



The Okaloosa Voter

A force for progress on the Emerald Coast since 1962

Jan / Feb 2017

"When everything is political, nothing is held in common, admired, and understood in the same terms by all. And a nation in which nothing is held in common, admired, and understood in the same terms by all is less a community than an aggregate of warring factions jostling for advantage, striving for a total victory in which those on the other side of the battle are permanently vanquished."

*Damon Linker
American Journalist, The Week*



Municipal Elections

Residents of Cinco Bayou, Fort Walton Beach, Laurel Hill, Shalimar and Crestview will go to the polls on 14 March. Look for the Municipal E-Voter to be published in February.



League's Mission:

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Message from the President

The last issue focused on controversial issues including immigration, the economy and unfounded fears. The 2016 election is behind us, so this issue of the Voter will focus on moving forward.

There was **no** evidence of voter fraud or voting machine tampering, and our new President-elect won fair and square according to the current rules. That's how democracy works. If you aren't happy with the election results you should (1) work harder to get your preferred candidate(s) elected; (2) work to reform the current rules with

an eye toward making them fairer; or (3) do both. You should **not** wring your hands and whine about unfairness. Be part of the solution by **doing** something about issues of concern.

Here is something that concerns me and should concern all of us: divisive partisan politics and its corrosive effects on our country. See this issue's quote (left panel) for details. So look for common ground and let's all work together to keep our democracy strong.

Mary Blackwell

Meet Representative Mel Ponder!

In November Okaloosa County voters chose Mel Ponder as our new Representative in the Florida House. He will be the only Okaloosa County resident in the Legislature for the next 2 years, so it's very important that we let him know what local and state issues are of greatest concern to us.

Please join League from **11:30–1:00 pm on Tuesday, 17 Jan, at the Twisted Grape** (1193 Eglin Pkwy, Shalimar), to learn about his legislative priorities and ask questions. This free meeting is open to the public (attendees will purchase their own lunches). RSVP to info@lwvokaloosa.org by 13 Jan.

Bias on the bench: Florida's broken sentencing system

The Sarasota Herald Tribune conducted a comprehensive study of the fairness of Florida's sentencing system in criminal cases, and published the alarming results in a series of articles. One article (<https://tinyurl.com/jxxac3r>) describes how race and politics influence judicial decisions, noting that "Judges in Florida say politics don't impact their rulings ...

But their sentencing records show that's not true." Another analyzes sentencing (<https://tinyurl.com/jddvywq>) variations, and begins, "Justice has never been blind when it comes to race in Florida ... Now, prejudice wears a black robe." See how Okaloosa County's 1st Circuit judges scored by exploring the data: <https://tinyurl.com/jqeroru>. (Spoiler: well.)

LWV 2017 Legislative Summit: 28–29 March

We are heading into the 60-day Florida Legislative Session, 7 March–5 May, 2017. March 28–29 will be historical, because halfway through Session League descends on Tallahassee!

We have many opportunities and many, many battles this session. League's voice has never been as strong and as needed as it is this year. Issues we will address include:

- Election reform and voter protection
- Sensible gun safety legislation
- The best education possible for our

- youth
- Protection of our land and water resources
- Healthcare for all Floridians

Many events are planned for the 2017 Legislative Summit, culminating with the Annual Gala in the old Capitol, where we will meet, speak with and listen to members of one of the largest freshmen classes of legislators ever.

League members who want to attend should contact Mary at 621-4088 or info@lwvokaloosa.org.

What about the Electoral College?

The American electorate has always been divided in its opinion of the best way to run the country. However, most Americans agree on the importance of protecting our democracy and preserving the union. The 2016 election—the most divisive in recent memory—has proven a challenge to both, because the Electoral College did **not** select the winner of the popular vote for President, for the 2nd time in 12 years.

The Electoral College was a compromise designed to preserve the union despite intractable disagreement over slavery, and “equality of representation was sacrificed in the service of that goal.” (<https://tinyurl.com/jzhabaz>) The cited article concludes: “That is the kind of compromise that every successful political system makes, because unless the viability of the system is maintained, other concerns like *making the system more fair* (emphasis added) can never be addressed.”

