



Feb/Mar 2009 Special Birthday Issue

"Apathy doesn't work in a democracy."

*Susan Scott-Kerr,
American Expatriate*

(When their absentee ballots failed to arrive, she and her husband flew 9,000 miles back home to vote in the 2008 Presidential Election.)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!



THE LEAGUE OF
WOMEN
VOTERS OF THE U.S.
IS
89 YEARS YOUNG
ON
FEBRUARY 14TH!

Mission:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Message from the President

The excitement of the presidential election is over, and now it's time to focus on the future and begin moving forward. What could be more exciting – and rewarding – than addressing and resolving some of the important issues affecting our community?

In the coming months we'll be revisiting the impact of offshore drilling along the Emerald Coast, studying the results of the county's pilot Overseas Distance Balloting Project, and reaching consensus on the National Popular Vote Compact,

a possible alternative to the current Electoral College process.

We're also helping educate FWB voters by joining the Chamber of Commerce and the NAACP in holding a city council candidate forum.

When the legislative session begins on March 3rd, Leaguers from across the state will meet in the capital to lobby for our priority issues. Learn about these and other events in the following articles and **get involved** in the ones that interest you.

Mary Blackwell

FWB City Council Candidate Forum

The League is partnering with the NAACP and FWB Chamber of Commerce to sponsor a forum for FWB City Council Candidates on **February 17th**. Please join us at 5:30 pm at the FWB Municipal Auditorium, 107 Miracle Strip Pkwy.

Meet the candidates from 5:30-6:00, and stay for the forum from

6:00-7:30. Local Channel 3 newscaster Laura Hussey will moderate. Your League proposed questions for the candidates and helped select others from those submitted by the CoC and NAACP. The candidates won't hear them until the forum.

Listen. Decide. Vote.

Did You Renew Your Membership?



**We want you to
renew today!**

Members: Please renew your membership today, using the form on the last page. Our League has an enviable record of community service over our 47-year history, and we have exciting plans for this spring, including meetings on offshore drilling and the Overseas Distance Balloting Project, the National Popular Vote Compact consensus, the annual meeting and the state of the county report.

Not a member? Now is the perfect time to get involved in League. We have the lowest per member payment in Florida, and our events are free of charge and open to the public. Call Mary Blackwell (621-4088) or Stan Berg (651-2619) for more information.

Florida League's 32nd Biennial Convention

The theme this year is "SET SAIL": Send Everyone To Successful Action In League. So, mark your calendars and get ready to cruise LWVF's Biennial Convention in Jacksonville on May 15-17 at the Hyatt Regency Riverfront. This will also be a Joint Meeting with the LWVF Education Fund.

Changes at LWVUS

The LWVUS Board will hold a "virtual" Council from 1-4:00 pm (EDT) on June 13th. To participate you'll need a computer with high-speed Internet access and a speakerphone. This move will save money and help State Leagues expand member participation in the meeting. Find details at www.lwvokaloosa.org.

Regretfully, the Board has suspended publication of *The National Voter* (paper and digital) until League's finances improve. LWVUS will continue to email regular updates to local League presidents. If you want to receive them, send your email address to bwel1@mac.com.

ERA Action Alert

Send a post card to new House Speaker Larry Cretul at 6911 SW Hwy 200, Ocala FL 34476. On the back write, "Florida wants the ERA. Please hold hearings in 2009!" with your name and address. Your postcards can make the difference. To find out what else you can do to help, visit www.ratifyERAflorida.net

LWVF Legislative Seminar for 2009

The Florida League's 2009 Legislative Seminar is scheduled for March 22-24 in Tallahassee. Effective grassroots lobbying begins with building a relationship with elected officials, and the Seminar provides a unique opportunity for League members to make personal contact with government leaders.

Leaguers **can** influence Legislators by talking to them face-to-face, so this year's theme is "ADVOCATES": Assess, Develop, Validate, Organize, Communicate, Act, Testify, Educate, Shape.

Among other events, the Seminar includes updates from legislative leaders; an Education Workshop

featuring Dr. Frances Haithcock, Chancellor of the Florida Public School System, and Dr. Willis Holcombe, Chancellor of the Florida Community College System; and a Healthcare Workshop featuring Kenneth Brummel-Smith, M.D., a certified Family Medicine practitioner and nationally-recognized expert in geriatrics.

Additionally, Florida Secretary of State Kurt S. Browning will be the guest speaker at breakfast on March 24th.

If you are a League member and are interested in attending, please contact Mary Blackwell (621-4088) or Stan Berg (651-2619).

Legislative Priorities for 2009

Lobbying Legislators has always been a prominent feature of the annual Legislative Seminar. The League of Women Voters of Florida adopted the following legislative priorities for the 2009 session, which begins March 3rd:

Government: Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the state.

