

# Howard County Issues

Volume 1 Issue 1 April/May 2007

A Publication from Howard County Independent Voters

## Early Voting or Statewide Voting with No ID



From Jim Robey,  
Maryland State Senator

### On Constitutionality & Absentee Balloting

The Maryland General Assembly passed legislation in 2006 that allowed for early voting. However, the law was struck down as unconstitutional by the Maryland Court of Appeals in

August 2006. Bills amending the Constitution to allow early voting are moving through both the House and Senate Chambers to allow for a referendum during the 2008 General election so that the voters can decide this issue.

### On Expense

Early voting will increase costs depending on the number of polling places and the logistics of assigning judges and making procedural changes. Any time you lengthen an in-place program the costs increase.

### On Voter Turnout

Anything that makes it easier to vote is good. It's extremely important to provide voters with the opportunity to vote on more than one day. For example, people in some occupations in particular have difficulty getting to the polls on one day; some people live in Maryland and work in other states; others work in Baltimore City and live on the Eastern Shore.

## INDEPENDENT VOICES

In each issue, we intend to ask the same questions of two or more elected officials or appointed officials and citizens. In this way, readers will be presented with both sides of the issue without the appearance of editorial slant or bias.

From Allan Kittleman,  
Maryland State Senator

### On Constitutionality & Absentee Balloting

Everyone must vote in their precinct per the constitution, so the current bill would require an amendment to be constitutional.

The debate has not been around voting on one particular day; absentee ballots have not been an issue. The debate has been about where to vote and how to identify individual voters from people who are voting for someone else. Precinct voting, the location where voters cast ballots, has been the focus of the discussion.

Two things would've enabled more support for the Early Voting bill: 1. Vote in your county, and 2. Require identification to vote. In 2005 I voted for the Early Voting bill, but this bill lacks these two important similarities. Since polling places cannot be kept open for two weeks or 10 days prior to the election, the current discussion is moving toward use college campuses. Any overly-zealous person can canvass the campus and ask those who don't normally vote if they can vote instead. This is too risky, and lacks integrity. Voting is a sacred right, and requires sensible attention to the integrity of the process.

The Maryland interpretation of the Federal Help America Vote Act is different than Ohio, in that Ohio requires voting within the voter's precinct, or they are given a provisional ballot. The Maryland interpretation is that voting can take place anywhere with no limitations. Variations in interpretations leave some question regarding the Maryland use of the Help America Vote Act.

### On Voter Turnout

It's been proven that early voting does not increase voter turnout, but does make voting more convenient for those who are going to vote anyway. The cost in terms of



## BORED OF ELECTIONS

from Dave Reich, Maryland Independent

Feeling betrayed by the original party of my choice, I became an "unaffiliated" voter several years ago, adding my small contribution to the message of "a pox on both your houses" that many had sent before me. As such, I have no desire to participate in their primaries, and suggest to any "independents" who do, that they join a party. (Hint to those who complained about the annoying political phone calls during the recent primary season; if you can't vote in the primary, you won't get called.)

Moreover, I would suggest that party primaries, be just that - PARTY primaries - which would be totally financed and run by the particular parties, and that the public at large should not have to pay for, nor have any say in how they are run. It should be entirely up to the party how they come up with their candidates to run in the general election. If the Democrats want to run their primary on the second Monday in July from sunup to sundown, requiring no voter ID, holding them in homeless shelters, while Republicans want to run theirs on every Wednesday in April from 6 - 9 am, requiring 3 forms of voter ID, and hold them in gun clubs, then let them have at it. It should be nobody else's business any more than the Elks should have a say in how and when the Lions hold their elections. And why should the Rotary club have to contribute to their processes? The point is that the integrity of the process by which any party brings its candidates to the general election need only satisfy its own members, and the cost and monitoring of that process should rest entirely on their shoulders.

