

Kansas Presidential Elector Shares His Experience.

My good friend Alan Townsend from Goodland just happened to be an elector in the 2024 election and the more we talked about his experience, the more I realized that nearly nobody I know understands how this really works, especially behind the scenes.

First though here are some basics which I found on the official White House and Kansas Secretary of State websites.



The Electoral College is a unique and often misunderstood mechanism in the United States' electoral system. Established by the Constitution, it is the formal body that elects the President and Vice President of the United States. The Electoral College was created as a compromise between electing the President by a vote in Congress and electing the President by a popular vote of qualified citizens.

The origins of the Electoral College can be traced back to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, where the framers of the Constitution debated various methods for electing the President. They were concerned about direct popular elections, fearing that voters would lack sufficient information about candidates from other states, and wary of giving too much power to populous states. The Electoral College was proposed as a solution that balanced these concerns and provided a fair mechanism for presidential elections.

The Electoral College consists of 538 electors, a number equal to the total voting membership of the United States Congress (435 Representatives and 100 Senators) plus three electors from the District of Columbia. Each state is allocated a number of electors equal to its total number of Senators and Representatives in Congress. The allocation of electors is adjusted every ten years based on the results of the U.S. Census.

Electors are typically chosen by political parties at their state party conventions or by a vote of the party's central committee in each state. They are often loyal party members, activists, or other individuals with a strong connection to the party. On Election Day, when voters cast their ballots for President and Vice President, they are actually voting for a slate of electors pledged to their chosen candidates.

After the general election, the electors meet in their respective state capitals on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December to cast their votes for President and Vice President. Each elector casts one vote for President and one vote for Vice President. These votes are then sealed and sent to the President of the Senate (the Vice President of the United States) who reads them before a joint session of Congress in early January.

To win the presidency, a candidate must receive a majority of electoral votes (at least 270 out of 538). If no candidate achieves this majority, the election is decided by the House of Representatives, with each state delegation casting one vote for one of the top three candidates. This process is known as a contingent election. Similarly, if no Vice-Presidential candidate receives a majority of electoral votes, the Senate selects the Vice President from the top two candidates.

One of the primary criticisms of the Electoral College is that it gives disproportionate influence to smaller states and swing states. States with smaller populations have more electoral votes per capita than larger states, leading to a potential imbalance in representation. Additionally, the focus on swing states that could reasonably be won by either major party—means that candidates often prioritize these states in their campaigns, potentially neglecting the interests of voters in less competitive states.

Another significant controversy is the possibility of a candidate winning the Electoral College while losing the national popular vote. This has occurred in several elections, most notably in 2000 and 2016. Critics argue that this undermines the principle of "one person, one vote" and leads to questions about the legitimacy of the election outcome.

Faithless electors are those who do not vote for the candidate to whom they were pledged. While this is relatively rare and has not changed the outcome of a presidential election, it raises concerns about the reliability and integrity of the Electoral College system. Some states have enacted laws to penalize faithless electors or to nullify their votes, but the issue remains a point of contention.

Over the years, various proposals have been made to reform or abolish the Electoral College. These proposals include:

- Direct Popular Vote: Abolishing the Electoral College in favor of a direct national popular vote for President and Vice President.

- Proportional Allocation: Allocating electoral votes proportionally based on the popular vote within each state, rather than the current winner-takes-all approach (except in Maine and Nebraska).
- National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC): An agreement among states to award their electoral votes to the candidate who wins the national popular vote, but only if enough states join the compact to guarantee a majority of electoral votes.

The Electoral College remains a complex and often controversial aspect of the United States' electoral system. While it was designed to balance various interests and provide a fair method for electing the President, it has faced significant criticism and calls for reform. Understanding its structure, function, and the debates surrounding it is essential for informed discussions about the future of American democracy.

Kansas, like most states, selects its presidential electors through a popular vote. The state has six electoral votes, which are awarded on a winner-takes-all basis to the candidate who receives the majority of the popular vote in Kansas. This method aligns with the practices of 48 other states and the District of Columbia, with only Maine and Nebraska using a different approach.

In Kansas, the political parties nominate a slate of electors who pledge to support their party's candidates for president and vice-president. These electors are typically chosen during the party's state convention or by the party's state committee. On Election Day, when Kansas voters cast their ballots for a presidential candidate, they are technically voting for the slate of electors representing that candidate.

Once the votes are tallied and the results are certified, the winning party's slate of electors meets in the state capital, Topeka, in December to cast their official votes for President and Vice President. These votes are then sent to the President of the Senate (Vice-President of USA), who counts them in a joint session of Congress in January.

While the process in Kansas has been generally straightforward and aligned with the traditional Electoral College system, it is not immune to the broader debates and controversies surrounding the system. The discussions about reforming or abolishing the Electoral College resonate in Kansas as they do across the nation, reflecting the evolving views on how best to represent the will of the American people in presidential elections.

