

Voice for Democracy

NEWSLETTER OF Californians for Electoral Reform

October 2013

Can We Fulfill the Promise of Suffrage.... Parity in Representation?

by Paula Lee

Today, as I submit this piece for the CfER newsletter, the United States government has just been shut down over the Affordable Care Act. CfER members are certainly aware the current electoral system contributes to the gridlock and false majority created by single member district gerrymandering. 35-45% of voters do not have a voice in the debate if they live in a district that is a safe seat and guaranteed to elect one party with one point of view. The 60% in the district gets 100% of the representation. In addition, our archaic electoral system limits opportunities for women to run and be elected.

Countries that use proportional voting elect more women and the public policy results reflect the impact women have in those legislative bodies. Here in California, women have had the vote for over 100 years and yet the numbers of women serving in our state legislature have been low, stagnant and now declining!

Several organizations have existed for years with a mission to recruit, train and even help fund campaigns for women. Yet, the numbers are declining because systemic change needs to be added to the mix of the many efforts being made to create opportunities for female candidates.

Proportional representation *IS* that systemic change. It is the missing ingredient that needs to be added to the roadmap to gender parity in representation in order to fulfill the promise of suffrage.

FairVote's (www.fairvote.org) Representation 2020 campaign advocates for an active and equal role in government as a natural extension of suffrage. Women worked for many years to secure a voice by getting the vote and now it is time to work for representation by looking beyond the traditional recruiting, training and

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Multi-Member Districts Help New Hampshire Elect All the Women it Wants

by Devin McCarthy

It is a widely-held belief in political science – and one of the core tenets of Fair Vote's Representation 2020 project – that multi-member districts help more women get elected. This argument is based on broadly observable correlations, like the fact that the 20 countries with the highest percentages of women in their national legislatures all use multi-member districts, or the fact that six of the ten U.S. states with the highest percentage of women in their state legislatures use at least some multi-member districts. It is also grounded in a sound theoretical idea: that parties will feel pressure to run an equal number of women to men if they are running a slate of candidates, and that voters are likely to vote for candidates of both genders if they have the opportunity to do so.

It is difficult to find convincing examples of this phenomenon in action, given how many outside variables can be in play in any particular election. Fortunately, New Hampshire exists as an ideal case study.

New Hampshire: A Paragon of Parity

New Hampshire is the gold standard of women's representation in the United States. In the 2012 elections, women completed their sweep of all five major statewide elected offices: governor, both Senators, and both congressional seats. Its State House of Representatives is 33% female – not perfect gender parity by a long shot, but still good for sixth in the country.

The New Hampshire State House also happens to be the largest in the country, with 400 members. Those members are elected from districts of varying sizes, ranging from single-member districts to one 11-seat monstrosity of a district.

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"Imagine if the U.S. resembled its Congress. The country would be only 18% women!"
- Representation 2020

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NEW HAMPSHIRE (CONTINUED)

Unfortunately, it's not easy to compare women's representation in single-member districts with their representation in multi-member districts because the districts are not distributed equally between the two major parties. That's an issue because Democrats in New Hampshire are much better at electing women than Republicans. As a result, women's representation appears to be better in New Hampshire's single-member districts than in its multi-member districts, but the party tilt of those districts heavily distorts those numbers.

Gender-Polarized Voting

New Hampshire has nine districts with at least five seats. We'll focus on those districts because it's around a district magnitude of five that multi-member districts really begin to have a significant effect on women's representation – voters start to notice when they're confronted with a slate of five male names and zero women on their ballot.

All of these districts but one are heavily Republican. They are also elected using a winner-take-all system of election, meaning that if everyone voted on purely party lines, Republicans would win every single seat in these districts. For all that New Hampshire is a relatively independent-minded state, it still largely follows the rule of party-polarized voting that has come to dominate the United States in recent years. Republicans should have been able to sweep these districts.

But they didn't. In five of the eight Republican multi-member districts, Democrats won at least one seat. In the 10-seat district of Rockingham-06, Democrats stole two seats away from Republicans.