As for the general election, while it must continue to be financed by the general public at

(Continued on Page 7)

A **referendum** is a direct vote in which an entire electorate is asked to either accept or reject a particular proposal. In the United States, the term "referendum" typically refers to a popular vote to overturn legislation already passed at the state or local levels. Source: Wikidpedia

(Continued on Page 2)

## Is There a Right to Referendum in Maryland?

from Angela Beltram

The Annotated Code of Maryland permits petitions of referendum of legislative actions of State and local elected officials, thereby allowing citizens to vote directly on issues. The Code sets forth requirements for a petition drive. The actual petition document is supplied by the local (Howard County) Board of Elections.

Certain language is required to be on the petition. The most important is the "title of the bill", an indication of what is to be taken to the voters. A certain number of eligible, registered voters must sign the petition.

In March, 2005, the County Council of Howard County passed approximately 38 changes to the zoning map and zoning regulations, which came to be known as CompLite. These items were to be the "reconsideration" of previous actions by the Council when it performed its responsibility to adopt a Comprehensive Zoning Plan.

Because of a lack of a public process whereby certain properties did not fit the category of "reconsideration" but were decisions on new properties, COPE, Citizens for an Open Process for Everyone, exercised its right

to petition this legislative act (bill) to referendum.

COPE collected over 7,000 citizen signatures in the required time frame and was approved by the Board of Elections.

Some of the property owners challenged that decision by the Board of Elections which defended its position before the Circuit Court in Howard County. The Court agreed with the Board of Elections that its decision to approve the COPE's petition was legal.

Again, that decision was appealed to the Maryland Court of Special Appeals. At that time, the Board of Elections chose NOT to defend its earlier decision for reasons that COPE believes was "political" and out of the purview of their responsibility. The Chairman of the Board stated in the local papers that this was a "zoning" issue and questioned whether "zoning" could be taken to referendum.

This was a "legislative" matter and by state and local law, may be referred to the voters. The Board of Election's only interest should have been to defend their own decision that COPE had met all the requirements, and they chose not to do so.

So, the question arises, is there a right to referendum? Yes, but when it becomes "political", the

citizens will not have that opportunity to vote on a question that should have been placed on the ballot in the General Election.

(Kittleman continued from Page 1)

potential for fraud is too high to offset the convenience of early voting. If voter turnout were increased, I could see that some risk would be more tolerable, but the benefits do not outweigh the potential costs. Some Democrats voted against the bill based on the expanded two weeks, and no identification. An over-zealous campaign worker could just gather up people to vote anywhere, or take their information and vote for them, and the fraud would go undetected.

Opponents say that requiring ID suppresses the vote, but we show our ID everywhere for any number of reasons. People are not going to stop voting because they have to show their ID.

Early Voting will be on the ballot in 2008, and will be named "Early Voting", but I think it should be called, "Statewide Voting Without ID".

## PROJECT VOTE SMART

Prior to the last election, the Maryland legislature librarian was inundated with calls from voters looking for the voting records of their State representatives. On the national level, the records are available in several locations. Public Citizen publishes a succinct chart which includes voting records for every national representative in the country (<http://www.citizen.org/>). But a site that can outweigh even this organization (which has a foundation on citizen protections), is the Project Vote Smart site at <http://votesmart.org/index.htm>.

What makes this site so unique is that voters can find just about anything about their incumbent representatives, whether voting records on issues, campaign funding, and biographical information. And it's free.



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# WELCOME TO HOWARD COUNTY ISSUES

from Mona Brinegar, Editor

Local politics is critical for several reasons, not the least of which is that incumbency is powerful: Local candidates and elected leaders go on to work at the State level, and even the National level. But in the absence of national news-like coverage, sufficient knowledge about local politicians can be a challenge. Therefore, the first purpose of this publication is to provide Howard County residents with a connection to local candidates, political leaders, people actively participating in our community and other citizens while providing information on local issues.

Issues that are specific to Howard County and Maryland will enjoy as thorough a presentation as writing contributors can provide. Our goal is to make readers and writers indistinguishable; be encouraged to write us often.

## Vote for the Environment

from Ken Clark

Are you interested in preserving open space? Breathing clean air and drinking clean water? The Sierra Club Howard County Group and Maryland Chapter are non-partisan groups that make a big effort to educate our elected representatives and analyze their voting records on environmental issues.

