

Rationale

The Patriot Vetting Committee (PVC) aims to support the process of evaluating candidates to help guide voters in the election of those candidates who most closely subscribe to the principles of liberty and limited government. This support is most needed now to help overcome the negative effects of ordinary candidate vetting in conventional politics, which has contributed significantly to the erosion of respect for the principles of liberty and limited government, as set forth in the United States Constitution and Declaration of Independence.

What is Vetting?

In politics, “vetting” is the process of evaluating and comparing candidates for public office, based on certain criteria. Theoretically, individual voters vet all candidates prior to voting, by personally examining and comparing their backgrounds, voting record (if any), and views on different issues. Then, they cast their vote at the polls based on this vetting.

Today, however, individual vetting of candidates is somewhat impractical and rarely employed due to the composition of the current electorate, large number of candidates, complexity of issues, and the growing size of government itself. Now, individual vetting has been replaced by group vetting procedures that attempt to reflect the collective interests and values of certain segments of society. Unfortunately, this group vetting often reflects only the views of the group organizers, which may significantly distort or misrepresent the true interests of the group’s whole membership. More significantly, it may bring about results that differ widely from the best interests of society at large.

History of Vetting

When the United States first began, voting was limited to land-holding citizens, who were among the more well-informed, responsible, and civic-minded members of society. In this situation, individual vetting was relatively simple and effective, especially since government was very limited in size and purpose; and, conducted by those persons most directly involved in its establishment in harmony with the country’s basic founding principles. Initially, debate and discussion focused on such fundamental issues as federal-state sovereignty, monetary policy, and how best to raise a modest amount of revenue for the functioning of a small, efficient government. Since candidates and their supporters contested directly with each other in the various elections, political parties didn’t exist and were not necessary.

Rise of Political Parties

As the country grew in size and diversity, government became larger and more complex, and the electoral process changed as well. For example, the voting franchise was enlarged to include the less well-informed citizens, who could not easily vet each candidate on their own. People, therefore, formed into interest groups based on their own distinctive ideas, values, and interests. In time, these groups became more stabilized as political parties, each one vetting candidates through meetings among its members, which are sometimes referred to as caucuses. In modern times, political party vetting came to involve more complex procedures conducted through primary election voting. In these primary elections, party members nominate, by majority vote, a single candidate to run in the general election for a particular office, against candidates from outside their party.

Modern Conventional Vetting

Modern conventional vetting is now largely consolidated into the primary elections and caucuses of two major political parties. Within this bi-party framework, vetting has gradually become mostly about gaining and holding power and control of government, rather than identifying candidates who are best equipped to serve the true interests of all its citizens.

Although many ordinary citizens distrust and question this restrictive, party-based vetting, they sense an inability to change or significantly influence it through direct personal action. A large percentage of potential voters, therefore, don't even register to vote, while others register only as "independent" to remain outside the vetting activity of either major party.

Contesting Conventional Vetting

Although third parties, interest groups, and independent candidates do sometimes contest conventional bi-party vetting, these efforts are usually too disorganized or isolated to achieve significant success. The major controlling party in one jurisdiction can further divide and frustrate this outside competition by using its power in government to re-shape district voting boundaries that favor the continual re-election of incumbent candidates from their party ("gerrymandering").

Through gerrymandering and other means, voting in many districts is not truly competitive, even when there are willing and capable alternative candidates available. Loyalty to incumbent candidates is assured through patronage, funding projects and passing laws that favor major party supporters and campaign contributors in their jurisdiction. In return, these "special interests" generously contribute to the incumbent's continuing campaign for re-election.

Ordinary citizens sometimes contest conventional bi-party vetting by participating directly in support of non-incumbent candidates in a party's primary elections. However, these pre-primary vetting efforts commonly fail because they are isolated to only one or several candidates or issues. Special interests can therefore usually overcome these contested primary elections through well-organized slate-making among the incumbents and their allies. In this way, one single party can so monopolize its control that the other major party disappears entirely as a competitive counter-weight to one-party rule in that jurisdiction.