- **Finance and Taxation:** Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

- **Redistricting:** Support single-member election districts that are equal in population, provide access for minorities, and are not determined by the Legislature.

- **Citizen Initiatives including the Statutory Initiative:** Support citizens' right to have both constitutional and statutory initiatives.

- **Election Law:** Promote integrity of process for matching voters to statewide database under HAVA; support automatic restoration of

voting rights for felons who have been released from prison.

Education in Florida: Support for a free public school system for Florida with high standards for student achievement and with equality of education opportunity for all.

- **Funding:** Support adequate funding for the public school system.

- **Accountability:** Support a reliable accountability system that measures the achievement of all students whose education is provided by public expenditures.

- **Civics Education:** Promote the extension of the civics education requirement.

Social Policy in Florida: Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice, and the health and safety of all Americans.

- **Financing & Delivery of Health Care:** Support a health care system that provides access to a basic level of quality health care for all Florida residents and controls health care costs.

Special Insert: National Popular Vote Compact Study

Since 1970 the LWV has supported direct election of the President by popular vote. Now League members have the opportunity to consider whether to support the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV Compact) as a viable process to achieve that result. Members will have an opportunity to learn more about the NPV Compact as the Okaloosa League studies the issue in the weeks ahead. NPV Compact study materials are available on our website, including background, pro and con articles, consensus questions, the text of the NPV Compact, a resource list and the Leader's Guide.

Summary. The NPV Compact would assure election of the individual receiving the most votes *without* requiring a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College. States that legislatively enact the NPV Compact agree that their state electors will vote for the individual receiving the most votes nationwide. Thus, state elections officials in all participating states would award their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who receives the largest number of popular votes. This alternative method of assigning a state's Electoral College votes would take effect only when enacted by states collectively possessing a majority of the electoral votes. This 270-vote threshold also corresponds essentially to states representing a majority of the people of the United States. To assure smooth functioning of the agreement, the plan includes procedural provisions to address enforcement issues, recounts and decisions by states to withdraw from the Compact at the last moment.

Opposition to the NPV Compact

The League opposes the Electoral College, and most voters want a direct popular vote, but is the NPV Compact an appropriate way to achieve that result?

States' Rights. Voters supporting the candidate who receives the majority of votes in their state want their state's electors to support their choice. Adoption of the NPV Compact may require a state elections official to direct its state's electors to cast their ballots in support of a candidate who was **not** favored by the voters of that state. Passage of the NPV Compact will result in the emphasis of presidential campaigns shifting from the battleground states to areas of large concentrations of population. So, while the Electoral College disenfranchises some voters, the NPV Compact might disenfranchise others. Because the Compact binds state elections officials to direct electors to vote in a certain way – regardless of the outcome of the election in their state -- states' rights are diminished.

Legal/Constitutional Issues. The Voting Rights Act requires pre-clearance for legislative changes. This issue may engender lawsuits to ensure compliance. The advisability of a method that bypasses the normal constitutional amendment process is also open to question. Many constitutional scholars argue that this plan will lead to court challenges on issues such as the scope of constitutional powers, the Compact itself, the need for congressional approval, the concerns of non-compact states, and constitutional protections of state interests and their role in elections.

Mechanical Issues. Opponents question the power and timing to withdraw from the Compact and the power to enforce compliance. Others are concerned about lawsuits as well as procedures in close elections. Additionally, the NPV Compact does not require the president to be elected by a majority. Just like the current system, the NPV Compact permits election by a plurality.

League Issues. The League has long supported abolition of the Electoral College, and the NPV Compact appears to foster the same result, but it also creates additional concerns. It will not achieve the goal of uniform standards of voting. Additionally, the compact's passage by states representing 270 electoral votes will effectively negate votes in all non-compact states. Finally, although amending the U.S. Constitution is a difficult process, supporting the normal amendment procedures may be preferable to advocating a "work-around."

Support for the National Popular Vote Compact

Because the League already supports direct election of the president, arguments against the Electoral College are not included in the material supporting the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV Compact).

States' Rights. Currently a candidate can be elected president by receiving the most electoral votes even though he or she did not receive the most popular votes. Election campaigns currently concentrate major emphasis and resources in key Electoral College battleground states, because that is where elections are won or lost. The NPV Compact would eliminate this emphasis and encourage campaign strategies that appeal to a broad spectrum of the electorate, which would foster greater voter participation. Additionally, poll results show that most voters want their individual vote to count, rather than allotting them to electors representing the state as a whole.

Legal/Constitutional Issues. The Voting Rights Act and the NPV Compact are in harmony, assuring equality of votes throughout the United States. The NPV Compact is a way to assure that every person's vote counts equally and that the person receiving the most votes is the winner of the presidency. The same result would be achieved by constitutional amendment but the U.S. Constitution is difficult to amend. The NPV Compact is a viable way to attain the goal of eliminating the Electoral College while avoiding the difficulties inherent in amending the Constitution. States already have the right to implement changes in how electors are appointed, so a constitutional amendment is not needed to implement the NPV Compact. Indeed, voting rights have been changed through state action many times. For example, women's suffrage was instituted by twenty states before passage of the constitutional amendment that made the right universal.

