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 BLOG | *Posted 04/10/2007 @ 12:36pm*

What's Right with Maryland

Justice Louis Brandeis once said, "It is one of the happy accidents of the federal system that a single courageous state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory, and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country." The Maryland General Assembly has taken advantage of this "happy accident" to pass a National Popular Vote bill and is expected to pass a Living Wage bill today as well.

Maryland State Senator and *Nation* contributor Jamie Raskin told me, "We passed the National Popular Vote bill in the General Assembly by mobilizing the essential democratic principles: the person with the most votes for president should win the office and every citizen's vote should count equally regardless of geography or time zone.... And with the Living Wage bill we have said that the state government should not be a neutral umpire in the economy but an active instrument for lifting people out of grinding poverty into at least the modestly secure working class. The gap between the minimum wage and the actual living wage is an index of shame, which we are about to close in Maryland."

The National Popular Vote bill calls for awarding Maryland's 10 electoral votes to the winner of the national popular vote instead of the winner of the state vote. It only takes effect when states representing a majority of votes in the Electoral College agree to join a binding National Popular Vote compact. The movement is being led by the National Popular Vote campaign and it has over 300 sponsoring legislators in 47 states. Other organizations involved in the effort include: FairVote, Progressive States Network, Asian

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EDITOR'S CUT

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL



Welcome to Editor's Cut. Expect no major manifestos or sweeping pronouncements. This weblog will be more of a running journal recording thoughts on politics, reporting on events, and offering riffs and reflections on what's in the news and what's not (but should be).

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American Action Fund, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, National Latino Congreso, Common Cause, and such former Members of Congress as Republicans Tom Campbell and Jake Garn, independent John Anderson, and Democrat Birch Bayh.

According to [Rob Richie and Ryan O'Donnell](#) of FairVote, "Under the Constitution, states have exclusive power – indeed have responsibility – to award their electors to reflect the interests of their people." Like Maryland, Hawaii also passed its National Popular Vote bill and so have single chambers in Arkansas and Colorado. Last year, California passed its own version but it was vetoed by The Terminator. Richie reports that establishing a national popular vote is supported by 70 percent of the public according to polls. "This should be no surprise," Richie and O'Donnell write. "The current system makes most Americans irrelevant in electing their most powerful elected office."

"[Maryland], like the two-thirds of all states consigned to the safe red or blue column, has been reduced to 'spectator' status in presidential elections," Raskin said. "... I believe that Maryland and now Hawaii can kick off an insurrection of the spectator states to demand a truly national presidential campaign instead of this debased division and polarization of red and blue states, a process which depresses turnout and participation."

Richie points out that in 2004, voter turnout was 8 percent higher in battleground states than non-battlegrounds and "fully 17 percent higher among young adults – a division only to grow in future elections with presidential campaign activity limited to battlegrounds...." And Richie and O'Donnell note, "The presidential campaigns and their allies spent more money on ads in Florida in the final month of the campaign than their combined spending in 46 other states." Raskin adds, "In the last two [presidential] elections, 99 percent of campaign dollars and candidate visits were spent in 16 battleground states and two-thirds of the money and appearances in just five key ones like Ohio and Florida."

"By strengthening the voting power of all Americans and treating all voters equally," Richie says, "the National Popular Vote plan is based on two of the key pillars of lasting reform: equality and universality."

Maryland's [Living Wage Bill](#) will have a lasting impact as well. "It's going to lift tens of thousands of Marylanders out of poverty," Delegate Tom Hucker told the *Washington Post*. "It makes Maryland a leader in ensuring that our tax dollars are helping build the middle class rather than perpetuating poverty."

And it's not just Democrats who are doing the work of small-d democrats. Florida's Republican Governor, Charlie Crist, has fulfilled his campaign promise to work towards [restoring voting rights](#) for convicted felons in his state despite the fact that it will add "tens of thousands of Democratic voters to the rolls -- possibly pushing a House seat or two into the blue column" and helping any Democratic presidential nominee. (Maryland's General Assembly has also acted to [secure voting rights](#) for more people with felony convictions and Governor Martin O'Malley is leaning towards signing the bill. Richie says that

also by
KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

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O'Malley – the only challenger to defeat an incumbent governor in last year's elections – has been instrumental in spurring progressive change by promising to sign such legislation as this.)

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These actions by the Maryland General Assembly and the action of a Republican Governor serve as reminders that what *Nation* article [John Nichols wrote](#) in a 2003 still holds true: "... some of the most important fights – for affordable healthcare, education, environmental protection and clean politics – are taking place beyond the Beltway. Often there is far more space for debate on these issues, and more opportunities for victory, in statehouses... Thus, while it is essential to battle Bush and his minions in Washington, it is equally essential to understand that the road to renewal may well run through the states."

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Maryland is free to do what it wants with its electors (within the Constitution)...but you DO realize that under such a law in 2004....solid Blue Maryland would have....gone to Bush!... despite who Marylanders as a majority would have voted for! Is that democratic?!?!?

As for the Living Wage Bill....I noted it only effects "employees in state contracts". So anybody NOT covered still doesn't get \$11.30 an hour.

But it is good to note a FIGURE finally being given for WHAT the "living wage" is....\$11.30 an hour, but no more.

Posted by MASK 04/10/2007 @ 1:27pm | [ignore this person](#)

Although this is a good first step in updating Presidential elections, I strongly believe that basing the awarding of electoral votes on who wins the most popular votes nationally would skew the elections toward the highly populated states and be unfair to the small, thinly populated states.

A better and more competitive and comprehensive approach would be the awarding of electoral votes based on the percentage of votes a candidate gets in each state's general election. This approach would force candidates to campaign in all 50 states, and moreover it would enable the impact of independent candidates to be fully felt.

