



March 2009 Stillwater Voter

Gladeen Allred-Struthers,
Acting President

A Publication of Stillwater, Oklahoma,
League of Women Voters

Marlee Pierce, Editor
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This newsletter is supported by member dues. Complimentary copies are provided to interested parties. If you are interested in joining the League, please contact Gladeen Allred-Struthers at 372-7238.

SLWV Calendar

Mon., March 9, 7:00 p.m. — Book discussion group: *Finding My Voice* by Diane Rehm.

Leader: Margaret Ewing
Location: Trish Emig's home, 2724 N. Monroe.

Tues., March 10, 11:30 — Hunan Restaurant, 702 East Sixth Avenue. *Freedom of Information Committee and Sunshine Week*. Speaker: Joey Senat, Professor, OSU Department of Journalism. (Program will start at 12:00) (Contact Person: Pat Jaynes)

March 15–21 — Sunshine Week ! Sunshine Week is a national initiative to open a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information. (Contact Person: Pat Jaynes)

Thurs., March 19, 7:00 p.m. — SLWV Board meeting at the Stillwater Public Library, meeting room 138. All members are welcome to attend. (Contact Person: Gladeen Allred-Struthers)

Tues., March 24, 11:30 — Perkins Restaurant. Consensus Meeting, National Popular Vote Compact for the Direct Election of the US President (Contact Person: Karen Melcher)

Tues., April 7 — Stillwater Mayoral Election.

Mon., April 13, 7:00 p.m. — Book discussion group: *The Double Bind* by Chris Bohjalian.

Tues., April 14, 11:30 — Hunan Restaurant, 702 East Sixth Avenue. *Results of the Health Care Study*.

Thurs., April 23, 6:00 p.m. — Highland Park United Methodist Church, 524 North Stallard. LWVStillwater Annual Meeting.

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Sunshine Week is Coming March 15-21!

Sunshine Week is a national initiative to open a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information. Participants include print, broadcast and online news media, civic groups, libraries, nonprofits, schools, and others interested in the public's right to know. Sunshine Week is led by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Though spearheaded by journalists, Sunshine Week is about the public's right to know what its government is doing, and why. Sunshine Week seeks to enlighten and empower people to play an active role in their government at all levels, and to give them access to information that makes their lives better and their communities stronger. Sunshine Week is a non-partisan initiative whose supporters are conservatives, liberal and everything in between.

Joey Senat Speaks on Freedom of Information (FOI) and Sunshine Week

"As the Oklahoma Constitution recognizes and guarantees, all political power is inherent in the people. Thus, it is the public policy of the State of Oklahoma that the people are vested with the inherent right to know and be fully informed about their government." Oklahoma Open Records Act

We are fortunate to have Joey Senat as a speaker on March 10 to tell the LWV more about the FOI committee and Sunshine Week. He is a member of the OSU Journalism Dept. He received his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina in 2000. He was the OSU Outstanding Professor of Arts and Science in 1999-2000. In 2007 he was awarded the First Amendment Award from FOI. The titles of his classes give you some idea of his expertise: Mass Communication Law, Public Affairs Reporting, Law and Ethics for Advertising and Public Relations, and Censorship. We look forward to his presentation and hearing more about FOI and Sunshine Week.

—Pat Jaynes

Consensus Meeting March 24: National Popular Vote Compact for the Direct Election of the US President

The LWV Stillwater will meet at noon Tuesday March 24 at Perkins Restaurant to discuss and reach a consensus on the National Popular Vote (NPV) Compact. Delegates at LWVUS Convention 2008 voted to study the advisability of using the NPV Compact among the states as a method for electing the U.S. President. Please read the information in this Voter on the compact. More can be found on the League web site <http://www.lwv.org/NPV>. The web site gives detailed information both for and against NPV as well as a suggested reading list. If you want to read this information and cannot access it call Kirsten Tautfest, 743-2337, or Karen Melcher, 377-3602, and they will send it to you.

Kirsten presented background information about the National Popular Vote (NPV) at a meeting last fall. The committee hopes that that information along with the information in this Voter will prepare you to discuss and reach a consensus to be sent on to LWVUS. You can also find additional information on the internet.

