

# Hartford Courant.

## For National Popular Vote

Hartford Courant editorial

March 2, 2008

Connecticut, to everyone's surprise, was in play during the Super Tuesday primaries. Three major candidates visited the state.

But that may not happen in the run-up to the November general election (minus a quick fundraising visit or two to Fairfield County). If, say, the state is considered safe for the Democrats, neither candidate will feel the need to campaign here. The same thing is likely to happen in two-thirds of the other states.

Our system of electing the president and vice president is flawed and archaic. There is a way to change it without amending the U.S. Constitution. The states can simply agree to give their electoral votes — regardless of who wins each state's popular vote — to the winner of the national popular vote. There is a serious proposal to adopt the "National Popular Vote" plan here and across the country. It's worth supporting.

### Connecticut Often Ignored

The problem with the present system is the winner-take-all rule used in 48 states. In all states except Maine and Nebraska, the candidate who wins the state's popular vote gets all of the state's electoral votes.

So if a candidate is assured of winning, say, 55 percent of the popular vote, the campaign is over. He or she will get all the electoral votes, and there's no point in trying to get more votes, nor is there any point in the losing candidate losing by fewer votes. Although it's possible that the losing candidate could try to reverse the numbers, what almost always happens is that both candidates put their money and time into battleground states.

According to the FairVote organization, 99 percent of the campaign advertising money in the 2004 presidential election was spent in just 17 states, and 92 percent of the campaign visits were in only 16 states. Issues in those states are thrust to the fore, at the expense of whatever Connecticut and other less-noticed states are concerned about. Federal grants tend to find their way to contested states, especially as elections near.

The way we elect presidents now thwarts the democratic principle of majority rule. Four times in our nation's history, most recently in 2000, a president has won the office while losing the popular vote. It almost happened in a number of other elections. A shift of only 60,000 votes in Ohio would have given the 2004 election to John Kerry, despite President George W. Bush's 3.5 million-vote lead in the popular tally.

Also, the lack of a meaningful campaign depresses voter turnout, which in turn makes things worse for the minority party.

Reformers have been trying to scuttle the Electoral College system for at least 50 years. Twice in the 1970s, a proposed constitutional amendment passed one house of Congress, only to be blocked by beneficiaries of the current system. It is difficult, as it should be, to amend the U.S. Constitution. But because states have the power to allocate their electoral votes, some clever folks have come up with another way around the block.

### Change How States Use Votes

The National Popular Vote creates a compact. All of the states that join agree to give their electoral votes to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The compact only kicks in when enacted by states possessing a majority of the electoral votes — 270 of 538, enough to elect a president.

The bill has passed in two states, Maryland and New Jersey, and is in the pipeline in more than 40 other states, including Connecticut. The bill, which failed to pass last year, has been introduced again, and backers say it has a better chance of passage this year.

Support is not universal. Critics such as Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who vetoed the bill after it passed both houses in the California legislature, object to the possibility that a state could give its electoral votes to a candidate it didn't support.

Others in favor of the devil-we-got say the new method could increase the cost of elections and focus campaigning on population centers at the expense of rural areas.

Those points are well-taken, but the positives of National Popular Vote outweigh the negatives. There are no other indirect elections left in government; they are a relic of the past. The Electoral College was supposed to help small-population states (and Southern states where slaves couldn't vote), but most small-population states aren't in play on Election Day. That the 2000 election was hanging on hanging chads was absurd.

If a million votes in Connecticut count as much as a million votes in Ohio, we'll see the candidates again. National Popular Vote is worth a try.

# The New York Times

## Maryland Takes the Lead

New York Times Editorial

April 14, 2007

As the nation braces for a long and numbing presidential election, the State of Maryland has done voters a favor by rejecting the Electoral College as a fossil in need of a democratic makeover. Gov. Martin O'Malley and the Annapolis legislature made the state the first in the nation to decide that its Electoral College members should someday be required to vote for the presidential candidate chosen by a plurality of the nation's voters, not according to the state's parochial tally.

The change would not take effect until it won final acceptance by enough states to amount to a 270-vote majority in the college. (Maryland has 10 votes.) But it is something all Americans would benefit from, particularly the masses of voters routinely ignored when candidates focus on a few battleground states — just 16 in 2004 — that increasingly settle modern campaigns.

The need to scrap the creaky college machinery was made clear in the angst of the 2000 election. George W. Bush lost the popular election by almost 544,000 votes, yet won in a Supreme Court showdown over Florida's electors that hinged on far fewer disputed state ballots. Four years later, it was Mr. Bush's turn to sweat as he handily won the national vote yet came close to losing Ohio — and the White House — in the college's arcane state-by-state fragmentation of the popular majority.