This is an opportunity to connect with other citizens as well as candidates and elected officials.

The front page accomplishes two goals simultaneously and we received enthusiastic feedback from friends and colleagues about the Point/Counter Point wherein local or state politicians and community activists, and citizens take the opportunity to address each side of a local or state issue. Politicians, candidates, and community participants can speak directly to voters, describing the basis for their positions, and readers will have the benefit of thorough information on each topic. Send your ideas, we appreciate feedback.

Inside Howard County Issues you'll also find cumulative tracking of local and state records for voting on bills which pass the council and the legislature so that readers will have a single source for identifying candidate positions on new legislation. Currently, we've found no other source for this information. You'll also

find campaign finance records and internet links to support sources. We'll provide information on state and local politicians and candidates working for citizens rather than special interests.

In this year where "You" were named Time Magazine's Person of the Year, make this newsletter a platform from which to speak with others in Howard County. Voters need all sides of issues, and you can certainly help; solutions to our issues are in the community.

## LOGISTICS

At this point in time, the printed version of Howard County Issues will be distributed prior to site links, and though we are aiming for five or six releases this year, eventually we'd like to increase the frequency. Distribution goes to all Howard County Public Libraries and various retail outlets. Delivery is possible; please see our coupon to order direct delivery, or email link delivery.

Info@howardcountyissues.org



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet



## We all deserve clean water, right?

The Clean Water Act has been protecting us for 30 years. While the Act has been instrumental in keeping *millions of tons* of sewage and toxic chemicals out of our waterways each year, we are still a long way from cleaning up ALL of the nation's water bodies. In fact, the majority of Americans live within 10 miles of polluted water. We need to strengthen the enforcement of the Clean Water Act, and we could use your help to do it. Clean water is not a privilege, it's a right.

JOIN Sierra Club to help keep the Clean Water Act strong.

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Contributions, gifts and dues to Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletters.

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Before elections, the Sierra Club publishes endorsements, which are taken very seriously by both voters and elected officials. The Sierra Club was a key influence in County Executive Ken Ulman's recent decision to make Howard County a "Cool County" by signing the U.S. Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement, joining many cities and counties across the country in making a commitment to help stop global warming. The club also leads outings and has volunteer opportunities like an Earth Day tree planting on April 21. For more information, or to help out, contact Ken Clark at 301-725-3306, [kenclark7@comcast.net](mailto:kenclark7@comcast.net). Also see the membership form in this issue, and at <http://maryland.sierraclub.org/hc>

Candidates Working for Citizens

In keeping with the goal to provide a venue for candidates to connect with directly with voters, circumventing the need for financing from special interests, we are happy to announce the candidacy of Michael Cornell, one of our editors, for the Columbia Association. Michael has a long history of working for citizens.

-Mona Brinegar

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Candidate Statement for Columbia Association Board of Directors - River Hill



by Michael Cornell

Having lived in River Hill for the past 14 years, I plan to bring a fresh perspective to CA. I will represent the interests of not only River Hill’s residents, but also all Columbians in seeing that Jim Rouse’s vision continues for our community.

I have gained considerable leadership experience as a member of the River Hill Village Board of Directors, as a trustee of my congregation, as Master of our local Cub Scout Pack 702, as assistant director for a local theater troupe, as a coach of youth sports, and as Co-chair for the Maryland Green Party. Recently, I worked on the Kevin Zeese independent campaign as the Unity Candidate for US Senate.

I currently work as a consultant to small businesses locally and nationwide, after spending 18 years working in not-for-profit organizations. And, I have been involved with many local issues, including the successful effort to place a cap on increases in your annual CA assessment, protecting civil rights of all Maryland citizens, keeping methodone clinics away from our schools, and creating paper trails for Maryland elections.

I look forward to your vote and to serving you as your new representative.



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Support a Local Olympic Hopeful



Mark Tucker of Maryland Boxing Club has an impressive record of wins, and continues with the commitment necessary to be a champion. Now Mark has his eye on the Olympics. To find out more, or support this local athlete, contact the Maryland Boxing Club at 443-277-2256.