LWVUS will look at the replies to the consensus questions from all the Leagues and write the LWVUS consensus from these responses. This consensus will either support or reject the NPV as a way to achieve the direct election of the President.

—Karen Melcher

The National Popular Vote Contract

Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by Nationwide Popular Vote

Article I - Membership

Any state of the United States and the District of Columbia may become a member of this agreement by enacting this agreement.

Article II – Right of the People in Member States to Vote for President and Vice President

Each member state shall conduct a statewide popular election for President and Vice President of the United States

Article III – Manner of Appointing Presidential Electors in Member States

Prior to the time set by law for the meeting and voting by the presidential electors, the chief election official of each member state shall determine the number of votes for each presidential slate in each State of the United States and in the District of Columbia in which votes have been cast in a statewide popular election and shall add such votes together to produce a "national popular vote total" for each presidential slate.

The chief election official of each member state shall designate the presidential slate with the largest national popular vote total as the "national popular vote winner."

The presidential elector certifying official of each member state shall certify the appointment in that official's own state of the elector slate nominated in that state in association with the national popular vote winner.

At least six days before the day fixed by law for the meeting and voting by the presidential electors, each member state shall make a final determination of the number of popular votes cast in the state for each presidential slate and shall communicate an official statement of such determination within 24 hours to the chief election official of each other member state.

The chief election official of each member state shall treat as conclusive an official statement containing the number of popular votes in a state for each presidential slate made by the day established by federal law for making a state's final determination conclusive as to the counting of electoral votes by Congress.

In event of a tie for the national popular vote winner, the presidential elector certifying official of each member state shall certify the appointment of the elector slate nominated in association with the presidential slate receiving the largest number of popular votes within that official's own state. If, for any reason, the number of presidential electors nominated in a member state in association with the national popular vote winner is less than or greater than that state's number of electoral votes, the presidential candidate on the presidential slate that has been designated as the national popular vote winner shall have the power to nominate the presidential electors for that state and that state's presidential elector certifying official shall certify the appointment of such nominees. The chief election official of each member state shall immediately release to the public all vote counts or statements of votes as they are determined or obtained.

This article shall govern the appointment of presidential electors in each member state in any year in which this agreement is, on July 20, in effect in states cumulatively possessing a majority of the electoral votes.

Article IV – Other Provisions

This agreement shall take effect when states cumulatively possessing a majority of the electoral votes have enacted this agreement in substantially the same form and the enactments by such states have taken effect in each state.

Any member state may withdraw from this agreement, except that a withdrawal occurring six months or less before the end of a President's term shall not become effective until a President or Vice President shall have been qualified to serve the next term. The chief executive of each member state shall promptly notify the chief executive of all other states of when this agreement has been enacted and has taken effect in that official's state, when the state has withdrawn from this agreement, and when this agreement takes effect generally.

This agreement shall terminate if the electoral college is abolished.

If any provision of this agreement is held invalid, the remaining provisions shall not be affected.

Article V – Definitions

For purposes of this agreement,

"chief executive" shall mean the Governor of a State of the United States or the Mayor of the District of Columbia;

"elector slate" shall mean a slate of candidates who have been nominated in a state for the position of presidential elector in association with a presidential slate;

"chief election official" shall mean the state official or body that is authorized to certify the total number of popular votes for each presidential slate;

"presidential elector" shall mean an elector for President and Vice President of the United States;

"presidential elector certifying official" shall mean the state official or body that is authorized to certify the appointment of the state's presidential electors;

"presidential slate" shall mean a slate of two persons, the first of whom has been nominated as a candidate for President of the United States and the second of whom has been nominated as a candidate for Vice President of the United States, or any legal successors to such persons, regardless of whether both names appear on the ballot presented to the voter in a particular state;

"state" shall mean a State of the United States and the District of Columbia; and

"statewide popular election" shall mean a general election in which votes are cast for presidential slates by individual voters and counted on a statewide basis.