The reform movement, driven by a bipartisan coalition called National Popular Vote, has a long way to go. But Hawaii is close to approval, and hundreds of legislators are sponsoring the change in more than 40 other states. It is an ingenious way around the fact that the alternative strategy of trying to amend the Constitution would require the approval of three-fourths of the states, leaving veto power in the hands of smaller states over-represented in the college.

The objection that reform would mean that rural interests would be ignored is a canard. The change would require candidates to present positions that galvanized all Americans. This is the truer and more certain path of democracy.

# The New York Times

## Drop Out of the College

New York Times Editorial

March 14, 2006

The Electoral College is an antidemocratic relic. Everyone who remembers 2000 knows that it can lead to the election of the candidate who loses the popular vote as president. But the Electoral College's other serious flaws are perhaps even more debilitating for a democracy. It focuses presidential elections on just a handful of battleground states, and pushes the rest of the nation's voters to the sidelines.

There is an innovative new proposal for states to take the lead in undoing the Electoral College. Legislatures across the country should get behind it.

Both parties should have reason to fear the college's perverse effects. In 2000, the Democrats lost out. But in 2004, a shift of 60,000 votes in Ohio would have elected John Kerry, even though he lost the national popular vote decisively.

Just as serious is the way the Electoral College distorts presidential campaigns. Candidates have no incentive to campaign in, or address the concerns of, states that reliably vote for a particular party. In recent years, the battleground in presidential elections has shrunk drastically. In 1960, 24 states, with 327 electoral votes, were battleground states, according to estimates by National Popular Vote, the bipartisan coalition making the new proposal. In 2004, only 13 states, with 159 electoral votes, were. As a result, campaigns and national priorities are stacked in favor of a few strategic states. Ethanol fuel, a pet issue of Iowa farmers, is discussed a lot. But issues of equal concern to states like Alabama, California, New York and Indiana are not.

The Electoral College discourages turnout because voters in two-thirds of the nation know well before Election Day who will win their states. It also discriminates among voters by weighing presidential votes unequally. A Wyoming voter has about four times as much impact on selecting that state's electors as a California voter does on selecting that state's.

The answer to all of these problems is direct election of the president. Past attempts to abolish the Electoral College by amending the Constitution have run into difficulty. But National Popular Vote, which includes several former members of Congress, is offering an ingenious solution that would not require a constitutional amendment. It proposes that states commit to casting their electoral votes for the winner of the national popular vote. These promises would become binding only when states representing a majority of the Electoral College signed on. Then any candidate who won the popular vote would be sure to win the White House.

The coalition is starting out by trying to have laws passed in Illinois and a few other states. Americans are rightly cautious about tinkering with mechanisms established by the Constitution. But throughout the nation's history, there have been a series of reforms affecting how elections are conducted, like the ones that gave blacks and women the vote and provided for the direct election of United States senators. Sidestepping the Electoral College would be in this worthy tradition of making American democracy more democratic.

**We vote for a fairer way to decide national elections**

Chicago Sun-Times editorial

March 1, 2006

Calls to reform or abolish the Electoral College hit a fever pitch after the 2000 presidential election, when Al Gore won the popular tally but didn't have enough votes in the right states to carry the electoral vote. That call quieted somewhat after the 2004 election, when President Bush won the popular vote but still could have lost the election if John Kerry had won Ohio. Despite interest in reform, nothing has happened, mostly due to the difficulty in amending the Constitution.

Now a bipartisan commission, whose members include former Rep. John Anderson (R-Ill.) and former Sen. Birch Bayh (D-Ind.), has proposed an idea to retain the Electoral College while still ensuring it reflects the will of the majority of voters. The Sun-Times News Group backs the concept and applauds the National Popular Vote group for thinking outside the box.

The group's plan is to get enough states to agree to give all their electoral votes to the national vote winner, regardless of the results in their individual states. Under the proposal, each state would pass laws to change the way their electoral votes are awarded, a process the Constitution leaves for the states to set. They would also enter an interstate compact with other states that make the same change, agreeing that the new system won't take effect until states representing 270 electoral votes -- the number needed to carry the Electoral College -- have joined.

In Illinois, the plan is backed by a group that includes state Senators Jacqueline Collins, a Chicago Democrat, and Kirk Dillard, a Hinsdale Republican and chairman of the DuPage County Republican Party.

Using such a system in the last election would have meant Bush won all of Illinois' electoral votes, even though Kerry easily carried the state. If that sounds strange, it's no stranger than Illinois and other populous states being virtually ignored by both parties during the last campaign, since one candidate or the other had them locked so early. That likely hurt the turnout in those noncompetitive states, affecting elections further down the ticket.

What of awarding electoral votes by the top vote-getter in each congressional district, as is currently done in Nebraska and Maine? That would simply set up a situation where candidates concentrate on a small number of battleground districts, because, thanks to gerrymandering, most districts are noncompetitive.

