

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

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PUBLIC HEARING

IN RE: HOUSE BILL 520 - YOUTH VOTE

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BEFORE: BABETTE JOSEPHS, Chair
 Thomas W. Blackwell, Mike Carroll, Craig
 Dally, Frank Dermody, Robert Freeman,
 Jaret Gibbons, and Carl Mantz, Members

HEARING: Friday, May 2, 2008
 Commencing at 10:00 a.m.

LOCATION: Easton Area High School
 2601 William Pennsylvania Highway
 Easton, PA 18042

WITNESSES: Rep. Richard Grucela, Robert Gleason, Abe
 Amoros, Michael R. Manchester, Amanda
 Hartzell, Sarah C. Darling, Brieana
 Viscomi, Charles W. Lewis, Kevin Pflumm,
 Douglas M. Weisband, Natalie J. Stewart

Reporter: Jessica Ashman

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

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4 I want to welcome everybody, all of my
5 colleagues, all of --- can't really see out there,
6 looks like students from this high school. Glad to
7 see you, and glad you're interested in this topic.
8 I'm very happy to be here. I don't exactly know who
9 to thank from Easton Area High School, but I thank
10 whoever it was that made all of these arrangements and
11 was so cordial to inviting us here for this hearing.

12 What I'd like to start with is, to my
13 left, to have everybody at the table introduce him or
14 herself, tell us your name, your position, where
15 you're from, and I will not talk about this bill as
16 introduction, because our first witness is the kind
17 sponsor of the bill, and he will do that more
18 adequately than I.

19 I am Babette Josephs. I am the Chair of
20 the committee. I represent an area in the middle of
21 South Philadelphia.

REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

22
23 My name is Carl Mantz. I represent the
24 187th Legislative District, which spans Berks and
25 Lehigh County.

1 MS. KOHAN:

2 Hi. I am Kristen Kohan. I am a
3 Republican research analyst for the House of
4 Representatives.

5 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL:

6 My name is Mike Carroll. I represent a
7 district in Luzerne and Monroe Counties.

8 REPRESENTATIVE BLACKWELL:

9 I'm Tom Blackwell. I represent the 190th
10 district in West Philadelphia and a little part of
11 North Philadelphia.

12 REPRESENTATIVE DERMODY:

13 My name is Frank Dermody. I'm a State
14 Representative from Allegheny County, and I'm proud to
15 represent at least a portion of the Fox Chapel School
16 District, and I thank the many students that are here
17 today.

18 REPRESENTATIVE DALLY:

19 Thank you. My name is Craig Dally. I'm
20 a state representative; I'm not on the State
21 Government Committee, but I'm here to support Mr.
22 Grucela, who's here this morning, and also I represent
23 all of the Pen Argyl School District. We have many
24 students here from Pen Argyl as well as Nazareth Area
25 School District. I represent half of that school

1 district. I share that with Representative Grucela.
2 So those of you who are from Lower Nazareth and
3 Bushkill Townships, I represent you, and
4 Representative Grucela represents the rest of you. So
5 welcome.

6 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

7 We also have here people who are still
8 arranging papers, who haven't been able to introduce
9 themselves, but let me say Rodney Oliver, who is the
10 Executive Director of the Majority Committee, who will
11 be up here, I think, along with Matt Hurlbert, who is
12 the Majority Research Analyst for the Committee.
13 Representative Grucela, whenever you are ready, we are
14 happy to hear your testimony.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

16 Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. Good
17 morning, and welcome to Easton Area High School.
18 Easton Area High School is not only my alma mater, but
19 where I was employed as a member of the faculty for 30
20 years before my election to the House of
21 Representatives. As Representative Dally already
22 mentioned, in addition to the Easton Area High School
23 students that are here today, we have, through his
24 efforts, Pen Argyl Area High School. As
25 Representative Dally mentioned, his local school

1 district is here, as well as, as he had mentioned,
2 Nazareth Area High School, and we also have from my
3 legislative district, students from Bangor Area High
4 School who are here. All of them will be on the panel
5 that will be testifying about House Bill 520, which,
6 as you are well aware, is the subject of this
7 particular hearing this morning. And again, Madam
8 Chairman, I thank you, and I thank the members of the
9 State Government Committee for traveling and having
10 this particular hearing, and especially here in this
11 locale.

12 House Bill 520 would essentially extend
13 the right to vote to a 17-year-old. The person would
14 be eligible in a November election anyway, so what
15 House Bill 520 says is basically, anyone eligible to
16 vote in November would be eligible to vote in the
17 primary election, and at that time, of course, they
18 would be 17 years old. As I've said in the past, this
19 last primary, this bill, had it been a law, would have
20 affected me personally. The election was April the
21 22nd; my birthday's April the 27th, so I would have
22 been ineligible as a high school senior to vote in the
23 primary. I was ineligible, but if this bill had
24 become law, I would have been eligible to vote in the
25 primary.

1 The background of the bill, as I
2 mentioned, you don't have to go too far from here, if
3 you went out the auditorium, made a right, went up the
4 first set of steps, made a left, the first classroom
5 is where I spent the great majority of my career,
6 about 25 years in that classroom, teaching American
7 Government to seniors here at Easton Area High School.
8 In the unit that I used to teach on voting at the
9 time, the textbook and part of my presentation, part
10 of my notes, the State of Nebraska was the only state
11 that allowed you to vote when you weren't 18, but at
12 17. Since that time, I believe there are somewhere
13 around 11 states that now have extended the right to
14 vote to a 17-year-olds under various and sundry
15 conditions of their own state law.

16 I can tell you, I think it's a very
17 practical thing. I remember the students in my class,
18 at the time you're studying it, and if they're
19 eligible to vote at that particular time, especially
20 this past year, I think you'll hear from the students,
21 because of the historical nature of this particular
22 election, there's a tremendous amount of interest
23 among the young people.

24 Most of the major criticisms that I've
25 heard about this bill is, will it lead to extending

1 the right to vote to much younger people, 16, 15. Of
2 course, that's not the case. What we are doing is
3 allowing someone who is going to be eligible to vote
4 in November anyway the opportunity to select their
5 particular party's candidate in the spring election,
6 in the primary.

7 It's not a mandate. We're not saying
8 that at 17 you have to register to vote. It's no
9 different than any other individual. It certainly is
10 up to the individual student, whether or not, with a
11 person at 17, whether or not they would want to
12 register and be part of the political process. It may
13 also, for those who fear young people voting, that may
14 not be registered themselves, it may actually expand
15 the electorate. Those individuals who have not been
16 voting and not registered to vote, all of a sudden
17 seeing an influx of 17-year-olds, may actually
18 register themselves for fear of these young people. I
19 hope that wouldn't be the case, but in all honesty
20 there could be some reality to that.

21 Again, I would mention that these are
22 individuals who are going to be eligible in the
23 November election anyway, so we are basically talking
24 about a five-month period between the primary and the
25 general election, again, not mandated. They may be

1 like everyone else and not necessarily register to
2 vote.

3 And in conclusion, I would tell you that
4 I believe the students are mature enough. I think you
5 will hear from those today that will expand on that
6 particular point. I can tell you the many, many Eagle
7 Scouts that I know from this particular area,
8 Representative Dally, Representative Freeman, and
9 myself represent, among the young people in scouting,
10 when you see these young people, I think that they are
11 mature enough. They'll be the ones, I think, who
12 would take advantage of this bill, should it become
13 law.

14 Again, I thank you, Madam Chairman, for
15 bringing the Committee here for the hearing, and I
16 certainly would stand for any particular questions of
17 the Committee at this time.

18 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

19 Thank you. Before we go to questions,
20 let me also introduce the very able administrative and
21 secretarial person from our Committee, Marianne
22 Scuzary (phonetic), and mention that we have been
23 joined by Representative Bob Freeman. Any questions
24 or comments from the panel? Mr. Freeman?

25 REPRESENTATIVE FREEMAN:

1 Representative Grucela, you were my
2 former teacher here in this building.

3 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

4 You're both much too young for that.

5 REPRESENTATIVE FREEMAN:

6 It's kind of odd me asking you questions
7 as opposed to the other way around. First, I want to
8 commend you on your legislation. I think one of the
9 things that we have seen the excitement of this
10 campaign season, as it is unfolding, is the interest
11 of the young people in getting involved. It's
12 refreshing. After many years of cynicism and terrible
13 voting participation by those who are eligible, it's
14 refreshing to see an engagement by younger voters in
15 the electoral process, and I think your bill speaks to
16 that.

17 You made an excellent point. Having been
18 a teacher, and a very good teacher at that, you
19 experienced kids at a level who got excited, because I
20 remember that from our class, who were interested in
21 the political process, who through you and other
22 excellent teachers, really were turned on to the
23 political process and wanted to engage in it. Many of
24 them did. Many of them became elected officials or
25 ran for office or got involved in party politics in

1 one form or another.

2 However, is it your opinion that if we
3 don't try and get these kids engaged when they're
4 interested, that by the time they leave high school,
5 they no longer have that environment which is
6 conducive to being reminded of their civic duty and
7 reminded of the importance of voting and getting
8 involved, so our best opportunity is now, while they
9 are engaged and interested in what's going on
10 politically?

11 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

12 Absolutely. Representative Freeman, I
13 agree. It is my opinion that we need to engage them
14 now while we have them in the classroom studying
15 American Government. I can tell you you are correct.
16 Many, many students that I have met, former students
17 that I have met during the elections, tell me, you
18 know, Mr. Grucela, you registered me to vote when I
19 was in high school, and I'm voting today, and those
20 were the ones, and they're rare in a sense, that turn
21 18.

22 You'll hear from Mr. Lewis later on. Mr.
23 Lewis and I have always conducted a voter registration
24 drive, and we had a club here that did it. Of course,
25 at that time, we got very few that were 18 at the

1 beginning of their senior year. We were able to
2 capture a lot more into the spring, but again, not
3 near the percentage of seniors that are here. And
4 most of those seniors would then turn 18 in the summer
5 or in the fall when they were away. I can tell you
6 that's also true.

