



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF NEW ORLEANS
LEAGUE ESSENTIALS**

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Winter, 2009

LWVUS STUDY: NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE COMPACT

LWVNO GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS SCHEDULED

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31-- 10:00 am
Parker Memorial United Methodist Church
Common Room
1130 Nashville Ave.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF PROS AND CONS

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28--10:00 am
Parker Memorial United Methodist Church
Common Room
1130 Nashville Ave.

DISCUSSION AND CONSENSUS QUESTIONS

Participate in this grassroots study to determine the LWV position for action. In June, delegates to the LWVUS Convention 2008 in Portland, Oregon, adopted a fast-track study of the National Popular Vote (NPV) Compact among the states as a method for selecting the U.S. President. The current League position supports abolishment of the Electoral College and the direct popular vote method for electing the president, which would require a constitutional amendment that has been difficult to achieve. In the past 200 years, over 700 proposals have been made to Congress to amend the Constitution.

Under the NPV Compact, all of the electoral votes of each member state would go to the presidential candidate receiving the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This interstate compact would not go into effect until enough states have joined to guarantee the 270 electoral votes required to elect a president.

**READ MORE IN THE BACKGROUND PAPER AND JOIN THIS LIVELY
EXCHANGE.**

Letter from the President

The New Year, 2009, brings new challenges for all of us. On January 20th, our country's new president, Barack Obama, and the 111th Congress will be sworn in. New congressional representatives, senators, and state and local officials will take office. LWVNO has been planning for the New Year as well. Our recent planning session focused on education and health care, and we realized that we had not scheduled any general membership meetings on these topics.

LWVUS has announced its forthcoming study on the Electoral College and alternatives to it. For LWVNO, this is a great opportunity to discuss the recent elections and our members' experiences as poll workers, poll commissioners, election totals volunteers, and election debate and forum coordinators.

We're also looking for people interested in serving on the Board beginning in June, 2009.

Wendy King

Our Gratitude

Special thanks to the election volunteers. We made \$1250 for the October elections and \$500 for Dec. 6. From contributions and book sales at the Holiday Party, we netted \$323. Again - thank you to Phil and Jean Fischer who arranged the party and contributed the rental amount to the LWVUS Ed Fund. Thanks also to Joan Francis Smith who was the party chair. 55 members and guests attended and enjoyed hearing Dr. Martha Ward speak about her book "Voodoo Queens, the Spirited Lives of Marie Laveau". The view of the city and river were spectacular. Many thanks to all who contributed food and labor to make it a success

Food for Thought:

"You possess only whatever will not be lost in a shipwreck."
El-Ghazali

Education Update

By Dr. Ann Meese,
Education Committee Chair, 218-8985, ameese@cox.net

Charter schools will soon outnumber schools run by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) and the Recovery School Board (RSD). In the December 4, 2008 Times Picayune, the State Board of Education Committee recommended to the full state board the formation of eight new charter schools for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. Four charters would operate the lower grades of existing low performing non-charter schools (listed in the December 22, 2008 Times Picayune). The others would focus on upper elementary grades and new high school programs.

A number of critics believe that more charters will not improve conditions for children in the public school. Angela Daliet, president of Save Our Schools NOLA, believes that this “waters down accountability and public ownership—the very foundation of public education. School leaders are taking a risk with our students by investing in an unproven model,” (Times Picayune, 12/22/2008, A-7).

Some parents are criticizing special education evaluation and placement in charter schools. Others are citing unfair discipline procedures. The December 12, 2008 Times Picayune described the plight of 16-year-old Robert Starks, a student at the New Orleans Charter Science and Math Academy, who is still waiting to find out if he is expelled for disruptive behavior. There is no common expulsion policy.

The Tulane University Cowen Institute recently published an overview and analysis of 2008 school performance scores for New Orleans. Schools, both charter and non-charter in OPSB, performed at a higher level than the RSD schools. However, the state took over these schools because they were scoring under the 60.0 cutoff for unacceptable academic performance. These schools also serve higher proportions of low-income families. In addition, they are open access by law whereas a good number of OPSB schools have some form of academic criteria for admission.

Several other factors were mentioned that might affect performance differences. Many RSD schools were more likely to take in mid-year transfer students who often affect classroom and school culture in a disruptive way. The other unmeasured contributor was related to school quality. Teachers and parents marked the RSD charters higher than the other RSD schools.

The School Master Facilities Plan and the partnership required of the OPSB, the RSD, and the State Board of Education to finance these plans will also require monitoring in the months and years to come.

Health Care Community Discussion

By Anne Redelfs

The LWV Healthcare Committee engaged in a lively discussion on December 29th in response to President-elect Obama's challenge to American citizens. The group decided that the biggest problem with health care in the U.S. is the enormous number of uninsured or underinsured and therefore a lack of access to care for many Americans. A doctor may save your life in an emergency, but then that's as far as the treatment goes. Participant Peg, a housewife and mother, talked about insurance only covering two days in the hospital after a church member was violently mugged. Elderly counselor, Sylvia, mentioned that the elderly are often sent home from hospitals because their insurance companies insist upon it. These seniors frequently become depressed or their condition deteriorates as a result, or an aging spouse is put in the difficult position of caring for them.

