

# Electing the President: *A Guide to the Election Process*

Learn how our president is elected and why voting counts. Articles appear every Wednesday through June 4 and again in the fall. In partnership with the League of Women Voters, [www.seattletimes.com](http://www.seattletimes.com) and [www.seattletlwv.org](http://www.seattletlwv.org).

## Unit One The Players

The United States presidential election is the biggest event in American politics. It's an exciting and complicated process that begins immediately after the preceding election and doesn't end until the voters have their say.

What happens during this extended campaign is a quest not just for votes, but also for political contributions, favorable media coverage, Internet attention, endorsements and all the other makings of a winning candidacy for the highest elected office in America. Key events along the way include the primaries and caucuses, the party conventions and the debates — not to mention all the speeches, polls and focus groups. Plus there is the barrage of radio and television commercials imploring you to vote this way or that.

It's easy to be overwhelmed. And that's why the League of Women Voters produced this series, based largely on the League's publication, "Choosing the President 2008: A Citizen's Guide to the Electoral Process" (The Lyons Press, 2008).

The series this spring will focus on the "players" — those key participants who all work together to make our electoral process what it is today.

**The People:** That's right, you. The people are the most important players in the election — our democratic system would not exist without them. You'll learn about your right to vote and the importance of increasing voter turnout in our country.

**The Candidates:** These are the folks getting most of the attention in an election. This year's candidates may be familiar to you even though the nomination process is not yet complete. This chapter will also focus on how candidates choose a campaign strategy.

**The Parties:** You may already align yourself with a party, or you may still be deciding or wish to remain an independent — no matter what you have decided, this chapter will help to break down some of the main differences among the different political parties and explain the history of our political system.

**The Media:** For better or for worse, the media play a huge role in the process of electing a president. This chapter will help you to identify bias in media coverage of an election, and will explain how to seek out reliable information to help make voting decisions.

**The Money:** Find out how money can make or break a campaign for president. This chapter will explain the cost of running for president and give a short history of campaign financing and reform efforts.

## Important Facts About The League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters is an organization that does hands-on work to safeguard democracy. The League helps people learn how to participate in the political process and helps them learn about public policy issues that affect their lives.

A nonpartisan organization, the League does not support or oppose candidates or political parties. Sometimes it does support or oppose governmental policies or ballot issues.

The League was started in 1920, when women first got the right to vote. Today's League includes men as well as women; any citizen aged 18 or older can join. The League works at all levels of government: local, state and national.

How does the League of Women Voters help during the election season? Many of its members register voters and answer voters' questions. Others work on guides to the ballot issues and candidates. Speakers address groups on a variety of topics ranging from the mechanics of American elections at the federal, state and local levels to voting trends among young people. The League also holds public forums on the ballot issues and sponsors or moderates debates among candidates. Visit the League's Web sites at [www.washingtonvoter.org](http://www.washingtonvoter.org) (state) and [vote411.org](http://vote411.org) (national) for helpful information about the elections and voting.

## Learn More

Search The Seattle Times for examples of each of the players highlighted in this chapter: the people, the candidates, the parties, the media and the money. Create a poster for your classroom that shows examples of each of these players taken from the newspaper. Continue to add to this visual aid over the next six weeks.