7 I taught a class at East Stroudsburg
8 University and had some freshmen in the class, and
9 when I would ask them if they would be registered to
10 vote, no. And they had just been 18, 19, and again,
11 it's the time gap. You get away from home, and if
12 you're away, obviously, to register an absentee
13 ballot, it's a little bit of process that you have to
14 go through, so yes, I would agree with you,
15 Representative Freeman. By the way, when I woke up
16 this morning, I didn't know you were going to be here.

17 REPRESENTATIVE FREEMAN:

18 One final point, too. If we don't catch
19 these students when they're interested now, is it your
20 opinion, collectively, there's an interest in
21 participating in the process, it will drop off, or the
22 study at their own school, or seeking their career or
23 job elsewhere? We can't miss that window of
24 opportunity to engage them, to capture their interest
25 in being a participant in the overall process, and if

1 they start voting now, there's a greater likelihood
2 that they will continue that habit throughout their
3 lives.

4 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

5 Yes. Once again, I agree, and I think
6 all the students here today, if they looked in their
7 American Government book, there's usually a chart, and
8 18 to 25 is usually the lowest percentage, and I think
9 it's for the reason you just mentioned, and of course,
10 as you follow the chart up, the older you are, the
11 more likely you are to vote, so again, I agree.

12 REPRESENTATIVE FREEMAN:

13 Thank you very much for your testimony
14 and for the excellent bill.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

16 Thank you as well.

17 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

18 I'd like to mention that Representative
19 Gibbons has joined us. Are there any other questions
20 or comments from the panel? Mr. Mantz.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

22 Representative Grucela, are you aware of
23 any studies that have been done gauging the amount of
24 elector participation by various age groups?

25 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

1 Well, as I just mentioned, Representative
2 Mantz, it does appear in textbooks. I don't know of
3 any particular study that I can cite, but I can tell
4 you that if you went to almost any American Government
5 textbook, I know the ones they use here for American
6 Government, I remember the chart. I remember because
7 I used to pass it out to my students, and basically
8 the chart, like I just said, would show from 18 to 25
9 as the lowest participation. So a specific study I
10 cannot cite, but I can tell you almost any textbook
11 would show you that.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

13 What do you attribute that to,
14 Representative?

15 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

16 I think that what Representative Freeman
17 just said. I think part of it just becomes the gap.
18 You graduate from high school. I believe at one time,
19 I think it was Representative Freeman who once had
20 legislation that the high school diploma would be
21 accompanied by a voter registration card, which is
22 another good idea. I attribute it to the fact that
23 you leave high school and they go on with their life,
24 for whatever reason, some go in the service, some go
25 to college, and college has changed. When I first

1 taught here, way, way back, a student that was going
2 to Ohio was like, oh my God, this kid's going far
3 away. These kids can tell you today, they go to
4 California, Hawaii, all over the place. So I think
5 there's a gap, and again, just to be repetitive, the
6 class that I had at East Stroudsburg, when I surveyed
7 the ones who were eligible at 18 and 19 and asked them
8 why didn't register to vote, they just never kind of
9 thought about it. They left high school over the
10 summer, went to college, enrolled in a college
11 classroom. The further away you are, obviously, from
12 home, maybe the tougher it is to register to vote. So
13 that's my opinion as to why.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

15 Has it perhaps historically declined in
16 that age group, or I don't know, back then, maybe 50,
17 100 years ago, with respect to that?

18 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

19 I don't know that it's declined. It's
20 probably just proportionally kept pace with the same,
21 the older you are, the more likely you are to vote.

22 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

23 It represents a society that became more
24 mobile. That may have something to do with it.

25 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

1 That's a possibility.

2 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

3 Thank you.

4 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

5 You're welcome.

6 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

7 Does anybody else on the panel have a
8 question or comment? Well, thank you. I assume,
9 Representative, you will be here throughout. You're
10 welcome to come up and join us. We've already put up
11 a sign for you, so please do that.

12 REPRESENTATIVE FREEMAN:

13 I will, Madam Chairman. Thank you very
14 much. I will stay. I hope I just don't forget to go
15 home when I can, you know, and not wait for the bell
16 at the end of the day. Thank you again.

17 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

18 We have some testimony from the Chairman
19 of the Republican Party of Pennsylvania, Robert A.
20 Gleason, who has asked in his testimony that his
21 comments be read aloud and inserted into the record.
22 So all right. This is what Mr. Gleason has to say.

23 As Chairman of the Republican Party of
24 Pennsylvania, I would like to thank the Pennsylvania
25 House State Government Committee for the opportunity

1 to submit a statement on the issue before this
2 Committee on whether or not to allow 17-year-olds to
3 vote in the primary, provided the individual will be
4 18 on or before the date of the general election.

5 First, it's important to note that we
6 have many Young Republicans, College Republicans and
7 Teenage Republicans across the state that have been
8 doing good work on behalf of our party. I support the
9 youth of our party, and we are excited and equally as
10 impressed by the young leaders who are emerging in
11 every region of Pennsylvania.

12 I would be remiss, Mr. Gleason goes on to
13 say, if I did not include the historical perspective
14 that triggered the legal voting age to be lowered to
15 18. For years the United States had a system where
16 soldiers were old enough to be drafted into the
17 military and in some cases died for their country
18 without having the right to vote in elections that
19 decided who would be the leaders who would make those
20 decisions.

21 With that in mind, I believe that we
22 should respect the 26th Amendment to the United States
23 Constitution that standardizes the voting age to 18.
24 I question whether or not moving the voting age will
25 be held as Constitutional by the Supreme Court, but in

1 any case a change violates the spirit and tradition of
2 the 26th Amendment.

3 I am confident that there are many 15-
4 year-olds that would like to drive a car to a school
5 dance a night before they get the permit, and equally
6 as many 20-year-olds that would like to purchase
7 alcohol in preparation for their 21st birthday.
8 However, the legislature, in its wisdom, has drawn
9 these lines for all citizens, Mr. Gleason says, and I
10 believe that the consistency of our laws is an
11 important principle that should be respected.

12 These laws have been in place for
13 generations, and I believe that this particular bill
14 is a peripheral matter that should take a back seat to
15 any number of issues that many would consider far more
16 important.

17 In fact, our party, Mr. Gleason says,
18 believes that this committee's time would be better
19 served taking steps to ensure fair elections by
20 passing bills that could potentially prevent voter
21 fraud. For example, this Committee has yet to act on
22 House Bill 1118, which would require Pennsylvanians to
23 show photo identification before casting their
24 ballots. According to a recent Associated Press
25 report, legislation requiring voters to show some form

1 of identification at the polls has already passed in
2 20 other states around the nation, and the U.S.
3 Supreme Court recently ruled in the case Crawford v.
4 Marion County Election Board that these requirements
5 are a valid way to protect the integrity of our
6 electoral process and our precious right to vote.

7 So in conclusion, Mr. Gleason says for
8 the Republican Party of Pennsylvania, I would like to
9 thank the State Government Committee for allowing me
10 the opportunity to submit this statement on this
11 issue. I truly believe that Pennsylvanians will be
12 better served keeping the current laws in place.
13 Respectfully, I would ask that my comments be read
14 aloud and inserted into the record. Thank you, says
15 Mr. Gleason.

16 Okay. Since I am not prepared to answer
17 any questions that Mr. Gleason might answer were he
18 here, I am not going to ask the panel if they have any
19 questions, but I would like to bring up our next
20 witness, who is Abe Amoros, the Executive Director of
21 the Pennsylvania State Democratic Party.

22 MR. AMOROS:

23 Good morning, Madam Chair. I appreciate
24 the opportunity to testify before you, and I also
25 would like to say a special good morning to my good

1 friend, Representative Bob Freeman. It's good to see
2 you as well.

3 Good morning, and thank you for allowing
4 me the opportunity to testify before the House State
5 Government Committee regarding Representative
6 Grucela's bill that would allow 17-year-olds to vote
7 in the primaries prior to their 18th birthday. We
8 think that this is an excellent piece of legislation,
9 and the Pennsylvania Democratic Party favors this bill
10 for the simple reason that it would allow more
11 Pennsylvanians to vote, and it also harnesses the
12 enthusiasm and energy of young people in the electoral
13 process.

14 This presidential election in particular
15 has captured the imagination and energy of many young
16 people who have been inspired to participate and
17 volunteer on a campaign, and campaign offices
18 throughout Pennsylvania have seen more young people
19 than ever before. In fact, high school classrooms
20 have also been buzzing with excitement as a result of
21 history in the making, as the possibility exists for
22 the first woman or the first African American to
23 become President of the United States.

24 Young people are also an excellent
25 barometer of the electoral mood. A recent study by

1 the Pew Research Center found that young people were
2 just as concerned about the economy, jobs, and the war
3 in Iraq. So this is consistent with all the polling
4 that's been done in Pennsylvania as to what has voters
5 anxious. And during this past primary election,
6 several high school classes have contacted our offices
7 in support of this legislation. And for the first
8 time in decades, decades, young people are excited to
9 participate in the electoral process.

10 The Pennsylvania Democratic Party would
11 welcome this demographic into the fold as future
12 leaders, not just within the party, ladies and
13 gentlemen, but within our own communities as well.
14 And it goes beyond good civics, as House Bill 520
15 takes young people seriously, takes them seriously,
16 which leads to greater participation at the polls as
17 well.

18 According to the University of Maryland
19 Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning
20 and Engagement, also known as CIRCLE, young people
21 aged 18 to 29 will make up 25 percent of the
22 electorate in 2008, up from 21 percent in 2006. In
23 addition, they will account for a full third of the
24 electorate by 2015. And during the 2004 presidential
25 and 2006 midterm elections, participation among those

1 aged under 25, though still lower than that of older
2 voters, rose faster than the population as a whole.
3 And according to Rock the Vote, a nonpartisan
4 organization that aims to educate and mobilize young
5 voters, 4.3 million voters under 30 turned out in 2004
6 than in 2000, while 1.6 million more voters under 30
7 voted in 2006 than in 2004. Unquestionably, the young
8 vote is going to be key for both presidential
9 candidates in the fall.

10 Just as a side note, Senator Obama won
11 Iowa with 57 percent of the 18 to 29-year-old vote,
12 while Senator Clinton did extraordinarily well in New
13 Hampshire as a result of the colleges and
14 universities. So the young vote cannot be taken for
15 granted. And those that are 17 years old that wish to
16 participate should be commended for wanting to
17 participate prior to the general election, because if
18 they register now, and they start participating at
19 this age, they're going to continue, because they will
20 feel as if they're taken very seriously.

