

Ronald Eichenlaub in Favor of SR-254

Pennsylvania State Senate Committee on State Government

October 17, 2018

First, I want to thank Chairman Folmer and the committee for having a public hearing on Senate Resolution 254 and in particular Senator Corman for inviting me, his constituent, to speak and submit testimony in favor of SR-254.

I was born in Altoona, PA and have lived in Central Pennsylvania my entire life. I started elementary school in the Altoona area, continued in Catholic school at St. Patrick's in Gallitzin, went on to Bishop Carroll High School in Ebensburg, and when my family situation changed, went to Hollidaysburg Area H.S. and graduated from Altoona High. I was the first in my family to go to college. I went to the Penn State Altoona campus for two years and went on to the main campus at University Park. I worked while going to school part time and received a B.S. in Science from Penn State. I have worked in the software industry for nearly 30 years. I live in Bellefonte and commute daily to State College for work.

I have deep roots in the western Central PA coal region. Many members of my extended family have worked in coal mines. My grandfather, Paul Eichenlaub, was part owner of the now long defunct Eichenlaub coal mine which closed because of competition from higher-quality coal mines in eastern PA.

I am no stranger to poverty, experiencing it myself when I was young and witnessing it in many of the people who lived around me. Though it took a long time, I obstinately refused to give up on my education and after many years of hard work, I am in a much more fortunate position now.

When I was in school, I was taught that we have the greatest system of government in the world: a representative democracy. I was told that meant every person, including me, has an equal say in what happens in our government. People tell their representatives what they want and legislators draft and vote for legislation that best represents the interests of their constituents. If enough legislators vote for a bill, that bill would pass because it represented the will of the people.

Now let's stop a moment and think about this: is what I just described actually the kind of Congress we have today?

It is extremely obvious to me that Congress no longer represents Americans like me who do not have the funds to influence politicians to represent their interests. The sheer size of the campaign spending by unions, corporations, special interests and dark money groups collectively ensures that most Americans have little or no influence on our federally elected officials compared to the "big dog" donors. We're no longer being heard by them.

Given my background, this situation is particularly galling to me. I have been fortunate enough that, in an attempt to change the situation in Washington, I have been able to make small

donations to Democratic and Republican candidates alike who have pledged to take only small dollar donations from individuals. There are many people I know who cannot afford to throw money at the problem. Amazingly, some do make that sacrifice.

Senate Resolution 254, "Free and Fair Elections" calls for a limited convention for proposing amendments under Article V of the United States constitution. The purpose of such a convention would be to draft an amendment that would address this excessive influence money has on our elections and restore our republic to the representative democracy that was originally intended.

SR-254 is our most realistic path toward that change. Our Congress has demonstrated time and time again, under both Democratic and Republican control, that they do not view this as a problem worth solving. Fortunately, the framers of the Constitution foresaw that Congress itself might someday be the problem. They included, in Article V, the means for the States to act on behalf of our citizens when Congress fails on their own. While our nation has never hit the threshold of $\frac{2}{3}$ of the states on a specific topic, pressure from state applications has played a critical role in motivating Congress to propose more than half of the constitutional amendments our nation cherishes today, including the entire Bill of Rights. This is one of our most important constitutional rights and it has been proven to be extremely effective.

You'll note that the resolution does not specify what the amendment would say. Instead it asks for a national conversation, a forum where ideas from across the political spectrum, liberal and conservative, can be debated and judged on their merits. Further, when the amendment is proposed, the extremely high threshold of 38 states is necessary to ratify it, guaranteeing that the proposal be not only popular, but completely cross-partisan as well. This problem is fundamental enough to require a cross-partisan solution and SR-254 represents the most cross-partisan way to solve it.

The resolution has demonstrated strong bipartisan legislative support. The House version, HR-357, has 79 cosponsors (out of 203), 48 Democrats 31 Republicans. In the Senate, there are 28 cosponsors (out of 50) for SR-254 consisting of 12 Republicans and 16 Democrats.

I have personally volunteered many hours and taken time off work to come to Harrisburg to ask you, our state representatives and senators, to vote on and pass this resolution. I do this because to me, SR-254 addresses the single most important issue facing our country today. If we can fix this one central problem, we can again face our nation's problems with an honest debate of ideas and a government incentivized to serve all our citizens. I ask you again as one of your citizens, please vote yes on SR-254.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ronald Eichenlaub