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Spring 2005

Review of *Giving Voters a Voice: The Origins of the Initiative and Referendum in America* by Steven L. Piott

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Cigler, Allen, "Review of *Giving Voters a Voice: The Origins of the Initiative and Referendum in America* by Steven L. Piott" (2005). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 755.
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Giving Voters a Voice: The Origins of the Initiative and Referendum in America. By Steven L. Piott. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003. x + 330 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Recent decades have shown renewed interest in using the initiative and referendum, typically viewed by reformers as devices with the potential to broaden citizen awareness and participation, thereby curbing the influence of special interests in the policy process. To others, such direct policy making by citizens strikes at the very heart of representative democracy: considered deliberation by elected officials is bypassed and public policy may not be well thought out.

In *Giving Voters a Voice*, historian Steven Piott carefully explores how and under what circumstances the initiative and referendum came to be part of many state constitutions starting in the first decade of the twentieth century. He traces the origins of the idea of direct legislation, especially as practiced in the Swiss cantons, back to the European revolutions in the 1830s. By the late 1890s in the US, loosely coordinated social movements existed in many states advocating adoption of direct legislation. Piott's research strategy is to examine reformer efforts in sixteen states that adopted direct legislation measures and to explore how citizens used such devices in the aftermath of adoption. Among the Great Plains states included in his analysis are North and South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Nebraska.

In every state studied a similar pattern emerged: citizen efforts to enact direct legislation amendments to state constitutions reflected outsider dissatisfaction with domination of the policy process by entrenched business and political elites that were viewed as unresponsive to citizen concerns on such issues as agricultural prices, workers' rights, and corruption in government. In a number of states citizen reform groups were the catalysts behind efforts to give residents constitutional devices to influence policy directly. In some states, farm and labor organizations headed the direct legislation movement, while in others the major party, or in some cases third parties

such as the Populists or the Socialist Party, spearheaded reform efforts. Opposition varied as well, but typically sprang from the most influential corporate interests or the political leadership in a one-party dominated state. Perhaps the most interesting oppositions of all were found in North Dakota where the Women's Temperance Union worried that voters would demand reconsideration of the prohibition law if direct legislation measures were to be adopted, or in Nebraska where the powerful liquor industry organized the opposition because of its fear of prohibition.

Piott's contributions go beyond the historical details of the direct legislation adoption battles in the various states. He effectively documents the linkage between the earlier Populist Movement and the later Progressive Movement. Moreover, he shows that even the early use of the initiative and referendum had mixed results: direct legislation could sometimes be a tool of elites at the expense of the broad public interest. **Allan J. Cigler**, *Department of Political Science, University of Kansas*.