

Written Testimony for SB225, the NAV Primary bill

Chair Burdick, Vice-chair Baertschiger, and committee members:

My name is Alan Zundel. I live in Eugene, Oregon. I was a political science professor most of my adult working life. I am now a retiree, and the last several years I've been spending a lot of time working on election reform issues. I am testifying in favor of SB225. I was the originator of the concept behind the bill.

Let me preface my remarks by paying tribute to our late Secretary of State Dennis Richardson. I came to know him in 2016 when I was running for Secretary of State as the Pacific Green Party candidate. Since then I've worked with him and his office on several election reform matters. He was remarkably open to new ideas and always eager to find ways to improve our electoral processes. He is and will be missed.

SB 225, the NAV primary bill, came out of some of those conversations. A few days ago I checked the statistics on voter registration. As of February the number of non-affiliated voters was second only to that of registered Democrats: 899,160 as compared to 975, 682. NAVs outnumbered the registered voters in all of the other parties combined.

Yet NAVs have little role to play in the nomination process for some of the most important offices in the state. NAVs can only vote in the primaries for partisan offices if a major party allows them to vote in its primary, which only the Independent Party has done.

And if a non-affiliated candidate (NAC) wants to run for one of these offices, the path will be more difficult than for party candidates. This is demonstrated by the fact that you will rarely, if ever, see a NAC on your general election ballot.

The growing number of NAVs is not simply a side effect of the motor voter law registering more people who are not very political engaged. The trend away from

parties and toward non-affiliated status is decades-long and nationwide. Some do not register with a party because their views do not sync up well with any of the parties. Some don't because they object to the party-centered nature of our politics, with its partisanship and division of citizens into contentious tribes.

These are matters of political principle, and I can see no compelling reason why those who hold them should be relegated to a lesser role in elections for these offices. The very term "partisan office" betrays the favoritism of the election system for partisans over those views lead them not to affiliate with a party.

The NAV primary is a simple way to give NAVs a role in the primaries and NACs a pathway to the general election ballot that is on a more even playing field. Just as Democrats receive a Democratic primary ballot and Republicans receive a Republican primary ballot, NAVs would receive a NAV primary ballot. Any NAC who files for office and pays the appropriate fee for that office would appear on the NAV primary ballot. Whichever NAC received the most NAV votes would appear on the general election ballot.

Some may complain this treats NAVs with disparate views "as though they are a party." But what it really does is treat NAVs and NACs as though they matter just as much as party-affiliated voters and candidates. Party affiliation should not confer a privileged status in a nation of equal voting rights for all citizens.

Thank you for considering this bill.

Dr. Alan F. Zundel