Republicans may be hardest to persuade to support this plan, over fears that large urban centers that tend to vote Democratic will dominate elections. But that wasn't an impediment to Bush's re-election. And polls show most Americans want the president to be elected by the popular vote. It's time to make the change with this innovative plan.

*This editorial represents the view of the Sun-Times News Group of 100 newspapers in the Chicago metro area.*

## **States join forces against electoral college**

**A piecemeal approach may be the only way to kill the anachronistic institution**

Los Angeles Times Editorial

June 5, 2006

A PROPOSED EXPERIMENT with majority rule has generated plenty of naysayers who apparently think that some nations are simply too immature to let people directly choose their own leaders. But we say the United States is ready for real democracy.

The experiment is the National Popular Vote campaign, which intends to undermine the Constitution's anachronistic Electoral College. If the campaign succeeds, future presidents will take office only if they win the popular vote nationwide.

The ingenious scheme was developed by John R. Koza, a Stanford professor who also invented the scratch-off lottery ticket. It calls on state legislatures to pass a measure dictating that all the electoral votes from that state go to the winner of the national popular vote. It goes into effect only if enough states approve it to represent a majority of the electoral votes. In other words, if states that represent at least 270 of the 538 electoral votes all approve the measure, the winner of the popular vote nationwide would automatically win the presidency. It thus renders the Electoral College moot without eliminating it.

This kind of end run is necessary because the only way to get rid of the Electoral College entirely is via a constitutional amendment, which would be nearly impossible to pass. Enough small states benefit from the current system to block an amendment. The beauty of this approach is that each state is constitutionally allowed to allot its electoral votes as it sees fit. The measure was approved by California's Assembly on Tuesday and is pending in four other states; backers hope to get it before all 50 states by January.

Anyone wondering why he should care about the Electoral College need look no further than the 2000 election, when George W. Bush won the presidency despite getting about half a million fewer votes than Al Gore. If that makes conservatives think they should be thankful that the majority doesn't always rule in the United States, they should think again. The same thing nearly happened in reverse in 2004. If John Kerry had picked up a mere 60,000 more votes in Ohio, he would have won — even though Bush took in 3 million more votes overall.

The Electoral College doesn't skew just election results; it skews elections. Candidates know they don't have to campaign in states that either clearly favor them or clearly don't; they have to focus only on swing states. In the 2004 campaign, Bush and Kerry spent a great deal of time brushing up on agricultural policy and other issues of vital concern in Iowa, while ignoring matters important to people in states such as California, Texas and New York.

Opponents argue that the current system ensures that smaller states continue to have a say in setting national policy. But the U.S. Senate already gives Delaware every bit as much clout as California. Any method besides majority vote empowers some citizens at the expense of others and makes the president beholden to minority interests.

At its inception, the United States was, well, a union of states. But it is now one nation, and our president should be elected by the citizens of that nation, not by its constituent states. To argue otherwise is to say that some Americans should have more power to elect a president than others simply because of where they live. Remember, all men are created equal. Including Californians and New Yorkers.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-ed-college05jun05,1,6822980.story>

**How to drop out of the Electoral College:  
There's a way to ensure top vote-getter becomes president**

Editorial—Minneapolis Star Tribune  
March 27, 2006

This country could form a more perfect union by accepting a novel idea: that the president of the United States should be elected by the people of the United States.

That's not the way it's done, of course, and, given the Constitution's enshrinement of the Electoral College, things aren't likely to change. To quit the college would take approval of two-thirds of both houses of Congress and three-quarters of state legislatures, so fuggedaboutit.

But now comes a gaggle of bipartisan reformers with a cheeky idea worth considering. What if legislatures, one by one, entered their states into an interstate compact under which members would agree to award their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote? The compact would kick in only when enough states had joined it to elect a president—that is, when a majority of the 538 electoral votes were assembled. As few as 11 states could ensure that the candidate with the most popular votes nationally would win the presidency. As a result, the Constitution and the Electoral College would stay intact, but the college's fangs would be removed.

That approach would be more democratic than current practice. Recall that Al Gore lost the 2000 election to George W. Bush despite getting a half-million more popular votes, and that Bush nearly lost the 2004 election despite getting 3 million more popular votes (a shift of only 60,000 votes in Ohio would have thrown the election to John Kerry). So, both parties have reason to fear the college's distortions.

That the Electoral College has “worked” in all but one election since 1888 isn't a good enough reason to stay with the status quo. The college has a perverse impact on campaigns. With no incentive to compete in states that are predictably red or blue, candidates concentrate on the battleground states—only 13 of them in 2004, down from 24 in 1960. That's not the national campaign voters deserve. In the last election, 92 percent of campaign events took place in just 13 states, which also absorbed 97 percent of advertising during the campaign's final month. Three dozen red and blue states as large as California, New York and Texas and as small as Delaware, Utah and Wyoming were mere spectators.

