution. "What Americans had taken for granted—that those who have a right to vote are able to do so, and have their votes counted accurately—was seriously thrown into question."

AEI resident scholar Norman J. Ornstein, co-director of the project, added, "Congress did act after that election, passing the Help America Vote Act, but it has not yet been fully implemented. And the 2002 and 2004 elections show that serious problems in the conduct of our elections remain. In our new project, we will monitor the implementation of HAVA and develop practical policy recommendations for further improvements in the administration and conduct of our elections. By bringing the research and policy communities together, we hope to improve understanding of the law and inform additional policymaking."

The Election Reform Project is supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which is committed to improving civic engagement and encouraging broad participation in the democratic process. For more information about the Election Reform Project, please contact Matthew Weil at 202.862.5883 or mweil@aei.org.

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The Brookings Institution is a private nonprofit organization devoted to independent research and innovative policy solutions. Celebrating its ninetieth anniversary in 2006, Brookings analyzes current and emerging issues and produces new ideas that matter—for the nation and the world.