

Readers lend their voices...

To the Editor:

Santa Claus will be coming to Vernonia to ride in this year's Lighted Truck & Classic Car Christmas Parade on Saturday, December 6, 2008 at 6:00 PM!

Vernonia Pride would like to invite everyone to join the fun by participating in the festivities. The parade will start at Grant Street, cross the bridge on Bridge Street and make its way to City Hall for the arrival of Santa Claus and the Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Anyone interested in participating in this year's parade, please contact Shirley Daughtry at 503-429-9002

Janelle Thomas Cedergreen
Vernonia

An Opinion: We Need Election Reform, Now!

By Scott Laird

By the time you read this, the United States will have elected a new president. Although there was probably increased turnout in voting and more interest in this year's results, the fact remains that when we are not electing a new President, more and more Americans are feeling disenfranchised by our election process, and are choosing not to participate in our democracy.

Because of an increasing number of factors-- the partisan nature of our mostly two-party system and the growing negative campaigning that accompanies it; the lack of third-party candidates; unfair redistricting policies; the inevitable re-election of incumbents; the poor design of our national primary system; and the inequity of using the electoral college to choose our President-- more and more voters are choosing not to exercise their right to vote, and many more choose not to register at all. Still others are not allowed to participate because of laws that restrict them because of their past, or even because of where they live. The two-party system and career politicians have left voters feeling unrepresented and indifferent-- that our democracy has passed them by. Our democracy is not working.

Is our current voter registration system fair and accessible? Why do we still vote on a Tuesday, when many citizens have to take time off from work in order to exercise their right? How do we know all votes are being counted in all states?

Did you know the United States is the only democracy in the world that takes away the right to vote in some states from citizens convicted of committing a felony-- even after they have paid their debt to society? Did you know citizens who live in the District of Columbia are not represented in the U.S. House or Senate? Does anyone remember the phrase, "No taxation without representation?" How is this still possible?

Using the Electoral College to choose our President means that sometimes the candidate with the most popular votes doesn't win the election (Remember Al Gore in 2000?). In this election, only a few states really determined who was going to be elected. When looking at an election map on the NPR website days before the election, only a handful of states were considered a toss-up and actually in play in the election, only a few more were considered leaning either Republican or Democrat. The rest of the states were already considered either red or blue-- meaning our votes for either Obama or McCain here in Oregon and a majority of other states did not really have an impact on who eventually won.

A National Popular Vote (NPV) for President is an idea that is gaining ground. If states possessing a majority of the Electoral Votes (270) were to pass laws agreeing to award all their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who receives the most votes in all states, the electoral college would in effect be eliminated. Maryland, Illinois, New Jersey and Hawaii have already passed this legislation; eight other states have passed NPV legislation in at least one chamber of their legislature.

Oregonians were given a chance this year to change our primary election process, with Ballot Measure 65, which would allow all voters to vote in the primary, not just those registered to a specific party. Although Oregonians appeared divided on the merits of this issue, at least there is a discussion about ways to change the process in Oregon, and an attempt is being made to find ways to include more voters who are not registered as Democrat or Republican.

One option to encourage more third-party candidates, that is gaining ground nationwide, is Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), where voters rank their choices of candidates in order of preference. If no candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the least number of votes is removed and their votes go to the number two candidate on the voters ballot. This continues, until one candidate receives a majority of the vote. This process allows voters to vote their conscience without fear that their vote will be wasted, or that by voting for a third party candidate, they will help elect someone they didn't want to win, as many people claimed happened with Ralph Nader in 2000. INV also removes the extra cost of holding multiple elections, by putting ranked choices on a single ballot. INV is currently being used in some large US cities, and in limited ways in Arkansas, Louisiana, North Carolina and South Carolina. Another way to represent diverse voters' views is through proportional representation, where, as opposed to a winner-take-all system, ten percent of the vote means ten percent of the seats-- every vote counts, no matter how lopsided an election result might be.

Many alternatives to the current primary system and schedule have been discussed and proposed. Although a clear-cut preference has not emerged, it is clear that it is not fair for voters in New Hampshire and Iowa to have such an impact on which candidates are qualified for the rest of the country to choose from.

You can learn much more about Instant Runoff Voting, National Popular Vote, proportional representation, primary alternatives, and universal voter registration at www.fairvote.org. Other topics of interest and informational sources include: redistricting reform and voting rights (www.brenncenter.org), encouraging citizen participation (www.commoncause.org), securing full voting rights for Washington DC voters (www.dcvote.org), restoring the vote to felons (www.senencingproject.org), and changing the mid-workweek elections (www.whytuesday.org).

Both Mr. McCain and Mr. Obama claim to be candidates for change, and so, as a new President takes office, the time may finally be ripe for real and meaningful election reform-- reform that could pave the way for more participation, more choices, more meaningful dialog about issues, better representation and, hopefully, better government. As Americans, it is our duty to inform ourselves and insist on an election system that is open, fair and inclusive, and allows us to choose candidates that we feel truly represent us.

HOW TO SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vernonia's Voice welcomes and requests your thoughts, opinions, and ideas. Please include your name, address, and phone number; limit your letters to 300 words or less. Vernonia's Voice reserves the right to edit, omit, respond, or ask for a response to letters submitted. We will print letters, space permitting. Deadline is the 20th of the month. **Email to: news@vernoniasvoice.com or mail to: Letters, PO Box 55, Vernonia 97064.**

It's Shopping Time!

**BUCKLEBERRY COTTAGE
AND
OUT ON A LIMB
invite you to their**

Winter Event

**November 21st thru
December 7th**

**Kick off party Friday night
November 21st, 6pm to 9pm**

**Monday thru Friday 10:00am to 6:30pm
Saturday & Sunday 10:00am to 4:00pm**

**Event Location: Next to Storage Too
One mile from downtown Vernonia**

Vernonia Hands-on art presents the fourth annual

Community Variety Show



Music, Drama, Dance, and Song!

Friday, November 7 at 7 pm

Vernonia Grange - 375 North Street

Cost: Adults \$5, Kids - 2 cans of food

Show proceeds will benefit the Vernonia Grange, Vernonia Cares Holiday Food Drive and Vernonia Hands-on Art.