Why vote for third parties?

Third parties have played a vital role in America's history by introducing ideas to the political debate that were adopted by the two major parties. Here are some examples:

1. Direct election of senators: Advocated by the Prohibition and Populist parties in the late 19th century; led to the 17th Amendment (ratified in 1913).

2. The progressive income tax: Advocated by the Populist and Socialist parties from 1892; led to the 16th Amendment (ratified in 1913).

3. Women's suffrage: Advocated by the Prohibition and Socialist parties from the late 19th century; led to the 19th Amendment (ratified in 1920).

4. Shorter working hours: Advocated by the Populist and Socialist parties from 1892; led to state laws and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938).

5. Initiative and referendum: Advocated by the Populist Party in the late 19th century; adopted by many state governments.

6. Prohibition of child labor: Advocated by the Socialist Party from 1904 to 1912; led to the Keating-Owen Act (1916).

7. Public works programs to employ the unemployed: Advocated by the Socialist Party from 1928; led to New Deal public-works programs.

8. Unemployment insurance: Advocated by the Socialist Party from 1928; led to the Social Security Act (1935).

9. Social security: Advocated by the Socialist Party from 1901; led to the Social Security Act. By 1936, Roosevelt had adopted most of Socialist Presidential candidate Norman Thomas' platform, leading Democrat Al Smith to comment that Roosevelt "caught the socialists in skinny-dipping, and stole their clothes."

10. Ross Perot's campaign in 1992 put deficit reduction at the top of the economic agenda for both the Democrats and Republicans during the 1990s.

11. Perot also supported campaign finance reform, leading to the adoption of McCain-Feingold in 2002. Several states have passed clean election laws.

12. The Green Party of Maine's platform advocated single-payer health care in 1994. Jonathan Carter and Pat LaMarche ran for Governor on the Green Party's ticket. The Democratic Party of Maine adopted universal health care in its platform in 2002, and the state legislature passed a universal health care plan for the state in 2003.