National Popular Vote Compact: Consensus Questions

Amending the Constitution

1. Which statement best reflects the consensus of the group? Select one.

- a. Action to alter a basic element of the Constitutional framework, which is achievable by amendment to the Constitution, should be accomplished by amendment to the Constitution.
- b. Action by states through a compact process is an acceptable way to alter the method for electing the President and Vice-President.
- c. The group could not reach consensus.

2. Which statement best reflects the consensus of the group? Select one.

- a. Because a compact has never before been used to address a fundamental constitutional issue such as voting, the chance that it might set a precedent for the future leads to the conclusion that it is better that the League continue to work for an amendment to the Constitution to establish the direct popular election of the President and the abolition of the Electoral College.
- b. Despite the novelty of the use of the compact approach to address a fundamental constitutional issue such as voting, the League should support the NPV Compact as a way of achieving an important goal.
- c. The group could not reach consensus.

Congressional Consent

3. Which statement best reflects the consensus of the group? Select one.

- a. The possibility that the NPV Compact will require congressional consent is not of sufficient concern to block the implementation of the plan.
- b. The possibility that the NPV Compact will require congressional consent is sufficient to conclude that the plan should not be implemented without obtaining such consent.
- c. The group could not reach consensus.

Enforcement

4. Which statement best reflects the consensus of the group? Select one.

- a. The NPV Compact contains sufficient enforcement provisions to assure smooth operation of the plan.
- b. Although it is not possible to determine whether the enforcement provisions will be sufficient to assure smooth operation of the plan, the plan should be passed anyway.
- c. Enforcement of the plan is likely to add uncertainty and bring the courts into the presidential election in ways that raise substantial concerns.
- d. The lack of adequate enforcement provisions is sufficient to conclude that the NPV is not a viable plan.
- e. The group could not reach consensus.

Uniformity

5. Which statement best reflects the consensus of the group? Select one.

- a. The uniformity of voting systems is more important to American democracy than the possibility that the NPV Compact can be adopted.
- b. The NPV Compact is more important than uniformity of voting systems because it would succeed in achieving the popular election of the President.
- c. The group could not reach consensus.

Popular Election of the President

6. Which statement best reflects the consensus of the group? Select one.

- a. It is more important to achieve the goal of national popular election of the President than it is to achieve the goal of abolition of the electoral college.
- b. It is more important to amend the Constitution to abolish the Electoral College than it is to achieve the goal of popular election of the President by alternative methods, such as the NPV Compact.
- c. The group could not reach consensus.

Achievability

7. Which statements reflect the views of the group?

- a. The NPV Compact will have problems being passed because of the need for congressional consideration and the need for action by so many states: Agree Disagree No Consensus
- b. A constitutional amendment to establish the direct popular election of the President and the abolition of the Electoral College will continue to have problems being passed: Agree Disagree No Consensus

LWVUS Study on the National Popular Vote Compact: Background Paper

**Portions of this background paper are from the LWVUS Impact on Issues, 2006-2008*

Selection of the President

The League's History

A League study of the presidential electoral process culminated in its 1970 position supporting direct election of the President by popular vote as an essential element of representative government. The League also has supported national voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections to ensure equity for voters from all states and to facilitate the electoral process.

At the 2002 Convention, the League voted to expand and update its position. The League came to concurrence on a new position in June 2004. The new position takes into account the entire presidential selection process and supports a process that produces the best possible candidates, informed voters and optimum voter participation.

At the 2008 Convention, the delegates voted to adopt a new study, "The Advisability of Using the National Popular Vote Compact among the States as a Method for Electing the President."

The League's Position

Statement of Position on Selection of the President, as Announced by the National Board, January 1970, Revised March 1982 and Updated June 2004:

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. 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 information.

Explanation of the Position

The League strongly believes that the Electoral College should be abolished and not merely "reformed." One "reform" which the League specifically rejects is the voting by electors based on proportional representation in lieu of the present "winner-takes-all" method. Such a system would apportion the electoral votes of a state based on the popular vote in that state. Instead of making the Electoral College more representative, such proportional voting would increase the chance that no candidate would receive a majority in the Electoral College, thereby sending the election of the President to the House of Representatives where each state, regardless of population, would receive only one vote. Election of the President by the House further removes the decision from the people and is contrary to the "one person, one vote" principle. The League also does not support reform of the Electoral College on a state-by-state basis because the League believes there should be uniformity across the nation in the systems used to elect the President.

