

April 2, 2019

Dear Senators,

Having studied for more than a year the history of the National Popular Vote movement, the arguments for and against it, and the current state of our national political polarization and distrust, I urge you today to help pass SB 807 as an important step toward repairing Americans' trust in politics and elections.

Here, in a nutshell, are my reasons:

1. The Electoral College is archaic, largely incomprehensible for most Americans, and undemocratic.

It was set up 242 years ago as a method to (a) provide the Founders concerned with “mob rule” democracy a mechanism to override democratic presidential choices with elite, educated electors who they thought would have the best interests of the whole country at heart, and to (b) to give the Southern plantation states more political power to get them to approve the new Constitution. Neither slavery nor aristocratic government are applicable in 2019.

2. The Electoral College is not democratic because five times in our history, including twice in the last two decades, it has elected a president that was NOT the choice of the majority of Americans. This happens because of the perverse way the electoral college math works out.

3. Presidential campaigns now devote most of their time, resources and candidate appearances to a dozen or more “battleground” states that are actively “in play” because neither party is dominant there, leaving most other states, large and small, dismissed as irrelevant.

a. Currently, thanks to the Electoral College and the way states award all electors as “winner take all”, the states that get most candidate attention are not the big states per se; rather they are the dozen or so states of all sizes that are considered “in play.” Most states, unfortunately are skewed by politics toward either red or blue, and are therefore either “safe” or “lost” to each party.

b. Statistics clearly show that time and money flows into the more evenly divided political states, where even a few thousand (or hundred) votes could capture an entire state’s elector slate. We all know these states – Ohio, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Florida, Virginia, Nevada, New Mexico, etc. – are where campaign resources (advertising, boots on the ground, candidate appearances, etc.) are largely invested on a per capita basis. Clearly, as records going back years show, Oregon is NOT among them, and will not be in the future, compact or not, because the state is overall blue.

4. The National Popular Vote state compact gives both individual voters and all states direct power in picking the president. Candidates would have to work for EVERY vote in EVERY state because they all would have equal value in a popular vote total.

a. With a direct popular vote election for president everyone’s vote across the land would count, literally. Republicans in Oregon and California, Democrats in Texas and Alabama, each would have an equal voice, and therefore campaign time and money would be allocated more broadly. This is a better way to ensure that all American voters count.

b. Further, I believe that using the national popular vote, rather than the archaic electoral college, would make the presidential election a truly “national” enterprise, where Americans might think beyond their state borders and parochial horizons. Here might be another way to step back from polarization and toward process transparency and unity.

5. The Electoral College doesn't have to be deleted from the Constitution. It can continue to operate as it has since political parties appeared in the late 18th Century, much to the dismay of the Founders themselves. That is, in non-NPV compact states, as a rubber stamp. The NPV state compact just works around the unjust and dysfunctional current results.

6. State participation is completely voluntary, and can be changed later if there is a change of heart. Each state retains its own sovereignty. The compact doesn't take effect unless enough states totaling 270 electoral votes have signed up. Current count: 14 and 189.

7. Based on the last two decades of presidential elections, on balance neither political party would gain an upper hand under the compact. Both large, medium and small states are split between the two major parties. The only loser states would be the dozen “battleground” states that siphon off so much campaign money and attention; instead it would be spread more equitably across the land. No state could be taken for granted since each voter in every one would matter in the only scorecard then applicable: the national popular vote total.

8. A direct popular vote is popular in every state the question has been asked since 1994 by Gallup. In Oregon, the polls say 76% are for it, including 70% of Republicans.

From a state perspective, as a small-to-mid-sized state, Oregon would win. We should see more candidates show up here, more advertising spent here, more campaign (and later administration) focus on us. From a personal voter perspective, each Oregonian's vote would count equally with every other American's, and the election result would truly be the choice of the most voters.

Oregon should join the National Popular Vote compact now. There is momentum nationally. Several state legislatures have signed on this year, and more than a dozen others are considering participation. I urge your committee, your house and the legislature to let us join too.

Sincerely,

Phil McLaughlin
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