

MendoVote Meeting in Ft. Bragg March 22, 2011

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We began by exploring behavioral changes we'd like to see from candidates and our elected representatives. The list included:

- Candidate is to campaign on ideas that are congruent with the peoples' expressed needs and not based on idealistic philosophies that conflict with practical considerations. Candidate is to speak to the actualization of his/her ideas in a pragmatic manner, addressing solutions to the present day problems, proposing progressive legislation that is feasible within the present political environment and which furthers the peoples' interests.
- Candidate shall speak for their own position and respect the position of others.
- Candidate shall clarify challenges and long-term issues
- Candidate shall distinguish short-term and long-term solutions
- Candidate shall make the effort to understand the needs of all constituents
- Everybody counts. Don't divide society into those who matter and those who don't

We observed that an overall theme is improving communication, problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills.

The next topic was discussing how our group can model the behavior we want to see from others.

- Inclusiveness
- Respect
- Everybody is equal
- Mutuality – We should learn from each other.

We developed three specific goals for ourselves as well as for candidates and our elected representatives:

1. Speakers seek to express themselves in a way that is understood by the listeners.
2. Listeners will assume that the speaker knows something the listener doesn't. If something doesn't immediately make sense to the listener, the listener will ask questions and offer the speaker an opportunity to clarify the subject.
3. Speakers will assume that questioners know something the speaker doesn't. Speakers will accept questions as an opportunity to re-evaluate and clarify a position both for the questioner and for the speaker.

The next topic was exploring goals for overall election/political reform. We agreed on:

1. Encourage strong communication/problem-solving/conflict-resolution skills in candidates and elected representatives. Look for these qualities as we "interview" the

candidates for the position. We, the voters, are hiring them for the position. We can select for these skills.

- 2.Reduce the influence of money on elections.
- 3.All parties/interest groups/perspectives should have some representation in a multi-member governing body (city council, school board, state legislature, etc.)
- 4.Encourage ballot initiatives that address the needs of most citizens and discourage ballot initiatives that primarily benefit a single business, industry or other limited interest.

We decided that goals 1-3 were closely related and reinforce each other. Goal #4 will remain a future goal but isn't something we want to work on immediately.

Some available resources are

- Website
- Facebook/social networking
- Public meetings
- MCTV, UVTv, local TV production facilities
- Radio
- Fundraising
- Seek non-profit status
- Schools, colleges
- Table at other events
- Letters to the editor, local media
- Leaflets

The next topic was exploring specific ways to achieve our goals

Goal #1 of encouraging strong communication/problem-solving/conflict resolution skills sent us in a direction that's potentially very challenging and very rewarding. If we're going to elect people with the desired skills, those skills have to be an issue during campaigns. This requires joint efforts by voters, candidates and journalists. We decided that candidates should demonstrate their abilities to work things out with those who may disagree. Candidates should also demonstrate their ability to present common ground and differences to voters in a clear, respectful way. If candidates can't deal effectively with differences during a campaign, they're not likely to deal effectively with differences on budgets, health care, retirement benefits or other divisive issues after they're elected. The same is true for candidates' abilities to clearly and respectfully communicate to voters their common ground and differences on divisive issues. The process is quite simple: All candidates for the same office collaborate on a joint campaign statement of common ground and differences. These statements will be distributed by us to voters at no cost to the candidates. We will have no direct editorial control but will review the statements and may question the candidates about reliability of claims and encourage them to either further explain why they consider certain information to be reliable, or issue a disclaimer that some claims are uncertain. Evaluating competing claims and determining reliable sources can be a big part of

resolving certain conflicts. This also simplifies things for voters since they get comprehensive, reliable information in one place.

Goal #2 of reducing the influence of all money (from corporations, wealthy self-financed candidates, PACs, private contributions, etc.) is met to a large extent by our solution to goal #1. Distributing campaign statements at no cost to candidates reduces a large part of the campaign budget to \$0. There are no attacks or one-sided statements requiring a response since all statements are approved in advance by all candidates. If candidates need less money, they don't need to raise as much and voters don't need to contribute as much. If we do a good job educating voters about the desirability of joint campaign statements, and the corresponding reduction in costs to the candidates, we can encourage voters to divide their contribution between the candidates and helping to pay costs for the campaign statements of each voter's preferred candidates. Limiting campaign contributions and public financing can also be part of the solution.

To achieve goal #3 of providing representation for multiple perspectives we decided on proportional representation which in turn can be achieved with an established voting method sometimes known as "Ranked Choice Voting", "Choice Voting" or "Proportional Voting". Voters rank all candidates in order of preference and the votes are counted in a way that provides majority control with minority representation. General law jurisdictions such as Mendocino County and the cities within Mendocino County cannot legally use any type of ranked voting until the California election code changes. We decided to focus on education to prepare voters for the day when ranked voting will be an option. We will also provide local support for efforts of groups like Californians for Electoral Reform (cfer.org) and FairVote.org which promote ranked voting throughout the state and work with state legislators to change the election code.

Wrap-up

For future meetings, we'll explore skype conferencing and other options that don't require driving or gas. Some topics we want to work on next are:

- Guides or other instructional materials for journalists and candidates who agree to support our goals
- A name for the group. The MendoVote name was chosen a couple years ago for a website promoting voting reform in Mendocino County. A pervasive theme running through many of our discussions was communication/problem-solving skills. A new name would better reflect our current goals.