

Submitter: Miles Rapoport
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure: HB3593

Testimony of Miles S. Rapoport in Support of HB 3593
April 6, 2003

Thank you, Chair Fahey, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify today.

My name is Miles Rapoport. I am currently a Senior Practice Fellow in American Democracy at the Harvard Kennedy School's Ash Center. From 1985 to 1994, I served as a State Representative, a member of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, and chair in 1993 and 1994. From 1995 to 1999, I served as Connecticut's Secretary of the State and was the state's chief election officer. I believe my home state offers a good example of the benefits of fusion voting. Fusion is not only simple to understand, use, and administer, but it is an effective tool to put power in the hands of voters that will encourage more cross-party collaboration, more cross-ideological coalitions, and more common-sense solutions, and do so without the dangers of the third-party spoiler effect.

Connecticut has always permitted more than one political party to nominate the same candidate on the ballot, with their votes being counted separately before being aggregated together—the kind of full fusion that advocates for the legislation we're discussing today are proposing.

When I ran for secretary, I eagerly sought out and obtained the nominations of the Democratic Party and the A Connecticut Party (ACP). ACP was a moderate party created by former Republican Senator Lowell Weicker, who ran a successful campaign on that third party line in 1990.

Being able to receive the cross-endorsement of ACP in addition to my Democratic Party endorsement wasn't just a helpful way to convey my views and understand the preferences of the electorate — it was essential to winning the election.

Out of nearly 1 million votes cast, I won by less than 2,300. More than 127,000 of my votes —more than a quarter of my entire vote total — came on A Connecticut Party's line. Having this cross-endorsement on the ballot was the best way I could demonstrate to the entire electorate, including thousands of new voters, that I wasn't simply a down-the-line Democrat. Crucially, the option to support me on a centrist minor party line, and not just on the Democratic line, made it possible for a substantial number of Republicans and unaffiliated voters to vote for me without having to forsake their core political identity.

During my four years as secretary, I had responsibility for election administration throughout the state. As minor parties cross-endorsed candidates also nominated by the two major parties, our elections have continued to operate smoothly.

Some will argue that fusion voting is confusing to voters and hard to administer. But in Connecticut, our ballots never grew overcrowded with candidates or cross-

endorsements, and voters understood their choices. While some candidates continued to run on a single party line, others were cross-endorsed and had two nominations on the ballot. Voters understood their options; voter confusion simply wasn't an issue.

Administration difficulties were not a problem either. The local registrars of voters in all of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns were able to accurately and easily count and verify vote totals in the dozens of races featuring cross-endorsements. The same, I'm sure, will be true in Oregon.

In sum, there are three key reasons why fusion voting is good for our democracy: it makes the ballot more informative for voters; it gives a greater voice to citizens who don't identify with the two major parties or who feel alienated from the political process; and it solves the "spoiler" problem facing minor parties and their supporters. Fusion voting is an effective, impactful, and common-sense reform that can broaden voters' options, and give voters across the political spectrum a constructive way to influence the political process. I hope Oregon will adopt this reform, and I would be glad to talk further if that is helpful to the process going forward.