

Women Voters Key to the 2008 Races

There's one point on which analysts in both political parties agree: women comprise a formidable electorate in the 2008 election. In fact, by some accounts, women will be the 'deciders' of the Presidential race. "The woman's vote is frankly the most powerful now in America" said Republican political consultant, Mike Murphy, earlier this year. Democratic pollster, Celinda Lake, speaking with Republican Representative Kay Granger this spring on National Public Radio said, "One thing we can both agree on is the 2008 President will be determined by the women's vote."

Yet despite the importance of women as an electorate, the issues that matter to women are arguably not receiving the attention they deserve at the national level. State candidates should take note. Those who speak directly to the concerns facing Maine women and families will earn a warm reception during the election season – and on Election Day.

Women shape the 2008 elections

The coverage of the 2008 democratic Presidential primary and the Vice-Presidential candidacy of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin have drawn continuous attention to women as a key demographic this election season. Why all the attention? Women's votes can be decisive for several reasons. First, women outnumber men among voters. In fact, women have voted in higher numbers than men in most every election since 1964. In the 2006 mid term elections, 51% of the total votes were cast by women. In 2008, that percentage is expected to rise to 54% of total votes. Secondly, women constitute a disproportionately large share of the undecided voters who will make their decisions late in the campaign.

While older women and married women make up the majority of this target constituency, women who are single, separated, or widowed are receiving specific attention, in part because of their increasing numbers. Unmarried women—now 53 million nationwide—are growing at twice the rate as married women. However, they are under-represented in the electorate. A nonpartisan organization called *Women's Voices Women's Vote* is one group dedicating major resources to encouraging registration, education, and turnout of unmarried women this election season.

Simply put, if fully engaged, the impact of women's votes could be transformative.

What women want

Despite the focus on women as voters, many candidates are not speaking directly to their concerns. Beyond the nation's financial crisis, American voters are overwhelmingly concerned about how the economy will affect their ability to

provide for their families. Women feel more economic anxiety than men do, both regarding their current circumstances and for the future. That's why women continue to identify such issues as providing access to health care, ending the wage gap, raising the minimum wage, bolstering child care assistance, strengthening social security, creating workplace flexibility, and establishing paid sick days and paid family leave policies as critical to improving their economic situation.

Women and children first: taking the issues to the candidates

Without leadership from the political establishment, organizations representing women and girls are working to voice these pocketbook issues in the election. For example, before the Vice-Presidential debate, *MomsRising*, a national organization working for family-friendly policies, delivered 20,000 queries from their members asking the moderator to include questions about fair pay, paid family and medical leave, childcare, healthcare, sick days, and more. Unfortunately, those questions still didn't receive a welcome reception at that venue.

The *Maine Women's Lobby*, which has been working since 1978 to improve the lives of women and girls through legislative action, is working with groups from eleven other states to raise working family issues at the federal level as well. We're committed to making sure statewide candidates are taking these issues to heart. For example, we developed a primer on work and family policies for every candidate to the state House and Senate, and we asked them where they stand. Our members are taking these questions to the candidates—in person, by phone and through the mail. In short, women voters are demanding attention and action on behalf of all Maine families. Candidates for office would be smart to listen.

For More Information:

Guide for candidates and voters available at

www.mainewomen.org.

Take action at www.momsrising.org

Visit www.valuefamiliesatwork.org for our national issue agenda.

Maine Women's Lobby 207-622-0851

- Sarah Standiford
Executive Director of the Maine Women's Lobby

Challenge to Candidates

The Maine Freedom of Information Coalition (MFOIC) has challenged all candidates for the Maine Senate and House of Representatives to sign the Coalition's pledge to support open government and public access. The Coalition has mailed pledge forms to each legislative candidate and is posting the names of those signing the pledge on its website, www.mfoic.org. Over 100 candidates had submitted pledges by the end of September.

The Coalition encourages citizens to check that list to determine whether the candidates seeking to represent them have pledged to be accountable to the public's right to know. The MFOIC believes that freedom of speech, open meetings of government, and access to public records are fundamental tenets of democracy. Mainers have a long history of open government, and MFOIC is seeking a pledge from all the candidates for the House and Senate to support openness in government.