According to the Kansas Secretary of State's office, the 2024 Kansas Republican Electors: 6, pledged to vote for Donald Trump for President and JD Vance for Vice President:

- Mike Brown, chair of the Kansas Republican Party
- Kristi Brown, wife of Mike Brown
- Maria Holiday, chair of the Johnson County Republican Party
- Mark Kahrs, state representative from the 87th district
- Cheryl Reynolds, vice chair of the Kansas Republican Party
- Alan Townsend, treasurer of the Kansas Republican Party

Ok, so most people don't know who these people are unless you are a political insider or in my case, random friends with a couple of them.

So, after all of that, are you still with me?

My good friend Alan Townsend, whom I met and became friends with through Leadership Kansas in 2012, hails from Goodland, Kansas. A large ag operation in Sherman County which manages over 15,000 acres of cropland, a large bean company and is building a flour mill and bakery for fun. My point is that he is not from the city, he knows agriculture, his family has farmed that same ground for over 100 years and while yes, he has been involved in politics for a long time, it is not normal for rural representation from that part of the state to be an elector. It's as simple as fewer people, less statewide name recognition and thus, less votes in the selection process.

Alan is the first person to represent Sherman County, or northwest Kansas for that matter, in over 150 years if not longer.

So how in the heck Alan, did you get selected and how was that experience?

I asked Alan this question and then we decided to wait until after the inauguration to tell his story and his full experience, since the Presidential Electors get invited to the ceremonies and have special seating, often in front of the congressional delegation, he will have a remarkably interesting perspective.

The Selection of Alan Townsend was like many things in life, a lucky break, right time, right place. Normally a selection is made at the statewide convention, but the divided Kansas Republican Party had so many issues to discuss that took up time, the electors were not selected in the normal process and were made by appointment of the party chairman, In this case Mike Brown. To make it easiest, he appointed the executive officers of the GOP, Himself, the Secretary, his wife, the RNC (Republican National Committee) representative from Kansas, a state legislator from the states' largest, Johnson County, and the state party treasurer, Alan Townsend.

Townsend shared, "Normally each potential elector can attend the state convention with 1/1000th from your geographic area, so for me from Sherman County where 1200 voted for Trump, I was able to take 1 vote to the convention to vote for me, me. So, it makes it an exceedingly rare occasion for rural people to have enough representation and votes to get to go. Unless people campaign or are very well known, it's usually going to be people from more populated areas. For instance, my friend from Wamego said he went with 10 delegates because Pott County has over 10,000 votes for Trump. In fact, there are 21 counties that have never had an elector. I also had no expectations of being one or campaigning, so I didn't attend the convention. Shortly after it ended Mike called me and asked me if I would do it and he officially appointed me by phone."

Townsend further commented, "Once we were appointed, we began to get a lot of communication about my attendance, my health, when I would be traveling to vote, where I was staying, if I was clear about where to be and when."

According to Townsend the security and babysitting of their (his) attendance for voting officially in December was a bit overwhelming. Just in case there were also two alternates in attendance in case somebody didn't make it.

For the Actual voting process according to Townsend, each state was simultaneously casting and submitted their votes, and they were watching the action live on their phones. Immediate families were allowed to attend with the electors and there were a few reporters and additional spectators in the gallery.

When asked how the actual vote happened, Townsend shared that it was handled by the head of state elections from the Secretary of State's office and it was all by paper ballot.

"The 6 electors met in the Old Supreme Court chamber. Lined up took a seat and instructions," Townsend shared, "We first voted for President individually. Signed off on the official ballot and then signed several copies with all of our names for the National Archives, and others that were collected for history, maybe 10-12 copies. Then the same for VP."

Townsend also mentioned that while listening to all the votes announced in DC, they noticed that Kansas was never called.

"That's when we learned that a little kerfuffle between the Governor's office and the Secretary of State's offices over the inclusion of A.D. in the date, caused a delay and so the official Certificate of Ascertainment from the State of Kansas was a day late. Those 6 votes didn't matter, but if the election were close, it would have been an issue."

See Story here: <https://www.kansas.com/news/politics-government/article298994810.html>



The invitation to the Trump Inauguration included that all electors were to have special seating right up front near where the Congress and other elected officials were. Townsend said “We were going to be staying within a perimeter that was heavily guarded and secure. So much, that we even had to go through security to leave our hotel and it was a 2 mile walk to be able to get any car services or be free to roam about or go to dinner.”

Then Townsend said “The weather change busted all the plans and while it was cool to be there, we definitely didn’t get to see anything up close and in person. We were sequestered in our hotel for the day. During the ceremonies no one could leave the perimeter so we watched everything from the hotel room TV or the lobby. Finally, a group of 5 states rented a restaurant and we all went there to enjoy what we could of the festivities together. We could have gotten tickets to the convention center for the parade, but there were 300,000 people there and the building only holds 20,000. Plus, you had to wait in line. We opted out, but some friends did buy tickets, waited in line 6 hours, and didn’t get in until it was almost over.”

When asked if he would do it again if elected or appointed, he emphatically said, “Yes!”

