INTERESTED in throwing the choice of Congressional candidates wide open—beyond the power of conferences and correspondence committees—in 1792, Hugh Henry Brackenridge advocated the publication of tickets from which voters might choose in a sort of direct primary. Following his suggestion, numerous lists of proposed candidates appeared in the Philadelphia newspapers in August and September, 1792.

A natural result of his proposal was that his own name should be proposed, as it was, August 18, and published in Claypoole's Daily Advertiser on August 25. Brackenridge preferred, however, to remain outside the competition, and so wrote to the editor. His letter appeared in the Advertiser for September 15, again presenting (as he had done on August 1) his arguments against the selection of candidates by conference and correspondence committees, as productive of faction, partiality, and unrepresentative choices:

Mr. Claypoole,

I FEEL with great sensibility the honor done me by the meeting in Montgomery county, of the 18th of August, in placing me in a ticket which I think so respectable for our representation in Congress; and I thank the meeting for the compliment; but would wish the matter to rest here, and that no gentleman may throw away his vote with my name at present, as I know it would not have a general currency. The fact is I could not be elected if I would; but I would not if I could; and therefore on two principles, that of a disinclination to serve, and


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that of good policy in saving myself from the affront of a partial support, I would withdraw my name from the public; not using the cant of saying I am not fit for the appointment; but because it is not fit for me.

I approve the mode of publishing tickets either proposed by individuals, or a number of inhabitants convened in a city, village, or district; and I think it the duty of every person who may as unexpectedly as I have, in the present instance, see his name brought forward, to signify his declining to have it used, however few the votes may be which he may suppose would be lost by the use of it. It is but civility, and good manners to the persons who suggested it.

I am a friend to a state election in opposition to districts; because the public in this case, has more at command the abilities and patriotism of its members, to take them where she [sic] can find them, and the members when chosen must have less local and partial attachments; but standing on the broad basis of the republic, have no temptations to swerve from its general interest. But I assert that conferences and correspondencies such as are agitated, will produce faction, and terminate in district elections as before. The fair and plain way, is the publications of the tickets in the gazettes, and let the people take their choice of the whole or a part of any tickets.

I find myself addressed at this moment by the Hon. Thomas M'Kean, and others, as a committee of correspondence, inviting me to send forward the names of such in our county as are qualified, &c. They ought to have begun with an example of frankness, and told me whom they think qualified, &c. in their quarter. They do not know, perhaps, or would not take upon them so delicate a task, between gentlemen that are candidates, as to say who are best qualified or most popular. What is the object of voting by ballot, but the giving an opportunity of exercising your choice without wounding the feelings of others, on your own men of the best principles and most sense, [who] have the finest feelings and most delicacy; and I will venture to say will not hastily expose their sentiments to any committee of correspondence whatever.

With these observations,

I am your very humble servant,

H. H. BRACKENRIDGE.