

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



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July 2, 2008

Dear Representative:

I am writing today to express my strong support for the National Popular Vote initiative that is now before the legislature.

I do so as a citizen of Massachusetts, a professor at the Kennedy School of Government, and as a scholar who has written extensively about American democracy and its institutions. (I am perhaps best known for a book entitled The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States.) I have also published several articles (in the Boston Globe, the New York Times, and the New York Review of Books) about the electoral college itself; the history of efforts to abolish the electoral college is the subject of a chapter of a book that I am now finishing.

To my mind, the arguments for replacing the electoral college with a national popular vote are overwhelming. The electoral college is an archaic institution which has never functioned as was intended; it emerged from our constitutional convention as a hybrid and compromise, closely tied to the maintenance of political power by states that embraced slavery. The electoral college has on multiple occasions led to the selection of presidents who did not win the popular vote; it does not conform to the principle of "one person, one vote," and it now deforms national political campaigns in a way that is damaging to the health of our democracy. The best remedy for these problems – and the only remedy consistent with democratic values – is to elect our presidents by a national popular vote.

The argument for the current initiative – the inter-state compact that the legislature is now considering – is, at heart, a strategic one. The NPV is, without question, the best means available for building political support and momentum to eliminate the electoral college. Getting rid of the electoral college has been the subject of more proposed constitutional amendments than any other issue in U.S. history; and public opinion polls dating back several generations make clear that a decisive majority of the American people would prefer to have a national popular vote. But the direct route to a constitutional amendment to attain that goal is an extremely arduous one, structured in ways that dampen grassroots involvement and initiative from the states. The current proposal and movement is a promising alternative, and our best hope at present of producing a needed revitalization of our electoral system.

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I strongly urge you to support the NPV proposal that is now before the legislature.
Please feel free to contact me if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Alexander Keyssar