21 And in Pennsylvania, the 18 to 29-year-
22 old vote surprisingly constitutes 56 percent of the
23 total vote. I must tell you that I was rather
24 astonished when I read this statistic yesterday in our
25 research analysis. That number obviously would

1 increase should this bill become law.

2 So ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion,
3 we are pleased to learn that 17-year-olds have pushed
4 for this bill to become part of the electoral process.
5 We commend Representative Grucela and his leadership,
6 and with voter apathy rampant in parts of the state
7 and the nation, it's refreshing to see so many
8 students, teachers and civic organizations embracing
9 inclusive legislation such as this.

10 So I'll be more than happy to answer any
11 of your questions regarding this matter. Thank you,
12 once again, for allowing us to testify.

13 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

14 Thank you. Any questions from the panel?
15 Representative Grucela.

16 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

17 Thank you for your testimony. Just one
18 question, and I know you're not an attorney and I know
19 you're not a judge, but Mr. Gleason tends to believe
20 that this is an unconstitutional bill. Do you believe
21 the bill is unconstitutional?

22 MR. AROMOS:

23 No, sir. I do not believe that the bill
24 is unconstitutional. The General Assembly has the
25 authority and has the power to change and amend what

1 is currently in place, so we feel very strongly that
2 this bill makes good sense, it is not
3 unconstitutional, it's inclusive, and I must say for
4 the record that I am rather astonished by the
5 resistance that the Republican Party has shown, and a
6 lack of, really, respect for the 17-year-olds that
7 wish to take a proactive approach to become
8 responsible citizens and participants in the
9 Democratic process.

10 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

11 Thank you. And he speaks for the party,
12 and I'll probably mention this later. There are
13 Republican sponsors of this bill, and I don't know
14 who's along with our party, so I think that though
15 he's speaking, I think, somewhat generically, and I
16 believe --- and which I think he has to address his
17 position. I do not believe that the party per se, the
18 entire party, is objecting to this.

19 I think you're going to hear from some of
20 these young people, and I can tell you when I was
21 teaching, Michael J. Fox was very popular at that
22 time, and I had a lot of Michael J. Foxes in my
23 classroom, and some of them to this day have gone on,
24 and Mr. Wilson's going to testify today and can tell
25 you that I meet them in life today, and they're

1 staunch conservative Republicans. I can still
2 remember that classroom, when we talked about these
3 political things and government. So they were
4 interested then, and they continue to be interested.
5 I think this transcends parties, so thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

7 Mr. Dermody?

8 REPRESENTATIVE DERMODY:

9 I'll try to speak here. Thank you, Madam
10 Chair. I just have a question about a portion of your
11 testimony that 18 to 29-year-olds constitute 56
12 percent of the total vote. Now, is that registered
13 voters, or is that the total of people eligible?

14 MR. AMOROS:

15 I'm glad you asked that question, sir.
16 Yes, it is of eligible voters. The participation rate
17 is not as high as it should be, but the registration
18 rate is, and I'm glad that you asked that question so
19 we could clarify that. Thank you.

20 REPRESENTATIVE DERMODY:

21 Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

23 Any other comments? Questions? We had a
24 question that I --- well, let me just ask the
25 question. Do you think it is possible for the party,

1 either party, to institute this change without
2 authority from the legislature?

3 REPRESENTATIVE AMOROS:

4 Obviously, the counties in Pennsylvania
5 are the ones responsible for administering the
6 elections, and they receive their guidance from the
7 General Assembly. I believe that the party would feel
8 more comfortable if the General Assembly deliberated
9 upon this and made it into law. That way, we would be
10 100 percent in compliance with the law. We have no
11 interest in skirting the General Assembly's will on
12 this bill, and we feel very strongly it's a good bill,
13 it should be supported. I am encouraged by
14 Representative Grucela's comments that there are
15 members of the Republican party that feel this is a
16 good piece of legislation, since it benefits our young
17 people.

18 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

19 Thank you. Anybody else? Mr. Dally?

20 REPRESENTATIVE DALLY:

21 Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to
22 reiterate that I am a co-sponsor of this bill, and I'm
23 a Republican, and I think it is good legislation. I
24 think it is good to engage the young people in the
25 process, and I would disagree with our state chairman

1 as far as his comments are concerned on that issue.
2 Thanks.

3 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

4 Any other comments? Mr. Amoros, thank
5 you very much. I appreciate your testimony. We will
6 now hear from Michael Manchester from this high
7 school, Easton Area High School, and Amanda Hartzell,
8 a student from Nazareth Area High School. Will you
9 come forward whenever you're ready? I think I would
10 like to see both students testify, and then the panel
11 will ask questions.

12 MS. HARTZELL:

13 Good morning. My name is Amanda
14 Hartzell, and I am a senior at Nazareth Area High
15 School. I am a Democrat and a member of Nazareth's
16 Students for Political Action club. I am a member of
17 the club because I know the value of voting and
18 political action. I appreciate the power of the vote
19 and the people's right to choose. My birth date is
20 April 29th, exactly one week after the primary
21 election. This makes me, by Pennsylvania election
22 law, ineligible to choose which Democratic candidate I
23 would like to see face off against Republican Senator
24 John McCain. Since I am voting in the presidential
25 election, I would like to be able to choose my

1 candidate. This election offers a great choice of
2 candidates, and voters like me are watching and
3 anxious to vote. The race between Senators Barack
4 Obama and Hillary Clinton is very close and could fall
5 within thousands or even hundreds of votes to decide a
6 winner before the convention.

7 The election of 2000 reminds us that
8 every vote counts. The right to choose counts as
9 well. I am one of the voters that is being denied the
10 right to choose my candidate. More and more of the
11 younger voting population is choosing to have a say in
12 their government. The percentage of young voters in
13 Pennsylvania is 63 percent, up 15 percent from 2000.
14 Losing the right to choose a candidate in a race this
15 close can damage these hopeful statistics.

16 I don't think that I, as an American
17 citizen, should be denied to vote in the primary
18 election because I was born a week too late. Our
19 system should welcome would-be November voters into
20 the primary process if their birthdates exclude them
21 from primary registration. I am frustrated by our
22 current system. If the candidate of my choice is not
23 in the November election, being excluded from the
24 primary process, I would not be so motivated to vote
25 for someone else's candidate.

1 Exclusion from the process can turn many
2 voters away. This is a huge moment in history, and I
3 would definitely like to be a part of it. Remember,
4 one vote can make a difference, and behind the right
5 to vote is the right to choose. Thank you.

6 MR. MANCHESTER:

7 Hello, Madam Chairperson, members of the
8 Committee, and everyone who was nice enough to come
9 out here and attend, my name is Michael Manchester,
10 and I am a senior here at Easton Area High school. I
11 would first like to say how honored I am to be here,
12 and I'm very proud to sit in front of you in full
13 support of House Bill 520 and the effect that it will
14 have on the primary elections in Pennsylvania.

15 First I'd like to address the question of
16 the necessity of this bill. When I talked to certain
17 teachers as well as my parents, I received the bigger-
18 fish-to-fry answer when it came to the need for such a
19 law. This issue of voter age is not at the top of
20 most citizens' political to-do lists.

21 However, I feel that being allowed to
22 freely choose our representatives when we become
23 adults is a fundamental democratic characteristic of
24 the American system of government. These issues are
25 the issues that must be dealt with before we can

1 complete any of the other steps of the democratic
2 process.

3 When we decide an issue like that of
4 House Bill 520, we must look at some of the history
5 behind it. While the founders of the United States
6 certainly did not plan for a two-party government, our
7 country currently is in a two-party system.
8 Therefore, representatives are no longer chosen in a
9 single-day election. Narrowing the field of
10 candidates for a political party in a primary election
11 has become an essential process in eventually electing
12 a viable candidate for office. Thus, our general
13 elections and primary elections are tied hand in hand,
14 and just as you cannot have one without the other, you
15 cannot have a separate set of voters choosing these
16 candidates.

17 I think what many people don't understand
18 is that an election day is meant to be treated as if
19 we were electing a candidate on a single day. Because
20 of the time required by primary elections as well as
21 the campaign process, we cannot feasibly have
22 primaries and general elections on the same day.
23 However, we must still treat each election season as
24 if we were electing candidates on that single day.
25 Therefore, we must also assess the ages of eligible

1 voters as if they were electing a candidate on a
2 single day, which means that we must treat voters who
3 will be 18 in general elections as if they were 18 for
4 the primary elections. Disallowing those 17-year-olds
5 who will be 18 by the general election from voting in
6 primaries is nothing more than disenfranchising a
7 select group of the voting populace.

8 I've heard a number of concerns about
9 this bill, and I will like to address them as well.
10 Many people have been questioning this bill by using
11 the snowball effect excuse. They claim that allowing
12 17-year-olds to vote is only the first step; next year
13 the voting age will drop to 16, then 14, then 12, et
14 cetera. But I would like to point out that this bill
15 sets a clear cut limit for voting. It is not trying
16 to move the voting age back at all. It simply serves
17 to extend the current voting age to all elections.

18 Another concern about this bill is that
19 it will benefit a certain political party. I,
20 sitting here before you as a right wing libertarian
21 vying for a Democratic bill, completely disagree.
22 Even the most astute political scientist would have a
23 difficult time determining which party this bill would
24 benefit most.

25 If we use history as a guide and take a

1 closer look at laws like the motor voter laws, we can
2 see that many times legislation, especially
3 legislation honed in on the voting process, does not
4 aid the party we think that it will. Therefore, the
5 question of this bill favoring a certain party becomes
6 a moot point.

7 I also would like to address a little bit
8 of Mr. Gleason's written statement said today and some
9 of his analogies. It's not about being 15 and wanting
10 to drive a car, it's about being 15 and trying to
11 choose the car that you want to drive when you're 16.
12 It's not about drinking alcohol when you're 20, it's
13 about maybe trying to choose what kind of alcohol
14 you'd like to try when you're 21.

