

To: The Rules Committee, Oregon Senate  
From: Jane Hunter, Resident of Multnomah County, Professor of History, Lewis & Clark College

Below please see my advocacy for National Popular Vote, written as an op-ed for my local newspaper. I am very hopeful that the Rules Committee will bring Senate Bill 870 to the floor and pass it. Oregon should finally be part of this national initiative to solve what to me is one of the pressing issues for the American democracy.

The brainchild of a group of wonky technocrats, the National Popular Vote Compact is a smart device that has been endorsed by a range of unlikely allies from both parties and joined now by 13 states and the District of Columbia. It is designed to fix a myriad of problems with our current Presidential election system—a system which baffles the world, and is already creating significant challenges to democracy at home. It uses the power granted by the U.S. constitution to state legislatures to determine how each state's electoral college votes will be awarded. State legislatures have always been the deciders on this, most recently exemplified by the decision of the legislatures of Maine and New Hampshire to award their electors on the basis of congressional district.

National Popular Vote is a compact among states, not a top-down federal fix. It remedies the current system where the national election is decided by a small group of voters in swing states, relegating the rest of the country—including Oregon now—to virtual irrelevance. Instead, once triggered by the participation of member states carrying the majority of electoral college votes (currently 270), compact members agree to award all their votes to the winner of the national popular vote. This ensures that no states can be taken for granted, and importantly, that every vote cast in a presidential election carries equal weight. This is far from our current system, which significantly amplifies the votes of voters in low-population states and reduces those of voters in higher population states.

NPV has been around for over a decade, and is not a response to the current moment. It has been endorsed by a number of nonpartisan “good government” groups—including the League of Women Voters and Common Cause. Our neighbors to the north and south, Washington and California, joined a number of years ago, and new members in the past year include Colorado and Connecticut. Currently the compact is two-thirds constituted and momentum is building. The legislature of New Mexico just sent a bill to the governor's desk, and Delaware's governor has just signed. The state senate in Michigan is engaging the issue.

The Oregon house has passed NPV four times in the past. It is exciting that the Senate Rules Committee will be discussing Oregon's participation tomorrow.

Less glamorous than many national initiatives, with its kinks worked out by long discussion and general agreement on its goals, NPV would be a tremendous step forward. By using powers granted in the constitution, it presents a pragmatic solution to a compounding national problem. Thank you for considering my perspective.

Sincerely yours,  
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