How did Democrats win them? The answer, it turns out, is simple: voters wanted to vote for women, and the Republican Party simply failed to nominate enough of them. Voters took matters into their own hands, choosing to vote for gender parity in the state legislature over their party preference.

Every one of the six Democrats that won a seat in a Republican district was a woman. The Republican candidates that lost out on a seat as a result were all men. That's too powerful a trend to be coincidence.

Creating a System That Lets Voters Vote for Parity

The implications of these elections are inescapable. When voters in New Hampshire were given an opportunity to vote for more women – to vote for gender parity in the state legislature – they did so. In the majority of these large multi-member districts, the goal of parity was important

enough for voters that they set aside their Republican party identity to vote for Democratic women.

Typically, gender is not put in the same category as race as a factor that dominates voting behavior. In most single-member races, it should not be – voters are highly unlikely to vote for a candidate for Congress of the opposite party because she is a woman, for instance, while majority-black districts typically elect black representatives. But in the multi-member districts of New Hampshire, gender has become a factor that actually does determine votes and election outcomes.

The intention of this report is not to chastise New Hampshire Republicans for nominating too few women. It should, however, demonstrate to the New Hampshire Republican Party that it is very much in their self-interest to run more. Democrats won six extra State House seats in 2012 by running women against male-dominated Republican slates. By nominating more women, Republicans would easily take back those seats, which could make the difference in determining control of an always hotly-contested legislature.

More importantly, the case studies of these elections show the value that multi-member districts could have for women's representation if implemented in more state legislatures and for the U.S. Congress. It cannot be assumed that the dynamics at play in these districts will develop identically in other areas of the country. New Hampshire voters, after all, have proven themselves to be more independent-minded and more interested in electing women than the average American voter.

But it is certainly plausible that similar phenomena would start happening around the country if the use of multi-member districts were more widespread. If these districts were elected using fair representation voting methods, it would be even easier for voters to vote for women, as they wouldn't have to vote against their partisan interests in a winner-take-all district, as Republicans did in New Hampshire.

Multi-member districts allow voters to vote for gender parity, at least if the parties nominate enough women. That's a goal that most Americans want to achieve. We should design an electoral system that lets them achieve it. §

Devin McCarthy is a Research Fellow at FairVote, focusing on proportional representation and international elections.

Original article published August 9, 2013. Excerpt reprinted with permission. Read the entire article at www.fairvote.org/multi-member-districts-help-new-hampshire-elect-all-the-women-it-wants.



Voice of Democracy Quiz

Of the 12 jurisdictions in the USA that currently use Proportional Representation and/or Instant Runoff Voting, how many can you name?

by Jim Lindsay

QUIZ ANSWERS

Using Proportional Representation:

1. Cambridge, MA - for City Council and School Board
2. Minneapolis, MN - Park Board and Library Board

Using Instant Runoff Voting:

3. Hendersonville, NC - City Council, Mayor, School Board (pilot program)
4. Minneapolis, MN - City Council, Mayor, School Board
5. St. Paul, MN - City Council, Mayor, School Board
6. Portland, ME - City Council, Mayor, School Board
7. Oakland, CA - City Council, Mayor, School Board
8. San Francisco, CA - City Council, Mayor, School Board (As of November 2011, SF has held 43 elections using the RCV ballot.)
9. San Leandro, CA - City Council, Mayor, School Board
10. Berkeley, CA - City Council, Mayor, School Board
11. Takoma Park, MD - City Council, Mayor, School Board
12. Telluride, CO - City Council, Mayor, School Board

Sources: www.fairvote.org/where-instant-runoff-is-used;
www.fairvote.org/fair-voting-proportional-representation;
wikipedia.org/wiki/History_and_use_of_instant-runoff_voting_in_the_United_States §



PARITY (CONTINUED)

funding of women candidates to examine how the rules of the game can be changed to create more opportunities for women to win.

Representation 2020 promotes electoral reform as THE formative strategy to create a truly representative government, in addition to other efforts, with the goal of achieving gender parity in elected office by the centennial of women's suffrage – August 2020. To that end, CfER invites you to join Representation 2020 by going to the website www.representation2020.org and signing the pledge to support efforts to:

“Eight of California's 32 women legislators will be termed-out in 2014.”