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**Voting Records for Elected Officials**  
from Mona Brinegar

After encountering multiple and varied difficulties in obtaining accurate voting records for our elected leaders from the State, and to a lesser extent the County governments, the reason why these records are not already tracked is becoming quite clear. We need more open presentation of data, even if it's just a flat file filled with data. My understanding is that no one can obtain information on bills that have passed without searching each day's proceedings. And after locating a bill, the location of the votes is inconsistent.

The second observation, along this arduous trek, is that perhaps too many low-impact issues are being worked while critical items are either subordinated or entirely omitted from consideration. A few of our representatives are very forthcoming with information; two of them are featured on the front page of this newsletter. However, citizens need to know how votes are being cast on issues, and we need to know what issues have been considered.

The State House and Senate are considering bills to neutralize the Electoral College and elevate the popular vote. It would be good to know how our representatives are voting during the readings, but this is not freely disseminated. One option is to attend the hearings, but citizens typically cannot attend hearings each day in order to cast an informed vote every two years.

And one voter called us to ask if this bill translated into the opposite, i.e., subordinating the popular vote further. Without knowing who is on each side of this issue and hearing from them, the answer may not be a simple and subjective reading of the bill.

At the county level, Planning Board votes are not easily obtained even though Howard County has seen an increase in citizen groups forming to insist on representation regarding land use issues.

The Columbia Association is not a government entity, but because they are elected with many of the same duties on a more local level, the Council members, and Village Board members, might also consider the availability of data. Some of the open positions during the April

2007 election did not have any candidates vying for the openings which likely correlates to the cloistering of sects within the organization. While some villages were very forthcoming, others refused to provide information initially, and persistence was required to obtain information on who was running for the 2007 open seats. Again, I don't know many citizens who have time to contact this organization repeatedly in order to be informed prior to voting.

Consider this: An enhanced remote access to issues and votes would solve multiple problems citizens face when searching for clear and available data to make informed decisions. Or quite simply, have votes and voting records readily available through websites. We have the technology and plenty of high school students with the knowledge to help make this a reality. And the voters have a right to be informed.

**Serious Health Risks Avoidable**  
from Marc Norman

You may recall that last Fall the Council considered a Bill (CB73-2006) to bring 46 acres of Turf Valley's former golf course into the MWSD. It was tabled (and died for lack of action) when citizens complained that the County was not protecting the community from the historic golf course chemicals (including Arsenic, Mercury, Chlordane and DDT) that would be exposed during construction, [affecting particularly the properties around Turf Valley including Brantwood which uses well water].

Since then, neither the State nor County have taken any action to address the potential health and safety hazards posed by these chemicals. Despite these concerns, the Department of Public Works, without ANY soil testing, is preparing to build a water main through the areas that most likely have the highest concentration of toxic contaminants. Furthermore, it is unclear whether DPW has studied the possibility of external soil/chemicals being drawn into the water supply as the pipes age/crack over time.

Please encourage your friends and neighbors to mark their calendars for April 16, or contact the County Executive, Ken Ulman, or Howard County Council members at any time. These serious health risks are entirely avoidable.

**COLUMBIA ELECTIONS**  
Elections are being held on April 21st. Check with your Village Center for location, times and absentee ballots.

**Dorsey's Search**  
Columbia Council  
Tom O'Connor  
Lester Straw  
Village Board  
Michael Hughes

**Harper's Choice**  
Village Board  
Bob Bastian  
Phillip Wright  
Evelyn Wilkins  
Evan Rose  
Juanita Robinson  
John David Smith

**Hickory Ridge**  
Village Board  
Tom Loudon  
Nancy McCord  
David Zetzer

**King's Contrivance**  
Columbia Council  
Jason Rigdell  
Evan Coren  
Village Board  
Barbara Seely  
Shari Zaret  
Shaun Lane

**Long Reach**  
Village Board  
Victor Bailey  
Nina Basu

**Oakland Mills**  
Columbia Council  
Barbara Russell  
Ian Kennedy  
Village Board  
Bill Lewis  
WH Krizmanich  
Phil Engelke  
Karen Gray  
Cathy Latham  
Katie Pittenger  
Bill Woodcock

