

Resolution: Certain Groups of Citizens to Qualify for Two Votes Each

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To be considered for endorsement by the eboard and members of the Silicon Valley Democratic Club, 2018

Also for endorsement of a body of resident voters of Brookdale, San Jose, CA

WHEREAS, (a) The political, social and other considerations of even the simplest of political proposals often require considerable study, taxing the ability and time of most voters, and

(b) that time is uncompensated in any way other than a general feeling of having satisfied a certain duty towards one's country,

(c) yet the *elected* members of even the most local elected offices typically spend an inordinate amount of time in the study of proposals that come before them in the performance of their office, and

(e) our system of government increasingly requires an educated electorate, and

(e) achieving even an elementary study of various issues presented to the public requires intellectual skill, a good memory, and a good appreciation of the nature of effective government in a democracy,

(f) yet many citizens vote on issues which they have barely studied, or worse, which require some sophistication to understand in terms of the increasingly complex world in which we live,

(g) and those who spend the time to understand an issue in some depth find that their vote has exactly the same value as that of a person who either spends no time in understanding an issue, or who simply casts a vote on the strength of someone else's opinion, through a herd instinct,

(h) and, in general, public appreciation for the mechanism of our democracy appears to be declining, while its complexity continues to increase,

(i) and the personal cost of studying the issues compared to just "winging it" is a source of discouragement for every voter, causing one to just not bother trying to understand the issues, and – too often – choosing not to vote,

AND WHEREAS, it is in the long-term interests of the nation that its voting citizens perform some minimum study of the issues brought to the voting public, therefore,

RESOLVED, that the Congress of the United States pass a law establishing a system by which certain well-qualified persons may cast 2 (two) votes in any election, for any candidate and on any measure.

- (a) The persons to be so qualified shall be those who pass a general examination on the basic operations of government, including the Constitution, its Amendments, the nature of our tripartite form of government, the general relation of a state government and its laws to the federal system, the general duties falling upon such officers as the governors of each state, the House and the Senate, the Supreme Court, the Executive branch, and the general relationship of the three co-equal bodies, including their checks and balances on each other.
- (b) The general examination will be drawn from a larger list of questions posed in the form of a multiple-choice examination; said list shall be modified from time to time, but also subject to challenge for accuracy in a manner to be established by Congress, and to be made public.
- (c) The time and place of the examinations shall be set by Congress, provided that their scoring and recording of double voters will make it possible for a double voter to renew his or her status at least a month prior to any election.
- (d) A general examination should be made available at least two months in advance of any vote calling for an election of national importance. Ideally, it should be made available to anyone at any time, for example, through an electronic examination machine or an internet process.
- (e) To be qualified for a double vote, a person must pass the general examination with a certain percentage of correct answers, said percentage to be set by Congress, not to exceed 90% nor be less than 70%.
- (f) The double vote will apply only to federal offices, unless particular States shall determine that the vote for its lesser offices may also be double for such qualified individuals.
- (g) The qualification for a double vote shall expire after no more than two general elections to the House.
- (h) A person may continue as a double voter by continuing to pass an appropriate examination.

DISCUSSION:

Our nation has been blessed with many citizens who appreciate the value of a democratic system of government, with its Constitution, governmental forms, free and fair elections, and more.

However, the issues brought before us, and the nature of the persons running for office, have required an increasing investment of time and study on the part of its citizens. So many more of our citizens now work longer hours, often both parents of children are working. They are finding less time to care for their children, and to keep a roof over their head. Any free time to spend studying an election pamphlet is precious, indeed, and often just ignored completely until one faces a ballot at the election station. Or chooses not to vote.

There is also little incentive for the average citizen, not running for office, to spend much time studying an election booklet. The issues put to voters are often traps designed for the profit of special interests, such as land developers keen to lift land-use restrictions on property, to profit in various ways by getting corrupt measures passed in their favor.

In short, from the standpoint of personal economics, studying the issues before a voter and then voting, consumes valuable time, and that time spent provides no reward to that voter other than a vague sense of satisfaction.

Given that thousands or hundreds of thousands of votes are often needed to swing an election, the task of reaching and selling a block of voters on the desirability of any particular measure or person is formidable. A single vote appears to be useless against the thousands generally cast, and any time spent on deciding that vote carries exactly zero compensation to the voter.

