

Members of the GAE Committee:

I'm sorry that I couldn't wait until late afternoon Wednesday to testify on the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact bills. The following is my testimony:

Testimony of Michele Jacklin

House Bills 5205, 5434 and 5435 and SB 9: Acts Related to Connecticut's Admission into the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact

Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing

Feb. 22, 2017

Good afternoon Sens. Winfield and McLachlan, Rep. Fox and members of the GAE Committee:

My name is Michele Jacklin and I'm a member of the board of Common Cause in Connecticut, a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizens lobby dedicated to open and transparent government as well as improving the ways that government operates.

I, as well as Common Cause, strongly support HB 5205, 5434, 5435 and SB 9, all bills that would enable Connecticut to join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC). As you are aware, the NPVIC is an agreement among a group of states and Washington D.C. to award all of their electoral votes to whichever presidential candidate wins the overall popular vote in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Or, in other words, the candidate who wins the most votes would be elected president. As of January of this year, 10 states and D.C. – together representing 165 votes or 30.7 percent of the Electoral College -- had joined the NPVIC.

The agreement would go into effect among the participating states in the compact only after they collectively represent an absolute majority of votes, or 270 out of 538, in the Electoral College. Connecticut should join forces with them because it is the right, fair and just thing to do.

I know that you will hear many well-reasoned arguments today why a candidate who wins the overall popular vote should be declared the winner. Here's one you will hear again and again: Five times in our nation's history – the most recent being the 2016 presidential election – a candidate won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College. As a result, the voices and of millions of Americans were silenced and their votes effectively negated.

But allow me to offer a personal perspective on why the current system of electing a president is patently unfair. As some in this building may remember, I was a political reporter and columnist for The Hartford Courant for roughly 25 years. As such, I covered five presidential campaigns. During those campaigns it was a rarity for a presidential nominee to set foot in Connecticut, except to attend fundraisers that were closed to the news media and to all but partisan supporters with very deep pockets.

In fact, study after study has confirmed that the Electoral College essentially results in candidates spending almost no time in states that are perceived – either by pundits or pollsters or campaign operatives – to be solidly Blue or Red States. Ergo, the contenders spend a disproportionately HUGE amount of time in so-called battleground states, i.e., those states that are perceived to be up for grabs.

Voters in those dozen or so states – and we know which ones they are – get to see the candidates and hear their views on the issues, while voters in the noncompetitive states are relegated to the role of bystander. If the residents of the Blue or Red States are lucky, they may receive a direct mail piece or see a few TV commercials. That's it.

I'm sure that voters in Iowa or Florida may wish, at times, that so much attention was not showered on them. But at least they are participating in the most fundamental exercise in American politics. Meanwhile, here in Connecticut a voter can't find a lawn sign or bumper sticker because all of the candidates' resources are directed to the competitive states.

There's another reason that Connecticut is largely ignored. It has only seven electoral votes, a tiny fraction of the total needed to claim victory. Because of that, many of us in the Nutmeg State feel as though we've been disenfranchised. Our votes are meaningless. And thus, voter turnout declines, as it has in many noncompetitive states across the country. Conversely, turnout rises in states where citizens' votes matter.

In conclusion, the premise of the NPVIC is simple and just: The winner of the popular vote should be declared the winner of the election and thus the occupant of the White House.

I strongly urge you to vote in favor of one of the bills that would enable Connecticut to join the NPVIC and would give state voters the opportunity to have their voices heard in the most important election on this planet. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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