

## BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Monday, November 5, 2012

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### **2012 REGISTRATION MODESTLY LOWER; LOWER TURNOUT LIKELY NONE OF THE ABOVE REGISTRATIONS CONTINUE TO CLIMB CONVENIENCE VOTING HASN'T AND WON'T BOOST TURNOUT**

*Washington, D.C.* – The percentage of eligible citizens who are registered to vote in Tuesday's general election likely slipped moderately from the levels reached in 2008 and 2004. However when all states have reported their registration, it is likely to be higher than it was in the 2000 election.

Based on final published registration reports from 34 states, the likely 2012 registration level will be 70 percent of eligible citizens or 153,271,000 out of 218,959,000 eligible potential voters. This compares with a 73.5 percent registration rate in 2008, a 71 percent registration rate in 2004 and a 68 percent registration rate in 2000.

Based on the 21 states reporting their partisan registration results (out of 28 and the District of Columbia that register by party), Democratic registration fell to roughly 1996 and 2000 levels, Republican registration held constant with several recent years and for the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive presidential election those registering for something other than the two major parties (as independents, unaffiliated or for minor parties) increased their percentage of the registrant pool.

These are three highlights of a report released today by the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) and the Center for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE) on 2012 registration and the impact of convenience voting on voter turnout.

Other Highlights:

Lowered registration is likely part of a picture that points to a reduced turnout in 2012 as compared to the recent high turnout years of 2004 and 2008. An earlier BPC/CSAE report pointed to a record low turnout in this year's statewide primaries. Nielsen reported a 10 percent decline in viewership of the two major party conventions. Pew reported a greater degree of negativity about the two major party candidates than at any time since 1992. Several polls on voter interest showed a decline since 2004 and 2008 in the range of ten percent. Added to this picture are the effects of Hurricane Sandy in hard-hit New Jersey, New York and Connecticut which will certainly reduce turnout there which, in turn, may skew not only the overall popular vote, but also the Democratic Party share since these are Democratic stronghold states.

All of which point to a turnout decline in the range of 10 percent or 6 percentage points from the 2008 high of 62.3 percent of eligible citizens (highest since 1960 and third highest since women were given the vote in 1920). A decline of that magnitude would mean that 96 million eligible citizens would not vote.

The level of this year's vote will also likely not be helped by "convenience" laws – no excuse absentee voting, early voting at places of convenience other than registrars' offices or Election Day registration. In this report, BPC/CSAE looked at the aggregate turnout effect of these procedures how states turnout performance, as measured by comparative turnout changes between elections, between states which adopted one or more of these procedures and those which did not.