To a person running for office, even a first-step office such as for a position on a school board, that person faces a daunting task of hundreds or thousands of doorbell ringing, many public speeches and an expenditure of personal resources, with the daunting prospect of losing the election.

We therefore argue, on general economic grounds, that for a voter spending any time on political issues prior to voting, is wasted time. People will do that in large enough numbers to be significant, only when driven to some extreme. Or driven by vague feelings of patriotism, that it is the “right” thing to do.

Given that situation, it is no surprise that many elected officials feel that

- They need to find one hot topic on which to run.
- They understand that the electorate is generally poorly informed, not only about the specific issues and the candidates, but about how their government works.

The end result is often a broken government, or one in which the wise actions and the most dedicated candidates are just sidelined in favor of money-driven advertising, false or impossible promises, side-show level of politics.

Case in point – our current corrupt President Donald Trump, and his side-show of unqualified or corrupt officials. They are threatening the structure of our political system, may get away with many crimes and misdemeanors, and may yet drive our democracy into a kleptocracy, or worse, a banana-republic dictatorship. All due to a sizeable segment of a voting population that either is driven by false or venal motives, or is just ignorant about the operations of government, in either case ready to follow an autocrat promising easy, but wrong, solutions to what are in fact hard problems.

From an economic point of view, if our system of democratic government is to survive, it will require more persons keen on spending the time on public issues. We have some such persons – they spend an inordinate amount of time, and often money, on running for office. They are rewarded with a government salary, and a certain power of office.

But what about the bulk of the voters that helped put these people in office? There should be more than some vague personal satisfaction in having studied the issues, then casting that single vote that the uninformed jerk next door can also cast. Or a whole office full of ignorant voters with no interest in uncovering the truth about certain issues or candidates. Such informed and concerned persons should be awarded with some additional form of satisfaction.

Why not a reward of casting two votes instead of one?

There is also the personal reward of having passed an examination, somewhat like passing a driving test, and one could – and should – be proud of that.

The Potential for Corruption

An opponent to this scheme may argue that the examinations could be rigged to favor certain blocks of individuals. If enough double-voters can be certified to favor a particular measure, that may tip the balance for that measure. Or favor some person running for office.

There are several ways of coping with this. We need to look at the possibilities, and assess the cost of implementing some corrupt practice compared to what might be gained by it.

I claim that the process could be similar to that to qualify for a driver’s license in most states.

- We first note that the list of persons qualified for double voting should not be revealed to the public, any more than detailed census information should be. On the other hand if someone qualifies as a double voter, who is to say that he is telling the truth? And, in the end, does it matter if someone chooses to brag about this?
- That double-voting qualification should eventually show up in the vote counting process. For example, California is moving toward vote-by-mail process. Thus, the vote counters would have to identify the double voting ballots through their own database registry, and ensure that those ballots are counted twice. The ballots are identical, but a database of double voters would establish who are the double voters, by the same process as qualifying a voter through his or her registration. It would take considerable negligence on the part of party observers or the voter registration bureau to pull off a corruption of that process.
- A campaign for the person or measure may be shaped toward appealing to these double voters, without knowing

who they are. I say – so what? It harms no one if the voter registration bureau announces what *percentage* of voters are double voters. The higher that percentage, the more the campaigns will want to appeal to these specially qualified persons, in whatever way that may be possible. I see a certain benefit in shaping a campaign toward a group of persons known to have earned a superior grasp of government and its laws. I see only a benefit in this. Hence – so what?

- I would assume that the general nature of the examination would be available for public inspection, for example, through publishing a pamphlet that covers the general information to be examined.
- Also publishing a long list of potential questions would be beneficial, since everyone could judge their fairness, and would have something to study. Note that the published list should be considerably larger than the particular examination questions. It might also be changed every year or two, but still based on the same general government information in the public pamphlet.
- Also suppose that a question (or correct answer) is based on false information or a false reading of the law or Constitution. That would be open to challenge, and enough reasonable challenges should cause its removal or modification. That is also why the long list should be public.

In any case, the driver license exam model seems appropriate. Each examination would be on a subset of a generally published set of questions, and those would be drawn from a published pamphlet available to anyone interested in studying for that precious double vote. Each exam should in fact be chosen at random from a large set of questions, reducing the corrupt potential of training a large set of candidates on particular questions and answers. Any such training would have to deal with the whole set, which ought to be much larger than any particular examination. That also follows a well-established examination process for the California driver's license.

REFERENCES: