

# PERIODICALS

*Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad*

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## **POLITICS & GOVERNMENT**

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### *Voting On the Issues*

"The Federal Initiative Idea" by Michael Nelson, in *The Nation* (Feb. 25, 1978), 333 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y., 10014.

At a time when the American public is said to be "turned off" from government and "dropping out" of politics, use of the initiative, by which citizens can propose laws and have them voted up or down in general elections, is on the rise at the state and local level. Nelson, a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly*, suggests that the time for extending the initiative idea to the national level may be at hand.

In the past 15 months, initiatives have produced a "sunshine" law in Florida, "returnable bottle" statutes in Michigan and Maine, a local-option fluoridation law in Utah, and an Arizona plan to improve procedures for the selection of judges.

Hearings on a constitutional amendment to permit use of the initiative at the federal level were held in the Senate last December and serious, if intermittent, debate is underway. Critics of the proposal argue that the initiative process would produce a "lawmaking binge" dominated by "hate issues" (e.g., anti-labor and race issues) or special-interest proposals. Nelson says the experience of the 23 states that now allow initiatives proves the contrary. (In Washington state, only 84 of the 407 initiative petitions filed since 1912 attracted enough valid signatures to qualify; of these, 40 were eventually rejected at the polls. None were frivolous or inconsequential.)

Ratification of a constitutional amendment requires formation of a broad consensus, says Nelson, and that takes time. One favorable omen: Respondents to a recent Caddell poll favored the idea by a margin of better than 2 to 1, and 74 percent said they would be "more inclined to go to vote if they could vote on issues as well as candidates."