Modern Vetting Alternatives

In recent years, alternative vetting, outside the conventional bi-party system, has become more practical due to the rise of inexpensive and widely available internet communication. Now, a simple, inexpensive website can provide public exposure to a single independent or third party candidate in a very effective manner. In this modern age of web and internet, a myriad of alternative vetting groups have emerged, often sharing the same basic principles, but divided and uninformed about each other in their operational tactics and activities.

Patriot Group Vetting

Many patriot groups, committed to liberty and limited government, have recently formed to protest growing waste, inefficiency, and control in government brought about by conventional party politics. However, these protests have minimal effect when directed to current elected officials who are essentially insulated from their influence due to the considerable power of incumbency.

Patriot groups are, therefore, gradually realizing the need to guide voters in the electoral process by evaluating and identifying those candidates that best reflect their basic shared principles. Unfortunately, these efforts at patriot group vetting face many practical obstacles in the context of conventional party politics.

For example, many groups focus on individual candidates instead of the whole field that will appear on the ballot before the voters. Other groups are small in number and lack the skill and experience to develop effective vetting tools and procedures on their own. In this situation, patriot groups readily divide over personality conflicts or various secondary issues, perhaps arriving at no vetting results at all. In the end, these separate vetting efforts are ordinarily too disorganized to fully unite the energy and commitment needed to overcome the well-established power of incumbency and special interest politics.

The Way Forward

The sensible way forward for successful patriot group vetting is to create a new context for its inclusive, consensus operation among all the groups involved. The Patriot Vetting Committee aims to help develop this context by providing the necessary tools and support for this to occur. For example, the PVC will provide standard candidate application forms, model questionnaire formats, sample questions, incumbent voting records, and other services for the groups to employ and share together in a cooperative, harmonious manner.

Ultimately, the vetting results that emerge from this process will be published by the PVC, so that they can be copied and distributed widely to the general public. In this way, the various groups can achieve effective cohesion, unity, and cooperation to mobilize strong campaign and voter support for the candidates emerging from this process.

Obstacles along the Way

Successful patriot vetting can expect to encounter many practical obstacles along the way, due to impatience, inexperience, and lack of knowledge of the ordinary citizens involved. The obstacle of human nature is foremost, drawing many towards the illusion of quick, easy vetting, which, in the end, fails to achieve any substantial results. For example, some organizations may offer vetting procedures based on superficial opinion polls or fixed to rigid impersonal questionnaires. Other organizations may present the appearance of vetting for high, noble ideals, when, in fact, they only copy or filter the results achieved by others elsewhere. Still others may falsely claim to engage ordinary citizens in vetting, while they actually only list candidates vetted among a limited number of specific alternatives, or who, in the end, may be determined by a single individual or a small number of the key organizers. Although these partial, limited, or false forms of vetting may have some benefit to identify patriotic candidates, they will more likely divide and frustrate the genuine efforts of vetting through the rigor and discipline of consensus-building procedures.

Consensus Vetting

The Patriot Vetting Committee (PVC) is committed to consensus vetting to assure the maximum support and cohesion of patriot groups during the electoral process. In this way, candidates are more likely to develop joint campaign activity, such as sample ballot and slate-making, which is so vital for ultimate electoral success.

The PVC uses the term consensus to mean “substantial agreement without significant opposition.” This type of consensus, however, still allows for a wide range of vetting approaches, such as majority voting and endorsement of specific candidates. For example, if a “majority-vote” procedure is accepted by consensus of the members in a group, then it would still meet the Committee’s guidelines for consensus vetting. The Committee will also establish various means to assure there is no “significant opposition” to specific vetting results among the groups participating in this process.

A Developmental Approach

Initially, groups will likely make many mistakes in the vetting process, requiring correction and resolution among all persons involved. Since the PVC offers a somewhat novel and unconventional approach, it will pursue a flexible, developmental approach in its practical application of procedures in support of consensus vetting.

While the PVC remains loyal to its core principles, tactics and procedures may change and adjust over time to meet the challenge of new, unforeseen circumstances. The PVC is, therefore, open to comment from all concerning its function and procedures.

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