When Maine's Freedom of Access Act became law in 1959, the Legislature found and declared "*public proceedings exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the Legislature that their actions be taken openly and that the records of their actions be open to public inspection and their deliberations be conducted openly.*" Since that time, however, state lawmakers have enacted hundreds of exceptions to the law.

The MFOIC believes that there is an ongoing need for vigilance to keep government open and transparent. The group is urging candidates to recognize that need by signing the pledge of support, which reads: "*As a candidate for ____, I, ____, endorse the purpose of Maine's Open Meeting and Open Records laws to ensure and facilitate the public's understanding of governmental processes and problems. Therefore, I pledge to support at every opportunity the public policy of the State of Maine that the people have the inherent right to know and be fully informed about their government so that they can efficiently and intelligently exercise their political power. Specifically, I pledge to support legislation to strengthen the letter and the spirit of Maine's Open Meeting and Open Records laws.*"

The MFOIC believes that government best serves the public when it operates in the most open manner possible. Its members, which include media organizations, lawyers, academicians, public-policy groups and like-minded individuals, strive to ensure that the public is informed about government actions to the fullest extent possible.

- Mal Leary
MFOIC President

Fair Elections Now Act (FENA) - Washington DC Follows Maine's Lead

Twelve years after passage of the Maine Clean Election Act (MCEA), the United States Congress is poised to consider Maine-style reform for its own elections. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) have introduced S1285, the **Fair Elections Now Act (FENA)**, in the United States Senate. Representatives John Larson (D-CT) and Walter Jones (R-NC) have introduced companion legislation, HR7022, in the House of Representatives. Based on Maine's successful law, FENA calls for public funding for qualified Congressional candidates who agree to limit their spending. It also levies a modest fee on broadcasters to fund media vouchers, since federal candidates spend so much of their campaign budgets on broadcast advertising.

The recent introduction of the House bill coincided with the crisis on Wall Street. "The need for this legislation has become crystal clear this week as Congress debates a \$700 billion bailout for the financiers of Wall Street, the industry that has spent \$5 billion, more than any other, to influence policy on Capitol Hill," said Nick Nyhart, Executive Director of Public Campaign.

While reform groups like Public Campaign, LWVUS, and Common Cause have long sought to connect the dots between campaign contributions and special interest legislation, it took the passage and implementation of Maine-style systems to prove the value and practicality of public funding. Maine is currently in its fifth election cycle with Clean Elections, and 81 percent of legislative candidates are using it. Arizona is also experiencing a fifth cycle under its public funding law, and Connecticut is trying its out for the first time. Several other jurisdictions are implementing pilot programs and similar programs for judicial candidates.

"State implementation is where the rubber meets the road," said Ann Luther, co-president of LWVME and co-chair of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. "Maine's system works, and we need to replicate our model in Washington."

A 2007 Ethics Commission report on the MCEA found that the law resulted in more choices for voters, including more women and first-time candidates; greater parity in spending between incumbents and challengers; sharp reduction in private contributions; slowed growth in legislative campaign spending and campaigns that allow candidates to spend more time with voters. A recent

Critical Insights poll affirmed the strong support for Clean Elections among voters. Success in Maine can be credited to both the soundness of the law and the tenacity of its advocates. Maine citizens have rallied to every challenge, and continued grassroots engagement is critical to the system's continued success.

There are two ways you can help right now:

1. JOIN MAINE CITIZENS FOR CLEAN ELECTIONS' EMAIL ACTION NETWORK. A strong and successful program here in Maine provides inspiration and more to reformers in Washington, DC. With your help, MCCE will continue to rigorously monitor, evaluate and advocate for a strong Clean Election program. Sign up at www.mainecelelections.org.

2. CONTACT MAINE'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION. Ask them to co-sponsor the Fair Elections Now Act. Tell them you are proud of Maine's pioneering Clean Election system and want the same benefits for the United States Congress – benefits like not having to spend so much time raising money! Contacting Senator Snowe is a priority!

