



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Winter 2016

Why an Electoral College?

Claudette Sortino

In a parliamentary system of government, the leader of the winning party assumes the role of chief executive. For example, the recent parliamentary election in the UK brought about victory for the Conservatives, giving its leader, Theresa May, the position of Prime Minister. Unlike in the United States, Mrs. May was not elected separately as prime minister, but attained that position because she is the leader of the Conservative Party and so became prime minister when her party won. The one result determines the other. On this side of the pond, our most recent election on November 8th brought about a Republican Congress and a President of the same party. However, in the election that took place in 2012, Democrat Barack Obama was elected president but the opposition party, the Republicans, took control of the legislature. The two are not connected.

So what does all this have to do with the Electoral College? The Electoral College is a provision in the US Constitution that takes away from voters the direct popular election of our president and puts it into the hands of a body of 538 “electors” who were chosen by the voters on November 8th. That number represents the total of Senators and Representatives from all the states, plus three from the District of Columbia. Even though we claimed we had elected Donald Trump as our president, we had not. We had actually voted for electors representing our choices. Those votes would be counted on December 19th. The votes of those 538 electors determine who is our next president. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton has conceded, Trump is assembling his cabinet, and government goes on. Or does it? The numbers show that Clinton has beaten Trump by well over two million votes. As a matter of fact, in the election of 2000 Al Gore had more of the popular vote than George W. Bush. In the last five presidential elections, only three “winning” candidates actually won the popular vote.

According to those who wrote the Constitution back in the 1780s, there was concern that a largely undereducated mass of voters with poor systems of communication wouldn't have the means to do it right if at all. Then there was also the question as to how to count slaves. Third, voter fraud was a possibility. And fourth, our political leaders were not willing to just let the masses decide. The creation of a government of, by, and for the people sounded good theoretically but there was always that concern on the part of the “powers that be” that a means of keeping some control over the will of the people was a good thing. Political shenanigans existed even back then.

Considering the presence of all of the above potential obstructions to achieving a genuinely accurate result, the Electoral College concept was written into the Constitution, adding one more step to the process which would better ensure the forefathers got it right, or at least appeared to be right based on the thinking of the times.

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Message from the Board

Winter 2016

What can the League do now?

With online voter registration in effect now and 'same day/election day' voter registration going into effect in Vermont in January do VT League members have anything left to do?

You bet there's a lot to be done, and we're pleased to see our membership growing again with new local chapters starting up in Castleton and St. Johnsbury.

On November 9, LWVUS President Chris Carson made the following statement:

"This is the first presidential election in 50 years without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act. Thousands of eligible voters were purged from the rolls. Onerous voter ID laws prevented eligible voters from casting their ballots. We saw cases of misinformation and intimidation at the polls.

"We can and must do better. All year the League has worked in more than 700 communities, in every state, to register and help eligible Americans get ready to vote ... The League of Women Voters will continue our work to expand participation in the election process and work to give a voice to all Americans."

Please also read Board member Claudette Sortino's article in this newsletter about the Electoral College and how the League has tried for many years to support the Popular Vote.

The Vermont League has also supported IRV or Ranked Choice Voting (1st, 2nd, 3rd ... choices) since 2007. Here is a quote from long time member and former President Vee Gordon, "Instant runoff is a viable alternative to a run off election. The historic process of the Legislature making the choice based on either a small plurality, or a partisan strength in that body, will no longer take the place of the popular vote. "

Let's keep in touch with each other so we can work together to bring about a better Democracy for everyone living in our country. Here are some contacts to get you started:

Jean Hopkins, seaheidi@earthlink.net 802-863-5359

Kate Rader, catherine.rader@myfairpoint.net 802-229-4737

Sonja Schuyler, sonjapeter@comcast.net 802-899-3657

Claudette Sortino, AASCJS@charter.net. 802-584-4263

In League, *Jean Hopkins*



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Show your pride in the League. Buy one of our great T-shirts! \$15 plus \$3 S&H. E-mail your order to hertzrader@myfairpoint.net.