15 And then on a more personal note, I've
16 spent four wonderful years in this high school, and
17 I've seen so many kids with deep passions for
18 politics. I've been involved in the Junior States of
19 America, the debate team and mock trial, all
20 organizations where we delve deeply into the
21 structures of America's political system. We are
22 students fresh out of economics, government, and
23 history courses who understand politics better than
24 many adult voters.

25 Just a few weeks ago, Bill Clinton

1 stopped here in our gymnasium to present a speech in
2 support of his wife, Hillary. Some students came to
3 watch, some cheered, and even some to protest. We
4 have students going to military colleges with
5 political aspirations, and also students going to
6 heavily political universities next year.

7 Most students here care a great deal
8 about the upcoming election, from Obama pins to McCain
9 bumper stickers to anti-Hillary T-shirts, I've seen it
10 all here. And I single out Democrats here, but it is
11 simply not fair to allow members of the Democratic
12 party to choose between a Democrat and a Republican in
13 November, but not allow them to choose which Democrat
14 will be on the ticket in November.

15 In many ways, this prevents many
16 Democrats from ever really choosing who they would
17 want to be the next president. I'm sure there are
18 maybe a number of stipulations and current laws that
19 refute this bill, but if we step back and remove
20 ourselves from the political bubble for one moment and
21 assess the situation with pure logic, it only makes
22 sense to change the current restrictions. Fair
23 elections are an integral part of the structure of
24 this constitutional republic we call our government,
25 and in many ways elections seem to have become unjust

1 and unfair. It is time that we begin to take a stand
2 to ensure justice in every aspect of our elections,
3 and bills like House Bill 520 are the first step in
4 that long and arduous process.

5 Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

7 The applause is for both of you. Thank
8 you very much, both of you. Better testimony than we
9 get from, many times, from people who are many years
10 older, so we are happy to have it. Any questions?
11 Mr. Carroll?

12 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL:

13 Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you both
14 for your testimony. It was well done. The
15 presidential election that we're doing right now and
16 participating in is high profile and is endorsed by a
17 number of people. Do either of you think that that
18 same energy would be applied in the other three years
19 between presidential elections, that would bring about
20 this same sort of energy?

21 MS. HARTZELL:

22 Yes. I think it will. I would be happy
23 to vote in another democratic election that is
24 especially as close as this one, is that I would be
25 making a difference.

1 MR. MANCHESTER:

2 Yeah, I agree with that. I think that
3 once we get into a current of voting, you start to see
4 your ideas and your beliefs transferred into
5 legislation, it's a good feeling, and I think in those
6 other three years between elections and having young
7 people becoming more involved in these elections, as
8 they take place on municipal or local levels or even
9 at the state or national.

10 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL:

11 Thank you both.

12 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

13 Mr. Mantz?

14 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

15 To what extent do you --- and either one
16 of you can answer this, or both. To what extent have
17 you found students who are interested, or express
18 interest and study the issues of local candidates,
19 like for city government, county government, or state
20 government?

21 MS. HARTZELL:

22 I am in the Nazareth Students for
23 Political Action club, and in the club, we talk about
24 the different aspects of politics, and we get in a lot
25 of debates, actually, about politics, because we have

1 a lot of members that are from different parties, so
2 we go back and forth, and we converse about that a
3 lot, so I feel that our club helps a lot of students
4 get involved with politics and help understand what
5 the right to vote is really about.

6 MR. MANCHESTER:

7 I think in the local elections, we do
8 have a significant interest. As far as the school
9 board last year, there was a number of students who
10 took a definite interest in that, and also the mayoral
11 race where Sal Panto won. A lot of the students I saw
12 did take an interest in that, now, obviously, not as
13 much as the presidential elections would be in this
14 season. But specifically, my government class
15 requires us to go to three different local meetings, a
16 city council meeting and a school board meeting and a
17 township meeting, to see how government runs in the
18 local levels, and I think that did spur some interest
19 in local candidates for many of the students in my
20 class.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

22 Is what you refer to as government class
23 what back in my day was referred to as a civics class?
24 Is that required of all students?

25 MR. MANCHESTER:

1 I believe it is. I believe the
2 government and economics is one of the classes you're
3 supposed to take senior year. I'm not positive. I
4 couldn't tell you about the requirements that guide us
5 for those classes, but pretty much every student I
6 know has taken either an American government class, or
7 the civics as you called it, and in conjunction with
8 an economics course.

9 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

10 Regardless of what section of general
11 academics?

12 MR. MANCHESTER:

13 I'm really not sure about that.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

15 All right.

16 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

17 Mr. Grucela?

18 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

19 Thank you, Madam Chairman.

20 Representative Mantz, just to amplify that a little
21 bit, I can tell you, I think the percentage would be
22 proportioned, just at a historic level, where it's
23 more people are always going to vote for a
24 presidential election, and if you look at it, it's
25 always presidential, gubernatorial. That's how we get

1 a super voter list and everything else in this
2 business. And secondly, I would mention, I know
3 Nazareth, and I'm not sure, but I'm sure Easton, Pen
4 Argyl, and Bangor as well, but I know specifically
5 that Mr. Grote (phonetic), who also was one of my
6 former students --- see what a great job I did? But I
7 know Mr. Grote, every election, would take a group of
8 students to the polling place, because it's not too
9 far away from the high school, and they would walk
10 down, no matter what the election, whether they were
11 electing the local mayor of Nazareth or whether they
12 were electing the President of the United States,
13 would walk down and take a look at the polling place
14 and see the operation.

15 My question, Michael --- you've answered
16 it, so I'll make it more to Amanda. I kind of knew
17 your answer Michael, because you and I have talked
18 before, and I would ask this, I'm going to ask this to
19 all the students, about whether this bill would favor
20 any particular party. Amanda, you did say in your
21 testimony about the Democratic party, so I know
22 Michael's opinion and he did a very good job, and I
23 appreciate your analogy. I may plagiarize them and
24 use them. In addition to what I was going to say,
25 that it's in the purview of state power. There are

1 some states, I would tell Mr. Gleason, that would
2 allow you to drive at 15, that do give you a permit at
3 15, and in fact, I believe in Florida you can even get
4 a permit at 14 and six months or something like that.
5 But that aside, Amanda, do you believe this bill
6 favors any political party?

7 MS. HARTZELL:

8 No. I don't at all. I mean, right now
9 it's for Democrats, but down the line it might be for
10 Republicans, so I don't think it favors either.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

14 Are there any other questions? I'm going
15 to say something, also, I think, to all of the panels
16 that come up. Part of political participation goes
17 beyond voting. It goes to lobbying for bills. It
18 goes to what you're doing now, testifying in favor, or
19 in the case of some other people, against a bill. I'm
20 hoping that all of the students who testify and all of
21 the students who are here will continue to lobby, I
22 hope favorably, because I like this bill, but if not,
23 that's your choice, personally with your own elected
24 officials. Everybody in Pennsylvania has a state
25 representative, everybody has a state senator. And I

1 know that many students have relationships with other
2 high school students across the state through various
3 student government organizations, through student
4 voices, which does work on helping students or
5 encouraging students to get involve in public
6 processes and civic work.

7 So I'm hoping that this is not the only
8 thing that any student here or any adult here is going
9 to do about this bill. I hope that everybody who is
10 here will go ahead and make his or her voice known and
11 make sure that everybody who she knows will do the
12 same. Thank you so much. We really appreciated your
13 testimony.

14 We're going to hear from two other
15 students. If you want to take your name cards with
16 you, you may. We are going to hear from Sarah
17 Darling, who is a student at Bangor Area High School,
18 and Briean Viscomi, who is a student at Pen Argyl
19 Area High School. Whichever one of you would like to
20 start first, please do so.

21 MS. DARLING:

22 Good morning. My name is Sarah Darling,
23 and I am a senior at Bangor High School and the
24 president of our student government. On April 22nd I
25 had the opportunity to vote for the first time. When

1 I turned 18 years old, one of the first things I did
2 was register to vote. Our school and community have
3 always encouraged students who are eligible to vote to
4 take advantage of that right.

5 As a first-time voter, I was excited to
6 go to the polls and finally have a voice in our
7 country's future. After voting on the morning of the
8 22nd, I came to school only to hear a buzz of seniors
9 saying, did you vote yet? Are you going to vote?
10 However, I also heard several seniors saying, I can't
11 vote yet, I'm not 18. As my school day continued,
12 lunch conversations came to the same conclusion,
13 several seniors disappointed that just because of
14 their birth date they would not be able to vote on the
15 22nd, but only in November's general election.

16 I honestly did not realize how many
17 students felt that they should be able to vote in the
18 primary elections, so long as they would be old enough
19 to vote in the general election. At that moment, I
20 felt that I had such an awesome secret about
21 Representative Grucela's proposed bill. I was so
22 excited to tell my classmates that in a week I would
23 be testifying in support of a bill that would allow
24 17-year-olds to vote in a primary if they would be 18
25 by the time of the next election.

1 As I explained this new bill, my
2 classmates responded in such a positive way, agreeing
3 that this was a fantastic idea and also wishing that
4 it had been passed earlier. I completely support
5 Representative Grucela's new bill. I truly believe
6 that young adults who are old enough to vote in the
7 presidential election should have the right and
8 opportunity to vote in the primary election. We want
9 to have an influence on the entire election process,
10 not just half. I can honestly admit that today's
11 young voters are eager to have a voice and want to
12 help our country become a better place with a brighter
13 future.

14 Altering the age requirement to vote will
15 ultimately encourage even a younger crowd to become
16 interested in what is going on in our country and how
17 they can have a voice and make a difference. I
18 believe that it is our responsibility to make sure
19 that we are reaching every young adult possible in the
20 voting process, especially 17-year-olds who will be
21 able to help determine who the next President of the
22 United States will be.

23 As a recent first-time voter, I can
24 understand the excitement and sense of responsibility
25 that some 17-year-olds feel that they are missing out

1 on. Exercising the right to vote as a citizen of the
2 United States is something that too many Americans
3 take for granted. 17-year-olds who will be 18 for the
4 general election are eager to begin to take part in
5 our election process.