Now that Minnesota is a battleground getting lots of attention, it's a lot to ask the Legislature to do the right thing and endorse the new compact. But it really should. So should other states—both red and blue—join, for the sake of a better democracy.

# The Sacramento Bee

## Editorial: Rx for U.S. elections

### States can assure the popular vote rules

Saturday, June 3, 2006

The election of the U.S. president should reflect the directly expressed will of the American people. But it doesn't.

The current Electoral College system can produce perverse results: A candidate can lose the popular vote and win the Electoral College vote and, thus, the presidency. That has happened several times in American history, most recently in 2000. With the nation so closely divided politically, this is likely to be an ongoing problem, undermining the legitimacy of our presidential elections.

It doesn't have to be that way.

Polls for the last 30 years have shown that Americans overwhelmingly support direct election of the president, but Congress hasn't budged on a constitutional amendment.

A new campaign, "National Popular Vote," spearheaded by several former members of Congress, including California's Tom Campbell (most recently Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's finance director), has a creative way to get the same result.

The campaign uses an old mechanism -- an interstate compact -- to achieve the direct election of the president. The idea is modeled on existing interstate compacts, such as the Colorado River Compact, which divides water among seven Western states. The compact depends on states changing their own rules for dividing up their electoral votes.

We'd prefer a constitutional amendment simply abolishing the Electoral College, but this state-by-state reform is an achievable second-best solution to a defective product that even the Founding Fathers regarded wearily and warily.

The strongest arguments at the 1787 Constitutional Convention favored direct election of the president by the people. Proponents wanted the president to be the "guardian of the people" and as independent as possible of Congress and the states. But the delegates were hopelessly divided between direct election by the people and election by Congress.

The Electoral College was a last-minute compromise, reached under what James Madison called the "hurrying influence produced by fatigue and impatience." The Electoral College has been patched many times since.

The interstate compact proposal wouldn't abolish the Electoral College, but at least it would ensure that it reflects the national popular vote.

Election officials in the compact states would award all of their electoral votes to the candidate receiving the greatest number of votes nationally.

Clearly, one state could not do this on its own. So each of the states has the same 888-word bill entering into a binding interstate compact (you can find the text at [www.nationalpopularvote.com](http://www.nationalpopularvote.com)). States would join the agreement one by one. The compact would take effect only after enough states joined to represent a majority of Americans and electoral votes -- 270 of the 538 electoral votes.

So far, the bill has been introduced in five legislatures -- California, Illinois, Colorado, Missouri and Louisiana. The campaign's goal is 10 states by the end of 2006 and enough states by the end of 2007 to make direct election the governing rule for the 2008 presidential election.

In California, the Assembly approved the bill Tuesday. Because California has such strong influence nationally, the governor and senators can get this process rolling in other states by acting this session. Otherwise, in presidential elections, unhappy Americans are bound to continue paying for the Founding Fathers' fatigue.

# The Fayetteville Observer

## **Our View: Electoral vote change would be good for the state and its people**

The Fayette Observer Editorial

May 16, 2007

Four times since the framers met in Philadelphia in 1787, the presidency has gone to the candidate on the losing end of the popular vote. The republic still stands.

That's hardly a compelling argument for leaving things as they are. The Electoral College less than perfectly reflects the will of the people, and the threat of the "faithless elector" who tips an election the way his partisan bias dictates is real, if remote. Both threats would vanish if the election automatically went to the candidate for whom most registered voters pulled the lever.

This is the point at which the conversation normally would turn to amending the federal Constitution to abolish the Electoral College. But the state Senate has just passed a bill that would achieve a comparable effect by simple statute.

The bill provides that, if enough states join in to command a majority in the Electoral College, all of North Carolina's electoral votes will be awarded to the winner of the popular vote — not the statewide winner, but the one who wins nationwide. More than 40 states are already looking at substantially the same bill.

If it works as planned, the problem goes away, with no violence done to the Constitution.

Something else happens, too. North Carolina will less often find itself in political obscurity when the nation chooses its top leader.

During the 2000 election, one analyst noted that the candidates were focusing most of their time and effort on 11 swing states. Ironically, only three of those had more electoral votes than North Carolina, which was not one of the 11. If candidates understand that they have a real shot at our 15 electoral votes right up until the polls close on that fateful Tuesday in November, we are unlikely to be shrugged off or taken for granted again.

The arguments against it are no stronger than those for retaining the Electoral College in all its supreme majesty: (1) it's different; and (2) it means that North Carolina could end up giving its 15 votes to someone not favored by the majority of Tar Heel voters. The first argument lacks heft. The second would make perfect sense, but only if one could ignore the fact that presidential elections are held to enable individual Americans to put someone in the White House, not merely to express each state's collective pique or pleasure.

This is worth a try — for the sake of simplicity and fairness, and in the interest of raising our state's political profile.