



November 22, 2016

Electing Our President by Popular Vote

In the presidential election of 2016, Donald Trump won by garnering more than the required 270 Electoral College votes, even though Hillary Clinton won the popular vote nation-wide by 1.7 million votes. Trump won the popular vote in states making up 290 electoral votes, and he leads in Michigan, with another 16 electoral votes, so a total of 306 electoral votes would easily exceed the needed 270 electoral votes. But is this fair? Does this threaten our belief that every vote counts? Do people not vote because they think the system is not fair?

In 2008 I authored and passed legislation which was signed into Illinois law which creates an interstate compact that would guarantee that the winner of the national popular vote is elected president. At the time, it made Illinois the third state to ratify the agreement – there are now 10 states and the District of Columbia that have ratified the agreement.

Known as the National Popular Vote Compact, this law would award Illinois' Electoral College electors to the candidate who wins the national popular vote, provided that enough states equaling a majority of electoral votes also ratify the agreement.

The Electoral College is outdated and anti-democratic, and as we have seen this year and in 2000, the system makes it possible to elect a president who did not receive the most votes cast by the people. A lot of Americans lost faith in our electoral process after the 2000 election, and many have questions in 2016, too. This interstate agreement sends the message that the will of the people should be respected.

The U.S. Constitution specifies that the office of president is elected by an Electoral College, but it gives states the power to determine how electoral votes are awarded. If enough states representing 270 electoral votes ratify identical language to the National Popular Vote Compact, Illinois' electoral votes would be awarded to the candidate who receives the most votes nationwide.

This new law doesn't eliminate the Electoral College, but it simply finds a smart way around it. As a bonus, because of its number of voters, Illinois can again become an important player in the election for president. Let's advocate for more states to adopt the National Popular Vote Compact to make our election process fairer and to truly make every vote count.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District