6 I think about how many more students from
7 Bangor High School would have been able to vote on
8 April 22nd if this law was in place, and then I think
9 about all the other high schools and 17-year-olds who
10 missed the cutoff date by very little. Therefore, I
11 urge everyone who is here today to support
12 Representative Grucela's bill. Tell your peers,
13 friends and family about today and Representative
14 Grucela is genuinely doing his best to help today's
15 young adults have more of a voice in our society.

16 Thank you to Mr. Grucela and all of the
17 other supporters of this new bill. I truly believe
18 that this bill can make such an enormous difference
19 and encourage us, the leaders of tomorrow, to begin
20 making a difference today. Thank you.

21 MS. VISCOMI:

22 Good morning. My name is Briana
23 Viscomi. I am a 17-year-old senior at Pen Argyl Area
24 High School, and I intend to register Republican. But
25 more importantly, my 18th birthday falls on May 13.

1 As a result, I represent just one of the thousands of
2 young Pennsylvanians who will soon be 18 and able to
3 participate in the general election. But because I
4 was 17 years old at the time of the Pennsylvania
5 primary, I was ineligible to participate in its
6 excitement this year.

7 The fact that Mr. Richard Grucela has
8 dedicated his time and effort to devise, sponsor and
9 back a bill that provides 17-year-olds to register and
10 vote in the primary election in Pennsylvania as long
11 as they are 18 by the time of that year's general
12 election is a sincere honor.

13 I believe I speak for all those teens
14 that would be influenced by Mr. Grucela's proposed
15 bill when I say thank you for your consistent support.
16 Today, with the intense media coverage surrounding the
17 presidential competition, and with the competition
18 within the Democratic party being more heated than
19 ever, teens such as myself cannot help but get excited
20 about the 2008 election.

21 We find ourselves sitting in front of our
22 TVs, watching not the next episode of American Idol or
23 any of our other favorite TV shows, but rather the
24 news. Realizing that we will be able to exercise a
25 voice in the general election when the time comes, I,

1 along with many others, have taken a deeper interest
2 in political affairs. We find ourselves coming to
3 class discussing not what we are going to do this
4 upcoming weekend, but rather politics. Instead of
5 talking about the score of last night's Yankees game,
6 we find ourselves analyzing the presidential
7 candidates' proposed solutions to problems such as
8 Social Security and Medicare, and we have become
9 thirsty to know how each candidate plans on making the
10 expenses of post-secondary education more affordable.

11 The significant amount of attention
12 students such as I have devoted to this years'
13 presidential election will clearly be made evident to
14 any spectator who would sit in on my AP European
15 History class. Although it's not exactly part of the
16 class's curriculum, students in my history class
17 always seem able, and unfortunately for my history
18 teacher, more than willing, to weasel their strong
19 political opinions and concerns into the historical
20 topic at hand.

21 Although it may temporarily sever class
22 unity for a day, discussions, and dare I say debates,
23 such as these, clearly serve as testimony to the deep
24 seated interests of America's youth in regards to
25 political affairs today. This intense interest, I

1 believe, stems from our desire to be well-informed and
2 knowledgeable of the key issues that exist in America,
3 expecting to become active citizens capable of
4 addressing and alleviating the problems that our
5 country currently faces and will face in the future.

6 We have recognized that it is only
7 through such close attention and research of the
8 candidates and their solutions to the many issues
9 facing America today, be it the economy, relations
10 abroad, health care, you name it, but we can truly
11 become active members in society and make informed
12 decisions that will benefit society as a whole. To be
13 able to not only elect a candidate from the candidate
14 pool, but to also have a say in who would comprise the
15 candidate pool, would create even a more high interest
16 in political affairs, which can only benefit our
17 society.

18 It would create energy within, and
19 enthusiasm among, those who will essentially be the
20 future of the United States, America's youth. Just
21 think of what a nation full of energized and
22 enthusiastic individuals could create, a sincere
23 passion for commitment to improvement will be one.
24 This bill would encourage even more of America's youth
25 to take a vested interest in global affairs and get

1 out there and exercise their voice and their privilege
2 to vote.

3 After all, as Dwight D. Eisenhower once
4 said, the future of this republic is in the hands of
5 the American voter. Once again, I thank Mr. Grucela
6 for his consistent attempts to help put more of the
7 future of the United States in the hands of the future
8 leaders of America. That's youth. I would also like
9 to thank you all for the privilege and honor to speak
10 to you today and for allowing me to speak on behalf of
11 my peers.

12 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

13 Thank you. Questions? Comments? Mr.
14 Grucela.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

16 Again, girls, thank you, and I have the
17 same question. Briana, you already mentioned that
18 you're going to register as a Republican as soon as
19 you can. I think Mr. Dally's very happy. He just
20 laughed about that. I want to make sure I tell you
21 that, but seriously, do you believe, and it's the same
22 question, do you believe that this bill would favor
23 any particular party? Both of you?

24 MS. DARLING:

25 I honestly do not believe that this bill

1 would favor either party. I think it's just really
2 important to get the 17-year-olds who want to make the
3 commitment to vote, to allow them to, and maybe
4 reverse the age group, allow the people who vote more
5 to be the 17 to 25-year-olds, rather than older ages.
6 So I really don't believe it would affect it at all.

7 MS. VISCOMI:

8 I completely agree. I mean, we all just
9 want the same thing, the chance to vote, and I don't
10 believe it aligns itself to any party at all.

11 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

12 All right. Just two other questions.
13 One, the curriculum. I assume you're both seniors?
14 And what social studies course are you taking as a
15 senior?

16 MS. VISCOMI:

17 Advanced Placement European History.

18 MS. DARLING:

19 At Bangor, it's required that every
20 senior take American Government, so that's what I took
21 this year.

22 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

23 And one final question, and I'm sorry, I
24 had a brain wave cramp, I meant to ask the other two
25 students, and I forgot, but the subject did come up at

1 a previous hearing about they contain more than voting
2 for candidates, as you're well aware. The subject has
3 come up, which may be a moot point now, because this
4 may be something constitutional, but often there are
5 questions on the ballot, referendum questions, from
6 the local to the state. Do you believe that you have
7 enough knowledge or enough discussion at the high
8 school level among your peers or in these classes that
9 you would be able to handle the ballot questions?
10 Again, I remember teaching this, and I can remember
11 telling students that were going to vote, don't miss
12 the questions, but you don't have to vote on the
13 questions, if you don't understand them. There's no
14 requirement that you must vote for every question, so
15 again, my question to you is, do you believe you
16 should be allowed to vote on referendum questions?

17 MS. DARLING:

18 I believe that we should be allowed to
19 vote on those questions if you feel that you're well
20 prepared enough to do so. If not, then just choose to
21 omit that, and vote for the next presidential
22 candidate.

23 MS. VISCOMI:

24 I agree. I mean, if you're know about
25 the subject, then I'd like to vote for referendum

1 questions, but I know in our school, we have
2 something, it's kind of like a mock voting process.
3 We have like this really old voting machine, and there
4 are actually like two referendum questions, and kids
5 can either answer them if they want to, and if they're
6 unable to, then they just don't, so I've seen a lot of
7 kids being able to do it.

8 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

9 Thank you again, girls.

10 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

11 Thank you, ladies. Anything else? I
12 also, again, want to --- I think Ms. Darling said that
13 she was working on lobbying this bill, and I certainly
14 hope that others will be doing the same thing. We're
15 now going to hear from Mr. Charles Lewis. Oh. Sorry.
16 One other question. Do you want this young woman back
17 at the table? You're going to ask them?

18 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

19 Yes.

20 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

21 Ms. Darling? Ms. Viscomi? If you'd come
22 back and sit down for a question from Mr. Mantz.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

24 Just wanted to give you a little extra
25 exercise. Neither of you personally perceive any

1 effort on the part of any of your political science or
2 government or social studies instructors to mold or
3 influence your political persuasion and your political
4 disposition one way or the other?

5 MS. VISCOMI:

6 For me, no. My history teacher,
7 currently she has the diversity and awareness club,
8 and she kind of like encourages difference of opinions
9 and things, and she really enjoys watching us engage
10 in such things, so no.

11 MS. DARLING:

12 I have to completely agree with Briena.
13 Our teacher has not influenced us in any particular
14 way, and actually supports when we want to talk about
15 certain topics and different views, so not at all.

16 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

17 So you would say they're very objective?

18 MS. DARLING:

19 Yes.

20 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

21 Thank you very much.

22 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

23 Okay. Wait before you get up, let's make
24 sure we're finished with our questions and the
25 comments here. Are we confident? Thank you so much.

1 Okay. Mr. Charles Lewis, retired teacher, has been
2 mentioned several times here. I feel strange
3 welcoming you to your own high school, but welcome to
4 the hearing.

5 MR. LEWIS:

6 My name is Chuck Lewis, and I did teach
7 at Easton Area High School for 36 years.

8 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

9 I'm not sure your mike is on.

10 MR. LEWIS:

11 Is it on now? I don't know what I'm
12 doing wrong or whether it's on. Is that okay?

13 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

14 Yes.

15 MR. LEWIS:

16 Okay. I'm a graduate of Muhlenberg
17 College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political
18 science. I'm a graduate of Lehigh University with a
19 Master of Arts, and I taught at Easton Area High
20 School for 36 years.

21 Before I make comments on House Bill 520,
22 I wish you would relay to Mr. Gleason that setting the
23 voting age is a power reserved for states. Therefore,
24 it would not be a violation of the 26th Amendment, and
25 therefore there will not be a court case.

1 Also I have a comment for Mr. Mantz,
2 since you seem to be interested in voting statistics.
3 As exciting as the last presidential primary was in
4 Pennsylvania, only 21 percent of the eligible voters
5 in the age bracket 18 to 29 actually voted. Because
6 of that, I think this issue must be addressed, and I
7 think Mr. Grucela is doing a fine job with this bill.
8 To me, this bill is a no brainer. There's no reason
9 why this bill should not pass. A similar piece of
10 legislation is working well in Maryland, and
11 Connecticut is pursuing the same legislation.

12 The voting patterns of people in the
13 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and in the United States
14 in general, are pathetic, especially for a democratic
15 society. Because of mediocre turnouts in most
16 elections, primary and general, we are really a nation
17 ruled by a minority of voters, not a majority as it
18 was intended to be. We should encourage more people,
19 especially the youth of the Commonwealth, to
20 participate in the system, and we should emphasize
21 that they vote in all elections, local, county, state,
22 and federal.

