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**Veto Message: Governor Salmon
1975 (H.51)**

An act to amend 17 V.S.A 794, 795 and 1043 (a) relating to elections.

STATE OF VERMONT
Executive Department.
Montpelier, Vt., April 30, 1975

The Speaker laid before the House the following veto message from the Governor relative to House bill No. 51:

To THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Sir:

Under the provisions of Chapter II, Section 11, of the Vermont Constitution, I am returning herewith House Bill 51, "An act to amend 17 V.S.A. §§ 794, 795 and 1043 (a) relating to elections."

A casual study of Vermont's voting trends over the past twenty years indicates distinct evidence of declining voter participation. This bill, which has been hailed by some as "election reform," would actually make it more difficult for Vermonters to vote.

Similar legislation in other states, abolishing straight party voting, has led to voter decline. This is particularly so in districts where voting machines are in use.

H. 51 would require the removal of the political party masthead at the top of the ballot. I believe this to be a serious mistake.

I hold the view that a political party should stand for something—that it represents certain principles, and that the two major parties are clearly distinguishable.

The party of Franklin D. Roosevelt is not the party of Herbert

Hoover.

The party of Harry S. Truman is not the party of Thomas E. Dewey.

The party of John Fitzgerald Kennedy is not the party of Richard Nixon.

In each case, there is no confusion with respect to the beliefs of those men or the creeds of their political parties.

H. 51 also has certain discriminatory factors that I find objectionable. The bill mandates that candidates stand on the ballot in alphabetical order. Studies indicate that political advantage accrues to those whose names appear earlier on the ballot, and indeed, some courts have found this to be constitutionally objectionable. Furthermore, an alphabet system was discarded by the General Assembly in a true election reform bill passed many years ago that requires a rotation of names on primary ballots.

With the *de-emphasis* on party and *emphasis* on name, H. 51 obviously favors the incumbent, and especially the incumbent with good name recognition. Money begets big name recognition, and so the bill favors those with money and those already in office—the ins over the outs, and the haves over the have-nots.

H. 51 affects every voter who resides within the borders of Vermont. Yet as I review the legislative history of the bill, I find that no public hearings of any kind were ever held by either of the committees in the House and Senate which considered the bill. There is no evidence that spokesmen for and of the established parties in Vermont, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party or the Liberty Union Party appeared, gave testimony or were given an opportunity to so appear.

In addition to the foregoing, this bill would clearly discriminate against minority parties.

I believe that those of us who hold public office should encourage, not discourage, people to go to the polls, and to otherwise

participate in the electoral process. In my first veto as Governor in April of 1973, I returned to the House H.334, a bill, which in my view, would have made it more difficult to become eligible to vote in the Green Mountain State.

In view of the foregoing, I veto this bill.

Sincerely,
Thomas P. Salmon,
Governor

**Governor's Veto Sustained
H.51, 1976**

The Governor's veto was sustained in the House:
Yeas 64 Nays 81

Sources: *Journal of the House*, January 7, 1976 (pages 20-22, 27-28)