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Curtis Gans (202) 546-3221
(703) 478-1943

TURNOUT DIPS TO 56-YEAR LOW

NON-SOUTH TURNOUT LOWEST SINCE 1818

GOP LOSES MORE IN STATUS QUO VOTE

WASHINGTON, November 5 -- Despite a nearly 8 million increase in the number of Americans eligible to vote and a 4 million increase in those registered, fewer Americans cast their ballots in the 1998 mid-term than in 1994, plunging voter turnout to its lowest level since 1942.

An estimated 72,500,000 Americans voted in the 1998 mid-term, down more than 2.5 million from 1994. This dropped the rate of voter turnout to 36.1, its lowest level since millions of Americans were fighting a war in 1942, when turnout was 35.7 percent. An estimated 119,450,000 eligible Americans eschewed the ballot box this year, the largest such number in American history.

It was the fourth national election in the last seven in which the actual number of votes cast dropped despite population increases. It continues a trend to declining turnout which has witnessed a 26 percent decline (12.5 percentage points) since mid-term turnout hit its post-women's suffrage peak at 48.6 percent in 1966. (This trend has been interrupted twice by elections of anger -- at the 1982 recession and at President Clinton in 1994.)

According to Dr. Walter Dean Burnham, voting expert and CSAE board member, turnout in the 1998 election in the states outside the old Confederacy was the lowest since 1818. These were among the principal findings of a report released today on turnout in the 1998 mid-term general election and registration for that election by the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE). The report was based on final, unofficial voting figures provided by the Associated Press and adjusted and analyzed by CSAE (See Notes.) and on final and mostly official registration statistics provided by the chief election officers of the several states and the District of Columbia.

Among other findings:

--Unlike the 1996 election when every state had lower turnout, twelve states had higher turnout in 1998 than in 1994 (a list which may expand to 14 when absentee ballots are counted in Oregon and Washington), but at least 36 states and the District of Columbia recorded lower turnout.

--Turnout was down in every region of the nation except the farm midwest, where turnout barely held its own. One of the sad findings of this study is that the South, which had until recently helped keep turnout from falling to truly historic levels by virtue of the enfranchisement of blacks and the development of a two-party system, is now part of the picture of declining turnout, making it unlikely that the progressive turnout decline will be arrested any time soon.

--The GOP suffered the greatest turnout losses, falling 19 percent (4.3 percentage points) from a 22.4 share of the eligible vote in 1994 to 18.1 in 1998. Democrats suffered more modest losses, down 2.1 percentage points from 18.9 in 1994 to 16.8 in 1998. Still, the GOP national vote exceeded the Democratic mid-term vote for only the second time since 1946 (the other being 1994).

"While the citizens continue to show in individual elections in some individual states that they are willing to turn out when there appears something important to decide," said Curtis Gans, CSAE's director, "those elections are the exception. The rule is that the impulse to civic engagement is eroding, our elected officials are getting elected with smaller and more fragile mandates, by-and-large there is a falling away from the principal political vehicles of cohesion -- the political parties, and this trend shows no sign of ceasing. We will, if this trend continues, have an electorate occupied only by those with an interest in policy outcomes and the ideologically zealous."

The election also produced some surprising results:

--This election perhaps nailed the coffin on the belief that low turnout benefits the GOP. Democrats won in close contests in states like California and New York where turnout was down substantially, while contests in the two states which had the greatest turnout increases (Kentucky and Minnesota) were won by a Republican and an independent.

--On the other hand, of the 12 states which had higher turnout, the key races in eight of those states (Alabama, Maryland, Georgia, South Carolina, Hawaii, Louisiana, Wisconsin and North Carolina) were won by Democrats.

--Turnout increases in many of those states -- Alabama, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina and Wisconsin -- were, in part, propelled by the presence of GOP leaders from the most conservative wing of their party, all of whom lost, as did almost all others of similar ideological persuasion in statewide competitive races (Linda Smith in Washington, Dan Lundgren in California and Jim Ross Lightfoot in Iowa).