23 Historically, people do not vote on a
24 regular basis until age 28, when they normally are
25 secure in a job and are probably married with a

1 family. Also, they are more apt to take part in a
2 federal election over a local one, erroneously
3 believing that the federal election is more important
4 to them. They do not heed the thoughts of the former
5 Speaker of the House of Representatives, Thomas "Tip"
6 O'Neill, about the importance of local elections.
7 O'Neill believed passionately that all politics is
8 local.

9 I have some examples of local issues.
10 Local school taxes and the municipal and county issues
11 are of utmost importance to the economic survival of
12 local areas, especially local school taxes. The youth
13 of the Commonwealth should also be concerned about the
14 educational issues on the local and state level. Too
15 many times the turnout at local elections does not
16 exceed 20 percent of the registered voters. This is
17 obviously rule by the minority. You, as legislators,
18 are aware of the property tax complaints in the
19 Commonwealth. We need to encourage people to attend
20 local meetings and to vote in local, and all,
21 elections, especially the youth of the state.
22 Actually, we need to get more people, regardless of
23 age, involved in the election process, period.

24 Mr. Grucela mentioned this, but I will
25 repeat this statement. Mr. Grucela and I encouraged

1 students to register to vote at Easton Area High
2 School for 25 years, before the Commonwealth
3 encouraged schools to do so. We even provided
4 students with the necessary forms. Students always
5 asked, how should I register to vote? We explained to
6 them that this was an individual decision and that we
7 could not, by law, sway them in any manner. Over the
8 years Mr. Grucela and I registered hundreds of
9 students, both as Democrats and as Republicans.
10 Students were excited to register and even more
11 thrilled to tell us that they actually voted. There
12 was a great deal of pride in the fact that they
13 actually participated in the system.

14 It is important to get voters
15 participating at an early age and to get them in the
16 habit of voting, as mentioned by Representative
17 Freeman. We have to return to rule by majority. I
18 strongly urge the Pennsylvania legislature to pass
19 House Bill 520, and I thank you for the honor of being
20 allowed to make comments to this panel. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

22 Thank you. I guess you're not going to
23 get any applause, Mr. Lewis.

24 MR. LEWIS:

25 You know, that's enough.

1 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

2 Is there anybody with a comment or a
3 question? Mr. Carroll.

4 REPRESENTATIVE CARROLL:

5 Thank you so much for your testimony, and
6 I completely agree that a presidential election gets
7 so much attention and so much notoriety, people pay
8 close attention, but in many, many ways the local and
9 municipal, county and school elections have a far more
10 direct impact on the day-to-day lives of citizens than
11 a presidential election could, and it's unfortunate
12 that the same type of interest doesn't make itself
13 known during the three years between presidential
14 election that occurs every fourth year. And I
15 couldn't agree more that the electorate in general
16 needs to pay even closer attention or as much
17 attention to the local and municipal elections that
18 occur in the three years between presidential
19 elections that occurs every fourth year, as we talked
20 about in the testimony, so I completely agreed, and
21 thank you for raising it.

22 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

23 Mr. Mantz?

24 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

25 Mr. Lewis, thank you very much for your

1 testimony.

2 MR. LEWIS:

3 You're welcome.

4 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

5 You make several statements, we should
6 encourage more people, especially the youth, to
7 participate in the system. I wholeheartedly agree
8 with that, and I do certainly think that this bill is
9 a step in that direction. To what do you attribute
10 the eligible voter apathy that prevails? It was maybe
11 going somewhat beyond the scope of this particular
12 bill, but I'm interested in hearing your ideas on
13 that.

14 MR. LEWIS:

15 Well, I think one of the things that
16 happens, after the kids get out of school and they go
17 on to college, in college, for example, I think you
18 are well aware of the fact that at Muhlenberg College,
19 former President Clinton was there, and Barack Obama
20 was there. I happened to attend both of those
21 sessions, just to say that I was there, because this
22 is my background. There were 3,000-plus people there.
23 People were very enthusiastic, and as I look back and
24 I think, I figure, here we have 3,500 people, maybe,
25 max. I hope they're all going to vote, but that's a

1 drop in the bucket, and what happens, people graduate
2 from high school, and they just lose interest. All
3 you have to do is ask these kids, what's the first
4 program they turn on on TV when they go home from
5 school? It is not a news program. It is not CNN, it
6 is not FOX, it has nothing in general to do with the
7 news. Now, you'll get a handful of people who will do
8 that. I happen to be a news junkie, and I'm flipping
9 back and forth on my channels when there's a
10 commercial to pick up as much news as I can. That's
11 just the nature of myself, but these kids in class
12 will show an interest. They almost have to show an
13 interest, because you get a teacher like Mr. Grote
14 and he wants proof that you attended a local meeting
15 or that you did such and such to meet a requirement in
16 his course.

17 Frankly, kids in general could care less
18 what you do. These kids will know the functions of
19 the three branches of government, they'll know it for
20 a test, and to be honest with you, after that test,
21 many students will totally blow that off and forget
22 about it. You can walk down 25th Street, stop ten
23 people, and say what's the function of the legislative
24 branch of government, you'll be lucky if you can get
25 20 percent to answer that question. Seventeen (17)

1 percent of the people you represent know you. That's
2 pretty darn bad, my friends, that they know your name
3 and know you, 17 percent.

4 So what we have to do is get people
5 started at a young age to understand what I call the
6 system, and to participate in the system. You know,
7 when I talk to people, and people are moaning and
8 groaning about gas prices, they're complaining about
9 property taxes or whatever it may be, I look them
10 straight in the eye and say, are you a registered
11 voter? When they say no, I say, well, I don't want to
12 hear your conversation, because you do not participate
13 in the system.

14 And as I stated before, it is pretty darn
15 pathetic when you look, even at a presidential
16 election, that you get 50 percent of the eligible
17 voters to go out and vote in a presidential election,
18 and then you trickle down to a local election, and
19 I've been to the polls, and those poll workers are
20 napping in a local election, which is pretty bad.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

22 What do you attribute that apathy that
23 you just very eloquently described to?

24 MR. LEWIS:

25 Well, to be honest with you, I think it

1 passes down from generation to generation, and you can
2 ask a lot of these people here --- now, a lot of these
3 students probably will register, and typically, Mr.
4 Grucela and I found out that they would register
5 exactly the way their parents are registered. The
6 ones who did not register, I'd be willing to bet their
7 parents were not registered.

8 Also, in this area, and you have to look
9 at, in general, in the state, the educational
10 background of people, and it's a proven fact, the
11 better educated you are, the greater the opportunity
12 that you will go out and register to vote and
13 participate in the system. If you're a high school
14 dropout, I can tell you right now, you are not going
15 to register to vote and participate in the system.
16 It's just not going to happen, but I think it's a
17 generational issue. I think it's an educational
18 issue.

19 I wish that all of the schools were
20 participating the way the ones represented here are.
21 I know I can brag very much about Easton Area High
22 School. We got kids involved. I hate to tell you
23 this. I shouldn't even tell you this, that we had
24 teachers in this building who were not registered to
25 vote, and a lot of them. That, to me, is totally

1 embarrassing, and we registered those teachers, and
2 there we're talking about people who allegedly are
3 educated in the system, but chose not to participate.
4 And Mr. Grucela and I were very adamant, we'd either
5 put a form in their mailbox or go one on one and say,
6 you probably should register to vote and participate
7 in the system.

8 I wish I had the answer to make it 92
9 percent people voted in every election. And I was a
10 political science major. I, in this case, taught
11 American Government for 36 years, and to be honest
12 with you, I jumped on kids and said, take advantage of
13 the system, participate, because they're spending your
14 money. I used to tell them how much money I made.
15 They'd say, why do you tell us how much money you
16 make? I said, because you're paying me. You deserve
17 to know how much money I am making, and I said, let's
18 find out how much so and so is making. I'd go, go ask
19 the principal, how much money are you making, Mr.
20 Jones? And Mr. Jones probably won't tell you, and if
21 he doesn't tell you, guess what? You tell him that
22 Mr. Lewis is going to find out how much money he
23 makes, and I'll tell you. And I thought that was
24 fair. And by the way, I know how much money you guys
25 make.

1 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

2 Would you go so far as, I believe,
3 Australia has gone, and put a fine on people who do
4 not exercise their franchise?

5 MR. LEWIS:

6 No. I talked one time with Mr. Grucela
7 about giving people maybe a writeoff on their income
8 tax, but I wouldn't go so far as to fine people,
9 because then you're going to have people who are going
10 to come in and vote and just vote for anyone, come in,
11 get it over with, and get out. I would not do that,
12 but I would consider maybe a little reward of a
13 reduction on their income tax if they can prove that
14 they voted in an election.

15 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

16 In your opinion, could there be something
17 more that the public school educational system could
18 do to encourage voter participation?

19 MR. LEWIS:

20 To be honest with you, I think most
21 schools probably go out of their way to teach kids how
22 the system works. I mean, you can teach them, you can
23 bring speakers in, you can have panels like yourself
24 come in, and it really is an individual decision for
25 people to participate in the system. Let's face

1 reality. The reason why it's age 28 is by that time,
2 people probably have gotten a mortgage. You ask the
3 average kid out here if 12 percent is a good mortgage,
4 and they'll tell you that it is. And I can tell you
5 right now, I don't know if this is true throughout the
6 Commonwealth, but pretty much in Lehigh Valley, kids
7 don't understand percentages, and I just don't
8 understand that.

9 So here's what happens. Look what
10 happened with the mortgage situation in the United
11 States. How anyone could give a mortgage to someone
12 making \$35,000 a year and tell them that your mortgage
13 payment is going to be \$2,800 a month is beyond me.
14 That is greed. That is probably in many instances in
15 violation of federal and state law, but we did it, and
16 I don't really understand that.

17 So here's what happens. Somebody gets
18 married, you have a child, you have expenses, and then
19 some married couples actually talk to each other, and
20 guess what? April says to Ralph, I don't think we're
21 going to make it. What do you mean, we're not going
22 to make it? And she has the bills lined up, and then
23 they figure, who do we turn to? And sometimes they'll
24 call the mayor. You guys get calls about people not
25 picking up your garbage, and you have to very politely

1 tell them that you're not in the garbage hauling
2 business and that's someone else's problem.