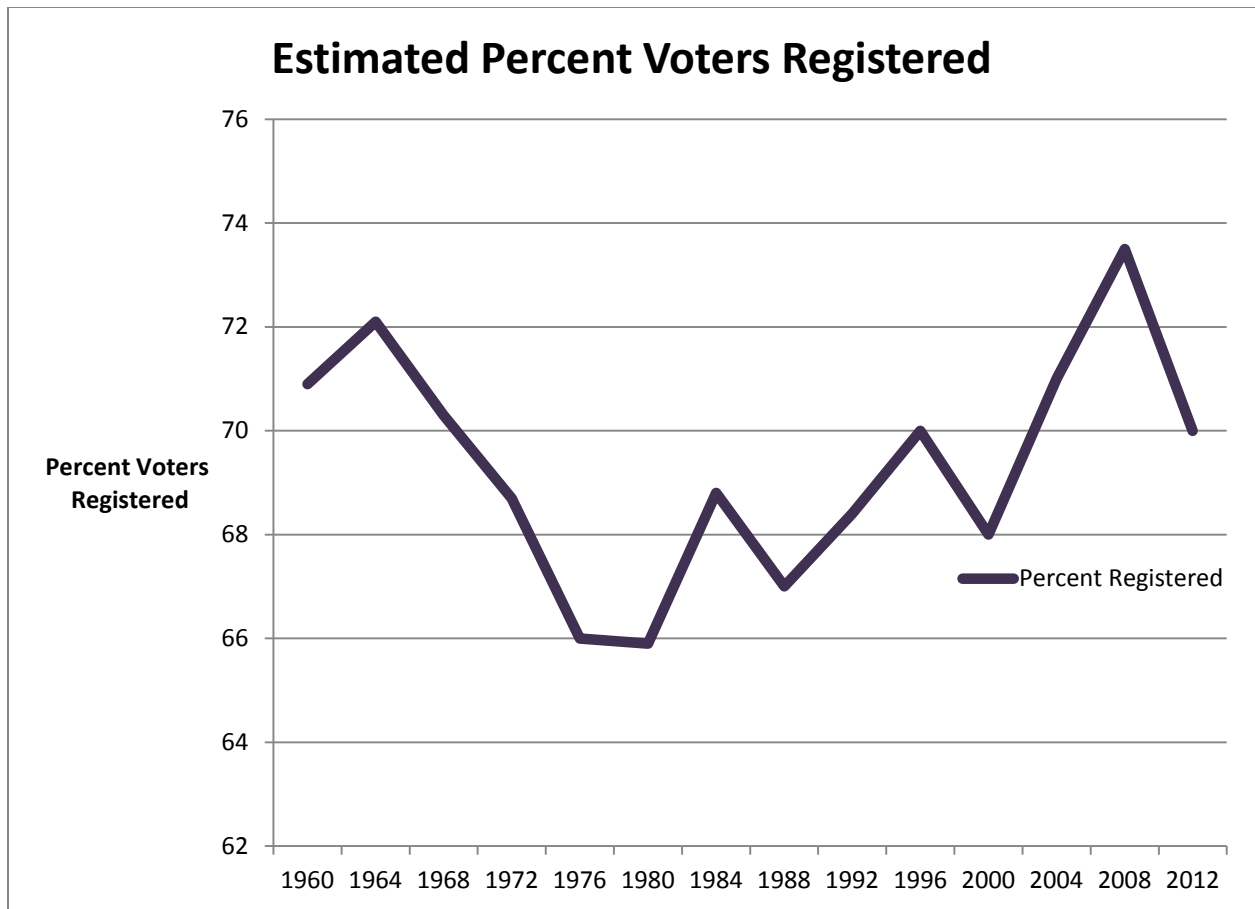
No excuse absentee voting had, in the aggregate, greater declines in years of decline and lesser increases in years of increase than the aggregate of states without the provision between 1992-96, 1996-2000, 1998-2002, 2004-08 and 2006-10. States with the provision performed at the same level as those without in 1994-98 and 2002-06. Only in 2000-04 was there a greater turnout increase in states with no excuse absentee as opposed those without the provision.

The turnout effect for both early voting and Election Day registration (EDR) is more balanced. Early voting states outperformed the states without the provision 1990-94, 1994-98, 1998-2002, 2000-04 and 2006-10; and underperformed in 1996-2000, 2002-06 and 2004-08. Election Day registration has a longer history, with most of its impact positive. In presidential election years, the states with the provision outperformed the others in 1972-76, 1976-80, 1988-92, 2000-04, and just barely in 1984-88. It underperformed in 1980-84, 2004-08 and just barely in 1992-96. In midterm elections, EDR did better in 1974-78, 1986-90, 1998-2002, 2002-2006 and, just barely in 1978-82. Others without EDR did better in 1982-86, 1990-94, 2006-10 and, just barely, in 1994-98.

## SUMMARY CHARTS

**1. Overall Registration:** The chart below represents BPC/CSAE's best estimate of the percentage of the citizen eligible vote which will have been registered in 2012 and were registered in previous years, adjusting for all the problems in registration lists outlined in note 3 in the notes section of this report. The estimate for 2012 is based on the 34 states which have completed registration and reported their results.