Which way, America?

The Week (<https://tinyurl.com/j7pqpkd>) recently discussed democracy vs. tyranny, using these definitions:

“A democracy is a nation in which the government is chosen by a free vote of citizens ...

A tyranny, by contrast, is a nation in which government is imposed on the citizens without choice, and dissent is repressed.”

The article explains that democratic rights such as freedom of speech, assembly and the press must be protected to ensure a free vote, because “without a real and freely made choice between competing candidates, there

Municipal Elections scheduled for March 14, 2017

Five County municipalities will hold elections on 14 March. Prospective candidates may file with the Supervisor of Elections from 3–6 Jan. Get a qualifying packet at <https://tinyurl.com/jydp85x>. Offices up for election include:

Cinco Bayou: Three Town Council seats (2-year terms).

Crestview: City Clerk (4-year term) and 3 City Council Seats (4-year terms) in East (Precinct 1), West (Precinct 2) and North (Precinct 3) Crestview.

So should we jettison the Electoral College via Constitutional amendment or the National Popular Vote Compact (<https://tinyurl.com/hfyawks>)? Or should we reform it—perhaps emulating Maine and Nebraska, which apportion all but 2 of their electoral votes by congressional district—to make it “more fair?”

If the purpose of elections is to establish the consent of the governed, then shouldn't **all** citizens hear from and be courted by both parties? If we want competition for votes all across the country, then we must eliminate gerrymandering nationwide as well as “winner take all” apportionment of each state's electoral votes.

The question now is whether or not America is ready to work toward meaningful reform.

(Full Disclosure: The LWV has a position in favor of popular election of the president.)

can be no true democracy.”

Sadly, this article was prompted by the recent actions of the North Carolina legislature, which moved to cement its hold on power by curtailing the power of the Governor and the State Supreme Court and neutering local election boards. Is Jim Crow really making a comeback, and will we really sit by and let it happen?

Tyranny requires the consent of the governed to succeed, so Floridians must be on the lookout for voter suppression tactics like these to make sure it does **not** happen here.

Fort Walton Beach: Mayor (4-year term) and three City Council seats (4-year terms).

Laurel Hill: Mayor (4-year term) and two City Council seats (4-year terms).

Shalimar: Mayor (2-year term), 2 Town Commission seats (4-year terms to the top 2 vote-getters) and 1 Town Commission seat for the remainder of an unexpired term (to the #3 vote-getter).

Calendar

Jubilee Day Celebration

1 Jan 2017: 3:00 pm
Gregg Chapel AME Church, 34 Carson Dr SE, FWB
Celebrate the 154th anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation with the Okaloosa County NAACP and Gregg Chapel AME Church. Hear evangelist Pamela Crowell preach on “A New Year – Renewed Focus.” Contact ocnaacp@gmail.com for more information.

Meet Mel Ponder

17 Jan 2017: 11:30 am
The Twisted Grape, 1193 Eglin Pkwy, Shalimar
Our County's new representative in the Florida House will describe his priorities for the 2017 legislative session and take your questions. RSVP to info@lwvokaloosa.org by 13 Jan.

Directions: Take Eglin Pkwy to Shalimar. The Twisted Grape is next to Pentagon Federal Credit Union across from Dollar General.

LWV Legislative Summit 28–29 March 2017

Join Leaguers from across Florida in Tallahassee to network, learn and lobby your legislators. See the front page for details and check out our 2017 Legislative Priorities: <https://tinyurl.com/zffaet2>.

2017 Florida Women's Hall of Fame Induction

29 March: 5:30 pm
The public is welcome at this free event on the 22nd floor of the Florida Capitol. Please come to honor Florida's best and brightest. All persons attending the ceremony are encouraged to arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the event.

Women's Day at the Capitol 29–30 March 2017

Join the Florida Commission on the Status of Women at the Capitol for a day dedicated to informing and motivating women to engage in the legislative process. Get info at <https://tinyurl.com/jptkr4b>; register at <https://tinyurl.com/ju82wcx>.