

## House Committee on Elections

### Written Opponent Testimony HB2013

Prepared by Daniel Gaeddert for the Libertarian Party of Kansas, authorized by Chair Tim Giblin

Since this great country was founded almost 250 years ago, many things have changed. Our information rarely comes from newspapers, The horse and buggy are no longer a viable mode of transportation, and our wars are no longer fought with cannons and muskets. However, one thing that has remained constant throughout this time is the wisdom of our founding fathers. As many of us would agree, I believe that George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, and the rest would all be rolling in their graves if they could see what this country has become. Our founding fathers warned us of many of the evils of government, but none so much as the evils of political parties. In his farewell address in September of 1796, George Washington himself stated:

"However [political parties] may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."

Benjamin Franklin also spoke frequently about his distrust of political parties, even going so far as to say:

"I am not a Federalist, because I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself. Such an addiction is the last degradation of a free and moral agent. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all."

There is no doubt that our founding fathers would be sickened if they could see the prevalence of political parties in today's society. But in order to address this problem, we have to look at why political parties exist in the first place. There are many answers to this question. From wildly different opinions due to geographical location, to the messages of hate and division we are constantly being bombarded with by the mainstream media, it's no surprise it was easy to turn Americans against each other. However, I believe that the biggest offender is our "first-past-the-post" election system. The way our elections are designed, it's very easy to consider a vote for an "un-viable" candidate as a vote for the "other side" even if that un-viable candidate may better represent the views of a group of, or even a majority of voters. It encourages people to vote party lines rather than ideas, for fear of the "bad guys" winning. Our current system of elections is almost entirely responsible for creating the very thing which our founding fathers feared more than anything else, and something needs to change.

There are currently 2 methods of electing public officials that would solve the problem of political parties if they could be implemented on a large scale: Runoff elections, and ranked choice voting. By allowing voters a "do-over" if their favorite candidate fails to get enough votes, it encourages people to actually vote for their favorite candidate first, not simply the one who has the best chance of beating the guy they think is worse. While this certainly wouldn't eliminate

political parties, it would provide people with the freedom and peace of mind they need to support 3<sup>rd</sup> party and independent candidates. It would help people vote for politicians they actually liked, and vote for the ideas and not the party. While the technology didn't exist to run an election like this when the founding fathers were alive, I have no doubt that they would enthusiastically support this idea if they were alive today.

While both runoff elections and ranked choice voting will ultimately benefit the voters and bring us closer to the vision of our founding fathers, ranked choice voting is clearly the superior option for 2 reasons: speed, and cost. To begin, runoff elections take a lot of time. Ballots need to be printed, candidates need to run another campaign, and the public has to be notified of yet another election. Turnout for runoff elections is undoubtedly lower, and it takes even more time for the results of the runoff election to be verified. All in all, it is simply an inefficient process. While it would certainly be better than the system we have now, it still leaves a bit to be desired. Runoff elections are also very expensive. With a statewide runoff election costing somewhere around 10 million dollars, it seems like there would be a much more fiscally responsible way to achieve the same results. Fortunately, ranked choice voting solves both of those problems. Ranked choice voting allows us to achieve the exact same results as with a runoff election, but still utilizing only a single ballot. This increases the timeliness of the results, decreases the overall cost, and still provides the voters with a much better election system.

In 1801, Thomas Jefferson said "The greatest good we can do our country is to heal its party divisions, and make them one people." 220 years later, I believe the same thing is true. Hatred and division sewn by political parties is tearing our country in two. If we want to have any hope of saving our republic, we need to find a way to stop thinking as democrats and republicans, and start thinking as Americans, and the best way to do that is by implementing ranked choice voting. When Benjamin Franklin was first asked what system of government this new country would have, he replied "A Republic, if you can keep it." I believe that implementing ranked choice voting will help us keep our republic and remain the last place on earth where freedom truly rings.