"In any election, the outcome is not determined by turnout, but by who turns out," Gans said. "It seems clear that the Democrats did a better job of mobilizing their base supporters -- among seniors, African-Americans, union members and, perhaps, more liberal women -- in the elections where they were most needed. It also seems clear that the most conservative elements of the Republican Party are capable of galvanizing sufficient support to win nominations, but also increasingly galvanize even greater numbers in the opposition and seem unlikely vehicles for GOP success among the broad electorate in either statewide or national elections. We seem to have had an election in which each party, in the pursuit of winning, designed its tactics to pull out its core supporters while leaving the vast majority of the electorate standing on the sidelines."

The most surprising result of election 1998 may have been the gubernatorial victory of independent Jesse Ventura in Minnesota, in the highest turnout election in the nation. On the other hand, the message Minnesota voters seemed to be sending was not a particularly new one. Over the last three decades, Democratic registration has declined by 25 percent in the states with partisan registration, GOP registration has declined by more than ten percent outside the South, and independent registration has increased by 800 percent.

"Ventura's victory is only the latest tangible manifestation of citizen disaffection from the two major political parties," Gans said. "We now have two independent governors and we are likely to have more third party ferment on both the state and national level, unless and until the two major parties fashion an approach to recapturing the interest and allegiance of the citizenry."

The results of the election make this unlikely:

While the Democrats can be happy that they escaped the normal second-term mid-term losses for the party that occupies the White House and that they elected a legislature and governor in California which may give them some additional seats in the House via the year 2000 reapportionment, they still are in the minority in both Houses of Congress, in a nearly 2-1 minority in the statehouses and in a minority in the allegiance of the voters at this time.

Nor can the Republicans be happy that their once-bright prospects for gains were washed away by their tactical ineptness in offering no issue of consequence for voters to rally around and seeking at the end to nationalize an issue which the public was and is sick and tired of, however necessary its pursuit may be in the coming months.

"If you didn't like the last two years of legislative inaction, partisan wrangling and attention to the trivial," Gans said, "wait for the next two. The GOP, in not gaining any seats, is saddled with its conflicting internal factions and is unlikely to find a common thread to govern. President Clinton and the Democrats may propose, but they don't have the votes to dispose. And the inquiries may be tempered, but they will continue. There were many individual changes in who won and lost and the Republican right suffered a black eye, but this was essentially a status quo election in which most of the important decisions seem to be pushed back until the election of the year 2000 at the earliest."

The election also again reaffirmed two maxims about the modern campaign of tit-for-tat attack advertising: 1. that it will drive down turnout; and 2. that there are occasions when transcendent issues or personalities will overcome awful campaigns.

The ugliest campaign of the year -- the D'Amato-Schumer Senate race -- propelled New York turnout to historic lows. Voters were so turned off that Governor George Pataki one-sided victory had a higher turnout than the Senatorial battle. Similarly, in Ohio, the ugly gubernatorial contest not only produced lower turnout for the state, but a lower turnout than the one-sided Senatorial contest in which former Gov. George Voinovich was elected in a landslide.

On the other hand, contests such as the North Carolina and Kentucky Senate races were hardly pretty spectacles, but there was sufficient voter emotion in those contests to propel substantially higher turnout, albeit against a backdrop of 1994 in which neither state had a statewide contest for either governor or Senator. (As was also the case and reason for the Louisiana turnout increase.)

"Ultimately leadership will have to address the advertising issue as a matter of public policy," Gans said. "What we have now is consultants run amok, destroying more careers than they help; undermining, distorting and trivializing the political dialogue; eroding reason and the will to vote. Those who hire them bear responsibility for what appears in their name. But those elected bear an even greater responsibility to see that what is happening in the political marketplace bears no resemblance to the free exercise of speech; that it undermines answerable and accountable speech, destroys political comity; makes difficult address of serious and controversial policy issues without the deus ex machina of bipartisan commissions; and makes ignoble a profession which has been and can be again the most honorable of callings. Given the way campaigns are currently conducted and the resultant images of our leaders which are flashed across the screen for one to two hours every day on every major broadcast outlet, it is a wonder that anybody has sufficient respect for the political enterprise to vote."

