

Greetings Senators,

My name is Paul Dame and I am the current chair of the Vermont Republican Party. Thank you for the invitation to testify on H.429 related to how we conduct our elections.

Sore Loser Law:

The primaries are an opportunity for parties to identify their best candidates for the general election. They should not be seen as a platform that non-party members can use to increase their own name recognition if they in fact have no intention of representing that party. That's why we believe that any candidate who runs in a primary should not have the option to be listed on the general election ballot as an independent, whether they win or they lose. Being part of a party means that you are identifying as part of a particular coalition, and intend to work within that coalition. Being an independent is an indication that you are a part of no coalition. We had an instance where someone who wanted to run as an Independent, decided instead to run in a major party primary. We believe that this is a betrayal of the will of the those primary voters. They voted for a candidate to represent them as their party's nominee, and it seems like if the candidate has the option to drop the label, but still appear on the ballot they have disenfranchised the voters who wanted that candidate to appear on the ballot with their label. Anyone who runs in a party primary should not be able to change their mind and run as an independent later – whether they win or they lose. Therefore we believe the current language in the sore loser law is incomplete and should more clearly state that when a candidate commits to running in a party primary, they can not run as anything else in the general election.

Contribution limits:

Again, no particular preference, but it seems like a rule that would be applied fairly and give the same opportunities to all parties equally. This new change does create a potential for wealthy candidates who self-fund a campaign to increase the amount they give to the party. While it may be unlikely that a donor would do this exclusively to exceed other contribution limits, it may have the unintended consequence of encouraging parties to support self-funded campaigns in the primary knowing that there is a greater opportunity to raise money with an after-election campaign transfer.

Making Public Membership Lists of Political Parties:

The biggest concern we have is with the new language around reporting requirements to the state. The new language would make a public connection between a citizen and a party affiliation. While this is common for voters in other states, Vermonters have enjoyed the privacy that comes with keeping this information private, unless you are running for a partisan office. While it is appropriate to ask for the contact info for the officers of the state party, as we work our way down the hierarchy many of the Town & County committees amount to basically volunteers. The question we have for this loss of privacy, is to ask what public good does it serve? In the old days, when town and county committees had the unilateral power to nominate candidates themselves, and we didn't have state-run primaries, that information was important because it identified where there may have been secret power brokers. But today that is not the case. Even when there is a vacancy, local committees may, but are not required to, submit names for consideration. Even then the Governor is not bound by any of the suggestions of any of the parties. These committee members have very little power or influence, and instead are asked by others to serve in various ways. Right now, political tensions have probably never

been higher. Political rhetoric has never been uglier and people have perhaps never been downright meaner than they are right now. Is this the environment that we want to start making names and addresses available for entry-level party volunteers? What if this information falls into the hands of the ill-intentioned? One core value for Republicans is respecting privacy rights. Most people's political involvement should be private. Once we start creating a database like this, we have to anticipate how it might be used – and abused in the future. There might be a justification for this. But frankly I don't know what it is. And if there is, we should ask ourselves is there another way we could achieve the same outcome. We believe that the appropriate keeper of a party's information is the party itself. If there are legitimate reasons that members of a party would need to be identified, we believe that a requirement of the state party to maintain that data would be more appropriate than creating a generic list that is publicly available to anyone for any reason with no restrictions.

And who knows how this data could be used. We all know there are thousands of companies looking for all kinds of consumer data, and this kind of data would be very valuable to any number of interests. Once again, this is new language we are adding here. And even if you do think there is a justification for collecting this data, the second question is whether you think now is the best time to do it? I believe this section should be removed from the bill because we should put people's privacy first.

Demographic info of Candidates

We don't have a problem with this collection of data because here privacy is protected and the data is not released unless done so in aggregate. Also the data provided is voluntary, nothing is mandatory or required.

Write-in Requirements

The place where we see the biggest discrepancy and inequity is in the section related to write-ins. Current law sets an equal standard, every candidate needs to get a certain number of votes to win that party's nomination. By using a percentage instead of a straight number threshold, it helps larger parties protect their ballot, while simultaneously making smaller party's ballots less protected. This would lead to an inequitable application. For example, if there are only 100 voters in a Progressive primary, but there are 600 voters in a Democrat primary, the 10% threshold would not change the Progressive threshold, but it would raise the Democrat threshold by 20%. Also it creates inequality across the state. In some districts one party's turnout may be higher than their opposition, but in a different part of the state the reverse may be true. It's an unequal standard, and I think raising the fixed number from half of the signatures to the full number of signatures was a sufficient enough action to raise the bar and is a more equitable way to address the issue, making it fairer for every party and every candidate equally.

Electronic Transmission of Overseas Ballots

It's my understanding that this section was only applicable to military or overseas voting, but from the text of the bill, it appears to me that any voter could request an electronically delivered ballot. We would favor rolling this out first with military and overseas, and then bringing it back to the legislature before expanding it further. This is an entirely new method of voting, and the first time we do not have a continuous paper trail, and so we should tread lightly and work with the smallest most restrictive set of voters first as we discover what some of the unintended consequences may be.