The Electoral College - A Review

Although the LWVUS has specifically adopted a position calling for the abolition of the Electoral College, a short review of the mechanics of that system of Selection of the President is helpful to an understanding of the National Popular Vote Compact.

The Electoral College is a process established by the founding fathers as a compromise between election of the President by Congress and election by popular vote. In short, the people of the United States [vote for electors](#) who then vote for the President and Vice President.

Each state is entitled to a number of presidential electors equal to its total representation in the House and Senate. The District of Columbia is awarded a number of electors equal to that of the least populous state.

The founding fathers designed this constitutional plan to promote several principles they considered important. One goal was to ensure that smaller states had a role in the election of the President. Secondly, the emphasis on the power of the state as contrasted to the power of the individual voter fostered the principles of federalism which are the core of the governmental process. Finally, the use of electors rather than popular vote assuaged concerns that the electorate was not competent or knowledgeable enough to be entrusted with the direct election of important government officials, such as the President and Vice President.

The electors are selected, according to the Constitution, in the "manner" designated by the state's "legislature" (the Congress in the case of the District). At present, the "manner" chosen by every state is by popular election. Most of the states (and the District of Columbia) use a winner-take-all system, in which the candidate who receives a majority of the vote, or a plurality of the popular vote (less than 50 percent but more than any other candidate) takes all of the State's electoral votes. In Maine and Nebraska, the winner of the popular vote in each congressional district wins an elector, and the remaining two electors are chosen based on the statewide vote.

On Election Day, the voters cast their ballots for electors, even though the names of the candidates for President and Vice President are often the names shown on the ballot. Each state's electors meet forty days after Election Day, and the formal balloting for president takes place at those meetings.

Many different proposals to alter the presidential election process by amending the Constitution, including direct nation-wide election by the people, have been offered over the years. None have been passed by Congress and sent to the States for ratification. Under the most common method for amending the Constitution, an amendment must be proposed by a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress and ratified by three-fourths of the states.

Background Paper Continued...

The Movement against the Electoral College

The most compelling argument against the Electoral College is that it prevents the direct election of the President by popular vote and is, therefore, contrary to modern principles of representative government. Studies show that more than 70 percent of American citizens favor the election of the President by popular vote.

Beyond this basic theoretical objection is the very practical objection that the Electoral College system enables candidates who have not received the most votes cast by American voters to become President.

We have seen such an outcome four times in our history. The first time was the 1824 election which was won by John Q. Adams even though he received fewer electoral votes and fewer popular votes than Andrew Jackson. (Adams won the election in the House of Representatives, with 13 State delegations voting for him, seven voting for Jackson and three voting for Crawford. This happened because there were more than two viable candidates, and would have been a less likely outcome in a two candidate race.)

In 1876, Rutherford B. Hayes beat Samuel J. Tilden by one electoral vote, becoming President despite trailing in the popular vote by a count of 4,288,546 to 4,034,311. In 1888, Benjamin Harrison beat Grover Cleveland with an electoral vote of 233 to 168, despite Cleveland's popular vote margin of 5,534,488 to 5,443,892. Most recently, in the 2000 presidential election, George W. Bush received fewer popular votes than Albert Gore, Jr., but received a majority of electoral votes. The situation was almost reversed in 2004. Although President Bush received more than three million more popular votes than John Kerry, Kerry would have been elected President if Ohio's electoral votes had been cast in his favor.

These circumstances have prompted much discussion on the advisability and feasibility of reforming our election process to eliminate the Electoral College and to elect the President by direct election. This conversation is not new. Over the past 200 years, according to the National Archives, more than 700 proposals have been introduced in Congress to reform or eliminate the Electoral College. Indeed, several joint resolutions were introduced in the current Congress on this issue. The proposals, all introduced in the House of Representatives, were referred to the Committee on the Judiciary, where no action has been taken.