In this election, the highest turnout was recorded in the Jesse Ventura victory in Minnesota, where 59.5 percent of the eligible voted, a turnout comparable to Presidential election turnout. The race for Montana's lone Congressional seat drew the second highest level of voting at 50.3 percent, followed by Wyoming's gubernatorial race (49.4), South Dakota's governor's race (48.7) and the "Jesse Tuttle" Vermont Senate race (48.5).

The lowest turnouts in states with statewide races were in Tennessee (23.6), Arizona (25.8), Texas (26.2) and Louisiana (30.8).

The greatest increases in turnout occurred in Kentucky (up 10.7 percentage points), followed by Minnesota (6.8), North Carolina (5.1) and Wisconsin (4.2).

The greatest decreases in turnout occurred in Tennessee (down 14.4 percentage points),

followed by Arizona (12.9), Maine (12.4), South Dakota (11.0) and Idaho (9.4).

Democrats scored their greatest gains in New Hampshire (up 9.8 percentage points), Kentucky (7.7), Louisiana (7.6), Indiana (7.1), Hawaii (6.3) and Maryland (5.5).

They suffered their greatest losses in Maine (20.3), Nebraska (15.5), Rhode Island (10.9), Massachusetts (10.8) and Idaho (10.5).

The GOP recorded its greatest gains in Hawaii (8.7 percentage points), Alabama (5.2), Alaska (4.7), Connecticut (3.9) and Kentucky (3.2).

Republicans suffered their greatest turnout declines in Maine (25 percentage points), Massachusetts (13.2), Minnesota (12.1), Indiana (11.6) and Rhode Island (9.1).

"As can be seen, many of these advances and declines track with the advances and declines of participation levels in individual states," Gans said, "but no one can be happy with the ever-decreasing levels of engagement. Each succeeding election seem to propel us to record new lows. We will have elections in which one side or the other wins and loses, but increasingly the real loser in the continuing decline in participation is the American political process and the political playing field upon which a vibrant democracy depends."

NOTES AND SUMMARY CHARTS

This report is CSAE's preliminary post-election report and includes data on final but unofficial returns from the 1998 mid-

term election (subject to the caveats included in the notes below) and an update on registration in the 1998 general election based on final and official registration figures from the states which have completed certifying their registration at the time of this report.

It should be noted that in all of these reports turnout is arrived at by dividing those who voted by the population eligible to vote, NOT by those registered. For whatever the flaws (noted below) in the eligible vote (Voting Age Population) figures provided by the Census and minor anomalies in the vote count (also noted below), this gauge is by far more reliable and consistent than registration. Using registration as a denominator leaves out those who both did not register and did not vote (and, in the case of North Dakota, which has no registration, would leave out a whole state). Registration as a denominator has no consistency, since it fluctuates by changes in registration law and procedure. (A major change, such as the implementation of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 -- the so-called motor voter law -- can show dramatic increases in registration and thus exaggerate decreases in turnout.) Registration lists are inflated by those who have either died or moved but remain on the lists because those lists have not been recently cleaned. This might not be a problem if each state had consistent list cleaning procedures with regard to frequency and timing, but they don't. Thus, there is no way of measuring the degree of distortion in individual states. And because of certain provisions in the motor voter law (noted below), state official registration statistics are more inaccurate than they have ever been.

The following are some notes relating to the figures which have been compiled and the deficiencies in those figures.

