

## *Innovative Midterm Elections*

For a party out of the White House, there is an age-old way to conduct midterm elections: Talk retrospective and make vague promises. The Republicans' "Had Enough?" campaign against the Truman administration in 1946 is a classic instance. In midterms, a retrospective focus makes sense because it is so inviting to blame everything on an incumbent president's two-year record. Vagueness helps along a "coalition-of-disaffected-minorities" strategy at a time when not having presidential candidates on the ballot lets House and Senate candidates run on local issues; what works in Alabama may not work in Rhode Island.

All the more surprising, then, that the Republicans of 1994 should present a campaign appeal—the Contract with America—that was both prospective and specific. For a congressional party, it broke new ground to commit hundreds of candidates to an action program and then use that program as respectively a campaign theme, a lens for interpreting the election outcome, and a centerpiece for a "hundred-days" legislative drive. Many presidential candidates have acted out this familiar mandate scenario—consider Ronald Reagan's use of the Kemp-Roth tax cut plan in the 1980 campaign and subsequently in his 1981 budget—as have U.S. national parties more generally by writing platforms every four years and then sometimes paying attention to