One caveat: The new concept may need to address the possibility that one candidate may not get a majority of the nation's electoral votes.

Posted by ORAIBI 1952 04/10/2007 @ 1:37pm | [ignore this person](#)

[sigh] Living wage legislation is about votes, not really helping the poor. It is so deceptive and an example of evil in politics. Poverty isn't about money. And wealth distribution by politicians won't "solve" poverty. What an abuse of power.

Posted by FREIHEIT 04/10/2007 @ 1:40pm | [ignore this person](#)

Our city passed a living wage ordinance in order to do business with the city...and required all workers be paid a living wage...whatever that is...according to who, I am not sure, but here is where problems occurred..

City parking lots and ramps are manned by city workers and had to raise rates...the managers said we have some workers who have been here longer than others, they bitched," it isn't fair to have all being paid the same and I have been here longer than..."...mean time, the city council wants to lower parking rates in order to attract more business downtown...so now you have a mandated \$ 9.00 for workers and city fathers want to lower the parking rates, which, never had enough to pay the % 7.50 they were currently being paid..guess where the extra money for workers is going to come from? Yup, the same tax payers who never went downtown before...and won't tomorrow..

or this gem..

The city pays a private firm to run the, for a better word, the dog catcher service, on a bid basis...now, the company has to bill the city for their wages and expenses on an agreed contract...so..., the wages of some workers had to be raised to meet the mandate for "Living Wage" law, so the company must comply to do business with the city, and ran into the same problem regarding time some workers were there over others and the new wage...so...the company asks the city for an increase in the amount the city agreed to pay for the services in order to comply with the city law...and of course the city refused, so the company says, fine, you collect your own dogs and cats, ect.,...now the city has to spend millions for a building and a service that they had for pennies on the dollar, and the company lays off most of their workers completely..and moves to Omaha...

Jobs in the private sector lost, tax revenue lost, and another private entity doing a job cheaper than govt is dead, replaced by a more inefficient over priced union job paid for by tax payers...who never use the service..

This is occurring in Lincoln as many other companys petition for exclusions, exceptions or just flat assed, moves away...and the chumps paying the taxes get the bill for the "progressive Govt"..

Is so sad it has become funny...and our Progressive mayor is not running again...she will be lucky to get out of town alive...the amount of companys that have left Lincoln is staggering...

Unitended consequences are inherent in most govt ideas put forth by well intentioned people with no experience in the real world....Maryland will regret this bill...watch over time as the jobs move accross state lines..

You cannot artificialy create a perfect world, but you can screw one up with mindless meddling....

Posted by JOHN MAASCH 04/10/2007 @ 1:41pm | [ignore this person](#)

Freiheit-Getting votes by doing what the people you represent want is called Democracy.

Posted by I'M NOBODY 04/10/2007 @ 1:47pm | [ignore this person](#)

Posted by JOHN MAASCH 04/10/2007 @ 1:41pm

So MAASCH, what you are saying is you want everything for free, or at least don't want to pay the real value for it.

As your salary probably keeps going up and up, you don't want the cost of the little things to go up either, because it will make you feel less rich and powerful. Is that it?

Posted by BLUETEXAN 04/10/2007 @ 1:48pm | [ignore this person](#)

And now, the good city fathers are looking to open up city owned gasoline staions...any guesses how that is going to affect..

1. The private companys and the workers they hired as they lay off and move away...
2. The cost of gas to consumers..
3. The avaiability of gas , since city sales of gas WILL not reach private sales.
4. Cost of gas to tax payers as city realizes it can't make any money and just bills the tax payer for shortages of revenue..
- %. The consummers as they drive accros city lines..5 miles away and buy their gas..

Hopefull some brains might be awakened to this fiasco and kill it before it even gets passed the council..

America can't afford the Progressive agenda as it ignores all basic and natural laws of business...

Posted by JOHN MAASCH 04/10/2007 @ 1:49pm | [ignore this person](#)

Posted by ORAIBI1952 04/10/2007 @ 1:37pm

Why should the majority of people living in major metropolitan areas be forced to accept a president elected by rural America. It makes no sense. Besides, those rural Americans and small-staters will still have two Representatives and two Senators. You could argue they wield too much power in the Senate even.

Posted by BLUETEXAN 04/10/2007 @ 1:51pm | [ignore this person](#)

Posted by JOHN MAASCH 04/10/2007 @ 1:49

I'm guessing wherever you live has no industrial base? All those middle-class jobs have been shipped to China? What about the farmers, all bought out by giant agricultural corporations? Who's fault is that? Nope, not progressives.

MAASCH it sounds like your city's economy is based on gas station attendants and parking lot attendants. Maybe your city deserves to dry up and blow away if they can't cut in the "free market".

Posted by BLUETEXAN 04/10/2007 @ 1:53pm | [ignore this person](#)

So MAASCH, what you are saying is you want everything for free, or at least don't want to pay the real value for it.

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Posted by BLUETEXAN 04/10/2007 @ 1:48pm

This is what you come up with after reading how business and jobs are driven out for higher inefficient government projects? That I don't want prices to go up?

You are shitting me, right? Not really serious..

Come be serious. This could hit your city...

Prices should go up naturally due to availability, supplies..ect..not some government hack...

My salary? It went down by \$ 50,000 last year...which is a big chunk of my income...it is my "Living Wage" part...I had a number of customers go out of business...I had a bad year, as does happen to all from time to time...and yes prices have gone up..

Do you work or run a business or anything?

Posted by JOHN MAASCH 04/10/2007 @ 1:54pm | [ignore this person](#)

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