1. Voting Age Population:

The most widely used denominator for determining the percentage of eligible Americans who vote is the Census Bureau's early election year estimate of age-eligible population in that election year. (To determine turnout on a consistent basis, that number is divided into the Presidential vote in Presidential election years, and, in mid-term election years, into the votes cast for that statewide office which draws the highest vote -- or in the absence of a statewide contest, aggregate vote for all Congressional elections in a state.) While the Census estimate of age-eligible voters (Voting Age Population or VAP) is both the number used for analysis by most reputable sources and the only number that provides a constant denominator through the history of the United States, this number is flawed in a number of respects: it includes aliens, convicted felons and people deemed incompetent in mental institutions who cannot vote, and it does not include age-eligible American citizens living outside the United States who can vote. It also does not make accommodations for at least two other factors: it does not factor in the undercount in the decennial Census (see registration notes below), and it counts those in the military at their bases in the several states,

although many cast their ballots in the state of their home residence. This figure is used, despite these limitations, because it is one of only two sets of denominators which offer a degree of consistency over time (similar methodology) and thus can be used for historical analysis purposes.

The other denominator, not in common use but a better one, is that developed by Dr. Walter Dean Burnham of the University of Texas which provides a citizen-age eligible population -- one in which the aliens (the largest source of distortion of the Census figures) are removed. Burnham has a data set going back to 1824 for a denominator of eligible population and, since 1870 (the first decennial Census to estimate aliens), that data set attempts through interpolation to exclude aliens. At some future point, funds making that possible, CSAE hopes to provide analysis using both Census and Burnham's figures. But while it should be noted that using Burnham's figures, turnout in 1996 was 51.9 percent (as compared to 49 percent using VAP), the national and individual state trend lines are quite similar -- at a remove of about 3 percentage points higher in Burnham's figures. It should be noted that in certain states with high concentration of aliens -- e.g. California and Texas -- actual turnout percentages could be two to three percentage points higher than those reported here.

For 1998, the Census estimated voting age population is 200.9 million. The estimated number of undocumented and documented resident aliens is 14.02 million. There are between 3-4 million convicted felons in prison; in some states, even after serving their time these felons remain stripped of their voting rights. There are between 3-4 million Americans living outside the United States who can vote but are not counted as eligible in the Census estimate. In addition, there are an indeterminate but relatively small number of people in mental institutions and deemed incompetent who are not included in the 200.9 estimate and there are a presently indeterminate but relatively small number of aliens who have gained citizenship this year, who would reduce the alien estimate.

(Note: CSAE's estimate of non-voters in 1998 is based on Census' national age-eligible estimate, minus the 14 million aliens who could not vote.)

2. Voting Figures:

Voting figures for 1998 used in this report are mostly final but unofficial and taken from the Associated Press' and Voter News Service's last press run of counted ballots at about 4 p.m. (EST) November 4. Votes from previous years are final and official, provided by the chief election officials of the several states and the District of Columbia and compared with America Votes, a biennial compilation of election statistics published by Congressional Quarterly Press. It should be noted that the 1998 figures for the overwhelming majority of states are based on 98-100

percent of what final turnout will be, but for four states -- Alaska, California, Oregon and Washington -- the vote totals herein are likely to be considerably understated. In the cases of Oregon and Washington, there are more than a million absentee ballots still to be counted. As a result, Oregon and Washington are likely to show higher turnout, while the charts in the back of this release show them with lower turnout. California still has some absentee votes to be counted, but its turnout will be lower than in 1994. Thus, with respect to advances and declines against previous years, the rankings of these three states are likely to move up when final results are in. In the body of the covering press release, CSAE reports what reliably can be gleaned from the available statistics for all states, including these states, but conclusion beyond those made should not be drawn from the data in the back for this release.

It also should be noted that the basis for determining turnout in any individual state is the number of votes cast for the statewide race which draws the highest turnout and, in the six states (Delaware, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, Virginia and West Virginia) which did not have statewide races in 1998, by aggregate vote for Congress. There are some who go to the polls but do not cast a ballot for the race used as basis for analysis. In a typical mid-term election, about 1.5 percent of the electorate does this. Thus, the final turnout percentages are slightly understated, but still form the most consistent basis of comparison, since only 30 states now count all ballots cast and that number has not been consistent over the years.

It also should be noted that, in providing charts on regional performance, Texas is included in this analysis both as a state of the South and of the Southwest.

(Note: Because six states -- Delaware, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, Virginia and West Virginia -- had no statewide races at the top of the ticket in 1998, their declines are exaggerated as compared to states where comparable races exist. Similarly, for the three states which did not have statewide races in 1994 -- Kentucky, Louisiana and North Carolina -- their increases this year overstate the increased level of voting. It should also be noted that some states do not, on election night, count the ballots for House races which are uncontested, preferring to wait until they have to report those figures to the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. AND because this practice is becoming more widespread, there are no reliable statewide House of Representatives turnout numbers for a number of states and the charts for House turnout will not be included in this report.

3. Registration Figures:

Registration figures used in this report are final and official (except for Rhode Island and Utah which are unofficial) and provided by the chief election officials in the several states

and the District of Columbia. The Committee only uses figures at the close of each registration cycle each biennium, believing those are the only ones which are comparable. In this report, only those states which have reported final figures are included. Note that only about half the states have partisan registration. Previous years' registration figures are all final and official.

Accurate registration numbers have always been difficult to ascertain, made now more difficult by provisions of the National Voter Registration Act (the motor voter law). The registration statistics contained in the back of this report are badly flawed because they contain the names of substantial numbers of citizens who have died or moved. In previous years, it was possible, after study, to estimate that the degree of distortion of registration numbers was approximately 10 percent nationally -- although there would be wide variations on an individual state basis pending the frequency, timing and thoroughness of their list cleaning procedures.

In the past, CSAE presented both gross registration numbers nationally and a figure for adjusted registration based on a ten percent deflation.

Three aspects of the Motor Voter Law have made this estimation obsolete:

--A provision in the law which prohibits election officials from removing the names of those who have changed residences from the lists until two federal elections have intervened. With mobility rates running about 16 percent a year, this means that an individual list, after three plus years before names could be removed, could be distorted by as much as 60 percent.

--A provision which makes it illegal for election officials to initiate any proceeding which might lead to removing a citizen from the list or placing him or her on an inactive list within 90 days before an election.

--A ruling by the Justice Department that prohibits non-voting from being used as a trigger for initiating list cleaning procedures -- such as mailings or computer matches with change of address files -- to ascertain whether a citizen is still residing where he or she is listed on the registration rolls. While the law rightly forbids removing a citizen from the rolls for exercising his or her right not to vote, this ruling forces states to double the effort and cost of list cleaning procedures and thus makes it less likely that such list cleaning will be undertaken at any greater frequency than mandated by the law.

While states are not permitted to actually purge citizens from their voting lists if they have moved until two federal elections have elapsed, they are mandated to provide the Federal Election Commission with an inactive list of voters -- voters who would

ordinarily be purged but are kept on the list by law -- by March of the year following each Federal election.

Those lists are instructive. In interviews between CSAE and the election offices, election officials indicated that their inactive list essentially represented the names that would have been removed prior to the motor voter law.

Thus, a realistic national picture of registration is derived by ascertaining the gross registration, subtracting the inactive list and multiplying the resulting total by 0.9 (to account for the normal inflation of national registration in any given election year.)

On the next page is a chart which shows the difference between registration percentages based on official statistics and the adjusted figure subtracting those on the inactive list. At the time of this release, there were eleven states which had compiled their inactive lists, sufficient to make a realistic correction to the gross registration figures at the back of this report. Only three states had lists of inactives by partisan registration, sufficient to be instructive rather than determinative.