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Kate Rader, Editor

Membership in the League includes a subscription.
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Help High School Students Learn to Vote!

Sonja Schuyler

The pressing need to teach high school students about voting and elections was brought up during our August retreat in Middlebury. Actual teaching about how to vote seems to be spotty around the state. Members saw working with schools to promote voting as an important role for the League. Masie Wood described a digital media program in use at Castleton University that reminds students to register to vote and then prompts the student to examine candidates and vote on election days. An *ad hoc* group was formed to look at ways the League could work with schools.

Experiences during voter registration events reinforced the need to improve voter education. Kate Rader and Sue Racanelli registered students at Norwich University and were surprised by the number of students who did not know the November election was for more offices than President. Champlain Voices, a self-advocacy group for people with developmental disabilities, identified learning how to vote as one of its goals for the year (see related story). National statistics show that the lowest participation rate for voters is the 18-29 age group. All of these observations indicate a real need to educate young people on the importance of voting and how to do it.

If you are interested in joining this *ad hoc* group, contact Jean Hopkins or any other member of the LWVVT board (p. 2).



SPOTLIGHT ON ISSUES



After a hiatus in our regular programming for election activities, we are going back on schedule with our discussions of issues on community access television:

December – Discussion of Electoral College
(Betty Keller/Paul Gillies)

January – Lake Champlain water quality

February – Money in Politics (analyze Vermont expenditures).

Here are some of the extra programs we have done in the past few months.

Panel on the election process, with Jim Condos, Mark Johnson and Susan Clark:

<http://www.orcamedia.net/show/election-process>

Ann Luther, LWVME, on Money in Politics:

<http://www.orcamedia.net/show/whose-democracy-it-money-politics>

LWVCEN/Kellogg-Hubbard Library panel on Immigrants and Refugees in Vermont:

<http://www.orcamedia.net/show/new-immigrants-refugees>.

We'll keep you posted as new programs are produced.

February 15 is Legislative Day

Do join us at the State House!

The new biennium will be a month old, and we'll know which bills and issues we will be following.

We'll be serving coffee and bagels in the cafeteria, starting at 8:00. This is the best way to connect with

our Legislators, and talk to them about our concerns and positions.

Our goal for February is to double the presence of the League over last year's Legislative Day. Help us do that!

Open Letter to the U.S. Senate: Oppose All Campaign Finance Riders to Funding Bills

By: Sarah Courtney, LWVUS 11/21/2016

Dear Senator:

Our organizations strongly urge you to oppose all campaign finance riders and other “poison pill” riders to any CR or omnibus bill to be considered in the remaining days of this Congress.

Our organizations include the Brennan Center for Justice, Campaign Legal Center, Common Cause, CREW, Democracy 21, Demos, Every Voice, Issue One, League of Women Voters, People For the American Way, Public Citizen, Represent.Us, The Rootstrickers Project at Demand Progress and U.S. PIRG.

Last year, “poison pill” campaign finance riders were enacted in the Omnibus Appropriations bill to prevent the IRS from doing any work on new regulations to govern the political activities of section 501(c)(4) organizations, and to prevent the SEC from issuing any final regulations to require public corporations to disclose their political activities to shareholders. In September 2016, Congress passed a CR that extended the SEC rider.

Unsuccessful efforts also were made last year during the FY 16 Omnibus bill negotiations to add other campaign finance riders. This included riders to do away with the presidential public financing system and checkoff fund, to repeal the long-standing limits on the amounts parties can spend in coordination with their candidates, and to prevent the Obama administration from issuing an executive order requiring government contractors to disclose their political spending.

The presidential public financing system served the American people and presidential candidates well for more than two decades until it became outdated. The system needs to be repaired, and not eliminated as the rider would have done.

The unprecedented role played by the Super Rich and outside spending groups in the 2016 election has made an overwhelming case for providing candidates with incentives to raise small contributions from millions of ordinary Americans. Candidates need an alternative means to finance their presidential campaigns without becoming obligated to big money funders. It is essential to keep the presidential financing system in law to provide the framework for updating and repairing the system in time for the next presidential election.

