

On April 24, 2017, The League of Women Voters hosted University of Michigan Professor John Chamberlin to deliver a lecture on “National Popular Vote Compact Explained. The Electoral College vs. the Popular Vote. Can we eliminate the Electoral College without a Constitutional Amendment? Should we?” The presentation was held at the Ann Arbor Public Library Westgate Branch and was attended by about 80 people, the majority mostly LWV members. The big draw was the outcome of this election in that if there was no Electoral College, Hilary Clinton would have won because she won the Popular Vote! So everyone is asking: Has the Electoral College outlived its usefulness and should we or can we do away with it?

My take on the Professor’s lecture is as follows:

The Electoral College was made part of the Constitution in 1787. Currently, the Electoral College reflects a federal or Republican approach to electing a President. The Electoral College failed to elect the popular vote winner five times in the history of the United States: 1824, 1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016. The E.C. distorts presidential campaigns in that they focus almost entirely on a small number of “battleground states” where the race is expected to be close.

Democrats are in favor of getting rid of the Electoral College, but we need 38 states to pass the Amendment to the Constitution to change to Popular Vote. There have been lots of attempts to change the constitution in this regard, but the last serious attempt was in 1968.

Since none of these attempts have been successful thus far, someone came up with a new approach called the National Popular Vote Compact. The definition of this Compact is: a Presidential Campaign will focus its resources in order to win National Popular Vote, wherever the votes are cast. Every vote is equal! The House and Senate of each state have to vote on the National Popular Vote Compact. Voter turnout at the state level matters a lot more with the National Popular Vote Compact and it would probably encourage more people to get out and vote. Its “Opt-out Provision” is really bad though – any member state may withdraw from the Compact. The positive aspect of the Compact is that Elections are intended to determine the will of the voters and it does just that! The Compact is a roundabout way of changing the Constitution, but chances of its success – doesn’t look good because it needs 270 votes to pass and it is mostly a Democratic desire!

By Pat Smolarski

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