

# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

# NEWSLETTER

Mansfield, Connecticut

February 2009

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## **League Boards and Committees**

The nominating committee is seeking League members to fill positions on the LWV Board of Directors, appointed positions and committees. Out slate is filling up, but we encourage members who are interested in being active in League leadership to put their name up for consideration. The slate of candidates will be voted on at the annual meeting in May. If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors or a committee, please call:

Cindy Weiss at 429-4015, Laura Katz-Smith, Nominating Chairperson at 429-8735, Shamim Patwa at 429-4321, Anne Smith at 429-0529 or Jean McCarthy at 487-0305.

This year the League will coordinate its Know Your Town Fair on Sept. 12 with the Downtown Partnership's Festival on the Green on Sept. 13. We have lots of exciting plans and are looking for additional members to add to the Know Your Town Fair Committee, whose members so far are:

Lisa Peterson-Blinn – Current board member has volunteered to lead the committee

Ann Kouatly – Past co-chair and current board member

Carol McMillan – Current board member

Becky Lehmann – resource person and current board member

## **The National Popular Vote Compact**

The League has two events upcoming (see events listing, later in this newsletter) that will consider the National Popular Vote Compact, an alternative to the Electoral College for electing the President of the U.S. To help prepare the membership to vote on this issue, the following pros and cons and background from the LWVUS are offered.

## Support for the National Popular Vote Compact

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

Constitutional Issues 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 same goal as amending the Constitution to eliminate the EC.

A constitutional amendment is not needed to effectuate the NPV Compact because states already have the right to implement changes in how electors are appointed.

The NPV Compact is a compact between states – a method of concerted state action that has long been sanctioned by the Constitution and the courts.

Evaluating Fairness A candidate can be elected president by receiving the most electoral votes even though he or she did not receive the most popular votes. This is not a result voters expect or desire. As election campaigns are now waged, major emphasis and resources are concentrated in key EC battleground states because that is where elections are won or lost. The NPV Compact would eliminate the emphasis on battleground states and would be more apt to assure campaign strategies that appeal to a broad spectrum of the electorate which would foster greater voter participation.

The argument that the plan would negatively impact states' rights is countered by poll results showing that most voters want their individual vote to count, rather than allotting them to electors representing the state as a whole.

Any claim that the NPV Compact is an unprecedented disregard for the U.S. Constitution ignores the reality that voting

rights have been changed through state action many times. Women's suffrage, for example, was instituted by twenty states before passage of the constitutional amendment that made the right universal.

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

Other Issues The Voting Rights Act and the NPV Compact are in harmony, assuring equality of votes throughout the United States.

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. 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, such as the Equal Rights Amendment. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that uniform voting standards are not now in effect. The NPV Compact could help assure that every vote would be counted equally.

Further, implementation of a method which assures direct election of the president by popular vote is in keeping with the League's long-held position.

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

## Opposition to the National Popular Vote Compact

There is little respect for the Electoral College (EC). The League opposes it and most voters want a direct popular vote. But is the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV Compact) an appropriate way to achieve that result?

Evaluating Fairness 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 some voters are disenfranchised by the EC, others might be disenfranchised by the NPV Compact. Because the Compact requires entry into a contract with other states which 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.

In addition, one can question the advisability of a method that bypasses the normal constitutional amendment process in this manner.

Constitutional Issues Many constitutional scholars argue that this plan will lead to extensive litigation involving challenges to the NPV Compact on issues such as the scope of constitutional powers, the Compact itself, the need for congressional approval, the concerns of non-compacting states, and constitutional protections of state interests and their role in elections.

Mechanical Issues/Flaws The methods for enforcement of this plan are unclear. Opponents question the power and timing to

withdraw from the Compact and the power to enforce compliance.

Others express concern about an onslaught of lawsuits between compacting and non-compacting states, as well as procedures in close elections.

The plan, allowing the election of a president by a plurality of votes, does not improve on the current system; neither the present system nor the NPV Compact requires that the president be elected by a majority.

Other Issues The Voting Rights Act requires pre-clearance for legislative changes. This, too, has the capacity to engender lawsuits to ensure compliance.

League Issues This proposal does nothing to achieve the goal of uniform standards of voting. The NPV Compact is effective when passed by states representing 270 electoral votes, effectively negating the impact on presidential elections of the voters in states which represent the other half of electoral votes. A system which assures no voter disenfranchisement is a better way to assure that every person's vote counts.

The League has long supported the abolition of the EC. Although the NPV Compact purports to foster the same result, it creates additional concerns. Amending the U.S. Constitution is a difficult process, and we should seriously consider supporting the normal amendment procedures to abolish the EC versus this specific "work-around."

**To prepare for the consensus meeting, please read the complete version of this paper (available at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)) by the LWWUS National Popular Voter Compact Study Committee.**

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## **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](http://www.lwv.org)) by the LWVUS National Popular Voter Compact Study Committee.**

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## Legislative Breakfast

Nearly 100 people came to our Legislative Breakfast on Jan. 31. Two state representatives from our area, Joan A. Lewis (Coventry, Columbia, and Vernon) and Susan M. Johnson (Windham) and Senate President Donald E. Williams, Jr., representing eight towns in eastern Connecticut, talked about their priorities for this session of the state legislature.

Williams said the economy presents the state's leaders with a "menu of terrible choices." This is a time to make state government more efficient, he said. Connecticut's political division into 169 town governments was an efficient model in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our state is one of only four or five states in the country that don't have some form of regionalization, he pointed out.

"We ought to use this economy as an opportunity to change that dynamic and help preserve the character of our state," he said.

He also urged protecting the current level of state bonding: "It's the only tool left if we cut on the spending side." Bonding could be used for biotechnology and public transportation projects to put people back to work and help the future state economy grow, he said.