Against this background comes the National Popular Vote Compact Proposal (NPV).

The National Popular Vote Compact Proposal

The National Popular Vote Compact proposal offers a method of achieving the result of election of the President by popular vote without amending the Constitution to eliminate the Electoral College. Instead, this method uses the mechanism of the Electoral College to ensure that the candidate who receives the most popular votes is elected President of the United States.

Under the proposed legislation to enact the National Popular Vote Compact, all of the state's electoral votes would be awarded to the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The bill would take effect only when enacted, in identical form, by states possessing a majority of the electoral votes—that is, enough electoral votes to elect a President (270 of 538)

The NPV Compact proposal is predicated upon the portion of the United States Constitution which states: "Each State shall appoint, in such Manner **as the Legislature thereof may direct**, a Number of Electors..." (*Article II, Section 1, Clause 2*) (emphasis added) The constitutional wording, "as the Legislature thereof may direct," contains no restriction on the states' exercise of their power with respect to their electors. The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly characterized the authority of the states over the manner of awarding their electoral votes as "plenary" and "exclusive." Therefore, the states have the right to decide how to select their electors and award their electoral votes. Thus, proponents of the NPV Compact claim that the U.S. Constitution need not be changed in order to implement nationwide NPV. Rather, they maintain, this change can be accomplished in the same way that the current system evolved—namely, the states will use their exclusive and plenary power to decide the manner of awarding their electoral votes.

An additional constitutional underpinning of the NPV is the Compact Clause (*Article I, Section 10, Clause 3*), which permits states to enter into legally enforceable contractual obligations to undertake agreed joint action with other states. Interstate compacts are typically used to address problems that concern more than one state—the states which are affected enter into a compact (contract) which regulates their actions, ensuring uniform response by the states to address their mutual concerns. These contracts are typically enacted through the passage of identical legislation by the compacting states.

Under the state legislation proposed to establish the NPV, the popular vote counts from all 50 states and the District of Columbia would be added together to obtain a national grand total for each presidential candidate. Then, state elections officials in all states participating in the plan would award their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who receives the largest number of popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The NPV Compact plan would take effect only when it has been enacted by states collectively possessing a majority of the electoral votes. The 270-vote threshold also corresponds essentially to states representing a majority of the people of the United States. As a result, every vote in all 50 states and the District of Columbia would be equally important in presidential elections.

The compact contains a six-month blackout period during which no state can withdraw from the compact. The blackout period starts on July 20 of each presidential election year and runs through the January 20 inauguration. Interstate compacts are contracts. It is settled compact law and settled constitutional law that withdrawal restrictions—very common in interstate compacts—are enforceable because the U.S. Constitution prohibits a state from impairing any obligation of contract.

The legislation contains other procedural provisions that would ensure the smooth functioning of the agreement. For example, one clause addresses the possibility of a tie in the national popular vote. If there is no national popular vote winner, each state chooses the electors for the candidate who has won that state.

Another clause addresses circumstances in which the winner of the national popular vote might be prevented from receiving the electoral votes from a member state. For example, it is possible that the winner of the national popular vote fails to appear as a candidate in a particular state and, therefore, there are no appropriate electors for the state to certify. To address that situation and five other situations identified by the drafters of the legislation as possible anomalies in the process they have developed, a mechanism is provided whereby the desired result is obtained by allowing the presidential candidate who has received the largest number of votes in the national election to select the electors in the state in which no electors associated with the winning slate have been elected. The full text of the compact is available at www.lwv.org.

Current Status of the National Popular Vote Compact

Since passage of the National Popular Vote Compact is accomplished on a state-by-state basis, its status is fluid. As of September 1, 2008, the legislation necessary to activate the compact has been signed into law in four states: Maryland, New Jersey, Hawaii and Illinois, for a total of 50 of the 270 electoral votes required to activate the NPV Compact. NPV Compact bills have been introduced in 15 other states, where some have passed committee and others have passed one house.

LWVStillwater February 24 Meeting Report: **Judicial reform with Robert Murphy**

On Tuesday, February 24, 2009, former district judge and former candidate for state senate Robert Murphy spoke to the local League on judicial reform during their 4th Tuesday monthly luncheon at Perkins Restaurant.

