

March 25, 2013

Testimony in OPPOSITION to SB1146 AAC Cross-Endorsements

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Thank you, Senator Musto, Representative Jutila, Senator McLaughlan and Representative Hwang for the opportunity to testify on this legislation today.

I completely oppose SB1146 for it's lack of constitutionality, attack on minor parties, and limits to voter choice.

As you may know, I have a long background in Connecticut politics. From 1983 to 1987 I served as the Connecticut Republican Party State Chairman. I have also worked for independent Governor Lowell Weicker as his chief of staff, and co-founder of A Connecticut Party. I have served as a Fellow at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government Institute of Politics. I have run a political consulting firm for independent candidates, and Supported Republican candidates, Reform Party candidates, Democratic candidates and other efforts.

In the work I have done I've seen that many voters are frustrated by the limitations of the two major parties, and many candidates often are as well. Voters often do not feel represented by either the Democratic or Republican parties, and look to third parties and independent candidates to promote their values. Likewise, many independent candidates find that the electoral deck is stacked against them. At a time when the number of independent voters is growing exponentially, and when independent voters make up the swing vote in every closely-contested election, they find themselves faced with fewer and fewer candidate options and points-of-view. The two major parties, by keeping out or marginalizing more voices, are doing a disservice to the voting public.

Cross-endorsement gives voters more opportunity to vote in a way that expresses their values *and* advances their issues after Election Day. This leads to a better-represented electorate, higher voter turnout, and more issue-driven politics. Too often, the Republican and Democratic parties try to be such a "large tent" that voters lose touch with some of their platform, and as these two parties become increasingly polarized, voters look for cross-endorsements to signal where candidates are on their priority issues. Our democracy needs non-irrelevant third parties to participate in our political system, and cross-endorsement helps produce a range of meaningful choices for voters.

Even though Connecticut is not a "swing state," we have enjoyed high voter turnout, which is no doubt encouraged partly by the presence of cross-endorsement. According to the United States Election Project, Connecticut consistently out-performs the national average. And in 2010, Connecticut was ranked 13th highest turnout state in the country.

Year	U.S.	CT
2006	40.40%	46.60%
2008	61.60%	66.60%
2010	41%	45.90%
2012	58.20%	60.90%

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Connecticut has historically benefitted from a more open political system than many other states enjoy, but with this bill that tradition is under attack. What cross-endorsement means is when a candidate is nominated by two parties and appears on both ballot lines. Eliminating this practice is misguided and a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. We should give more access to independent voices in our system, and shouldn't consider anything that will make it harder for independent voices to be heard. Parties are the way that citizens in a democracy organize themselves, and those citizens deserve to nominate who they want, vote for them, and see their total votes reflected as a party on Election Night.

While banning the cross-endorsement of candidates may not be unconstitutional, it is still wrong. Connecticut should be proud of this tradition and uphold the right of a political party to endorse whomever they feel best represents them in an election. It would be an untoward intrusion of the state to prohibit that.

Please reject SB1146. Thank you.