



The Center for
Voting and Democracy

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April 19, 2010

Dear Members of the City Council, District of Columbia

I am writing in support of Councilwoman Mary Cheh's legislation to enter the District of Columbia into an interstate agreement that would guarantee the election of the presidential candidate who wins the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The National Popular Plan represents what representative democracy should be in the United States -- and is grounded in constitutional authority that makes it imperative for the states and the District of Columbia to act to fix a broken system.

My name is Rob Richie. I am proud to have been born in Washington, D.C.. For the past 18 years I have been the executive director of FairVote, a nonprofit group based outside Washington, D.C. I am co-author of *Every Vote Equal*, a book that explains the National Popular Vote plan, and our organization produced *Presidential Election Inequality*, a report detailing the increasingly serious problems with the current Electoral College system.

I strongly support the National Popular Vote legislation. A nationwide election of the President is a goal supported by an overwhelming majority of Americans (more than 70% in poll after poll in Republican-leaning and Democratic-leaning states alike, including the District). Americans recognize that our country only benefits from campaigns that reach out to everyone and everywhere—small states, big states, rural areas and urban areas alike. The current system does just the opposite. Due to the winner-take-all rule the current system essentially forces states to use, today's elections focus exclusively on an ever-smaller club of swing states. The system is nothing like the one-person, one-vote system we hold for every other election of import in this nation.

The voters of the District of Columbia do not receive the attention they deserve, as they are virtually ignored by both major parties unless being asked to go campaign in neighboring Virginia. Because of the current state-by-state system where only swing states matter, candidates have no reason to poll, visit, advertise, organize, campaign, or address the important concerns of the District's people. Indeed, the 2004 presidential campaign of George Bush was the richest in history -- but it didn't waste a dime in polling a single person outside of 17 potential swing states in the last two years of the campaign. All the Americans in spectator states meant absolutely nothing to the campaign because their votes were taken for granted. In 2008, after Labor Day more than 98% of campaign attention and money was devoted to the closely contested states that represented barely a third of the American people.

Our *Presidential Election Inequality* report measures the adverse impact of the current system in many ways. Here are a few statistics from the 2004 election that closely mirror what happened in 2008, 2000 and other recent elections:

- The presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the major parties made 291 campaign stops in the last five weeks of the 2004 campaign. 109 were in Florida or Ohio, while a majority of states did not receive even a single visit.

- In those last five weeks of the 2004 campaign, more than \$110 million was spent on television ads about the presidential election in Ohio and Florida. Not a single presidential campaign ad aired in 25 states.
- The ten states with the biggest declines in youth turnout over the past 30 years are all "spectator states." Young people under 30 were 36% more likely to vote in the ten closest swing states than the rest of the nation in 2004.
- A white American in 2004 was more than 50% more likely to live in a swing state than a person of color.

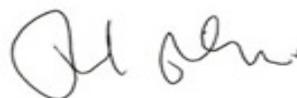
As you consider the National Popular Vote bill, you are considering a bright-line choice. On one side is a District of Columbia where its people are politically relevant in the most important election we hold in America, and on the other, a District for which 2012 and future general elections will be a spectator sport. On one side is a truly national campaign, where we elect the president of all fifty states, and on the other, an election decided by only a dozen. On one side, a great incentive to get out the vote and engage the people of the District and on the other, not even an incentive to air an ad. Joining with the majority of Americans in electing the president with a national popular vote is a declaration that the people of the District are just as important as the people of Ohio or Florida when deciding the future of our nation. Embracing the current system implies that they are somehow less.

In no way will the District be taking this important step alone -- and of course nothing will change until states representing a majority of Americans have entered into this agreement. Lawmakers in all 50 states have agreed to sponsor the National Popular plan since being launched in 2006. It has become law in five states and passed chambers in 14 more. It has advanced to the governor's desk in a mix of big and small states, red and blue states. Such a wide range speaks to the universal and fundamental appeal of democratic fairness in America.

We are fortunate that our Constitution gives you the power to choose how the President would be elected. States and the District of Columbia have the right and responsibility to award their electoral votes in a manner chosen by the states themselves. The National Popular Vote bill solves a widely recognized problem. It is a common sense approach that is firmly rooted in the Constitution.

In the end, one thing is sure. Americans want a government that listens to them, and elections in which their votes count. We all hold the principle of "one person, one vote" in high regard. When it comes to the most important election we hold, only a national popular vote will do, for the District of Columbia and for America. That is why I applaud the introduction of the National Popular Vote plan in Washington, D.C.

Sincerely yours,



Rob Richie
Executive Director