

## **Report of the Saxe-DiSalvo Commission**

### **To Members of the Democratic State Committee**

#### **Final Report 2 February 2009**

The purpose of the Commission appointed by Chairman John Walsh was to review and make recommendations on the manner in which we elect DSC add on (at large) members. The issue was raised after was commonly believed to be a long and difficult meeting on March 8, 2008 at Bunker Hill Community College.

The 16 member Commission represents a cross section of experienced and new, at large, geographically distributed and diverse DSC members and we looked at all appropriate aspects of the election process. On the Commission are: Diane Saxe and Mark DiSalvo (Co-Chairs), Joe Kaplan, Matt O'Malley, Dee Dee Edmundson, Deb Goldberg, Alana Murphy, Sandi Bagley, Bill McDermott, Pavel Payano, April Taylor, Eliza Beringhouse, David O'Brien, E Henry Twigg, Mary Gail Cokkinias and Stephanie Mercandetti.

#### **Process**

An initial meeting was held in June to craft our approach and commence deliberation. With a goal of reporting to the DSC at a yet to be scheduled January/winter meeting we initiated the following process.

1. Review of past meetings and protocol
2. Review of recent initiatives regarding conduct of the meeting with a focus on efforts instituted by Chairman Walsh
3. Internal deliberation and belief regarding the issue
4. Independent outreach by members to interested constituencies
5. Various working sub-committees were established
6. Creation of a survey vehicle to secure opinion from DSC members
7. Distribution in August of the Survey
8. Compilation of Survey metrics and commentary
9. Independent interview of the DSC Chair and Executive Director
10. Follow-up of the Survey with DSC Chair and Executive Director
11. Commission review of Survey
12. Commission consideration of independent views
13. Creation and review of a Preliminary Draft Report
14. Presentation and review with DSC Executive Committee
15. Redraft of Commission Report
16. Publishing of a Final Commission Report

The commission focused on questions of process, communication, conduct of the meeting and the integrity of the voting system. It also reviewed the potential use of appropriate technology while recognizing that its utilization will not be required until the next DSC election in 2012.

A survey/questionnaire was developed for on-line responses using a method from Survey Monkey and sent to all of the current DSC members. 92, or about 36% of the Democratic State Committee, responded to this survey. Of that group, 27.2% were 4 year ballot, 23.9% were 4 year caucus, 33.7% were add-on, 3.3% were 2 year caucus and 8.7% were 20 year.

The questions and percentages of responses are attached for your review as well as compilation of written commentary.

A summary of the responses and commentaries follows:

1. A majority of respondents were concerned with the entire voting process.
2. There were favorable replies to the booklet but some concerns to make sure that all potential nominees are included.
3. Sentiment was divided on the length/elimination of speeches. Some respondents recommended elimination of speeches entirely while others suggested limiting speeches to 1 to 1 ½ minutes. Time needs to be kept!
4. A majority of respondents questioned the “one ballot.” People also questioned, without adding specifics, the method of distribution and collection of ballots.
5. Many respondents favored the use of electronic voting. There were concerns with the length of time of the actual counting of the ballots. There was mention of establishing a minimum percentage to stay on the ballot.
6. There was strong interest in adopting a ‘first past the post’ election system
7. Several concerns were expressed regarding the length of time between nominations and voting.
8. There were numerous responses recommending election of one category at a time. Therefore while the voting of that category is taking place another nomination and ballot can occur for another.
9. Concerns were expressed regarding the venue for the meeting. Stadium sitting was difficult for this process; ease of movement seemed to be a problem. Accessibility was a major concern in and around the location where process/voting took place. People running for an add-on seat had difficulty in reaching voters inside the auditorium.
10. Respondents thought that the election meeting was poorly organized and ineffectively run.

## **Commission Recommendations:**

The Commission, by and large, reflected similar opinions of the Survey respondents. It took the data, applied its real world practitioner experience recognizing that practical solutions within realistic bounds of cost, access and DSC rules were paramount.

### **The Commission recommends the following be established for all future elections:**

#### **1. Nomination**

The Commission believes there needs to be an absolute deadline for filing as a candidate without exception. We recommend that rules be changed to require written nomination no later than two weeks prior to the election. We concur with the initiative to limit candidates to nomination for one office.

Action Required: Adopt Standing Rules

#### **2. Communication to DSC members**

The Nomination booklet was a well received innovation by the Chair at the last meeting and we recommend that it continue. We leave to management the process of securing information for the booklet but recommend that it establish a common format and that the information deadline be the same as Nomination.

The Commission surveyed and there was general interest in holding a separate meeting prior to the election date where candidates could speak and be introduced to interested DSC members, especially if a speaking opportunity is eliminated when the election takes place.

An exhibition room could be set up where candidates at the election meeting could espouse their candidacy in an appropriate manner with tables of information or other appeals. The DSC could even charge a small fee for the set up of such a space.

There was split opinion as to whether the distribution of materials and other appeals should be banned from the hall where the meeting takes place. We believe that this 'color' should not be inhibited but held within the bounds of propriety by the authority of the Chair to conduct a meeting.

