

Mark C. Ritter: Comments to the Presidential Commission on Election Administration

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration. My name is Mark Ritter and my residence is Frankfort, Kentucky. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before this commission in support of your charter to study and recommend improvements for election related issues in our exceptional country.

I am one of over 229,018 voters registered as “Other” in Kentucky. Kentucky excludes Independent voters like me or anyone registered as a third party to vote in the publically funded primary election process. In 2009 I spoke before the Kentucky Elections and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee in support of Kentucky House Bill 17, an amendment to KRS 116.055 Qualification for voting in primary elections. I spoke of how this amendment would energize the electoral process, and the fairness of access to the voting booth. Unfortunately, the bill did not reach the floor of the Kentucky house for a vote. However, the pressure to do the right thing was very apparent. The following year KY SB 53 – Allowing Independents to Vote in Primaries did make it to the Senate floor and was passed on February 2, 2010 with 25 Yea votes and 12 Nay. The bill failed in the KY House vote.

Why? Fear for change. Fear for loss of control. Fear that more informed voters would participate in our nation’s coveted process to choose our leaders. The reality is that the two party control of our electoral system is wrong. Extreme partisan politics is wrong. It does not serve the people and move our nation forward. Our current electoral process only perpetuates this loss of civility among our elected leaders that the Congress has become so ineffective it is unable to produce a federal budget, a most fundamental duty of government.

Your charge to improve the electoral system can best be accomplished by allowing access of all registered voters to the primary elections. Our service members have defended this right to vote throughout our history. I have served in Iraq as an officer in the United States Army Reserve. I find it appalling that we continue to restrict access of registered voters not aligned with the Democrat and Republican parties.

My recommendation is the committee considers access of the Independent or non-aligned registered voter to the electoral primary process. We will then truly be exceptional.