Senator Olympia Snowe, 800-432-1599 or (202) 224-5344 and www.snowe.senate.gov
Senator Susan Collins, 202-224-2523 and www.collins.senate.gov
Representative Tom Allen, 202-225-6116 and www.tomallen.house.gov
Representative Mike Michaud, 202-225-6306 and www.michaud.house.gov

For more information about the Fair Elections Now Coalition, see www.fairelectionsnow.org.

*- Alison Smith
Co-chair of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections*

Why No Progress on Health Care Reform?

The majority of Americans want universal and affordable health care. The question is -- why has there been essentially no progress on this issue in spite of years of discussion?

The Democracy Forum topic for October 4 was health care, analyzed in the context of previous Democracy Forum topics including lobbying, campaign finance, government privatization and corporate power.

This Health Care Forum featured guest experts Trish Riley, Director of the Maine Governor's Office of Health Policy and Finance, and Brian Biles, Professor in the Department of Health Policy at George Washington University. Trish Riley has previously held numerous leadership positions nationally including president of the nonprofit Center for Health Policy Development. Brian Biles, in various government roles, has helped analyze and shape the nation's health care policy for more than three decades. Ann Luther moderated this informative and timely discussion.

Democracy Forum can be heard on WERU at 89.9 FM in Downeast and mid-coast Maine and at 102.9 FM in Bangor. This and other past programs are archived on WERU's *Weekend Voices*, at <http://shows.weru.org/archives/category/voices>. More information about the Forums can be found at <http://www.lwvme.org/forum.html>.

Pam Person, Bonnie Preston, Marge May, and Ann Luther serve on the committee that chooses the topics and questions, selects and invites guests, and produces the program at the WERU studio. There may be one or two more programs left in this election year series, so stay tuned to WERU on the first Saturdays at 3pm.

*- Linda Hoskins
LWV Downeast*

Portland Area League Welcomes New Citizens

"It was the most beautiful and inspiring naturalization ceremony I have attended yet," declared Patricia Morin, who represented the Portland Area LWV at a special United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) administrative naturalization, sponsored by Windham Middle School at Windham High School on September 25, 2008. Eighty applicants were sworn in as American citizens.

Off-site events in schools are extraordinary because they engage students who are as enthusiastic and well behaved as the new citizens. The Windham Chamber Singers added a unique dimension to the September 25 ceremony. This renowned chorus of 37 singers has made appearances throughout the United States, Canada and Europe – including St. Patrick's Cathedral and Carnegie Hall in New York City and the White House. During the summer of 1996, the chorus won the Prize of Vienna at the 25th annual *International Youth & Music Festival* in Vienna, Austria.

Former Governor Angus King spoke at the ceremony and issued a special request to the chorus for an encore performance of its final presentation, "America the Beautiful." The audience was not disappointed. It is customary for speakers at these sessions to emphasize the new rights and responsibilities gained by naturalized citizens. Governor King did that, but in his remarks he stressed the importance of the gifts new Americans bring to the nation. It is a fact mentioned too rarely in such gatherings and is as much a reminder to the native born as to newly minted Americans.

Other special guests were: Anthony Plante, Windham Town Manager; William Diamond, State Senator and former Secretary of State; Mark Bryant, State Representative; Sandy Prince, Windham Superintendent of Schools.

Patricia Morin passed out voter registration information cards to new citizens from New Hampshire and voter registration cards to new citizens from Maine (plus a few to old Mainers, as well). In her concluding observation about the moving session in Windham, Patricia had this to say. "Something had told me it would be a special day. And so it was. As I left the school, I told myself that I felt like a million dollars." Since October 5, 2007, we have introduced voting to almost 1,000 new Americans and over 55 unregistered citizens.

If you want your own joyful and fulfilling experience, please contact me. I have prepared detailed guidelines about what to do and how to do it. They include suggested scripts, where to stand, flag/national anthem etiquette, and how to work with our USCIS staff partners. We need you!

