

Testimony from Vermont State Representative Christopher Pearson
Connecticut Government Affairs & Elections Committee
February 28, 2007

Thank you for having me. For the record, my name is Chris Pearson and I am a Vermont State Representative. I am testifying today on behalf of National Popular Vote – the group behind the Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by Nationwide Popular Vote. I believe you have this bill in a few ways: SB – 42, HB – 6000 & 6018.

If it's all right with the committee I'd like to start by outlining the problem National Popular Vote is trying to address and then talk about how the bill would actually work.

Under the current system we use to elect the President, most states are completely taken for granted. Connecticut, Vermont, and at least two-thirds of the states fall into this category. We all watch as Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania and a few others are showered with attention. Candidates don't visit our states, don't poll our opinions, don't spend money on advertising and don't mount campaigns. We are left to watch the contest from the sidelines.

Most political observers are familiar with battleground and spectator states but few realize how bad it has become. In 2004, two-thirds of all the money spent by both campaigns went to influence votes in just five states. After the campaign, Matthew Dawd, a senior campaign advisor for President Bush acknowledged that for two years running up to the campaign they had only polled in 18 states. For two years the opinion of folks in 32 states had no value to the Presidents campaign. And I don't mean to pick on him; Senator Kerry talked often of his 18-state strategy.

The impact of this process is dramatic. In my state, if you want to get involved in Presidential elections you get in your car and you drive to New Hampshire.

Even more disturbing is the impact on issues. We hear a lot of discussion about what matters to the few states in play. Cuban immigration is a good example. Cuba is a very small country with relatively few immigrants coming to America. But, the issue is important to Florida and so we hear a lot about it.

Electing the President by popular vote is not a new idea. Since Gallop started asking this question in the 40s support has consistently been between 65 and 80%. Today, we have a strategy for states to take the lead and deliver this change.

Turns out states have exclusive power over how to allocate their electoral votes. Article II, section I of the United States Constitution says: Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct...

A reminder of this flexibility is Maine and Nebraska that today award their electoral votes by Congressional district. Over the history of our country states have awarded

electoral votes in many ways. It took several decades to approach the more uniform system we have today.

The agreement among the states takes advantage of this flexibility. If enough states work together, we can have a popular election for the president. We can guarantee that the person who gets the most votes will win. And, we can guarantee that every American gets an equal say in the outcome of this vitally important election. A one person, one vote system is overdue.

The bill works this way: if enacted, Connecticut would award its electoral votes, not to the person who wins Connecticut as you do today, but to the person who gets the most votes in the whole country.

But, this change doesn't take effect immediately, it only takes effect once enough other states have made the same change that together the states make up a majority of the Electoral College, or 270 Electoral votes.

Once we reach that threshold, it doesn't matter which states are involved, you run a campaign and add up the votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The candidate with the most votes is guaranteed a majority in the Electoral College.

This project launched last year and six states looked at our bill. It passed a few chambers. This year we have sponsors in 47 states. The Colorado Senate and the Hawaii Senate have already passed the bill on bi-partisan votes. We are engaging in a vigorous national effort and we hope Connecticut will join us by passing this bill.

I am happy to answer questions.