National Popular Vote compact pros and cons

Ken Bickers

Colorado is on the verge of joining a nationwide movement that could eventually change how we choose the next president of the United States. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact is an agreement where states in the compact award all their electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote, no matter which presidential candidate wins in their state, says CU Boulder political scientist Ken Bickers.

CUT 1 “The idea is that when a candidate gets the popular vote plurality there would be enough states controlling the majority of the electoral college votes to swing those electoral college votes to that candidate. (:11) And that would mean that that candidate would win in the Electoral College.” (:16)

The Colorado Senate passed the bill last month and this week the House is debating it. But there is a trick to the popular vote compact, says Bickers. It only takes effect when enough states with 270 electoral votes join the compact - which is the number of votes needed to win the presidency.

CUT 2 “When they get enough states that have a majority of the Electoral College votes, at that point the compact would take effect. (:07) So there have been states that have been voting into this system for several years now but they are not quite to the point where they would have enough signed in to be able to shift a majority of the Electoral College vote to which ever candidate wins the plurality of the popular vote.” (:27)

The main argument for the compact is that the Electoral College discourages voter turnout in states where it looks as if the outcome is predetermined.

CUT 3 “One argument is that the current system essentially disenfranchises states where the outcome is well known in advance. (:09) Everybody knows in advance already that California is going to vote for the Democratic candidate in 2020. Texas will almost certainly vote for the Republican candidate in 2020. (:20) So the argument is that the electoral college privileges states that are close - the battleground states.” (:27)

But Bickers argues that the electoral college actually forces candidates to seek the middle ground on issues that tend to divide the country since they need to appeal to independent and undecided voters.

CUT 4 “The Electoral College is actually one of the few things that helps push us back to the middle of the ideological spectrum. That the general election and the campaigns we see candidates try to find issues that appeal to centrist voters - to the undecided voters. (:19) The national popular vote - that would be gone. And what we’d see are issues that are the hot button - the flash point kind of issues for voters on the left and voters on the right.” (:30)

So far it has It has been adopted by 11 states and the District of Columbia, amounting to a total of 172 electoral votes, or about 32 percent of the Electoral College. Colorado would bring nine more, leaving the compact 89 votes short.