It should be noted that North Dakota has no registration; and six states -- Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin and Wyoming -- permit registration up to and including election day, thus explaining their lack of figures. Wisconsin does not have statewide records for registration and both Mississippi and Ohio do not have statewide registration records prior to certain years in the past.

It should also be noted that Alaska has a reported registration rate in excess of its eligible vote (and that it is likely that Maine will also report registration in excess of VAP). There are two possible causes for this: a. the Census may have underestimated population in those states; or b. the states have not sufficiently cleansed their lists of those who have died or moved to present an accurate picture of true registration. Both factors could be responsible for this picture.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

CSAE would like to again acknowledge the assistance that Dr. Walter Dean Burnham has given in each of its major reports in providing historical context to the figures it analyzes.

CSAE would like to thank the Associated Press and the various state and local election offices for their continuing help with CSAE's research.

The statistical analysis in this report and previous CSAE reports has been made possible through a custom database program developed for CSAE by Gary Corbin and Laura Lee Guimond.

Data for this report was gathered by CSAE Research Associate Joel Wolf with assistance from Research Associate Emeritus Samuel Schreiber.

All analysis in this study was done by Curtis Gans, CSAE's director, who is solely responsible for any screw-ups.

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NOTE: The registration figures in the summary charts below represent CSAE's best estimate of registration this year and in previous years. The tables in back are the reported and unadjusted registration, from the individual states.

Note also that while the top of some charts indicate that comparisons are between 1962 and 1998, in the interests of saving both paper and printing costs, the page containing only 1962 is not part of this report. CSAE will be glad to provide it.

SUMMARY CHARTS

I. 1998 TURNOUT:

VAP	VOTED	PCT.	NON-VOTERS
200,929,000	72,500,000 (est.)	36.1	119,450,000 (est.)

II. TURNOUT TREND: Percentage of eligible citizens who voted in each election for either the statewide race engendering the highest turnout or the total Congressional vote in those states which did not have a statewide race:

YEAR	PERCENTAGE VOTED
1998	36.1
1994	38.79
1990	36.53
1986	36.42
1982	40.09
1978	37.77
1974	38.78
1970	46.78
1966	48.61
1962	47.57

III. PARTISAN TURNOUT TREND: Party share of eligible vote based on turnout for the statewide race which drew the highest turnout and total U.S. House of Representatives turnout for states which did not have statewide races:

YEAR	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS	OTHER
1998	16.76	18.15	2.05
1994	18.90	22.43	2.72
1990	20.43	18.61	2.32
1986	20.72	19.01	1.82
1982	23.00	19.19	0.98
1978	20.81	18.47	1.31
1974	23.05	17.06	1.90
1970	26.43	22.77	3.87
1966	24.08	25.91	2.05
1962	25.25	24.58	0.74

IV. REGISTRATION TREND: Registration rate as a percentage of eligible vote (VAP) for those states (34) and the District of Columbia which have reported in 1998 and all states in previous years. In each case these percentages are estimates, based on downward adjustments of 10 percent (in all other years except for 1998) account for those names which have not been removed from the rolls, but who have died or moved and, in 1998, also for those placed on inactive lists who would have been purged from the lists.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE OF VAP REGISTERED</u>
1998	63.8 (est.)
1994	61.8
1990	60.0
1986	61.2
1982	60.0
1978	60.1
1974	61.6
1970	64.9

1966	66.0
1962	64.2

V. PARTISAN REGISTRATION TREND: Registration by major party and other (those registering independent and for third parties) for those states (18) and the District of Columbia reporting this year and in previous years which register by party, using unadjusted registration figures:

YEAR	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICAN	OTHER
1998	34.27	25.54	13.55
1994	33.00	23.34	9.61
1990	33.12	22.72	8.35
1986	35.43	21.98	8.11
1982	35.96	20.61	6.60
1978	38.08	19.93	5.90
1974	38.71	21.52	4.77
1970	41.05	24.85	3.42
1966	44.68	24.49	2.65
1962	43.38	25.39	1.54