



The Center for
Voting and Democracy

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Written Testimony of Rob Richie, Executive Director
On Behalf of Connecticut Legislation on the National Popular Vote Plan

Prepared for Representative Caruso, Senator Slossberg and members of the Government
Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing (GAE) Committee.
Hearing, February 29, 2008

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Raised Bill 5662, An Act Concerning An Agreement Among States to Elect the President Of The United States by National Popular Vote. This legislation would enter Connecticut into an interstate compact designed to guarantee the election of the presidential candidate who wins the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

My name is Rob Richie. Since 1992, I have been the executive director of FairVote, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group based outside Washington, D.C. that promotes voter participation and fair elections. I am co-author of *Every Vote Equal*, a book that explains the National Popular Vote plan, and our organization produced *Presidential Election Inequality*, a report detailing increasing serious problems with the current Electoral College system. Last year FairVote and its allies played a central role in our home state of Maryland's decision to become the first state to enter the National Popular Vote compact. New Jersey has since joined the compact, and legislation likely will be under consideration in all remaining states in 2009-2010.

I strongly support the National Popular Vote legislation. A nationwide election of the President is a goal supported by an overwhelming majority of Americans (more than 70% in 2005 polls taken in Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning states alike, and as high as 80% in some Gallup polls in recent decades). Americans recognize that our country benefits from campaigns that reach out to everyone and everywhere—small states, big states, Republican strongholds, Democratic strongholds, rural areas and urban areas alike. The current system does just the opposite. Today's elections focus exclusively on an ever-smaller club of swing states such as Florida. The system is nothing like the one-person, one-vote system we hold for every other election of import in America.

Connecticut and all of its neighbors do not receive the attention they deserve, as they are nearly completely ignored by both parties in general elections. Because of the current state-by-state system where only swing states matter, candidates have no reason to poll, visit, advertise, organize, campaign, or address the important concerns of the people of your state. Indeed, the 2004 presidential campaign of George Bush was the richest in history -- but it didn't waste a dime in polling a single person outside of 18 potential swing states in the last two years of the campaign. All the Americans in spectator states meant absolutely nothing to the campaign because their votes were taken for granted.

Our *Presidential Election Inequality* report measures the adverse impact of the current system in many ways. Here are a few:

- The presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the major parties made 291 campaign stops in the last five weeks of the 2004 campaign. 109 were in Florida or Ohio, while a majority of states did not receive even a single visit.
- In those last five weeks of the 2004 campaign, more than \$110 million was spent on television ads about the presidential election in Ohio and Florida. Not a single presidential campaign ad aired in 25 states, and only \$388,095 was spent on ads in Hawaii.
- The ten states with the biggest declines in youth turnout over the past 30 years are all "spectator states." Young people under 30 were 36% more likely to vote in the ten closest swing states than the rest of the nation in 2004.
- A white American in 2004 was more than 50% more likely than a person of color to live in a swing state.

As you consider the National Popular Vote bill before you, you are considering a bright-line choice. On one side is a Connecticut where its people are politically relevant in the most important election we hold in America, and on the other, a Connecticut for which 2008 and future elections will be a spectator sport. On one side is a truly national campaign, where we elect the president of all fifty states, and on the other, an election decided by votes in a dozen. On one side is a campaign where all who care about presidential elections have a great incentive to get out the vote and engage the people of Connecticut and on the other, not even an incentive to air an ad. Joining with the majority of Americans in electing the president with a national popular vote is a declaration that the people of Connecticut are just as important as the people of Florida when deciding the future of our nation. Embracing the current system implies that they are somehow less important.

I want to emphasize that no way will Connecticut be taking this important step alone -- and of course nothing will change whatever you do until states representing a majority of Americans have entered into this agreement. More than 360 state legislators in 47 states have introduced the National Popular plan or agreed to sponsor it. In addition to the wins in Maryland and Jersey, it will keep moving through committees and chambers in a mix of big and small states, red and blue states.

We are fortunate that the Founding Fathers created a U.S. Constitution that gave you and state legislators like you the power to choose how the President would be elected. -- and make our elections work for your citizens. States have the right and responsibility to award their electoral votes in a manner chosen by the states themselves. The National Popular Vote bill solves a widely recognized problem. It is a common sense approach that is firmly rooted in the Constitution.

Last year our nation mourned the death of Gerald Ford. President Ford, just like other presidents of his era like Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter and Lyndon Johnson, supported a national popular vote for president. In 1969, as minority leader in the U.S. House he rose to speak, ending with "Now, my final point is this: I believe that we ought to pass the direct method of selecting the President of the United States. If we do not, it is my honest opinion that the people will be let down."

In the end, one thing is sure. Americans want a government that listens to them, and elections in which their votes count. We all uphold the principle of "one person one vote." When it comes to the most important election our nation holds, only a national popular vote will do, for Connecticut, and for America. That is why I respectfully urge you to support this legislation. Thank you.