

**Testimony of John Buchanan**  
**At Committee on Government Operations and the Environment**  
**Of the**  
**District of Columbia City Council**  
**On the “National Popular Vote Interstate Agreement Act of 2010”**  
**(Bill 18-0769)**  
**May 19, 2010**

I want to thank the Committee on Government Operations and the Environment of the District of Columbia City Council for considering legislation to enter the District of Columbia into the National Popular Vote interstate compact.

I have supported the idea that the President of United States be elected by a popular vote of the people since my election to Congress in 1964 as the first Republican to represent Birmingham in the Congress in the city’s history.

The founder of my party, Abraham Lincoln, described the American political system as “Government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Yet in the first presidential election of the twenty-first century, once again the presidential candidate who won the popular vote lost the election, and the will of the people who cared enough to be present and voting was frustrated rather than fulfilled. In the next election the then incumbent President won the popular vote, but a change in the electoral vote of a single state could have cost him the election.

Denying the American people the right to determine by their votes who the President and Vice-President shall be is a flaw in our system, and one that needs fixing. It is time for “the world’s greatest democracy” to in fact become one at the highest level of elective office as is already the case at all other levels.

As a member of Congress I voted in support of the direct election of the president and nearly saw the system change during my tenure. At the time it was a controversial idea, but not overburdened by the partisan bickering so much as regional concerns. Many of my colleagues in

Southern states, for example, believed the Electoral College system, as it stood, benefited their states.

Today, any discussions, although there have been too few, seem to give rise to partisan concerns. Yet this is not, nor should it be, either a regional or a partisan matter. We should rather be guided by patriotism and principle to do what is right for our country and for the American people as a whole. When we look at the method by which we elect the president, we should have a system that is fair, guarantees votes are counted equally, puts residents of each state on equal footing, and promotes vote-seeking across the nation.

Today, the Electoral College system means that campaigns are focused on dangerously few states. In 2004, over two-thirds of the country, including the District of Columbia, was completely neglected during the one nationwide political contest. Candidates spend more and more money to reach fewer and fewer voters. In the closely-divided battleground states, which do get attention, under the winner take all system of allotting electoral votes practiced by most states, all who end up on the losing end of even a 50.1% to 49.9% statewide vote are denied the right for their votes to count toward the election of the candidate of their choice at the national level in a national election. Hence, too many people in too many places have no meaningful role in the election process.

In 1969, I was one of 337 members of the U.S. House of Representatives who passed an amendment for direct election of the president. We had overwhelming support and outside help from the US Chamber of Commerce, the American Bar Association, and others who agreed this was a needed change to our system. Unfortunately the effort went down in the Senate. Yet from that time to the present, a large majority of the American people has continued to support the direct election of the president.

While doing away with the Electoral College would be my preference, that requires a Constitutional amendment. Yet the states and the District of Columbia themselves have the

power to achieve the result of the popular election of the President and Vice-President without such an amendment. The time has come for them to act.

The strength of our country and its democracy lies in the public. The people have supported the direct election of the president for over fifty years.

If every vote counts equally, if every voter has an equal say in the election of the president and can cast a meaningful vote, then we can better address issues of confidence in our political system, and in fact and fully become a true democracy.

I strongly support the approach offered by the “Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote.”

I want your vote and my vote to count in the most important elections of all. It can happen. It should happen. If enough of us care enough, it will be done.