Similarly, any effort to try to insert last year’s unsuccessful rider to repeal the party coordinated spending limits should be rejected for the same reasons the rider was blocked last year. Additionally, the effort to obtain disclosure by government contractors of their political activities is an effort to prevent pay-to-play efforts from undermining the integrity of the government contractor process. There is a powerful case for issuing this regulation and it should not be blocked by a rider.

The two campaign finance riders currently in the law serve to keep the American people in the dark about hundreds of millions of dollars in secret contributions that have been poured into federal elections. Secret campaign contributions prevent voters and others from holding officeholders and influence-seeking donors accountable for their potentially corrupt practices. These two riders should be rejected and not included in any funding measures passed in the lame duck session.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has a vital role to play in ensuring corporate transparency for share-holders. More than 1.2 million investors and members of the public petitioned the SEC to create a rule requiring uniform corporate political disclosure, the most signers to a petition in agency history. The congressional rider, however, would prevent the SEC from issuing such a regulation. We urge that this rider be dropped. Congress also has blocked the Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service from issuing new regulations regarding the political activities of 501(c) groups. This prevents revised regulations from being issued that would provide nonprofit groups with a clear definition of political activities and would provide increased disclosure of secret money contributions being spent in our elections.

In preventing a rulemaking, Congress is leaving in place a chronically broken IRS definition that allows those willing to game the system to pour millions of dollars of secret contributions into our elections. At the same time, Congress is leaving nonprofit groups without a clear definition of what constitutes political activities, thereby making it difficult for groups to determine the nonpartisan civic activities that are allowable. We urge that this rider be dropped.

Any effort to rewrite the Nation’s campaign finance laws and to restrict related campaign finance measures must be done by regular order and through the legislative process. This should not be done by a back door misuse of the appropriations process.

Poison pill riders have no place in any budget bill. We urge you to oppose any campaign finance riders or other poison pill riders from being included in any funding measures for FY 2017.

Jericho Town Clerk discovers 1920 checklist for Town's first women voters

Jericho Town Clerk Jessica Alexander was going through boxes of old papers when she discovered a folded checklist for the 1920 Primary Election that had only women's names on it. The list was for the September 14th Primary Election.

Looking at the election date, she realized that this was a list of the first women to vote in Jericho. The list appears to be a carbon copy of a typed list. The Checklist for the men in town was printed and had additions hand written on it. Realizing the significance of this document, Jessica took it to document preservation specialists, Kofile Technologies, for restoration. After the list was preserved, she had it photocopied and framed by Jons Darkroom and Frameshop of Essex Junction. The photocopied list now hangs in the Town Offices and the preserved document is held with the historical Town Records.

This checklist provides a look at how the women of Jericho stepped up after ratification of the 19th Amendment on August 18, 1920. The checklist of men had 295 names and the checklist of women had 136 names. Eighty percent of the women voted in the primary election and 76% of the men voted in that election. While I was at the

Town Office, Jessica said "Let's look at the Town Records around that date." Two women took the Freeman's Oath at a meeting of the Board of Civil Authority on September 4th, only seventeen days after ratification. On September 11th, the Board of Civil Authority recorded giving the oath to a long list of voters, most of whom were women. It's clear that the addition of women to the checklist had to be a last minute effort. The list is only typed and the school district designations which appear on the men's list are absent.

Unfortunately, the ratification came too late for these women to vote in the Presidential Primary in May 1920 when the Calvin Coolidge won the local vote for Presidential candidate. The list for the November election showed men and women separately on one list. This practice continued into the 1950's.

Does your Town have the 1920 Primary Election checklist? Wouldn't it be great if these lists of the first women voters could be located and collected for the 100 Anniversary of Women's Suffrage in 2020.

