



Testimony to the Government Administration and Elections Committee

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Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director

Common Cause in Connecticut

Senator Winfield, Representative Fox, Senator McLachlan and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire. I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. We have nearly three quarters of a million members nationwide and 7,500 members and activists in Connecticut. Common Cause in Connecticut has a long history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics **and we have worked for years to urge Connecticut to join the National Vote Compact to guarantee the Presidency to the winner of the popular vote in all fifty states.**

We want to thank the Committee for addressing this important issue.

We support the following bills that enter the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact and urge passage:

Proposed H.B. No. 5205 AAC An Agreement Among the States to Elect the President of the United States by National Popular Vote

Proposed H.B. No. 5434 AA Adopting the Interstate Compact to Elect the President of the United States by National Popular Vote

Proposed H.B. No. 5435 AAC Election of the President of the President of the United States by National Popular Vote

Proposed S.B. No. 9 AA Entering Connecticut into the National Popular Vote Compact

The national Popular Vote or "NPV" — would establish a compact among states to guarantee that the presidency would be awarded to the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes across the 50 states and District of Columbia. NPV addresses a problematic barrier to a more fully involved and counted electorate — the winner-take-all system — under which all of a state's electoral votes are awarded to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in that state.

National Popular Vote, once it reaches the threshold to become effective would guarantee that the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia will win the presidency.

This would put Connecticut and the vast majority of states back in play in presidential elections. Currently, it is no exaggeration to say that elections are waged in 6-8 swing states while the rest are essential bystanders. As of January, 2017, 10 states and Washington, D.C. -together representing 165 votes or nearly 40% of the Electoral College – have joined the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. The agreement will go into effect only after they represent a majority of votes – 270 out of 538 in the Electoral College.

Having presidential candidates in the state to do more than raise campaign funds would bring positive attention to our election. Estimates for greater voter turnout range from 3% to 10% and as high as 35% among young voters. This is a very positive outcome.

I have learned a number of things in my time advocating for this proposal. There is increasing information suggesting that the “founding fathers” chose the Electoral College over direct election of presidential candidates as something of a deal brokered between northern and southern states and between the coasts and the center of the country. As we have learned this agreement had a pro-slavery bias. “...in a direct election system. The North would outnumber the South, whose many slaves (more than a half a million in all) of course could not vote. But the Electoral College – a prototype of which Madison proposed in this same speech – instead let each southern state count its slaves, albeit with a two-fifths discount, in computing its share of the overall count.”ⁱThis deal, in addition, assumed that ordinary Americans lacked sufficient information to choose a presidential candidate directly.

In addition, the Founders gave the states complete, plenary authority to decide how our electors will be chosen. NPV does not eliminate the Electoral College, it is not unconstitutional, and it is not an “end run around the constitution”.

Much will be said about the fact that for the second time in the last five elections, we’ve elected a president who lost the popular vote. And every year voters in all but aⁱⁱfew battleground states don’t have a real say in picking our president.

We support this proposal in a belief that the winner of the most votes in the election should actually win the office just like every other election in the country. It is time to make a change to the winner-take-all Electoral College system that leads to anti-democratic outcomes so that voters in all 50 states have a voice in presidential elections.

ⁱ Amar, Akhil Reed, *The Troubling Reason the Electoral College Exists*, Time, November 10, 2016