Murphy began by telling the tale of former Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Corn who took bribes in order to rule certain ways on court cases to tip the balance or create a super-majority among the 9 sitting justices. He came clean and ratted out some of his fellow justices after he was convicted of federal tax evasion. This was in the 1960's. During this time, judges in Oklahoma were elected in partisan elections from top to bottom. No accountability for campaign donations existed. Neither were there limits on campaign spending. The corruption was so rampant that the judicial selection process, The Missouri Plan was proposed, so-called because it was based on Missouri's system in place at the time.

Currently, in Oklahoma, district and associate district judges are elected at the local level every four years. Those at the appellate level and higher are appointed by the governor, but placed on a retention ballot every two years. The judicial elections are non-partisan. If there are more than 2 candidates, a primary is held with both parties being able to vote on the judicial ballot.

However, as Peggy Murphy (Robert's mother and long-time League member) quipped, "It is never perfect." In recent years, judicial campaign budgets have increased with more negative campaign advertising taking place. This makes it harder for the incumbent judicial candidate since he may face sanctions from the Bar association if he runs a 'dirty' campaign. There is no punishment for the loser if the loser is not the sitting judge. Murphy stated that the Oklahoma Bar Association is working to change this by giving the Code of Judicial Conduct more teeth to cut down on dirty campaign tactics.

The question was raised that the public has difficulty in finding out information on judicial candidates for election and for information on judges who are up from retention. Murphy replied simply that it is indeed hard. Some states have active organizations who provide information to the voting public. Kirsten stated that Illinois is one state which does that: There are ads in the local papers that a voter can cut out and take into the voting booth with them to aid in making decisions. Murphy did not have a good answer as to why the Bar associations or others organizations do not do this for the public in the State. Murphy passed out an information sheet on the US Supreme Court case *Republican Party of Minnesota vs. White* (2002). In this case, the Court in a 5-4 ruling, stated that the 'announce clause' in the Minnesota Code of Judicial Conduct which prohibits any judicial candidate from "announc[ing] his or her views on disputed legal or political issues," is unconstitutional based on the application of the First Amendment. In other words, candidate questionnaires like the League distributes to candidates, the judicial candidate has the right to answer or not. The one who does not answer, citing the Judicial Code of Conduct, may appear to the public as wishy-washy or the one who does answer may set himself up for votes against him/her based on that particular hot button issue.



As for the appointments of judges, in Oklahoma, a handbook is available for the Judicial Nominating Commissioners. This is a state commission which has six lawyers from state districts selected by other lawyers and seven laypersons selected by the governor. The commission vets the names and selects three to present to the governor. The governor then appoints one judge to fill the vacant seat. As we know locally, the governor also appoints district judge vacancies created mid-term due to resignation (like Murphy's) or death. The gist of it is that the governor still makes the final pick. One can easily see how the picks can be rigged, since party politics can be involved in picking the commissioners. This is the case even if there is a requirement that the laypersons be split between the parties or by sex or both. In other words, it is certainly more who you know than what you know.

Murphy suggested that League members pay attention to when vacancies come up on this commission if they want to work on reform from the inside. He also suggested that the appointment of the layperson be spread out equally between the legislative and executive branch of state government. When asked, he was unsure if this would take a change in the statutes or an amendment to the state constitution. He also suggested that League members ask gubernatorial candidates their views on this commission, even going so far as to asking who they plan to appoint.

As you can see, there are no easy answers. If this is an issue that concerns you, talk to your fellow League members if you want to take on the issue for more research on what could be done. Knowledge is power.

—Kirsten Tautfest

[Oklahoma Women's Network Blog](#)

Celebrating, informing, empowering Oklahoma women & girls

Thursday, February 12, 2009

[Full text of Mary Melon's opinion piece on the need to advance the potential and equity of women and girls in Oklahoma](#)

[Oklahoma lacking in number of women legislators](#)

by Mary Mélon

The Journal Record

February 11, 2009

mary.melon@journalrecord.com.