Joan Lewis said that education has to be a priority. She is serving on a "smart growth" working group that is looking at regionalization and tax reform measures, such as regionalization of tax benefits from business developments. She is also part of a dairy farm support group that is looking at funding streams to help the state's dairy farms.

Freshman legislator Susan Johnson, who sits on the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee, said she wants to make the income tax more progressive. She is also on the Energy Committee and supports having a secretary of energy for Connecticut. She has submitted a bill to create a trust fund for towns that provide fire services to state institutions so that they can buy pumper and aerial fire trucks. Willimantic, one of the poorest towns in the state, provides all fire services to Eastern Connecticut State University, she noted.

Thanks to Sondra Astor Stave, moderator and organizer of the breakfast, and Peter Millman, who assisted this year. And many thanks for the wonderful homemade rolls, jams, and breakfast service provided by First Church!

## MEMBERSHIP

We are pleased to welcome these new members whose names you will find on the new rosters. Maria Capriola, 57 Serwan Avenue, Willimantic; 429-3336; [maria.capriola@mansfieldct.org](mailto:maria.capriola@mansfieldct.org)  
Jo Fox, 34 Westgate Lane, Storrs, 429-0424, [Jo.fox@att.net](mailto:Jo.fox@att.net)  
Joan Prugh, 83 Charles Lane, Storrs, 487-3517, B: 450-9789, [joanprugh@gmail.com](mailto:joanprugh@gmail.com)  
Laura Tordenti, 3 East Road, Storrs, 429-6182, B: 860-832-1608, [tordentilau@ccsu.edu](mailto:tordentilau@ccsu.edu)  
Also, I must apologize to Denise Burchsted, whose e-mail address I misspelled; it will be correct on the new roster ([swampmama@ctgaia.net](mailto:swampmama@ctgaia.net))  
I must reiterate that I really want you all to give me new names of anyone you think might be interested in knowing more about the League! -  
Anne Smith, Membership (429-0529, [anneksmith@charter.net](mailto:anneksmith@charter.net))

## OUR LEAGUE'S HISTORICAL MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE AT THE DODD CENTER

Organization of the MLWV's historical materials at UConn's Dodd Center is complete! Now any member of the MLWV (or the public) may peruse the collection -- e.g. newsletters, Board minutes, study materials, Voter Service materials -- at the Dodd Center (call 486-2524 for hours). A search for general or specific items begins with consulting the table of contents to the collection, known as a Finding Aid. This is available online from the comfort of your home or the Dodd Center:

<http://doddcenter.uconn.edu/findaids/mlwv/MSS20050159.html>

Questions? Call or email Becky Lehmann (423-5807; [slehmann@snet.net](mailto:slehmann@snet.net)).

## Mansfield's Blueprint for Children Will be Noon Meeting Topic

Sandra Baxter, Mansfield School Readiness Coordinator, will be the speaker at the next L WV noon meeting on February 26 at Angellino's in the Big Y Plaza. Sandy will tell us about the ongoing development of a blueprint for Mansfield's youngest citizens. Since late summer a group consisting of representatives from area community service providers, parents and interested Mansfield residents has been engaged in a process designed to establish a comprehensive plan to ensure that Mansfield's children birth to eight are supported and achieve positive outcomes in the areas of early care and education, health and well being, and family supports. The work is funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education's Early Childhood Education Cabinet and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Foundation. Please join us on February 26th to learn more.

## CALENDAR

### February

February 23, 2009, (Mon) 7:00 p.m., Board Meeting, Employee Lounge, Audrey Beck Building.

February 26, 2009, 12:00 p.m., LWV Noon Meeting, Angellino's Restaurant in the Big Y Shopping Plaza. Sandy Baxter will talk to us about Mansfield Advocates for Children.

### March

March 19, 2009, 7:00 p.m. Buchanan Center. Howard Reiter, professor of political science at UConn and an expert in American electoral politics, will speak about the Electoral College and the National Popular Vote movement.

### April

April 16, 2009, 12:00 p.m., LWV Noon Meeting, Angellino's. We will meet and reach a census on the LWV's study of the National Popular Vote.

April 29, 2009, 7 p.m., Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building in Mansfield, Town Council Chambers. The League will sponsor a presentation on the Storrs Center project in 2009. The Mansfield Downtown Partnership, LeylandAlliance, and town officials will give a complete update on the project and will take questions from the audience. The focus of the presentation will be on the current status and plans for the project. Stay posted for more details.

### May

May 19, 2009 (Tues) 5:30 p.m. Annual Meeting LWV, First Church, Mansfield Center (Rt. 195 at Rt. 89) Region 19 Supt. Bruce Silva will speak on the K-12 school regionalization proposal. Save the date now for dinner, a short business meeting to elect new officers and pass a budget, and Supt. Silva's talk with Q and A.

The League of Women Voters of Mansfield web page address is  
**<http://www.lwvct.org/lwvmansfield>**

Communications to the **Mansfield LWV** can be emailed to  
**[lwvmansfield@lwvct.org](mailto:lwvmansfield@lwvct.org)**

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**POSTMASTER: DATED MATERIAL**



For more information about items in this newsletter or about membership in the LWV, please contact President Cindy Weiss (429-4015; e-mail: [lweiss2007@charter.net](mailto:lweiss2007@charter.net)), or Membership Chair Anne Smith (429-0529; e-mail: [anneksmith@charter.net](mailto:anneksmith@charter.net)). Membership is open to both men and women. Dues are \$45 per year and should be sent to Anne Smith, 156 Hillyndale Road, Storrs, CT 06268. Lisa Peterson-Blinn, Newsletter Editor (377-6132), e-mail: [lisajpb@gmail.com](mailto:lisajpb@gmail.com)).