3 So what happens, people realize at age
4 28, 29 and 30, there has to be someone we can turn to,
5 and they get involved in the system. And sadly, it's
6 not as many as I would like to see, but again, folks,
7 and you are very much aware of this, we are elected by
8 a minority of voters. Mr. Grucela and I bragged to
9 the kids, it's rule by majority. We lied to them. We
10 actually lied to those kids, and we have a close
11 friend who used to be in our department who analyzes
12 voting statistics after every election, and he calls
13 me up, and he said, you know what percentage of
14 registered voters went to the polls yesterday? I said
15 I don't want to hear it unless it's over 75. It's
16 never going to be there until we start to get out and
17 tell people you have to get involved in the system.

18 REPRESENTATIVE MANTZ:

19 Thank you very much for your points.

20 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

21 Is there anybody else who has a comment?

22 Mr. Grucela.

23 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

24 That brings back a lot of memories. First
25 of all, I'd like the panel to know, and all of the

1 students and everybody here to know, not only Mr.
2 Lewis, 36 years at Easton Area High School, but we
3 have an Easton Area High School day every year, and
4 most recently a couple weeks ago, Mr. Lewis was our
5 honoree. They always honor one of the outstanding
6 graduates of Easton Area High School, and Mr. Lewis
7 received that award just recently.

8 Chuck, my question to you, 36 years, it
9 seems like yesterday to you and I, but do you believe
10 that the students would be mature enough and
11 knowledgeable enough to vote if this bill were to
12 become law?

13 MR. LEWIS:

14 I think what's going to happen, Rich,
15 you're going to get the students who are mature enough
16 and who follow the system on a regular basis to
17 register and vote. Yes, in general, I do. I can't
18 give you a percentage on the number of 17-year-olds
19 who are really mature enough to go out and participate
20 in the system, but you know what, even if they make a
21 mistake, if there is such a thing as making a mistake
22 in voting, they're participating in the system, and
23 you know full well that there are people who have
24 voted in the last presidential election for someone,
25 and they go, I can't believe I voted for that

1 individual. My answer to that is, at least you
2 participated.

3 So it's the old theory, if you help one,
4 you have helped so many in the future, and it's the
5 habit that you have to get people involved in. And
6 Mr. Grucela and I were pretty adamant in telling kids
7 that it's really important all the way throughout your
8 life to participate. And we really encouraged
9 students not only to vote --- Mr. Grucela and I used
10 to take kids to all of the branches of the government.
11 We used to take kids down to the county courthouse, as
12 I know teachers still do that, to attend a criminal
13 trial. Do you realize that most people who live in
14 Northampton County, where you are now seated, have
15 never been in the Northampton County government
16 center? They go because they're called for jury duty.
17 They go because they need a marriage license, but in
18 general the percentages of people who actually go to
19 the government center are quite low.

20 You know, you can walk into the
21 government center any day and go to a civil trial, a
22 criminal trial, or just open up an office door and
23 say, what do you people do here, that does not happen.
24 And again, everyone in this room who pays taxes pays
25 for those people, pays their salaries. We have to get

1 people more involved so we can better the system.

2 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

3 I'm smiling, Chuck. I remember one time
4 after an election, a student came in and said, Mr.
5 Grucela, I voted yesterday and got it all wrong. I
6 told him, I said, it wasn't a test. One last one,
7 Chuck, and I've been asking this all morning. Do you
8 think this favors any particular political party?

9 MR. LEWIS:

10 Absolutely not. It favors the youth, is
11 what it does.

12 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

13 Thank you. Anybody else from the panel?
14 Mr. Lewis, thank you very much.

15 MR. LEWIS:

16 Thank you.

17 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

18 Congratulations on your award.

19 MR. LEWIS:

20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

22 We now have three students from Fox
23 Chapel Area High School, Pittsburgh Area, Kevin
24 Pflumm, Douglas Weisband, Natalie Stewart. When you
25 are ready, please go in any order you have determined.

1 And thank you for coming so far.

2 MR. PFLUMM:

3 Madam Chairman, members of the committee,
4 I would like to start by thanking you for allowing us
5 to speak in front of you today. I would also like to
6 give a special thanks for Representative Dermody, for
7 without his help and dedication, House Bill 520 would
8 not be where it is today.

9 My name is Kevin Pflumm. I am currently
10 a senior at Fox Chapel Area High School. I traveled
11 from Pittsburgh to Easton today with several of my
12 classmates in order to show our support for House Bill
13 520. Last year the idea was posed to make House Bill
14 520 permanent in the state constitution by potentially
15 adopting it as an amendment through the lengthy two-
16 year process.

17 We would like to clarify our position on
18 this matter. We feel this issue should simply be
19 passed as a bill rather than going through the process
20 of making it an amendment, for the following reasons.
21 We understand that the rationale for amending the
22 Pennsylvania Constitution is to allow 17-year-olds to
23 participate in all primary ballot questions, and this
24 is a noble cause. However, we feel our primary goal
25 is to first ensure the right to vote in the primary,

1 which is arguably the most important political right
2 next to voting for president.

3 This may seem contrary to the ideal
4 scenario, but sometimes big ideas need to begin with a
5 small step. If we take the giant leap into the
6 amendment process, we are fearful our cause will be
7 lost. Therefore, we would like you to pass this
8 legislation as a bill and not go through the two-year
9 amendment process at this time.

10 For example, when America tackled the
11 issue of racial equality, it took several bills and an
12 amendment to finally obtain full political rights for
13 the African American community. It was the small
14 steps that helped mold racial equality today.

15 Many people believe that their right to
16 vote should also include the right to vote on
17 referendum items, a condition which is not included in
18 this bill. While debatably election of the president
19 could be just as important, most 17-year-olds are not
20 affected by things such as property taxes or highway
21 funding. The absence of this secondary right should
22 not impeach the primary goal and focus of this
23 committee, that being to obtain the right to vote in
24 the primary for 17-year-olds.

25 Please give us this basic American right

1 and let us vote in the primaries.

2 A former vice president of the United
3 States, Al Gore, quoted, the continued vitality of
4 American business, our communities and our nation is
5 highly dependent upon the knowledge and capabilities
6 of young people. It is this belief in which we need
7 to fall back on. Our youth will eventually run our
8 country, and we must trust them and give them the
9 rights they are entitled to.

10 I ask for your support in House Bill 520
11 so we can join the other nine states and now allow our
12 youth to have their political voice.

13 Madam Chairman, members of the committee,
14 again, thank you for allowing me to testify and show
15 my support for House Bill 520.

16 MR. WEISBAND:

17 Madam Chairman and members of the
18 committee, thank you for granting me this opportunity
19 to speak with you today. In our nation's earliest
20 elections, candidates were chosen in a smoke-filled
21 room by the political party leaders. In 1832, when
22 the first national party convention assembled, the
23 ability to pick the party nominees became essential
24 for the democratic process. The nominating process is
25 still a crucial procedure, and everyone who is

1 eligible to vote for our president needs to be able to
2 vote in the primary as well.

3 At the least hearing in Philadelphia, the
4 question of whether we should pass this reform as a
5 bill or as an amendment to our state's Constitution
6 was raised. Our intention for House Bill 520 is to
7 resolve the date discrepancy as well as the
8 consequential voter disenfranchisement, both of which
9 are issues viewed as obstacles in the eyes of many of
10 America's youth.

11 As my colleague mentioned before, it has
12 been suggested that this issue could be solved by
13 creating a Constitutional amendment. However, it is
14 my understanding that the processes of amending the
15 state's Constitution are more extensive and
16 complicated than those of having a bill passed. In
17 fact, it takes two years to amend our state's
18 Constitution. If money is the concern, then passing
19 this bill as a bill instead of an amendment will be a
20 cost-effective solution.

21 As I mentioned, if House Bill 520 is
22 transformed into an amendment, a significant amount of
23 time will be needed for it to have a chance to pass,
24 and time, in this instance, is of the essence.

25 House Bill 520 has received a

1 considerable amount of media attention and is
2 currently on the minds of voters and politicians
3 alike. We must capitalize on this momentum and on the
4 progress that has been made in and out of these
5 hearings. If House Bill 520 is not passed now, or
6 even if it's introduced again later, its significance
7 and interest to the public may be lost. Consequently,
8 its passing will become an arduous task to complete.
9 House Bill 520 is a feasible aspiration that may be
10 lost if we do not act on it now.

11 As I conclude my testimony, I would like
12 the committee to know how wonderful it is to be
13 involved in such an astonishing experience. I am just
14 one of the many students involved in this political
15 process in Pennsylvania who are now working for a
16 better future. Once again, thank you, Chairman
17 Josephs, members of the committee, my dedicated
18 teacher, Mrs. Klein.

19 Thank you also, Representative Dermody
20 and Representative Grucela for your unwavering
21 support.

22 MS. STEWART:

23 Madam Chairman, members of the committee,
24 my name is Natalie Stewart, and I am also a senior at
25 Fox Chapel High School. Before I begin my testimony

1 today, I would just like to address some of the
2 concerns raised by the head of the Republican party in
3 the state, Mr. Gleason.

4 I believe that he mentioned that it is
5 against tradition and against the Constitution in
6 general that this bill be passed, because it would be
7 moving around the primary date. However, I would like
8 to remind everyone in this committee that the primary
9 date does move.

10 In fact, I believe in the 2000 election,
11 it was on April 2nd. They move it, basically, to
12 accommodate people based on the days, obviously, and
13 this year, Pennsylvania tried to move its primary to
14 February to try to make the date more influential in
15 this race. I would also like to mention that almost
16 half of the new applications to the Democratic party
17 were turned in two weeks before the registration
18 deadline. So moving it a week really does make a big
19 difference.

20 Now, to the actual written part you have
21 in front of you. February 5th. April 22nd. November
22 4th. Before this year, these seemingly random dates
23 would have held no significance to a crowd of people,
24 yet as I say them aloud today, undoubtedly every
25 member of this committee and of the audience has named

1 Super Tuesday, the Pennsylvania primary, and the 2008
2 election without even thinking. It is this spirit,
3 this enthusiastic and ardent passion for politics,
4 that we can capture by working together to pass Bill
5 520 now. There are essentially two elements of our
6 current political climate which have created the best
7 possible time to pass this bill.