The Bangor USCIS plans to naturalize 100 immigrants in its judicial ceremony on October 30, in which the League will have an active role. Portland's semiannual judicial event takes place on October 10.

- Colleen Sanders, Portland Area LWV
PortlandAreaLWV@att.net

How Easy Is It to "Follow the Money" in State Politics?

The Campaign Disclosure Project, a project of the UCLA School of Law, the Center for Governmental Studies, and the California Voter Foundation, recently released its report, *Grading State Disclosure 2008*, which assesses each state in four areas related to the transparency of the flow of money in state politics: state campaign disclosure laws, electronic filing programs, accessibility of campaign finance information, and the usability of state disclosure web sites. Since they began their annual reports in 2003, the Project has documented a clear and steady improvement, driven largely by the increasing use of computer technology to both collect and display campaign disclosure data.

The Project's website at www.campaigndisclosure.org provides detailed information about each state as well as comparisons

among the states. Their Campaign Disclosure Law Database contains statutes and regulations in 105 categories from 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Federal Election Commission.

The state of Washington ranked first in all assessments; they scored an A in all four areas in 2008. See the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission's information at www.pdc.wa.gov. According to the PDC's website, the Public Disclosure Commission is "not simply a repository for data. The Commission works to provide quick and easy public access to campaign finance and lobbyist expenditure data so that you can 'follow the money.'"

Maine ranked 15th among the states and scored a B overall, with a B in campaign disclosure law, an A in electronic filing, an A- in disclosure content accessibility, and a C for online contextual & technical usability. According to the study, "Users can search the databases by name, amount, date or zip code, but not by a donor's employer or campaign expense purpose. The Commission is planning to make major changes to the disclosure site in 2009. Adding the ability to sort search results online and download results for offline analysis would help make the site even more user-friendly." See the website of the Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices at www.state.me.us/ethics.

Although Maine is ahead of other states in many areas of campaign finance, perhaps we could take some tips from other states in the realms of disclosure law and online database usability.

- Martha Dickinson, PAC Study Group, LWV of Maine

Ballot Questions - from the *Easy-to-Read Voter Guide*

In a cooperative effort with the Maine Elections Division, Literacy Volunteers of Maine, and the Disabilities Rights Center, the League of Women Voters of Maine is creating an *Easy to Read Voter Guide* for Maine. The 20-page, non-partisan guide will cover such topics as registering, absentee ballots, voting, what to keep in mind when you go to the polls, political parties, the presidential race, the races for senate and the two house seats, and any statewide ballot or bond issues. The text will be at or below a fifth grade reading level. We take the following information on the ballot questions for November 4, 2008, from that Guide.

BALLOT QUESTION 1: PEOPLE'S VETO

Do you want to reject the parts of a new law that change the method of funding Maine's Dirigo

Health Program through charging health insurance companies a fixed fee on paid claims and adding taxes to malt liquor, wine and soft drinks?

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Maine's Dirigo Health Program is a state health insurance plan that covers 15,000 individuals and small businesses. The State pays part or all of the cost of the plan for individuals with incomes less than \$31,200. The State pays part or all of the cost of the plan for families of four with incomes less than \$63,600. Right now, Maine pays for the Dirigo Health Program by charging private health insurance plans. The State charges private health insurance plans for the savings that Dirigo creates in the health care system. The private health insurance plans then pass the cost of the charges along to their customers.

Instead, the new law would pay for the Dirigo Health Program by:

1. A new tax on beer, wine and soda, and
2. A 1.8% fee on each medical bill paid by a health insurance plan.

The **People's Veto** asks that you reject these two parts of the new law.

Argument for it: The prices of beer, wine, and soft drinks will stay the same.

Argument against it: If Maine keeps paying for the Dirigo Health Program the way it is now, the cost of private health insurance will go up.

BALLOT QUESTION 2: CITIZEN INITIATIVE

Do you want to allow a certain Maine company to have the only casino in Maine, to be located in Oxford County, if part of the revenue is used to fund specific state programs?