There is a general lack of **quality healthcare** (the body is treated like a machine rather than a holistic human organism where all parts are in relationship). Retired M.D, Anne, spoke about how poor the food is in so many hospitals – patients cannot regain their strength with food of such low nutritional content. Sylvia talked about patients who were physically unable to feed themselves (both arms broken) not being spoon-fed by medical staff. In other words, vital needs of patients are NOT addressed. Medicine is often practiced in a defensive manner – minimizing the possibility of a malpractice suit (doing lots of testing particularly with expensive technology), rather than practicing the ART of medicine - maximizing the patients' health and well-being at minimal expense. Committee chair, Flora, a retired nurse, spoke about times in the past where doctors knew their patients and their families – they had a personal relationship. Doctors interviewed their patients on the phone and dialed in prescriptions if the sick didn't want to go to the clinic or office. Doctors also made house calls. She told a personal story of falling on the stairs and calling the doctor. He prescribed pain medicine and muscle relaxants and scheduled an appointment with an orthopedist just from the phone conversation.

Participants felt healthcare should be **NEEDS-driven/evidence-based** and not profit-driven. Doctors should listen to their patients at length, so the human being can be known and assessed and treated this knowledge. The medical system should also **support the doctors' health** - reasonable working hours without stressful restrictions on time spent with each patient. **Incentives should shift** so that doctors who keep their patients healthy are rewarded.

Cost is another big problem in health care – the amount some people pay in insurance premiums could cover monthly care by skilled healers that might actually minimize the risk of illness. The group supported **universal health care**. If excessive administration or **middlemen** were **eliminated** from the system (money goes directly from treasurer or patient to provider), there would be less cost to the patient. We were also in favor of a **single payer system** like the existing Medicare system but open to everyone. We felt **more information** should be disseminated on health reform, like the experiences citizens in countries where national health is a great success.

There were multiple stories exchanged of friends visiting countries with National Health Insurance when they had an accident or sudden illness, and they were beautifully cared for with minimal cost. Group members also gave examples of insurance companies and Medicare not covering cutting edge, experimental or off label treatments that have potentially life-enhancing results, like retaining one's sight. We also spoke about the **psychological components** of physical illness that are often not mentioned by doctors or not covered by insurance companies.

Attendees felt **prevention** and **health promotion** are a priority. Public policy can promote healthier lifestyles by teaching, starting in schools, all people to care for their own health (healthy foods, exercise, rest, psychological nutrition and exercise, environmental clean-up, etc.) – **empowering people in self-care**. Focus would then be redirected from illness management, money management or symptom control to health and healing. Perhaps tax credits could be given to anyone who follows stress reduction or prevention programs. We also discussed the need for patients to be informed of ALL treatment options and statistics about each, including alternative treatments. Effective **alternative methods of healing** should also be promoted, offered by doctors as viable treatment options and paid for by insurance, as they may be gentler, safer and cheaper than many mainstream protocols.

Background for the National Popular Vote Compact

The League has a long-standing position in support of the 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. The NPV Compact would avoid the need for a constitutional amendment abolishing the Electoral College (EC) and would assure that the individual receiving the most votes would become president.

The NPV Compact proposal uses the mechanism of the EC. States that legislatively enact the NPV Compact would agree that their state electors would vote for the individual that received the most votes nationwide. Thus, the popular vote count from all 50 states and the District of Columbia would be added together. State elections officials in all states participating 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 EC 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.

The plan includes procedural provisions to help assure smooth functioning of the agreement – conditions that deal with states deciding to withdraw from the Compact at the last moment, enforcement issues and recounts.

Currently four states have passed legislation to enact the NPV Compact.

There are pros and cons to this plan, which are discussed in full in papers found on the LWVUS Web site. Summaries of these papers are also available. League members can learn more about the plan from these sources and consider its ramifications at consensus meetings across the country. Be sure to participate! Who better than the League to be ready to speak to this good-government issue?

To prepare for the consensus meeting, please read the complete version of this paper (available at www.lwv.org) by the LWVUS National Popular Voter Compact Study Committee.

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Linda Walker

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On the Light Side

If lawyers are disbarred and clergymen defrocked, doesn't it follow that electricians can be delighted, musicians denoted, cowboys deranged, models deposed and dry cleaners depressed? Laundry workers could decrease, eventually becoming depressed and depleted! Even more, bed makers will be debunked, baseball players will be debased, landscapers will be deflowered, bulldozer operators will be degraded, software engineers will be detested, and even musical composers will eventually decompose.

Wetland Restoration

The League is starting a new committee to study the Louisiana coast and what can be done to restore our disappearing wetlands. If you are interested in being involved, please contact Francine Giugno (324-5950) or the League office (581-9106).