

Force on Intergovernmental Affairs. All of the major associations of state and local officials are involved, as well as the National Academy of Public Administration, a nonpartisan network of more than 850 fellows from both academia and government at all levels who have experience in dealing with federalism issues.

The academy has the opportunity to play a key role because of the quality of its participants. But achieving results will also require political and strategic savvy—an ability to carefully align the carrots and sticks—that members of Congress or those whom they entrust will have to provide. A great deal of talent and perhaps an even greater amount of will is going to be necessary if they are to get anywhere.

The task force is in many ways modeled after the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, which faded away in 1996 after 37 years in existence, largely because it had become politically irrelevant. That begs the question of how any new plan will be able to avoid the same fate.

Right now, members of the task force are engaged in carefully structured discussions about the focus and shape of a new federal strategy, taking into account all the difficult questions that will have to be addressed. But providing answers will be excruciatingly difficult.

Despite all the obstacles, however, we need to press ahead with some sense of urgency in developing a revamped federal strategy and structure. The task is likely to grow even more daunting in the next few years, given the federal government's mounting debt problems and the slow growth in state revenues in the post-recession years.

It's a long shot. But we have to try. **G**

Email pharkness@governing.com

Voters Take Up Voting Rights

Debates move from statehouses to the ballot box.

Voting has become one of the most partisan issues in contemporary politics. Republicans have sought to make it more secure by requiring photo identification. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision last month to allow Ohio to purge inactive voters from the rolls is likely to open the door to similar efforts in other red states.

Democrats, conversely, are doing everything they can to make voting easier. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed a bill in March implementing automatic voter registration. The following month, Gov. Phil Murphy signed a similar bill in New Jersey, bringing to 12 the number of states that sign people up, unless they opt out, when they interact

with the department of motor vehicles or other state agencies. Democrats control the political branches of government in most of these states.

In states where the party is partially or wholly blocked from power, progressives are turning to the ballot to promote changes to election law. Maryland voters, for instance, will have the chance to allow registration on Election Day itself. Nevada will decide whether to adopt automatic voter registration. And a Michigan measure would combine both same-day and automatic voter registration, plus other changes.

Meanwhile, several states will consider campaign finance or redistricting measures. Ohio voters in May already approved changes to that state's redistricting process. New maps will have to earn support from three-fifths of legislators in both chambers, including support from more than half of the minority party members. Failing that, the job will be given to a bipartisan commission.

Sometimes the ballot is the only option. In Florida, a proposal to restore voting rights for most ex-felons requires a constitutional amendment, which means putting the question before voters. But in general, these initiatives have been triggered by a lack of success in the legislative process. "A number of these ideas have been proposed as bills during the last several sessions, and they haven't gone anywhere," says Judy Karandjeff, president of the League of Women Voters of Michigan, which is one of the sponsors of that state's ballot initiative on voting.

Case in point: The Nevada Legislature, which is controlled by Democrats, last year approved an automatic voter registration bill. But GOP Gov. Brian Sandoval vetoed it, warning that it could expose residents to legal liability if it turned out they weren't eligible to vote.

In recent years, progressives have enjoyed a fair measure of success with ballot initiatives on issues including minimum-wage increases and marijuana legalization. They believe they can similarly convince the voters themselves that expanding the franchise is the right way to go, despite concerns about election security. "People who have come into power as a result of the current electoral system have less interest in changing that system," says Sean Morales-Doyle, counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. "Direct democracy puts changes to elections in the hands of people without a direct vested interest." **G**



In blue states, Democrats are intent on making voting easier.

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