Further, the Commission believes that technology options exist for the expansion of communication to members. Similar to the printed booklet the information can be placed on a secured portion of the DSC web site. The DSC could choose to welcome, and we believe it should, for example, video from candidates for posting to members. It could establish an effort to offer, and educate, candidates on the use of the technology so that it can be used for their individual campaign efforts.

**Action Required:** None Necessary

### **3. First Past the Post**

The commission believes that the rule of requiring majority vote of those present and voting to secure election is unproductive and a significant cause to what is perceived as a too long meeting obligation. We strongly recommend a first past the post system. That is, that those candidates with the most votes (for the number of available seats) secure election. This is how we conduct every election in the Commonwealth and, even our own election in multi-member elections such as Ward and Town Committees. A second ballot would be required only in the event of a tie vote.

**Action Required:** By-laws

### **4. Conduct of Election**

We strongly considered that no speeches be allowed and that nominating speeches be eliminated. We believed that the obligation of informing the members about the candidacies of those seeking election belonged to the candidates themselves. Upon feedback from members and others and further reflection we defaulted to a more moderate position.

We recommend that no nomination speeches or announcement be allowed. That on the date of election the chair open the meeting and the first item of business shall be a block of time to allow limited speeches by all candidates, grouped in the nomination category they seek, be allowed for a period of no more than two hours upon the discretion of the Chair. As the total number of candidates will be known because of the early written nomination deadline then the Chair can unilaterally set the length of speeches by each candidate. Subsequent to completion of the speeches block of time balloting may commence. Several other points about conduct of the election are noted in the subsequent recommendations.

This is discussed further below in #5 as this judgment is integral to the process.

**Action Required:** Adoption of Standing Rules

## 5. Single Ballot

The Commission supports the single ballot process with all races printed on the same ballot. As is the case in Commonwealth elections we see no need to separate ballot contests as discrete elections.

Alternatively, should the membership desire that single election ballots per category be conducted we recommend that one category at a time should be counted and another voted on at the same time as the category is counted.

Collection of ballots was an issue. The commission recommends that a more orderly process be established. Should a single ballot process be established then DSC members could queue just as we do as voters in regular Commonwealth elections. If separate ballots then some other kind of process needs to be established—we regret to report that we do not have a specific solution.

The election could be conducted in a timeline basis with ‘polls’ open for an hour long period affording members the opportunity to collect ballots upon check-in, vote and stay for a regularly scheduled meeting agenda. In this case, in the event of a tie, a re-vote would be conducted with eligible voters remaining at the meeting. A rule could be established that a re-vote would be conducted at a subsequent meeting.

Alternatively, it could be required that ballots will be available only to any members that were present upon the time they were distributed, as has been the case traditionally. In this case, in the event of a tie, a re-vote would be conducted with eligible voters remaining at the meeting.

**Action Required:** Standing Rules

## 6. Electronic voting

It is a nearly unanimous opinion that electronic or some other form of current voting procedure such as optical scanning (OCR) be utilized, for reasons of:

- a. Ballot security
- b. Integrity of counting results
- c. Speed of count.

That said, we only recommend that such be attempted but do not advise a specific or particular technology. We refrain for two reasons:

1. Cost is a consideration for the DSC at all times.
2. Technology changes rapidly and that it would be imprudent to recommend a specific methodology

Nonetheless we strongly suggest that some kind of demonstration be attempted at a future meeting and that a small committee empowered to advance that interest well prior to the next need for a similar meeting opportunity.

**Action Required:** None Necessary

## **7. Site**

Such a well attended and important meeting should be held in a site that affords the most flexibility for the conduct of the election, i.e. separate and secured counting room(s); lobby space for vote appeal by candidates and socializing for DSC members; a large enough floor space for all attendees for the actual meeting; and visually separate space at the front of the room for the management team of the DSC to lead the conduct the meeting itself.

The default should be a large space with a flat floor and a small stage. Theater style seating on the floor is preferred or table seating if the room is of a particularly large size. It seems that the IBEW Hall or similar venue is a reasonable template. It is also suggested that this meeting take place in Eastern Massachusetts and Greater Boston specifically because of the preponderance of population and candidate pool. Handicapped accessibility is a given.

**Action Required:** None Necessary

## **8. Eligibility**

The Commission believes that members elected at the meeting should not be considered eligible voters until the entire election process for their particular category is completed. In such case, should there be a tie vote in a multi-member contest where all but one seat was decided then those elected would not be eligible to vote on other matters until the election was over and any appeal deadlines or subsequent process has expired. This appeal deadline and subsequent process expiration shall apply to all DSC elections.

**Action Required:** By-Laws

## **Summary Conclusion**

The conduct of the meeting needs to be more like a regular Commonwealth election where it is incumbent on the candidates to make their own efforts to reach the defined universe of voters. That the sole obligation placed on the DSC is respect for the time and comfort of the DSC members and candidates, as well as ballot security.

We believe the wholesale adoption of our recommendations alliterated above is necessary for an orderly and improved election process-benefiting all interested parties. A piecemeal adoption will have the capacity to improve the process but not solve the systemic faults of the current election system.

We urge the adoption of the recommendations presented.