

Testimony from:
Chris Saxman
Member of the Virginia House of Delegates for the 20th District, 2002 - 2010

In OPPOSITION to SB 368

February 1, 2024
Kansas Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

I am a former four-term Republican member of the Virginia House of Delegates, and recently led Virginia Lt. Governor Winsome Sears' transition team, inauguration committee, and also stood up and ran her current PAC. I write to you today about SB 368 - a bill that would ban the use of ranked choice voting in the state of Kansas.

If you had told me during my election to the Virginia House in 2001 that in 20 years Virginia Republicans would be facing a statewide existential election, I would have laughed out loud. At the time, we had two US Senators, back to back Republican governors and attorneys general as well as a near supermajority in the state House.

Shortly after the 2020 presidential election, I called my campaign manager from 2001, Dave Rexrode, who at the time was the Executive Director of the Republican Governors' Association. Previously, Rexrode managed and deputy managed gubernatorial elections in 2009 and 2013. I asked him if RGA had budgeted money for the Virginia gubernatorial election. He said that the **RGA was not planning on spending ANY money in Virginia.**

That meant we were going to lose in 2021.

I then offered that if the GOP loses in 2021, we would effectively be a third party in a two party system with no chances of winning statewide ever again. Dave agreed.

At the very same time, the Republican Party of Virginia State Central was deciding on the method of nomination for the '21 statewide races for Governor, Lt. Governor, and Attorney General. After multiple ballots, they had a stalemate in their deliberations. I'm being charitable with that. This has been an internal battle royale for State Central for over thirty years - at least.

To make matters worse politically, State Central decided to live stream their debates and votes.

The running narrative quickly became that if the GOP can't even run their party, why should they run the Commonwealth?

They compromised on a hybrid convention/primary via an unassembled convention but with Ranked Choice Voting.

While new to the rest of Virginia, RPV used it in 2020 to elect its chairman, former Delegate Rich Anderson.

It was **a useful tool in the toolbox** that started a remarkable turn of fortune for the Virginia Republicans.

Not only did it help keep all the statewide candidates in the race as Republicans (one had threatened to run as an independent as an intentional spoiler candidate), it actually encouraged MORE candidates to come forward. In the end, 17 statewide candidates fanned out across the Commonwealth signing up delegates to the unassembled convention.

They grew the base of the party.

Additionally, due to its format the candidates **had to focus on the issues** versus negatively campaigning

It worked.

Glenn Youngkin was nominated, the base quickly unified around him due to a lack of lingering campaign animus, and his unfavorable numbers statewide were very low.

Youngkin did a lot of positive name ID building ads and built up his favorables to the point where the RGA came in with \$15,000,000 in the middle of summer and took over the ground game operations. That was a huge boost to the entire ticket which swept the top three statewide offices and won back the House of Delegates with a 7 seat pick up.

Following that very successful campaign, Virginia Republicans have used Ranked Choice Voting in the nominations for *four Congressional Districts in 2022*, state House races in '23, and are using it in '24 for a Congressional District chairman's race.

That's five years in a row.

Moreover, the State Central Committee defeated the same resolution the RNC adopted in January 2023 denouncing the use of Ranked Choice Voting. The vote was **63% to 37% AGAINST the resolution** to ban RCV. Please note the **RNC did not even debate** the resolution due to the priority of the race for RNC chair.

Given the recent successful use by Virginia Republicans of ranked choice voting in electing strong conservative Republicans, I would hope the Republicans on this committee and across the Kansas legislature will not vote to effectively ban its use at the local level. If you don't want to use it in statewide elections - fine. Then don't use it. However, **banning** a very useful tool from the electoral tool box could hurt Kansas parties in years to come.

In my experience, the loudest complaints about ranked choice voting have come from campaign consultants who have spent decades winning elections by attacking their opponents with negative ads. They've built their business on dividing voters, and ranked choice voting would make it much harder to win elections that way.

Ranked choice voting is not something Republicans should fear, but rather celebrate. Ranked choice voting creates an opportunity for strong, conservative candidates to compete in parts of this country long written-off as "impossible." But, regardless of your feelings about ranked choice voting, SB 368 deprives the cities and towns of Kansas of their right to choose how they elect the people who lead their communities.

The principle of keeping government limited and keeping it local to the people it affects is something that unites all Republicans. SB 368 undermines that principle, no matter how one feels about ranked choice voting.

Thank you, and I hope you will oppose SB 368.

Sincerely,

Chris Saxman
Virginia House of Delegates 2002-2010