

program experience and technical expertise, the business community with its financial resources and entrepreneurial approaches, and citizens who have an interest in solutions to community problems. The term public-private partnership was popularized by the book, *Reinventing Government*, which also looked at other means of restructuring bureaucracies to make them more innovative and responsive.²² If Congress succeeds in moving decisionmaking from Washington to the local level, new approaches must be developed, and more citizen involvement will be required.

There has also been a growth in "regionalism" as communities or groups within communities have come together to solve problems. Regionalizing water authorities, landfills, and jails are all examples of how resources can be shared for the benefit of more people at less expense. Through the actions of corporations and these regional groups, citizens

have another opportunity to participate in our democracy.

Conclusion

Organizations must work to reinvolve individual and corporate citizens in our democracy. A 1995 open letter from Becky Cain, President of the League of Women Voters of the United States, to all members of the League, calls for the organization to take the "lead in renewing American democracy—how it works, how citizens participate, how citizens think about democracy." She states that we must "rediscover what binds us together as a nation if we are to succeed in finding shared solutions to the many complex problems that confront our communities today." To quote one of the League's most familiar slogans: "Democracy is not a spectator sport." Citizens must participate

Fancy Clothes and Overalls

A LITTLE BOY AND HIS FATHER walk into a firehouse. He smiles at people standing outside. Some hand pamphlets to his father. They stand in line. Finally, they go into a small booth, pull the curtain closed, and vote. His father holds the boy up and shows him which levers to move.

"We're ready, Wade, pull the big lever now."

With both hands, the boy pulls the lever. There it is: the sound of voting. The curtain opens. The boy smiles at an old woman leaving another booth and at a mother and daughter getting into line. He is not certain exactly what they have done. He only knows that he and his father have done something important. They have voted.

This scene takes place all over the country.

"Pull the lever, Yolanda."

"Drop the ballot in the box for me, Pedro."

Wades, Yolandas, Pedros, Nikitas, and Chuis all over the United States are learning the same lesson: the satisfaction, pride, importance, and habit of voting. I have always gone with my parents to vote. Sometimes the lines are long. There are faces of old people and young people, voices of native North Carolinians in southern drawls and voices of naturalized citizens with their foreign accents. There are people in fancy clothes and others dressed in overalls. Each has exactly the same one vote. Each has exactly the same say in the election. There is no place in America where equality means as much as in the voting booth.

My father took me that day to the firehouse. Soon I will be voting. It is a responsibility and a right. It is also an exciting national experience. Voters have different backgrounds, dreams, and experience, but that is the whole point of voting. Different voices will be heard.

As I get close to the time I can register and vote, it is exciting. I become one of the voices. I know I will vote in every election. I know that someday I will bring my son with me and introduce him to one of the great American experiences: voting.

—Wade Edwards

Wade Edwards, who was an honor student at Broughton High School, won the National Endowment for the Humanities and Voice of America national essay contest for this essay.