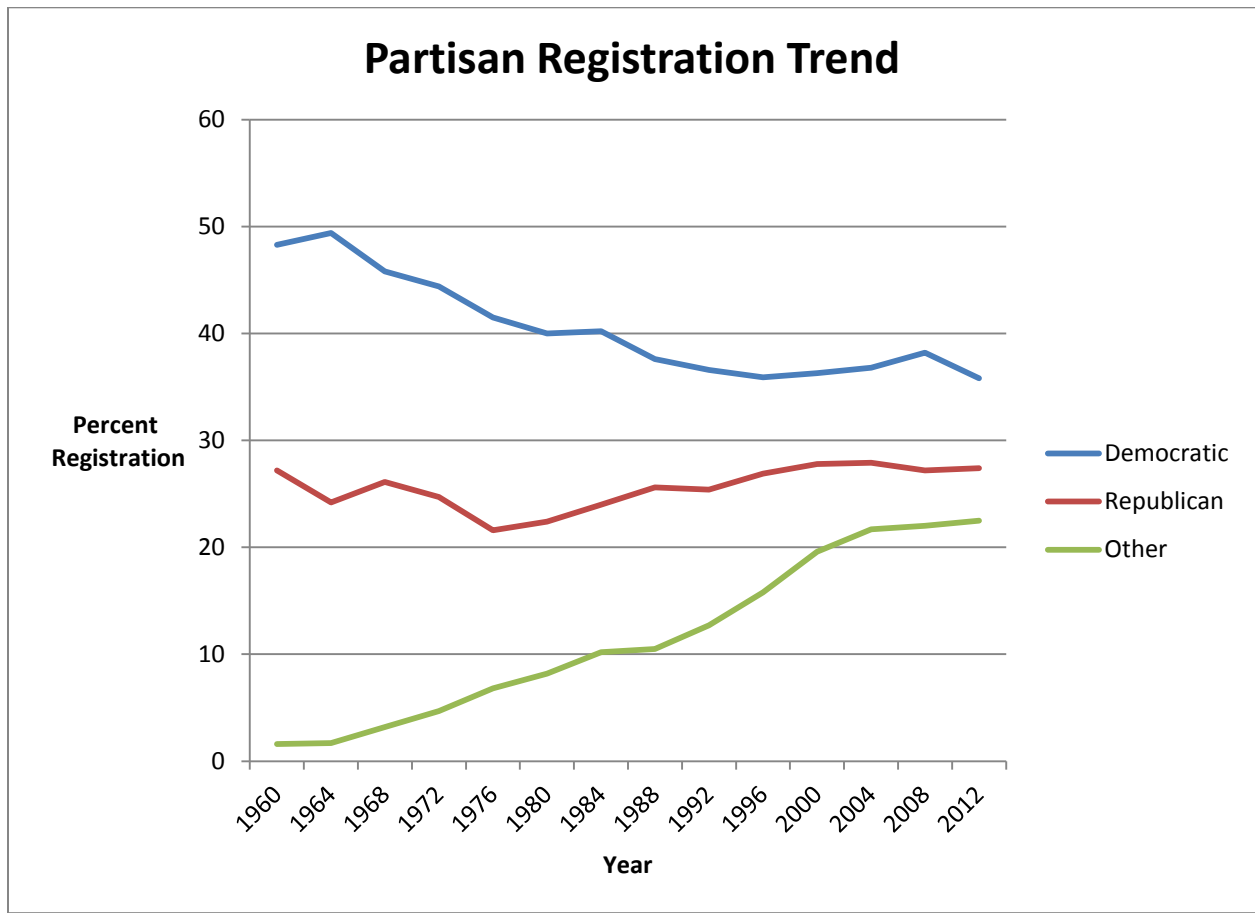
<b>Year</b>	<b>Estimated Number and Percent Registered</b>	
2012	153,271,300	70.0
2008	153,100,000	73.5
2004	143,000,000	71.0
2000	133,780,000	68.0
1996	132,000,000	70.0
1992	123,649,000	68.4
1988	116,820,000	67.0
1984	114,750,000	68.8
1980	103,500,000	65.9
1976	95,850,000	66.0
1972	92,700,000	68.7
1968	81,000,000	70.3
1964	78,300,000	72.1
1960	74,250,000	70.9



**2. Partisan Registration Trend:** Estimated partisan registration based on registration figures available at the time of this release. The other category includes those registered for parties other than the Democratic and Republican parties and those who register without affiliation or as independents. Note the percentages for previous elections are for all states and the District of Columbia, while the percentages for 2012 are for the 21 states that have completed their registration and compiled the numbers.