As the 2009 session of the Oklahoma Legislature convened last week, it is clear that many issues affecting the state's business climate and economic future will challenge our lawmakers over the next four months. While much of the talk is focused appropriately on jobs and economic development, it is also important to recognize the challenges facing many Oklahoma families. Now is the time to invest in our families and communities. Unfortunately, we must also note that the Oklahoma Legislature may lack some of the strongest voices for Oklahoma families – women.

Last November's election returned fewer women to the Oklahoma Legislature than the prior session, and you have to go all the way back to 2002 to find fewer women. The Oklahoma Senate Republican majority has no women members. In 1979, Oklahoma ranked 43rd nationally in the percentage of women serving in the state legislature. Since that time the number of women lawmakers has risen nationally, and today, on average, 24.2 percent of the membership of the 50 state legislatures are women. In Oklahoma, that percentage is 11.4, which places our state 49th among the 50 states.

Upon examination of other states in our region, the scarcity of women in the Oklahoma Capitol is all the more puzzling. Colorado leads the country, with women comprising 39 percent of its legislature, but other neighboring states also put Oklahoma to shame: Arkansas (23 percent), Kansas (29.1 percent), Missouri (20.8 percent), New Mexico (30.4 percent) and Texas (23.2 percent).

Just what difference does it make to have women serving in the legislature?

Cindy Simon Rosenthal, director of the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, points to a large body of research that shows women lawmakers are more likely to propose and advocate for policy solutions addressing the concerns of children and families. Women are more likely to identify families and communities as their top legislative priority and to devote scarce time and energy to those issues. Women are also more likely to speak on behalf of under-represented groups. In short, women lawmakers change the legislative agenda and provide a critical voice for some of the issues confronting our state.

At the end of the day, there is a strong correlation between the lack of women in our state Legislature and key indicators of economic health and well-being of families. Oklahoma families are under stress. We rank No. 1 in incarcerated women, No. 1 in child abuse, No. 4 in divorce rate, No. 7 in teen births, No. 42 in overall women's health, No. 45 in women in professional jobs and No. 49 in political representation. Our state ranks among the highest in the nation in terms of unhealthy lifestyles such as obesity and smoking, and poverty levels among female-headed households. We lead the nation in areas where it's not desirable to be national champions.

Fortunately, there are leading citizens who are tackling this challenge. The handful of women in the Oklahoma Legislature are providing critical leadership at this juncture. The Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women leads the way on advocacy around issues of poverty and criminal justice. The Oklahoma Women's Coalition represents a new statewide nonpartisan association of organizations and individuals

founded to support specific legislation and policies that advance the potential and equity of women and girls in Oklahoma. The Coalition is hosting an advocacy day at the Capitol on Feb. 18.

Insuring full and adequate representation at the Capitol requires a more systemic change. Research suggests that women, compared with equally qualified men, are more likely to doubt their capabilities for political office, less likely to think about running for office and less likely to be recruited as a potential candidate by political insiders. To address that problem, the Women's Leadership Initiative at the Carl Albert Center sponsors N.E.W. Leadership for undergraduate women across the state in an effort to encourage, empower and inspire them to become community and political leaders. N.E.W. Leadership and the Girl Scouts of Western Oklahoma are partnering to promote a vision of leadership, self-esteem and possibilities to young girls.

Until those future leaders change the face of political representation in our state and take their place as legislators, we must hope our current assemblage of legislators will begin their deliberations this week by heeding the words of Abigail Adams spoken so many years ago – to remember the ladies. We need them at the state Capitol.

Mary Mélon is the publisher of *The Journal Record*. You may reach her by fax at (405) 278-2890 or by e-mail at mary.melon@journalrecord.com.

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Voter ID legislation is not in the public interest

By Diane Blank and Mary Francis, LWVNorman

published on the Opinion page of *The Norman Transcript*, Saturday February 21, 2009 and reprinted here by permission.

— For the past 89 years the League of Women Voters has been dedicated to removing unnecessary and unjust barriers to voting. In fact, the work actually began with our foremothers and founders at the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in 1848.