Mechanical Issues. Those opposed to the NPV Compact cite mechanical issues that might lead the NPV to fail, but the Compact includes provisions that address enforcement issues, recounts and winning levels.

League Issues. Opponents say that the NPV Compact conflicts with the League's support of uniform voting standards. Supporters of the Compact advocate its passage in all states, which *would* result in uniform voting standards. While it is true that the NPV Compact could be in effect for an interlude when not all states had signed on to it, the same could be demonstrated for other laws. Regardless, uniform voting standards are **not** now in effect, and the NPV Compact could help assure that every vote would be counted equally. Further, implementation of a method to assure direct election of the president by popular vote is in keeping with the League's long-held position.

Upcoming General & Special Meetings

OFFSHORE DRILLING REVISITED FEB 28TH, 10:00-12:00, SHALIMAR

League last addressed this subject in January 2007. It's back due to renewed interest and growing support for offshore drilling. **Enid Sisskin**, PhD., Director, Gulf Coast Environmental Defense, will report on the impact of offshore drilling and the results of last fall's Offshore Drilling Summit. Come to Shalimar Town Hall, #2 Cherokee Road, on February 28th and learn how our community may be affected.

REVIEW: OVERSEAS DISTANCE BALLOTING PROJECT RESULTS MARCH 21ST, 10:00-12:00, FWB

In November 2008 our county participated in a landmark pilot project to test the feasibility of secure Internet voting for Americans over-

seas. Supervisor of Elections Paul Lux will report on project results and implications for future elections. Come to the FWB First Presbyterian Church at 34 Beal Pkwy SW to learn more about how new technology can help overseas voters exercise their franchise.

NOTE: League general meetings are free and open to the public. Come and get involved in our community!

ANNUAL MEETING APRIL 25TH, 10:00-1:00, FWB

Members: mark your calendars for the Annual Meeting, which will be held at the Fort Walton Yacht Club, 180 Ferry Road NE, on Saturday morning, April 25th. Our speaker is TBD, so watch the website and your mailbox for updates.

National Popular Vote Compact Consensus Meeting

The League has long supported direct election of the president by popular vote. LWVUS is currently sponsoring a study of the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV Compact), a possible alternative to the Electoral College process. (See the special insert on the pros and cons of the NPV Compact.) While only League members may join in the consensus discussion, members of the public are welcome to observe.

The consensus meeting will be held from 6:00-8:00 p.m. on Monday, April 6th, at Tech Center Bldg 3, 51 Third St, Shalimar. To get there, go east on 9th Ave at the courthouse light, right at the stop sign onto 3rd St, right at the Tech Center sign, and park in the first lot on the left.

This is a very special meeting for members, so we need as many as possible to be there. Participating in league studies and the consensus process is not just instructive and rewarding, it also helps set the agenda for League's lobbying

efforts – so we need your participation! To prepare, read the study briefs and consensus questions at www.lwvokaloosa.org. Bring a sack lunch and plan to stay the full two hours so we can cover everything.

Make a difference: Help League reach consensus on this important issue. *We'll see you there!*

Election Audits Task Force Report Available

LWVUS convened an Election Audits Task Force last year to study audit procedures nationwide. Okaloosa League members Mary Blackwell, Mary Hahn and Fran Goodall participated in the effort by observing the Okaloosa County Canvassing Board meeting and the post-election audit held in November. To find out more, check out the Task Force report posted on our website at www.lwvokaloos.org.

Court OKs Florida Fair Districts Amendments

In January the Supreme Court cleared the proposed fair districting amendments to the state constitution. Proponents must now collect 1.6 million signatures by October 31st to win a spot on the November 2010 ballot.

If approved by voters, they will take effect for the next redistricting in 2012. Regular adjustment of district lines was intended to keep pace with population changes and ensure that all votes counted equally. Unfortunately, with no standards to ensure fairness in the process, legislators have used it to make seats "safe" for incumbents.

A Tallahassee Democrat editorial noted, "Gerrymandering isn't anything new ... Right now the Legislature does the redistricting work itself every ten years, but these constitutional amendments would change the way it's done, setting out standards for redistricting that would help stop favoritism for any party or incumbent and would prevent denying equal opportunity for racial or language minorities."

Together we can ensure that from now on, Floridians can have a meaningful chance to select their representatives rather than having our legislators choose *for* us! Go to <https://www.fairdistrictsflorida.org/donate.asp> to find out how you can help.

**DEMOCRACY IS NOT
A SPECTATOR SPORT!**