- Paula Lee

- Combat gender stereotypes that suggest men are more effective leaders than women;
- Train, recruit, and fund women candidates, especially for open seat elections;
- Encourage more women to run for office, especially for executive offices like president, governor, and mayor;
- Promote [party rules](#) that foster gender parity in recruitment for all elected offices;
- Enact [electoral laws](#) that will increase the election of women, including multi-seat legislative districts with fair representation voting systems;
- Ensure that [rules and internal procedures](#) within legislatures are not biased against women serving in office.

Women are “Caught in a Bad Romance.” We can no longer “settle” for only 12%-18% representation after 100 years. I hope you will spread the word about this timely campaign, sign the pledge and encourage others to do the same.

For more inspiration and a good five minute workout video see:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYQhRCs9IHM> §

Paula Lee is on the CfER Board of Directors, the special advisory committee for Representation 2020, and is a long-time activist with the League of Women Voters.



President's Letter

– Steve Chessin, President

I write this a few days after the temporary resolution of the government shutdown and combined budget and debt-ceiling crisis. (I say temporary because the budget was extended only into January and the debt limit will be reached in February.) The polarization of Congress that led to this can be directly traced to the single-member-district winner-take-all nature of our elections. If we used proportional representation (PR) to elect Congress (which we could on a state-by-state basis with just a simple change to federal law), we'd have more moderates and fewer extremists and a Congress more willing to compromise. As the only statewide organization working to bring PR to California, we need you to spread the word. Please tell your friends about CfER, share this newsletter with them, and ask them to join.

Our last newsletter came out just before CfER's 20th Annual General Membership meeting. It was an excellent event. Jim Lindsay, CfER founder, spoke about the events and circumstances surrounding the founding of Californians for Proportional Representation (CPR) in May, 1993. (CPR later became CfER.) He also described CfER's initial relationship with Citizens for Proportional Representation, the national organization that is now FairVote and which was established in Cincinnati in 1992.

The keynote presentation was a panel discussion featuring three of the candidates for California Secretary of State in 2014: State Senator Leland Yee (Dem); Derek Cressman (Dem), until recently the Vice President of State Operations for California Common Cause; and David Curtis (Green), a design architect.

Two other invited candidates who declined due to schedule conflicts were: State Senator Alex Padilla (Dem) and Pete Peterson (Rep), Executive Director of Pepperdine University's Davenport Institute for Public Engagement and Civic Leadership.

The discussion, which was not intended to be a candidate debate, included opening and closing remarks from the panelists, and featured mostly live questions from the audience. All three panelists expressed support for PR.

Professor Michael Latner, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, then gave a presentation about how the California Assembly might change if it were elected using a system of party list PR in 5-member districts. His presentation was based on his 2011 paper, "Mapping the Consequences of Electoral Reform," which was co-written with Kyle Roach. The presentation showed that such a PR system would provide

more equitable representation for voters, broaden the geographic diversity that each of the major parties represents, give minor parties greater opportunities for winning seats in the legislature, and was not expected to result in a hyper fragmentation of political parties. Professor Latner also answered questions from the audience.

I presented three sets of Wilma Rule awards to people who have advanced the cause of proportional representation in California. The recipients of the 2013 Wilma Rule Awards were:

- Jim Lindsay receiving a special life time achievement award, as founder and active member over many years since CfER's founding 20 years ago.
- Michael Latner and Kyle Roach for their paper "Mapping the Consequences of Electoral Reform", in the California Journal of Politics and Policy, which demonstrated many of the potential benefits of implementing PR in the California Assembly.
- Joel Pett for an editorial cartoon after the November 2012 election about the growing, but still low number of women elected to Congress. The cartoon showed a group of women celebrating, with one proposing a toast: "... to proportional representation ... before our granddaughters reach menopause."

The cartoon was originally published in the Lexington (Kentucky) Herald-Leader and also appeared in the Sacramento Bee and other McClatchy papers. The cartoon helps to bring the phrase "proportional representation" into the mainstream in the U.S.

