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State of Connecticut
SENATOR DONALD E. WILLIAMS, JR.
Twenty-ninth District
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Testimony before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

In Support of House Bill 5126: An Act Concerning An Agreement Among The States To Elect
The President Of The United States By National Popular Vote

February 24, 2014

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank the co- chairs, Senator Musto and Representative Jutila, Ranking Members McLachlan and Hwang, as well as distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 5126: "AN ACT CONCERNING AN AGREEMENT AMONG THE STATES TO ELECT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES BY NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE."

I am Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr., President Pro Tempore of the Connecticut State Senate. I serve the 29th district, representing the residents of Brooklyn, Canterbury, Killingly, Mansfield, Putnam, Scotland, Thompson, and Windham.

All elected officials in America, including and especially the president, should be elected by a majority of the people. That is a simple rule of democracy that every man, woman and child in America understands. The National Popular Vote bill restores this simple principle to our system of electing a president. In the greatest democracy in the world, it makes no sense to have a system where a candidate who loses the popular vote is nonetheless elected president due to the vagaries of an "electoral college." We would not sanction and approve of such an "election" in a third world country, and we should not do so here in the United States. The National Popular Vote encourages voter participation, engagement in campaigns, and greater involvement by all citizens in the democratic process. When every vote counts, people care. They want to participate. Everyone counts with the National Popular Vote.

Whenever we're asked to make change -- whether it is a change in process, culture, or in this case, a change in the way we elect the President of the United States -- there is resistance. There is often misinformation and distortion of facts by those who benefit most from the status quo. That is why I'd like to talk about what is true and what is not true regarding this bill.

The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact does not require a change to the United States Constitution. Each state will continue to decide how to award its electoral votes. Once our state approves the National Popular Vote bill and enough states have joined to make the compact effective, Connecticut will award its electoral votes to the winner of the national popular election. This will guarantee victory for the candidate with the most votes.

One of the major benefits of passing this bill will be the end of the so-called “battleground” states and the end of their disproportionate power. Currently, there are safe “blue” states that vote Democratic and safe “red” states that vote Republican. The remaining 10-12 battleground states can go either way. As a result, they are the beneficiaries of all the electoral attention in time, money, and access to candidates.

Let’s consider the 2012 Presidential election: President Obama and Governor Romney each spent over 99 percent of their combined advertising dollars—totaling \$463 million—in just 10 states.¹ The candidates traveled to just 12 battleground states, totaling 173 visits between the conventions and the election. All other states were essentially ignored. There is an additional consequence: battleground influence has only just begun on Election Day. Federal dollars must find a home somewhere, and battleground states are disproportionate winners of those dollars. Researchers Douglas L. Kriner and Andrew Reeves at Boston University found that between 1998 and 2008 “the relationship between federal grants and votes are more than twice as strong in counties of swing [battleground] states as in noncompetitive states.” These battleground rewards unintended consequences of the undemocratic electoral college system. The National Popular Vote would dismantle this unfair system that can distort both election outcomes and policy decision after the elections. Once established, the National Popular Vote will end the battleground state anomaly.

Currently, the influence of Political Action Committees or PAC money is also disproportionate. PAC leaders know which states will win elections; they are strategic in the way they target their money. With the National Popular Vote compact in place, the power of PAC money would be diluted. It is far more difficult to influence or corrupt the entire voting population than it is to buy narrow victories in a few key states.

With a National Popular Vote, candidates for president would base more of their campaigns and platforms on mainstream issues that concern the entire nation instead of a narrow appeal to the parochial interests of a handful of battleground states.

In the end, what is most important is that the process for selecting our president must embody our democracy; the president must serve with the consent and endorsement of the governed. That can only occur in a meaningful way if majority rules, and the candidate with the greatest support of the people is the winner.

¹ Fairvote.org