8 First, and arguably most important, is
9 the sheer number of citizens engaged in the political
10 process. This rising participation is perhaps most
11 noticeable in the extreme high voter turnout across
12 the nation. Though one may expect that increases are
13 concentrated in the middle age bracket, candidates are
14 receiving the biggest boost from 18 to 29-year-olds or
15 the youth bracket. For example, in the 2004 election,
16 the youth vote surged by 4.3 million votes, which is
17 more than double the increase of all other voters.

18 In this election, states such as Ohio and
19 Texas experienced a nearly 84 percent increase in the
20 number of under 30 voters from 2000. Nowhere has this
21 trend been more visible than in our State of
22 Pennsylvania, with the overflowing registry was filled
23 to the max with 185,185 new youth voters.

24 Yet these numbers, while illustrating one
25 aspect of political participation, sometimes

1 overshadow other forms of activism, such as door-to-
2 door canvassing, fundraising, and even blogging. The
3 youth, more than ever, are involved in new forms of
4 campaigning and networking which didn't even exist ten
5 years ago. For example, last November, my government
6 class submitted video questions which could have been
7 asked directly to the candidates during the YouTube
8 debate. These are the activities where thousands of
9 teens excitedly wait in the ranks for their turn to
10 vote.

11 If we can take advantage of this surge in
12 political involvement and include the hordes of avid
13 and eager potential voters, then Bill 520 will be able
14 to extend rights to as many future voters as possible.
15 However, waiting until interest has relaxed and teens
16 are no longer clamoring to assert their political
17 opinion, then the bill will not create the impact
18 which we've hoped and strived for over the past couple
19 of months.

20 The second important political feature is
21 the large upswing in voter awareness. According to
22 data released in February by the National Annenberg
23 Election Survey, public knowledge of the issues is
24 increasing as the campaign proceeds. The survey
25 found, for example, that from January 18th to February

1 6th, the day right after Super Tuesday, 38 percent
2 more people knew that Senator Obama was against the
3 authorization of the Iraq war from the start, which is
4 one of the issues that has been stressed in this
5 election.

6 Knowledge has further increased with the
7 advent of internet campaigning, whether through sites
8 like Facebook and YouTube or through live streaming of
9 debates on CNN. In fact, of the two thirds of 18 to
10 29-year-olds who use social networking sites, 27
11 percent say that they've gotten information about
12 candidates and their campaigns from them. And judging
13 by the utter takeover of Facebook in high school, it's
14 safe to assume that 17-year-olds are also profiting
15 from these caches of knowledge.

16 When one combines the two elements of our
17 political environment, both the abundance of active
18 citizens and the rise in political knowledge, then the
19 optimal conditions for Bill 520 are laying in front of
20 us. We must capitalize on the wealth of both
21 excitement and awareness and use these features to
22 advance this bill forward.

23 If the goal of this committee is to
24 foster and promote democracy, then I see no better way
25 than promoting the swift passage of legislation which

1 will not only increase the size of the voting pool,
2 but also will lift the political conscience of
3 America.

4 If I can speak without statistics,
5 without percentages and without proportions, today we
6 have talked to you about why the issue of 17-year-olds
7 voting should be passed as a Bill, and why, as the
8 saying goes, there's no time like the present to pass
9 it. Whether because of the sensitive nature of the
10 issue, the money involved in solving it, or its
11 extreme urgency, voting rights for 17-year-olds should
12 be granted through the speedy passage of Bill 520.

13 Through all of my political activities
14 this year, whether I was campaigning for Senator Obama
15 or supporting my classmates' political aspirations, I
16 have never had the privilege of working so closely
17 with such a group of motivated, passionate and
18 dedicated individuals. I had the opportunity to vote
19 in the primaries this past week, and if I could do
20 anything to share that same pleasure with any of my
21 17-year-old classmates, who I know are equally as
22 knowledgeable and worthy of expressing their political
23 opinions, then I would do it in a heartbeat. Two
24 weeks cannot and should not prevent an American
25 citizen from determining his or her future. Thank

1 you.

2 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

3 Thank you. Representative Dermody?

4 REPRESENTATIVE DERMODY:

5 Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want
6 to thank the students from Fox Chapel Area High School
7 for your testimony. You all did a fine job. On a
8 very personal note, I want to thank you, the students
9 of Fox Chapel Area High School, their teacher and
10 adviser, Jennifer Klein, for bringing the issue to my
11 attention, and you did a tremendous job. I want to
12 really commend you for the hard work you've done since
13 then, the work you've done in testifying in
14 Philadelphia, and for the work you've done working
15 with Representative Grucela and Chairman Josephs in
16 keeping the spotlight on this issue throughout the
17 state. And I also want to say we're all looking
18 forward to the hearing that will be at Fox Chapel Area
19 High School, I think next week, so we'll see you next
20 week. Thank you once again, you've done a great job.

21 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

22 Mr. Gibbons?

23 REPRESENTATIVE GIBBONS:

24 Thank you. I just wanted to point out, I
25 thought there was one interesting comment that was in

1 your non-written text, Ms. Stewart, the comment about
2 moving the election up and how it --- and I never
3 actually thought of this back when we were considering
4 this, and I was somewhat in support of moving up our
5 election, but the fact that we would have
6 disenfranchised a number of 17-year-old voters who
7 turned 18 during those two months, and the fact is,
8 like you say, we do move our election date, and in
9 presidential years it moves up a month, and we
10 actually disenfranchise those voters who would have
11 gotten to vote were it between the end of April and
12 the third week of May, which is when it is in other
13 years. So realistically, we are already arbitrarily
14 deciding who's going to vote and who's not, and on
15 that, I think that's an important point that I had
16 never thought about during our debate for moving the
17 primary, so I appreciate you bringing that up.

18 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

19 Yes. I think I can honestly say that
20 when we were discussing moving the primary forward ---
21 actually I think the date in the bill that we talked
22 about in this committee and eventually passed out was
23 February 12th, I can honestly say that it never
24 occurred to any member of the General Assembly that we
25 would be disenfranchising younger voters, so this

1 point was brought up in Philadelphia, and I thank you
2 for reiterating it, because we must keep that in mind.
3 When we move around election days, we must keep that
4 in mind. Mr. Grucela?

5 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

6 Thank you guys. First of all, my
7 apology, I had to step out, but I did hear your school
8 in Philadelphia give some excellent testimony for this
9 bill, and I've been beating this to death all morning,
10 but I am going to ask you the same question about
11 whether or not this particular bill, you believe,
12 favors any one political party.

13 MS. STEWART:

14 If I can start? I do not believe that
15 this bill favors any political party. It does not say
16 all Democrats, you can register to vote or all
17 Republicans, you can register to vote. It says any
18 17-year-old who will be able to vote in the November
19 election will be able to vote. And perhaps the reason
20 why people think, at least at this present moment,
21 that maybe it would favor the Democrats, is just
22 because the Democratic race has raised so much
23 excitement, just because there are still two people,
24 and the Republican nomination has been decided. It
25 has been decided. Senator John McCain is the nominee.

1 But there's still a chance to influence the vote, and
2 I think perhaps that's where the misperception is
3 coming from.

4 MR. PFLUMM:

5 Yeah. I completely agree. As of now,
6 possibly the Democratic party, just because young
7 voters are striving to vote. I mean, whether it's
8 going to help them now, for the Democrats or
9 Republicans in the future, either way, it's not
10 favoring one or the other.

11 MR. WEISBAND:

12 Yeah. I agree. I mean, I agree with
13 their points. It doesn't favor a party. As someone
14 who testified earlier said, I think it just favors the
15 young people. I think young people should have a
16 voice, and that's what we're all about that. It's not
17 favoring one party or another.

18 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

19 Thank you, and I just want to add this.
20 To use a trite saying that we use in the legislature,
21 you guys gave this bill legs, and however it came up,
22 in your classroom or in your high school, I'm not
23 exactly sure, but I really thank you for it, because
24 once we contacted Representative Dermody, who is one
25 of our legislative leaders in the Democratic side of

1 the aisle, and Representative Josephs had an interest
2 in this as well, the ideas here just came about, so I
3 really have to thank you guys, because you guys were
4 the ones who sort of gave us the push that created
5 what we're having today. So thanks. And thanks for
6 traveling all the way from western Pennsylvania, and
7 enjoy your time here at Easton Area High School and
8 Lehigh Valley.

9 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

10 Is there anybody else? Well, since I
11 don't see anybody, I want to thank all of the
12 witnesses, all of the people in the audience, all
13 members of the panels. I can see that this has got
14 great interest in the legislature. You usually do not
15 get this many people coming to --- traveling long
16 distances to come to a hearing, which you young people
17 may not be so aware of. We are people who are close,
18 we are people all the way from Pittsburgh, from
19 Philadelphia, from Wilkes-Barre, and that's really
20 unusual, and I think it speaks to your enthusiasm and
21 Mr. Grucela's commitment to this bill. So I thank
22 everybody and I look forward to seeing it pass, and
23 Mr. Grucela's going to have the last word here.

24 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA:

25 Thank you. I almost forgot, I want to

1 give some final thanks to the teachers and the
2 students from Bangor, Nazareth, Pen Argyl, and of
3 course here in Easton. Also, Mr. Jeff Corpora, the
4 government teacher here at Easton Area High School,
5 and Bill Rider, our principal here in Easton Area High
6 School, for all of the accommodations and facilities
7 and for you guys coming down and being part today, so
8 I want to extend those thanks to all of you. And
9 also, finally, I look forward to coming out next week
10 to Fox Chapel and visit your high school, and talk to
11 some of you and participate in that hearing again next
12 week, so again, thanks to everybody who made this day
13 possible.

14 CHAIRMAN JOSEPHS:

15 There are copies of testimony for as many
16 copies as we have, you are welcome to pick them up at
17 the table here. Thank you, and the hearing is
18 concluded.

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21 HEARING CONCLUDED AT 11:58 A.M.

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