Year	Democratic	Republican	Other
2012	35.8	27.4	22.5
2008	38.2	27.2	22.0
2004	36.8	27.9	21.7
2000	36.3	27.8	19.6
1996	35.9	26.9	15.8

1992	36.6	25.4	12.7
1988	37.6	25.6	10.5
1984	40.2	24.0	10.2
1980	40.0	22.4	8.2
1976	41.5	21.6	6.8
1972	44.4	24.7	4.7
1968	45.8	26.1	3.2
1964	49.4	24.2	1.7
1960	48.3	27.2	1.6



**3. Convenience Voting – Presidential Election Years:** In this report BPC/CSAE has attempted to evaluate the turnout effect of three forms of convenience voting -- election day registration, no-excuse absentee voting and early in-person voting at places other than registrars' offices. To do this, the states with one (or more) of these innovations were aggregated against the aggregated states without the particular innovation(s). The turnout performances were judged on the basis of the change in the level of turnout from election to election. The figures in this chart are of states with the particular form of convenience voting against all other states, but in the detailed charts at the end of this report each form of convenience voting is also evaluated against all the others minus any states that had adopted one or more of these forms of convenience voting. Those charts do not change the picture presented here. The charts reflect the changes in the number of states adopting one or more of these reforms. The short-hand in these summary charts is: EV for early voting, NE for no-excuse absentee, ED for election-day registration and O for the states other than those with one of the forms of convenience voting. Each year by year comparison is based on at least four states adopting the form of convenience voting used for comparison, with the exception of election day registration between 1988 and 1992 the presidential election cycle after Oregon abandoned election day registration, leaving only Maine, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

**Percentage Point Changes In Turnout Level**

<b>Year</b>	<b>NE</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>EV</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>ED</b>	<b>O</b>
1972-76					+3.2	-1.1
1976-1980					+1.0	+0.3
1980-84					-1.5	+1.0
1984-88					-2.5	-2.7
1988-1992					+7.9	+5.2
1992-96	-7.1	-6.5			-6.8	-6.5
1996-2000	+1.0	+2.7	+2.2	+2.5	+2.7	+2.8
2000-04	+6.2	+5.7	+6.3	+6.0	+6.7	+5.9
2004-08	+0.8	+2.0	+1.5	+1.7	-0.9	+1.7

#### 4. Convenience Voting – Mid-term Elections

##### Percentage Point Changes in Turnout Level

Year	NE	O	EV	O	ED	O
1974-78					+3.9	-1.5
1978-1982					+4.2	+4.0
1982-86					-8.2	-2.6
1986-1990					+4.6	-0.5
1990-94			+2.6	+1.5	-0.9	+1.8
1994-98	-3.0	-3.1	-2.7	-3.2	-3.4	-3.0
1998-2002	-0.3	+3.7	+2.8	+2.4	+3.5	+2.1
2002-06	+0.8	+0.8	-0.9	+1.7	+1.3	+0.7
2006-10	+0.2	+0.8	+1.7	-0.5	-2.5	+1.9

**5. Turnout Trend:** The number and percentage of eligible citizens who voted for President in elections since 1924:

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>Citizens Eligible</b>	<b>Vote</b>	<b>Percent of Eligible Voted</b>	<b>Pct. Pt. Dif.</b>
2012	218,959,000			
2008	208,323,000	131,303,357	62.3	1.7
2004	201,780,000	122,265,430	60.6	6.4
2000	194,327,000	105,399,313	54.2	2.8
1996	187,437,000	96,277,872	51.4	-6.9
1992	179,048,000	104,428,377	58.3	5.0
1988	171,855,000	91,594,805	53.3	-2.6
1984	165,727,000	92,659,600	55.9	1.2
1980	158,111,000	86,515,221	54.7	-0.3
1976	148,419,000	81,555,889	55.0	-2.1
1972	136,228,000	77,718,554	57.1	-3.9
1968	119,955,000	73,211,875	61.0	-1.0
1964	113,979,000	70,645,592	64.0*	-3.0
1960	106,188,000	68,838,219	67.0*	5.8
1956	101,295,000	62,026,908	61.2	-2.5
1952	96,607,000	61,550,918	63.7	10.5
1948	91,689,000	48,793,826	53.2	-2.2
1944	86,607,000	47,976,670	55.4	-6.8
1940	80,248,000	49,900,418	62.2	1.3
1936	75,013,000	45,654,763	60.9	3.5
1932	69,295,000	39,758,759	57.4	0.5
1928	64,715,000	36,805,951	56.9	8.6
1924	60,334,466	29,095,023	48.2	

\* Figure adjusted upwards to compensate for the African-Americans considered as part of those eligible but denied the vote throughout the south. Similar adjustments in lesser amounts should be made for all the years preceding the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but will await CSAE's final election report in January. Actual figures, without adjustment are 62 percent for 1964 and 64.9 for 1960.