Sonja Schuyler, Jericho



*Jessica Alexander, Jericho Town Clerk holding mounted copy of 1920 Women's Checklist
Original checklists in foreground – women on left, men on right*

Champlain Voices Voter Registration Drive and Mock Election

Sonja Schuyler

Champlain Voices held a very successful voter registration drive and mock election with help from the Champlain Valley League of Women Voters. The voter registration drive started on September 27th, National Voter Registration Day. Voices members manned a voter registration table at Champlain Community Services during the lunch hour each day that week. Voices members



and Champlain Community Services staff publicized the event to other businesses and agencies near them at Fort Ethan Allen. The kick-off day was a celebration, and Nicole Villemaire, Interim President of Champlain Voices made an excellent speech

about the importance of voting. The Voices registered 25 people during their drive, and several more during the Mock Election.



Kickoff L-R: Nicole Villemaire, Pres. Champlain Voices; Elizabeth Sightler, Executive Director, Champlain Community Services; Sonja Schuyler, Champlain Valley League of Women Voters; Emily Anderson, Advocacy Facilitator, Champlain Community Services

Two Mock Election sessions were held on October 3rd, one in the morning for high school students in the Bridge Program and one in the afternoon for the Champlain Voices members. League members Lea Terhune, Jean Hopkins, Ann Earle, Irene Wrenner, and Sonja Schuyler worked at the "polls" for the Mock Election. Colchester Town Clerk, Karen Richard, loaned the Voting Booths. Bridge and Champlain Voices members received training in voting from Disability Rights Vermont and Green Mountain Self-Advocates for an hour preceding the mock



Voter Training: L-R Ed Paquin, Disability Rights Vermont; Sonja Schuyler, Lea Terhune, Ann Earle, Champlain Valley League of Women Voters

election. Green Mountain Self-Advocates (www.gmsavt.org/) has prepared an excellent voter training lesson suited for people with developmental disabilities (<http://www.disabilityrightsvt.org>). Disability Rights Director, Ed Paquin, emphasized the importance for them to exercise their right to vote.

Champlain Voices is a self-advocacy group made up of people with developmental disabilities and autism that is facilitated by Emily Anderson of Champlain Community Services. Champlain Community Services is the non-profit agency in Chittenden County that prepares these people with disabilities for work and supports them for work and independent living. (ccs-vt.org/) The

Bridge Program is for high school students with these disabilities who will be transitioning from public school to work, and is also facilitated by Emily.



Mock election

Champlain Voices had made a voter registration drive and mock election one of their goals for 2016. Emily linked up with the League at the Women’s Economic Opportunity Conference this spring and contacted us for help with this project. Sonja Schuyler met with Emily and the Champlain Voices several times to plan for this event. Voices members were very interested in this project and in learning how to vote. They were following the election campaigns and many had formed decided opinions on the candidates! We were all pleased with the success of this event.

**Coming up on the
LWVCEN/Kellogg-Hubbard Library series:**

January 12 – Future of Health Care in Vermont?

March 9 – Privacy

May 11 – Threats to the First Amendment
(tentative)

Cont. from p. 1

The passage of time creates a need for change. If the Constitution were being written today it is much less likely that an Electoral College would be in the mix. Go back 230 years and we see the need. Look at today’s technology and we don’t. As a matter of fact, the inclusion of an Electoral College in the Constitution has proven in modern times to be more of a burden toward doing it right. But making change is difficult and was designed that way for good reason. The document has served us well for over 200 years. While there have been a few instances where we’ve needed to change the bathwater, the baby continues to grow both in strength and good health.

The League’s Position, as Announced by National Board, January 1970, Revised March 1982, Updated June 2004 and Revised by the 2010 Convention:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the direct-popular-vote method for electing the President and Vice-President is essential to representative government. The League of Women Voters believes, therefore, that the Electoral College should be abolished. We support the use of the National Popular Vote Compact as one acceptable way to achieve the goal of the direct popular vote for election of the president until the abolition of the Electoral College is accomplished.

The League also supports uniform voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. The League supports changes in the presidential election system – from the candidate selection process to the general election. We support efforts to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates and their positions, public policy issues and the selection process itself. The League supports action to ensure that the media, political parties, candidates, and all levels of government achieve these goals and provide that inform

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