

## OPINION USA

# Making the voices of ordinary citizens count

**Citizens Jury, beginning Sunday, will play a role in helping President-elect Clinton and Congress with the long-term tough choices facing the country.**

For three days in Little Rock, President-elect Clinton heard from experts about how to fix our economy. He showed his concern about the views of average citizens by taking phone calls from them. But only the experts were seated at the table during the extensive deliberations.

Starting Jan. 10, the Jefferson Center aims to improve on this by bringing the experts to talk to 24 ordinary citizens, chosen at random from around the USA, and gathered in Washington for five days of hearings.

The jury's task is to hear from the experts and then say what needs to be done to make America strong and

healthy in the 21st century.

They are participating in the Citizens Jury process, a long-tested method for gathering a microcosm of a community or a nation to discuss important problems.

No one can volunteer for or buy a seat on a Citizens Jury. The jurors are picked at random and the panels balanced for age, education, gender, geographic locale, race, '92 presidential vote, and attitude toward taxes and spending.

In fact, each member is paid \$600, plus expenses, for his or her five days of jury meetings in order to make this jury duty open to the larg-

est number of people.

Among those at the jury table in January will be Robert Allen, a 23-year-old Air Force veteran, cardiac technician and university student from Austin, Texas; Juanita Graham, a 45-year-old computer graphics specialist from Brooklyn, N.Y.; and Evelyn Swanson, a 64-year-old supply clerk from Napa, Calif.

The January Citizens Jury panel will struggle with the issue of what sacrifices we face if America is to be strong and healthy in the 21st century, and who should bear them.

The jurors will not rewrite the election, but they will help flesh out the mandate for change given to Clinton and Congress. They will suggest how much room there really is for change and what the president-elect and Congress must do to keep their support.

The Citizens Jury process is hardly a radical idea. For more than 500 years, people have turned to juries of their peers to help sort out complex decisions, including issues of life or death.

What is revolutionary is the urgent need for a process that will reconnect citizens with their government

— a process that can wipe away the forces of gridlock to clear a place for voices of reason.

Over 18 years in development, the Citizens Jury process has been tested and proved on 12 occasions. Citizens Jury panels have rated the candidates' stands on issues in Minnesota and Pennsylvania and have considered policy issues ranging from organ transplants to health clinics in schools.

A 1992 panel of Pennsylvanians challenged hospital administrators on the availability of care (the administrators did not seem to know what actually happened to poor people at the admitting desks) and forced a Senate candidate to rethink her proposal on national health care.

The jury will open with a review of the Clinton platform. Economist and *Business Week* columnist Robert Kuttner will present a liberal vision and budget direction. Republican leader and National Public Radio commentator Vin Weber will do the same for the conservatives. ABC's *Nightline* and others plan extensive coverage.

It is often said that the American people get the government they de-

## How jury will be selected

The Citizens Jury uses demographic breakdowns from the 1990 Census to assure the jury is composed of a cross-section of the country. Here are some of the goals for the 24-member jury.

### Target percentage

Women ☐ 51%  
Men ☐ 49%

Age 18-44 ☐ 58%  
45-over ☐ 42%

High school and less ☐ 59%  
Some college ☐ 41%

White ☐ 81%  
Black ☐ 12%  
Other ☐ 7%

### Target no. of jurors

Women ☐ 12  
Men ☐ 12

Age 18-44 ☐ 14  
45-over ☐ 10

High school and less ☐ 14  
Some college ☐ 10

White ☐ 19  
Black ☐ 3  
Other ☐ 2

Source: Census Bureau

By Elys A. McLean, USA TODAY



By Ned Crosby (left), president of the Jefferson Center and creator of the Citizens Jury process, and Bob Meek, the senior vice president of the center. The Minneapolis-based Jefferson Center is a non-partisan political research and reform organization.

serve. We don't think so.

Rather, the American people have been stuck with a government that is neither representative nor knowledgeable — too many lobbyists, too many opinion polls and too much

manipulation. The Tough Choices Citizens Jury panels offer a fresh start by creating a forum that is both representative and knowledgeable in a new institution that the people can trust.