Legislation pending in the Oklahoma legislature (SB4 and HB1037) requiring that a photo ID be presented before a registered voter can cast a ballot erects barriers to voting. This legislation is being promoted on the false premise that the integrity of elections is threatened by individuals who are trying to commit voter fraud at the polls. There are many serious problems with voting systems and election administration nationally, but there is no evidence that voters are at fault.

Voter fraud occurs when someone tries to impersonate an eligible voter at the polls in order to cast a ballot. The Brennan Center for Justice sponsored an extensive investigation of alleged incidents of voter fraud nationwide. The report concludes that most of the irregularities reported were not voter fraud. The full report, "The Truth About Voter Fraud," by Justin Levitt is available online at brennancenter.org.

How affective would a photo ID requirement be in combating election irregularities? Accord-

ing to the Brennan Center report, "...photo ID laws are effective only in preventing individuals from impersonating other voters at the polls -- an occurrence more rare than getting struck by lightning." The Brennan Center study found that most of the alleged cases of voter fraud were actually mistakes or inefficiencies on the part of state and county election officials and workers. Voters were not at fault, and photo ID legislation would do nothing to correct these problems.

Project Vote, www.projectvote.org, concluded in Policy Brief No. 8, Restrictive Voter Identification Requirements:

"By passing burdensome laws that address an almost non-existent problem, representatives erode the public's faith in the electoral system. When the impact of additional identification laws is examined, one sees their dangerous potential to disenfranchise eligible citizens. Americans need more than ever to believe that their government acts truthfully and honorably where their constitutional rights are concerned. Americans have real concerns about the integrity of their election system, given recent controversies about ballot design, vote counting, and the security of new voting machines. By passing burdensome laws that address a non-existent problem, elected officials risk further eroding the public's faith in their ability to

govern with the interests of the voters in mind."

Voter ID requirements are discriminatory. At least 11 million eligible voters nationally do not have photo identification. A recent study shows who these people are:

- Americans over 65: 18 percent have no photo ID
- Persons with disabilities: 10 percent have no photo ID
- African-Americans: 25 percent have no photo ID
- Low income citizens: 15 percent have no photo ID

How will the supporters of this legislation ensure that all eligible voters who currently do not have photo IDs are able to exercise their right to vote? We should be working to make the voting franchise more accessible, not more restrictive.

Legislation which requires eligible voters to present a photo ID at the polls is not in the public interest. Oklahoma has one of the fairest and most efficient election systems in the nation. There is no evidence that voter fraud is or is likely to become a problem here. Oklahoma voters would be better served by focusing on the real issue -- maintaining the integrity of our fine state elections process.

Diane Blank and Mary Francis are with the League of Women Voters of Norman.

Note: The mayoral race is coming up April 7th. Members should look for responses to League questions in the March 29th or April 5 NewsPress, on our website, or at the public library. A forum is also being planned, but the date is not yet set. —Karen Melcher

Cancelled Presentations/Banquet Report

An ice storm and an afternoon of tornados caused the League to cancel one meeting and to hold our annual banquet without a speaker. Both presentations will be rescheduled since the speakers want to talk with us. Alice Richardson and Sureka Sheorey are willing to give us their presentation on Stillwater's finances and bonding sometime later this spring. Tentatively the meeting is scheduled for the second Tuesday in May. Sundra Flansburg from World Neighbors was disappointed that she was unable to make it here due to the storms and has asked us to keep her in mind for another time. She is willing to speak at a noon meeting.

Despite tornado warnings and watches and a speaker who could not make it, a good crowd showed up for our banquet. We appreciated Trish Emig getting *Iron Jawed Angels* for us to watch. Several attendees noted the name and will watch it again. Most of all everyone seemed to enjoy sitting around and talking with League friends and guests. We had a good meal and pleasant company. What more could we want? A successful fund-raiser? Well, we got that too. According to Alice Richardson the silent auction was the most successful ever. We thank Kay Murphy, Kirsten Taufest, Alice Richardson, Marsha Coyle and the others who planned for such a pleasant and successful evening.

—Karen Melcher



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OF STILLWATER**

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