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

A Maine company wants to build a casino in Oxford County. For ten years, it will be the only casino in Maine. The casino will give 39% of its income to Maine charities.

Argument for it:

- There may be more jobs and economic growth in Oxford County.
- 39% of the income will be given to Maine charities.

Argument against it: In the Oxford County area:

- The cost of town services like fire fighters and police officers may go up.
- The problem of crime may increase.
- The problem of domestic violence may increase.
- The problem of gambling addiction may increase.

BALLOT QUESTION 3: BOND ISSUE

Do you favor a \$3,400,000 bond issue to support drinking water programs, to support the construction of wastewater treatment facilities and to leverage \$17,000,000 in other funds?

WHAT IS THE BOND?

The total project cost for drinking water programs and wastewater treatment facilities is \$20,400,000. Maine would pay \$3,400,000, and the federal government would pay \$17,000,000.

Arguments for it:

- The bond will be matched 5 to 1 by federal dollars.
- The money will improve the quality of Maine water.
- The money will create jobs.

Argument against it:

- The bond will create an estimated total debt of \$4,241,500 that must be repaid by Maine taxpayers in the future.

*- from Easy-to-Read Voter Guide
Literacy Volunteers of Maine*

Ballot Questions – Pro and Con Websites

More pro and con information on the ballot questions is available at the following websites:

- Yes on 1: Fed Up With Taxes at fedupwithtaxes.org/
- No on 1: Health Coverage for Maine at www.healthcoveragemaine.org/
- Yes on 2: Proponent's web site currently unavailable; recent [newspaper article](#)
- No on 2: Casinos No! at casinosno.org

- from www.lwvme.org

Candidates for Attorney General

In the majority of states, 43 to be exact, the voters elect their attorney general. In five states -- Alaska, Hawaii, New Jersey, Ohio and Wyoming -- the governor appoints the attorney general. In Tennessee, the Supreme Court appoints the attorney general.

Maine has yet another method of selecting its attorney general. Under Article IX of the Constitution, the attorney general is “chosen biennially by joint [and secret] ballot of the Senators and Representatives in convention.” Because Democrats now outnumber Republicans by one in the Senate and 31 in the House, the assumption among

political pundits is that the next attorney general will be a Democrat.

To date, three Democrats have announced that they are seeking the office of attorney general. They are: John Brautigam, a two-term house member from Falmouth, who is not seeking reelection; Sean Faircloth, a five-term house member from Bangor (1992-96 and 2002-08), who is not seeking reelection; and Janet Mills, a three-term house member from Farmington, who is also seeking reelection.

Representative Brautigam, 47, holds a bachelor's degree in government from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, a master's degree in history from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut and a law degree from Stanford University. He has taught history at the high school level, was the Executive Director of the non-profit organizations Maine Citizens for Clean Elections from 1996 until 1998 and the Maine Citizen Leadership Fund from 1998 until 2000, served for four years as an Assistant Attorney General in the Litigation Division under Attorney General Steven Rowe, and is now a legal consultant. See maine.gov/legis/housedems/jbrautigam/

Representative Faircloth, 48, is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the University of California Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. He served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Child Protective Division for four years under Attorneys General James Tierney and Michael Carpenter, has been in private practice, and is currently an Adjunct Professor of Justice Studies at the University of Maine at Augusta. See maine.gov/legis/housedems/sfaircloth/index.html

Representative Mills, 60, attended Colby College, earned her degree in French from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and graduated from the University of Maine School of Law. She served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Criminal Division for four years under Attorney General Joseph Brennan, was appointed and then elected the District Attorney for Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford counties from 1980 until 1995, and is now an attorney in private practice at Wright & Mills in Skowhegan. See maine.gov/legis/housedems/jmills/

The new members of the Legislature are always sworn in by the Governor during the first full week of December. Then, they elect constitutional officers. If Representative Mills is reelected to the House and then elected as Attorney General, a special election will be scheduled to fill her House seat. Because the other two candidates for Attorney General have decided not to run for reelection, no special provision would need to be made for them.

- Michelle Small, Brunswick Area LWV