

**Testimony of Miles S. Rapoport**

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**Government Administration and Elections Committee Hearing**

**March 25, 2013**

**Testimony in Opposition to Raised Bill 1146, An Act Concerning Cross-Endorsements**

Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hwang, Members of the Committee. Thank you for having me here today. It gives me great pleasure to come before the Committee on which I served for all ten years of my legislative service and with which I worked so closely in my years as Secretary of the State.

It is especially heartening to be here because Connecticut has been such an extraordinary national leader when it comes to ensuring an inclusive, open, and fair democracy that reflects our citizens and guarantees every voice is heard. As President of Demos, I have the opportunity to observe and be involved in election issues all over the country. In many states, we have seen disturbing trends toward limiting the right to vote and discouraging people from entering into the process.

Connecticut has been a beacon in bucking this trend and expanding its democracy. The landmark Citizen's Election Program has been a national model in making elections less captive to the relentless demands of fundraising. We are working hard to have New York State follow Connecticut's lead. Connecticut's adoption of Election Day Registration and online voter registration last year were terrific steps forward. Your serious consideration of early voting through the passage of last year's Constitutional Amendment language is tremendously encouraging.

All that said, I come to testify in opposition to Raised Bill 1146, An Act Concerning Cross-Endorsements. In my view, this bill represents a significant step in the opposite

direction from the leadership role Connecticut has had these last several years, and would tarnish the state's reputation among advocates for a stronger democracy. Banning cross-endorsement, would narrow the process, limit voter choices, and discourage the leavening influence of minor parties. Allowing cross-endorsement is healthy for our democracy. We should pause to consider some of the history and political science, which I believe make a strong case for rejecting this legislation.

Cross endorsement was once part of the landscape across America. Recalling the history of political parties and social movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Greenbackers and Grange and Free Soil and Know-Nothings and, most famously, the Populists. All were minor political parties that routinely cross-endorsed major party candidates.

Minor parties have actually played an important role in introducing new issues to the political debate. Here are a few of the issues that began first as part of the program of a Minor political party-- abolition, 8 hour day, unemployment insurance, social security, family farm support programs, women's suffrage, prohibition (okay – not all were great ideas!).

Minor parties provide a voice for minority viewpoints that often, as you can see, migrate into one of the major parties, and press the major parties from varying directions. And while that can be irritating to the major parties, that should Not be a reason to undercut their ability to serve that role. And that is exactly what Raised Bill 1146 would do.

In most states, major parties have been successful at imposing burdens on minor parties, in addition to the cultural traditions of two party politics, by preventing cross endorsement. This casts the minor parties into one of two roles. Either, they are the hopelessly irrelevant irritant whose candidates can hardly be heard. Or, they are Spoilers. The spoiler role is particularly pernicious, because supporters of a minor party candidate have to cast a vote supporting their candidate, knowing that the vote could cause their least favorite candidate to win. Consider liberal leaning people voting for Ralph Nader in 2000, or fiscal

conservatives voting for H. Ross Perot in 1992. Or, they can cast an uncomfortable “strategic vote” for a candidate they do not like but who is ‘the lesser of two evils’. I believe this is an unfair position for a voter to be in.

Not so in Connecticut and the other states that continue to allow cross endorsement. These states include New York, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Mississippi, and New Hampshire. In these states, minor parties and their voters have a way to constructively participate without being forced into the spoiler or wasted vote box.

Let me give you a few other arguments.

1. **Minor parties create a richer democracy.** More choices are good for voters.

.Cross endorsement not only provides more choice to voters, it also provides them with much more information. That’s very important. A major party candidate – from whichever one – who is also nominated by the Green Party or the Libertarian or Working Families or Independent party is providing voters with more information about what they believe in.

2. **Cross-endorsement gives people who are not Republicans or Democrats more choices.** Let’s acknowledge that not every voter fits neatly into either the Republican or Democratic camp. That’s okay. We owe those citizens the right to support the candidate they favor under the label they favor. The minor parties might only get a few percentage points, but it is important for their supporters to be able to stand up and be counted. We should not force them to vote for us on one of the major party lines.

3. **Cross-Endorsement is not complicated or administratively difficult.** As a former Secretary, I can tell you that the current system works well and presents no technical problems. We have operated with it for a very long time. It is simple to tally the votes on two separate lines and then add them together to determine the overall outcome.

4. **Cross endorsement seems to increase turnout.** There isn't a huge amount of data on this, but what there is, is positive. First, polling shows that the people who are least likely to vote are most interested in minor parties. That includes young people, low-income voters and immigrants. Minor parties can serve to turn out those new voters. Second, robust studies also find cross-endorsement decreases down-ballot drop off by providing meaningful information to voters on the ballot.
5. **Remember – cross endorsement is always voluntary.** The candidate must want the endorsement of the minor party. So there's a choice for the candidate to make here as well. If he or she does not think the minor party is worthy, then they need not accept their support.

Overall, I believe that an important principle is at stake here. I believe, and Demos believes, that we should endeavor to open up access to the political process in as many ways as we can. Election Day Registration has opened up voting to many more people. Early voting will help people to vote. Public financing opens up the field for many more citizens to run. And cross—endorsement gives voters who join minor parties more choices and more ability to make a difference. All these are feathers in Connecticut's democracy hat. Please don't reverse course on this issue.