

Memorandum

TO: Senator Mike Thompson, Chairman, Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

FROM: Dr. Helen Van Etten, Former Republican National Committeewoman for Kansas

DATE: March 22, 2023

SUBJECT: Proponent Testimony on SB 321

Chairman Thompson and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to provide this testimony. The voters of Kansas deserve the opportunity to fully engage in the process of selecting the next President of the United States. This can be achieved by adopting SB 321.

In 2016, only 78,978 voters participated in the Republican presidential caucuses in Kansas, as compared to 276,896 who voted in the 2016 Republican primaries in August for U.S. Congress.^{1 2}

A similar turnout disparity occurred in 2012 when only 29,857 voters participated in that year's Kansas Republican presidential caucus. More alarming was that 254,106 voters cast ballots in the 2012 August primaries for the U.S. Congress in Kansas, even though all four nomination contests were uncontested.^{3 4}

Authorizing a state run presidential preference primary in 2024 will remove several barriers that have resulted in lower participation in previously held presidential caucuses. Historically, voting in a Republican Party run presidential caucus in Kansas has been limited to a narrow time window on a single day. This prevented those who worked, required assistance, or those who needed to find childcare from taking part in the process. Media reports from the 2016 Republican presidential caucus in Johnson County reported lines lasting over an hour.⁵

SB 321 will provide greater accessibility for Kansas voters to participate in the selection of their next president. This legislation supports democracy and gives more Kansans a voice.

Thank you,

Helen Van Etten

¹ 2016 Kansas Republican Presidential Nominating Process, The Green Papers, accessed on 3/22/23.

² 2016 Primary Election Official Vote Totals, Kansas Secretary of State, accessed on 3/22/23.

³ 2012 Kansas Republican Presidential Nominating Process, The Green Papers, accessed on 3/22/23.

⁴ 2012 Primary Election Official Vote Totals, Kansas Secretary of State, accessed on 3/22/23.

⁵ Ali Hoxie, Kan. voters wait hours to cast GOP caucus ballot, KSHB News, published on 3/5/16.