

The Seattle Times Newspapers In Education presents

Electing the President: A Guide to the Election Process

Produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters



Thank you for joining our Wednesday series about the presidential election, produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters through November 5. Last spring's chapters are online at lwvwa.org and will help students of all ages to understand the people, the parties and the issues regarding our election process.

Week Nine: Election Day Election Day

On Tuesday, November 4, 2008, control of the presidential election finally passes to the hands of the American voters, where it belongs. It comes down to this: the voters will decide which candidate they feel is most qualified to lead the nation.

Hoping to boost voter turnout, states are increasingly allowing voters to vote as much as a month early, by mail or in person. Most Washington counties now conduct their elections almost entirely by mail. Absentee or mail-in ballots must be postmarked by the end of Election Day or dropped off at a polling location before closing time. If you vote by mail or absentee, make sure you sign the envelope in the space required.

If you go to a polling location to vote, make sure that you have ID and that you know where to vote. The vast majority of calls received on Election Day hotlines are from voters asking about their polling place. King County voters can visit kingcounty.gov/elections to look up their polling place. Voters in other counties should consult their county auditor's office at secstate.wa.gov/elections/viewauditors.aspx for this information.

Become an Educated and Informed Voter

1. Register to vote and encourage adults 18 years of age or older to register.
2. Educate yourself by researching the candidates and their positions on issues and their leadership abilities: read the newspaper, check their Web sites and watch the televised debates.
3. Talk about the candidates and issues with friends, classmates, relatives and coworkers.

How does the Electoral College Work?

The Electoral College was established by the Founding Fathers as a compromise between electing the president by Congress and electing by popular vote. The people of the United States actually vote for electors who then vote for the president.

The Constitution authorizes each state to appoint a number of electors equal to the number of representatives and senators that the state has in Congress. The 23rd Amendment added three electors for the District of Columbia — the same number of electors as the least populous state — bringing the total of the college to 538 electors.

If one candidate for the office of president (and one candidate for the office of vice president) gets 270 electoral votes — a majority of the total numbers of 538 electors — a president has been elected.

The Constitution is silent on how a state is to choose its electors. In the early years, legislatures adopted several methods: appointment by legislature, election by the people on a statewide basis or a combination of these methods. But by 1836, almost every state was using a popular vote system.

On Election Day, when voters in each state go to the polls, each one casts a ballot for the slate of presidential electors — selected by political parties, through conventions, committees or

primaries — who are pledged to support the candidate the voter prefers.

In some states, only the names of the candidates appear on the ballot, masking the fact that voters are choosing electors rather than voting directly for the candidates. In other states, both candidates and electors are identified.

To learn more about the Electoral College and the electoral vote in your state visit: electoral-vote.com.

Learn More:

- **Research the Candidates:** How do Barack Obama and John McCain compare on issues that are important to you? Review each Web site: barackobama.com/issues/ and johnmccain.com/informing/issues/.

Take notes on where each candidate stands on the following seven issues: education, energy, global warming, health care, immigration, social security and taxes.

Write a two-page reflection paper on these issues and how each candidate compares with your personal philosophy. Could you make an informed vote right now? What other factors would you want to consider (watching the debates, age, experience, leadership abilities, etc.) and why? Give details to support your answer.

- **Voting at the Polls:** Help yourself, family members or friends find the following information, using kingcounty.gov/elections and secstate.wa.gov/elections/polling.aspx.

1. What ID is required for voting at the polls? If you don't have ID, can you vote a "provisional ballot?"

Constitutional Rights of Voters

15th AMENDMENT, Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude (Ratified in 1870).

19th AMENDMENT, Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex (Ratified in 1920).

24th AMENDMENT, Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax (Ratified in 1964).

26th AMENDMENT, Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age (Ratified in 1971).

2. What are the polling hours?
3. Where will you vote? (Where is the polling place location?)

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