## NOTES

1. Turnout defined: Turnout should be a simple calculation - the number of eligible citizens who voted divided by the number of eligible citizens. While the calculation isn't necessarily simple, it is the standard that CSAE has used and is the basis for this and other BPC/CSAE reports.

In presidential election year general elections, the numerator is the votes cast for president, mindful that all who cast ballots do not necessarily vote for president and occasionally the vote for a governor or U.S. Senator exceeds the vote for president in a state. There are also blank ballots and mutilated ballots, but since many states have no historical record of counting the total number of ballots cast, the most consistent numerator is the presidential vote for which there are records by state and nation from the first election in 1788 to the present.

The denominator - those eligible to vote - has been a source of contention in some academic circles. What is not in contention is that in order to vote a person must be of age (18 years or older) and must be a citizen. It is the standard used in the report. Since the founding of the Republic the decennial census provided an accounting of those age-eligible to vote (it was not always 18 and over and not always uniform in all states) and from 1870 through 2000, with the exception of the census of 1960, the census enumerated those residing in the several states who were not citizens. One could, after each decennial census, subtract the non-citizens of age from the total age-eligible population, emerge with a citizen eligible figure and interpolate between censuses for denominators for the intervening years. The decennial census of 2010 only provided the number of those age-eligible, but the American Community Survey of the Census Bureau, published biennially, provides a non-citizen estimate from its survey. Thus, for the 2012 election, this report (and subsequent ones) CSAE/BPC uses the age-eligible figures from the 2010 Census, minus the estimated non-citizens in the 2010 American Community Survey and interpolates forward from 2010 based on the rate of change of the citizen age-eligible population between 2000 and 2010. The methodology for arriving at these interpolated numbers was pioneered by Dr. Walter Dean Burnham. His interpolations were between Censuses or usually in recent times from April to April. The Center for the Study of the American Electorate has also interpolated from November to November, a figure that will be used in its general election reports.

There are many other factors that affect the denominator of age-eligible citizens. With few exceptions, convicted felons serving prison sentences and many ex-felons who have served their time can't vote but are included in those age-eligible. The problem with correcting for their number is that the laws affecting their enfranchisement are subject to changes, many between one election and the next, and accurate data for the number of disenfranchised felons and ex-felons is not available beyond a certain number of years, making historical comparisons of their impact on the eligible vote difficult. People in mental institutions who are deemed incompetent cannot vote, though they are included in the figure of age-eligible persons. But no one has accurate data on how many are so deemed. American citizens

residing in places other than the United States are not included in the Census enumeration, despite the fact that they can vote. While it possible to allocate those living outside the United States in government and the military to the states from whence they came, it is impossible to accurately estimate overall the balance of those residing outside of the U.S. or allocate them to states for voting purposes. People who are naturalized in the year of the election are not included in the biennial estimate of the eligible, and their numbers cannot be accurately determined until months after the election. People who move also affect state and national denominators, but their number also cannot be accurately ascertained until after the election. In addition, the estimated undercounts and overcounts in Census enumerations can also affect the denominator. For all of these reasons CSAE/BPC has chosen to use the citizen age-eligible denominator, as the most accurate way of determining turnout and the one that has the greatest present and historical validity.

2. This report comes with two parts: a. Registration figures for all the states which have completed or nearly completed registration for the 2012 election; and b. a study of the impact of three forms of convenience voting on turnout – election day registration, in-person early voting at designated places of convenience beyond election officials’ offices, and no-excuse absentee balloting. A few words about each:

3. Registration: The registration figures in the back of this report are, for most of the 34 states in this report, final, official and certified by the chief election officer (or, in a few cases, close to final) in each state and totally misleading. Because of the problems with registration tallies, all numerical conclusions in this report are estimates.