We then held elections to our Board. We re-elected Casey Peters, David Cary, Joan Strasser, Paula Lee, Pete Martineau, Richard Winger, and myself, and elected new Board members Steve Sosnick and Phill Courtney.

At the retreat the next day, we re-appointed Joe Nemeck to the Board. For officers I was re-elected President, Casey Peters and Paula Lee were re-elected as Executive Vice-Presidents, Paula Lee was re-elected Treasurer, David Cary was re-elected Secretary, and Dave Kadlec was elected as Chief Financial Officer.

In the last issue I told you that the parties in the Anaheim voting rights lawsuit were scheduled to meet in court in July. They met, and the judge set a trial date of March 17, 2014. I will keep you posted.

(I want to thank Secretary David Cary for his excellent minutes of the AGM and retreat, from which much of this report was taken.) §



CfER Contacts

STATE OFFICE

Californians for Electoral Reform
P.O. Box 128
Sacramento, CA 95812
916-455-8021

Web: www.cfer.org Email: cfer-info@cfer.org

LOCAL CHAPTER CONTACTS

East Bay (SF Bay Area)	Joan Strasser	510-653-3174	jstrasser@igc.org
El Dorado County	Paula Lee	916-400-3802	paula.lee@comcast.net
Fresno County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	ryan_dunning@hotmail.com
Kings County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	ryan_dunning@hotmail.com
Long Beach (LA County)	Gabrielle Weeks	562-252-4196	gabrielle@workwithweeks.com
Los Angeles County	David Holtzman	310-477-1914	sdave@well.com
Madera County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	ryan_dunning@hotmail.com
Marin County	Bob Richard	415-256-9393	bob@robertjrichard.com
Mariposa County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	ryan_dunning@hotmail.com
Mendocino County	Don Rowe	707-463-2456	irv@mendovote.org
Merced County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	ryan_dunning@hotmail.com
Monterey County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	mlatner@calpoly.edu
Riverside County	Casey Peters	951-213-6032	democracy@mail2world.com
Sacramento County	Pete Martineau	916-967-0300	petemartno@att.net
Sacramento County	Paula Lee	916-400-3802	paula.lee@comcast.net
San Bernardino County	Matt Munson	909-984-5083	thinktank909@gmail.com
San Diego County	Edward Teyssier	858-546-1776	edwardt@sbcbglobal.net
San Francisco	Richard Winger	415-922-9779	richardwinger@yahoo.com
San Luis Obispo County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	mlatner@calpoly.edu
San Mateo County	Mike Northrup	415-753-3395	northrop@alumni.tufts.edu
Santa Barbara County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	mlatner@calpoly.edu
Santa Clara County	Michael Hunter	510-909-3941	mhunter@lusars.net
Santa Cruz County	Michael Latner	805-466-0821	mlatner@calpoly.edu
Tulare County	Ryan Dunning	559-930-6073	ryan_dunning@hotmail.com
Yolo County / Davis	Pete Martineau	916-967-0300	petemartno@att.net



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Steve Chessin,
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About CfER . . .

Californians for Electoral Reform (CfER) is a statewide citizens' group promoting election reforms that ensure that our government fairly represents the voters. We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with members from across the political spectrum. Since our founding in May of 1993, our numbers have grown from about two dozen to hundreds of members participating in local chapters across California.

OUR ELECTORAL SYSTEM IS IMPORTANT

The method by which we vote has dramatic consequences, and nearly one third of the state's electorate consistently goes without a representative that speaks for them in Sacramento. The choice of electoral system can determine whether there will be "spoilers" or vote-splitting effects, majority sweeps of representation on city councils, or pervasive negative campaigning. The choice of electoral system determines whether minority perspectives or racial and ethnic minority groups receive fair representation or get shut out of the process entirely.

CFER IS THE LEADING ADVOCACY GROUP FOR THESE REFORMS IN CALIFORNIA

CfER works for legislation that would allow cities and counties to adopt voting methods that allow people to rank their preferences when they vote. CfER also works with activists in its local chapters to enact fair election methods in cities and counties across the state.

For more information visit www.cfer.org/aboutus

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