

Electoral College under review

THE DEBATE ON ELECTIONS RAGES ON

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In 2016, the election of Donald Trump sparked a major uproar, and much of the blame — or thanks — went to the Electoral College, the system currently used every four years to select the President of the United States. Despite losing the national popular vote to Hillary Clinton, Trump won the presidency because of the Electoral College. With campaigns for the 2020 election already underway, the system will soon be on display again.

Many believe the Electoral College is in need of attention; some believe the system should be repealed altogether; Jerry Spriggs, a local Oregon man, thinks he's found a way to repair it. The problem with the Electoral College, Spriggs believes, lies in the current winner-take-all mentality. This was made apparent to Spriggs in the 1990s when he participated in the election of President Bill Clinton.

"I was living in Arizona at the time and I voted for [Clinton] both times," Spriggs says. "But because Arizona was

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-Jerry Spriggs

red, my vote didn't matter. And by not mattering, I mean it wasn't represented in the Electoral College results."

In the current Electoral College system, a state is awarded one electoral vote for each of its senators and one for each of its representatives. When the election takes place, the overall winner in the state is awarded the total of these electoral votes — with the exception of Nebraska and Maine where electoral votes can be split. What this means is that despite nearly 50 percent of Oregonians voting for Trump or independent candidates in the 2016 election, all of Oregon's electoral votes were awarded to Clinton.

Spriggs has created a solution to this issue that he calls "Equal Voice Voting,"

and as he states, the premise is simple: take the popular vote of the state, divide it by the state's electoral votes, and that number is the "Popular Vote Value." For example, a state with a popular vote number of 2 million that has eight electoral votes would then have a PVV of 250,000. As the votes are counted, a candidate is awarded one electoral vote every time they capture this number. This would make for a proportionate result, getting rid of the winner-take-all aspect of the electoral college.

"I've never been told this won't work. Never," Spriggs says. "And I have addressed legislators all across the country. I reach out to any state legislator I can."

One such voice who sides with Spriggs is that of Charles Gallia, a candidate in the 2018 state senate race. Gallia, who holds a bachelor's in political science and a Ph.D. in public administration and policy, sees the same problems with the Electoral College that Spriggs' system aims to solve.

"When the Electoral College results show that somebody wins the popular vote but loses the Electoral College, it means the president isn't necessarily reflective of the majority consensus of the country," Gallia says. "[The other problem] is the Electoral College still pushes pressure on the tension that different parts of the country receive, so who happens to have the most electoral votes gets grossly disproportionate attention from presidential candidates."

Hillary Abbott, a math professor at Clackamas Community College, also saw the strength in Spriggs' solution.

"[Equal Voice Voting] probably will eliminate the need for politicians to pander to the big states and not really worry about the small states that don't have as much weight in terms of the Electoral College," Abbott says. "I think that's the other big issue is that the politicians are more concerned about the big states that they need to win and forget about some of the smaller states that aren't as big that don't have the population or the electoral votes."

Though both Gallia and Abbott agree that Spriggs' Equal Voice Voting system would go to solve these problems,

that doesn't mean there aren't any challenges that it would face.

"There is a substitute effort called the National Popular Vote," Gallia says. "If something's gonna change, I think that's the first thing that people turn to as an alternative to the Electoral College."

The National Popular Vote is an organization that proposes a different system, one that would award the total of a state's electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote. The movement already has support and funding, but as Spriggs points out, this system comes with its own flaws.

"If you look at today's world, we have nine states that comprise half of the population. Another 16 states are a third of the population. That means that 25 states are populated by only one-sixth of the population, Oregon being one of them. So that means that we're at the bottom of the food chain here because of the simple numbers of people."

"The National Popular Vote bill pretends to fix a problem; they don't even know what the problem is," Spriggs says. "A candidate doesn't have to get the majority of a state's votes, but it would get all of the electoral votes. It's just nuts."

Even though the NPV bill would retain the winner-take-all mentality and allow for an imbalance in voice to remain, the simplicity of its system appeals to many, presenting a formidable foe for Spriggs' budding movement.

"I'm just a lone voice. I don't have financing. I'm a force of one," Spriggs says. "I'm just a concerned citizen with an idea. That's it."

Though the NPV is quickly gaining momentum, Equal Voice Voting is on its way up to match it — slowly, but surely. Legislators from Montana, North Dakota, and Nebraska have already reached out to Spriggs for language for the bill. It has also been submitted in Maryland, however, it was tabled in the House Ways and Means Committee.

"Which the delegate said, 'That's a win!'" Spriggs says. "Because it wasn't voted down."

Many remain adamant that Spriggs' Equal Voice Voting solution is a much

Photo by Steve Toft



Jerry Spriggs, the mind behind Equal Voice Voting, poses with his book "Making all Votes Count!"

better option than others being presented. It will just take some time to finally get the momentum going and get the voice of the people behind it.

"It involves math. And it's not complicated math, but I think that just freaks out people when they think about doing this one step in addition other than counting the ballots directly," Gallia says. "I think if there were some demonstrations of how it works in some way, if there was a way to test it, that people might be a little more accepting of it."

For now, it's only looking forward to the 2020 elections and for Spriggs, hoping that his small movement can create a ripple in the election system. Because it goes state by state, Spriggs hopes to at least get Oregon on his side.

"We're very evenly split," Spriggs says. "We have seven electoral votes, which is close to an average kind of number. In the last election, it would have gone four and three. It wasn't a whole lot of difference. You could have had a few votes go the other way and it would have been four for the Republican, three for Hillary."

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