In any given election the official registration figures provided by the states are inaccurate because they contain the names of people who have either died or moved but have not been removed from the registration rolls. The degree of inaccuracy in any given state would depend both on when they conducted a list cleaning and how thorough such a list cleaning was. A state which conducted a thorough list cleaning close to an election would likely have fewer names that were not eligible. But because of non-thorough and early list cleaning, some states, frequently Alaska, Maine and Mississippi and this year Colorado and Michigan, have registration rolls which exceed 100 percent of the Voting Age Population. Prior to the enactment of the NVRA, it was at least possible to make a national estimate of registration which would be, on the average, ten percent lower than the official figures provided by the states.

But the NVRA mandated that states must keep even those who have moved or died on their registration rolls for at least two federal elections, even if the people whose names have remained on the rolls have been determined to have moved or died. And, this, in turn, accounts for the substantially higher official figures than prior to the NVRA’s implementation.

While states cannot remove names, they can transfer those for whom they have evidence have died or moved to an inactive list, which they are required by the NVRA to report each biennium by March of the year following a national election. A truer picture of actual active registration can be gleaned from the chart below which compares registration rates based

on official figures and rates based on official figures minus those kept on inactive lists for a few states. But even this chart overestimates by about 10 percent nationally the actual level of registration. Accordingly the overall registration figures in the summary charts are estimates.

Overall and Active Registration

State	VAP	Total Reg.	Pct. Reg.	Inact. Reg.	Act. Reg	Pct. Reg	Pct. Dif
UT	1840000	1508215	0.819682	234298	1273917	0.692346	0.127336
AZ	447200	3725362	0.833042	600650	3124712	0.698728	0.134314
WA	4861000	4335775	0.891951	426055	3909720	0.804304	0.087648
IL	8887000	8586527	0.96619	1099693	7486834	0.842448	0.123742
CO	3635000	3645274	1.002826	944162	2701112	0.743084	0.259742
NV	1869000	1500818	0.803006	243064	-1743882	-0.93306	1.736062
<b>Total</b>	<b>25564000</b>	<b>23301971</b>	<b>0.911515</b>	<b>3547922</b>	<b>19754049</b>	<b>0.772729</b>	<b>0.138786</b>

The partisan summary charts are based on unadjusted data for the 21 of the 28 states and the District of Columbia who have partisan registration and reported their figures at the time of this release. This data, however flawed, is useful for looking at trends. It should be noted, however, that the figures in this summary chart do not add up to 100 percent and are arrived at by ascertaining the partisan share of the eligible citizen population. The difference between these numbers and 100 percent is the unregistered.

The registration figures in the detailed charts in this report are the compilations by the states and should be taken with large grains of salt. For most of the states reporting the figures used in the detailed charts are overall registration including both active and inactive voters. The numbers for some states, like Ohio, are only for active voters, but they correspond to the figures for previous elections.

BPC/CSAE believes that the only valid time to compare registration with previous registration is at the close of registration.

4. The figures in the study of the impact on turnout of three forms of convenience voting are final, official, certified by each state's chief election officer. The numerator for the percentages in this report is the presidential vote in presidential election years and the race(s) which had the highest statewide turnout (for U.S. Senate, governor or aggregate U.S. House) in mid-term elections. The basis of this study is not the level of turnout in any given state (many of the states which adopted one or more of these innovations already had high turnout) but the impact of these new laws on the changes in turnout between elections as compared to states which did not enact these laws. The laws were tested against all those states which had not adopted the particular law and all those states that had not enacted the law in question minus the states which had adopted other convenience voting

procedures. The abbreviations EDR (for election day registration), EV (for in person early voting) and NE (for no-excuse absentee voting) are used in all the charts.

5. All comparisons in this report are made between similar elections – presidential year elections against earlier or later presidential year elections; and mid-term elections against other mid-term elections.

6. Acknowledgements: There are too many to thank for making this report possible, but some include John Fortier, Eric Larson and the leadership of the Bipartisan Policy Center: Corey Lewin who prepared the data for the study of convenience voting; Samuel Schreiber who many years ago designed a custom database program that makes my analysis possible; to a series of research assistants the most recent of which are Matthew Mulling and Mark Harvey; the many state election officials who provided information and data and Dr. Walter Dean Burnham who provided the wisdom and methodology that made the work and analysis of CSAE sound.

5. The analysis and conclusions in this report is the responsibility of Curtis Gans, CSAE's director.