

WASHINGTON REPORT

Congressman Edwin D. Eshleman
16th District—Pennsylvania



Since the opening of the 90th Congress there has been a good deal of talk about electoral reform. I introduced my own version for changing the Presidential selection process a couple of weeks ago. That proposal was based upon rather extensive research, and it offers the changes that appear to me to have the best chance of becoming law before the next Presidential election.

After completing the research into electoral reform my staff assistant, Robert Walker, and I felt that the information we had gathered might be of some general interest. We put it together in a magazine article that was published early this month in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY magazine. However, I thought that a condensation of points covered in the article would aid those of you who follow my newspaper column in understanding the multitude of problems that the Congress faces as it goes about trying to change the electoral system. Therefore, this column and the one to appear in two weeks will be devoted to the subject of electoral reform.

The issue is certainly not a new one for the Congress. As early as 1797 an electoral revision plan was offered in the House of Representatives. Since that time hardly a session of Congress has passed without the introduction of one or more pieces of legislation seeking to change or abolish the electoral college. Yet during those 171 years, this nation's peculiar fashion of picking its leader has remained basically unchanged.

Under the electoral college system, the American people do not really choose their chief executive. A small band of 538 independent men and women actually cast the deciding ballots. This system often seems completely inadequate in the modern day, especially when the public's voice can be totally ignored. But, while a wide variety of ideas have been suggested to revise the electoral college, each plan has weaknesses as well as areas of strength.

Several questions must be asked about each reform proposal to determine its relative merit. Those questions include: Will it make the election process more democratic? Will it eliminate the uncertainties now

embodied in the election system? Will it add an element of security from possible constitutional crises arising from electoral deadlocks and the like? Can it survive the difficult and complicated process of becoming a Constitutional Amendment? Is it a better system than what we now have? My research has indicated that none of the reform plans under consideration, including the one I have submitted, can bring a yes response to each of the above questions.

One proposal that seems to have a good deal of popular appeal is called the direct election plan. Such a system would have the vote of the people be the only determining factor in the election of a President. The electoral college would be totally abolished.

Direct election has numerous features to recommend it as an adequate reform measure. It

would certainly add a more democratic character to the election of a President. As a matter of fact, it answers all of the basic questions pretty well except one — the most basic one.

Direct election appears to have little chance of ever becoming an amendment to our Constitution. The thing to be remembered is that three quarters of 38 of the fifty states must ratify a Constitutional Amendment, and in this case the small states, in particular, would have a basic reason for opposing a switch to direct election. The reason is that they would tend to lose considerable influence in the whole Presidential selection process. In other words, the few electoral votes given a small state are much more influential than the total vote of its population would be, and a small state is not likely to give up this degree of power. Seventeen states stand to be affected adversely in this manner by a direct election plan, thereby putting a probable damper on the chances of such a plan finding acceptance.

I shall pick up the discussion at this point in my next column, look at some other reform ideas, and explain a little about the conclusions that I reached.

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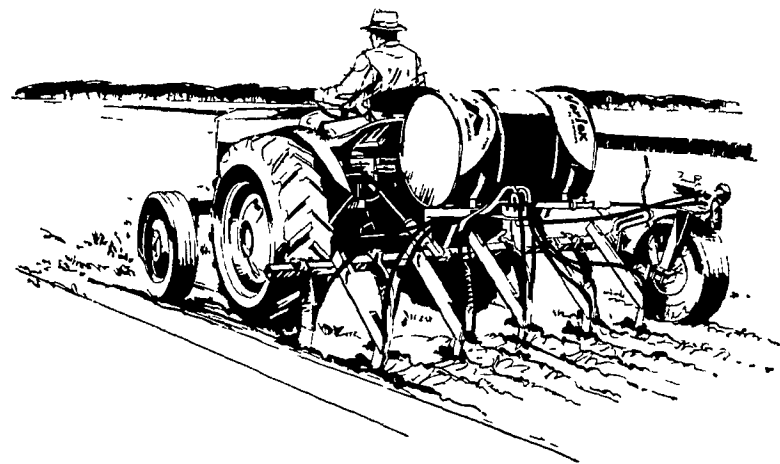
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● DHIA Directors

(Continued from Page 1)

Strasburg R1, president; John Breneman Kirkwood R1, vice president; and Donald Eby, secretary. Jacob Houser, Jr., and J. Wilbur Houser both of Lampeter Road, were reappointed treasurer and head tester respectively.

Over 1000 herds in Pennsylvania were reported on the once-a-day testing, but no number of the county herds on the new testing program was available.

Robert Hess, state director, reported on central laboratory testing and announced a district meeting for DHIA directors for March 6 at the Fleetwood Grange Hall. Many of the local directors expressed opposition to the central laboratory testing concept, but most seemed to believe the move is eventually inevitable.

If you want a man to tell you how smart you are, first, tell him how wonderful he is. It works every time.