**Owen Brown**  
Village Board  
Summer Romack

**River Hill**  
Columbia Council  
Michael Cornell

**Town Center**  
Village Board  
Stephen Meskin  
Lee Richardson  
Suzanne Waller  
David Wissing

**Wilde Lake**  
Columbia Council  
Phil Kirsch  
William Santos  
Village Board  
Rhoda Toback  
Linda Odum  
Mary Pivar  
Vincent Marando  
Richard Madzel

**Senior Tax Break**  
from Don Dunn

I am a member of the task force that examined the bill passed last year to benefit the elderly by providing a property tax credit. The recommendations made by the task force were not unanimous.

Retired seniors on fixed incomes who experience significant increases each year were pleased with the original bill, now a law. An economic obstacle to their ability to age in place was removed.

The task force lost sight of the purpose of the bill. A majority voted to rescind the law. They claimed success in suggesting ways to reduce the cumulative effects of the law, limiting the tax cuts and the county’s revenue loss. These suggestions were made without accurately knowing the actual financial impact.

The small changes would result in an unknown number of fixed incomes being deprived of needed tax relief.

The County Council has a social responsibility to enact legislation to benefit the vulnerable parts of our society. I feel we are obligated to allow the law to work. One of the most affluent counties in the country can do no less.

We can be proud of the validity of the legislation unanimously passed by the previous council.

**Current Proposals for the County Tax Credit from**  
Melania Pender, Special Assistant to Chairperson Calvin Ball

The Howard County Council passed Resolution 145-2006, establishing a Task Force to examine CB68-2006. The Resolution stipulated that the Task Force was to submit an interim report by February 22, 2007. The Task Force was able to meet that requirement. The interim report contains

County Council votes since Dec 4, 2006 on Bills that passed

Bill #	ISSUE	Ball	Fox	Sigaty	Terrasa	Watson
CB4	An Act to require that pre-submission community meetings required for residential subdivision applications in the County be held in public or institutional buildings within a five mile radius of the subdivision site.	y	y	y	y	y
CB5	An Act to require that pre-submission community meetings required for residential subdivision applications in the County be held for minor sub-divisions outside the Planned Service Area for Public Water and Sewer.	y	y	y	y	y
CB6	An Act to require developers to send notice of pre-submission community meetings at least three weeks prior to the scheduled meeting and <u>allow citizens to request a meeting with a staff member of the Department of Planning and Zoning after the initial plan has been submitted to the Department of Planning and Zoning</u> ; and generally relating to pre-submission community meetings.	y	y	y	y	y
CB7	AN ACT amending certain definitions related to firearms control; adding certain definitions; adding that certain prohibitions shall not apply to a public safety officer acting within the scope of the officer’s official duties or to certain transfers of electronic weapons; and generally related to firearms control.	y	y	y	n	y
CB8	AN ACT amending the Plumbing and Gasfitting Code for Howard County to adopt certain local amendments relating to certain plumbing facilities, fixtures, and fire protection systems; and generally relating to the Plumbing and Gasfitting Code for Howard County.	y	y	y	y	y
SAO5-FY07	AN ACT transferring \$44,100 from the Grant Fund Contingency to the Department of Police for a grant to combat gangs and gang violence.	y	y	y	y	y

Senate Bills passed House and Senate, Maryland				
Bill #	ISSUE	Robey	Kittleman	Kasemeyer
SB1	Early Voting, or Statewide Voting with no ID	Y	N	Y
SB6	Adding a new article known as the "Human Services Article", to revise, restate, and recodify the laws of the State relating to human services, including laws relating to the Department of Human Resources and its component parts, etc.	Y	Y	Y
SB33	Generally curing previous Acts of the General Assembly with possible title or other defects.**	Unanimous*	Unanimous*	Unanimous*
SB106	Prohibiting a ground lease or a ground sublease under specified circumstances.	Unanimous*	Unanimous*	Unanimous*
* "Unanimous" provides no information regarding attendance and actual voting. ** See website for voluminous details				

recommendations which are implemented in CB10-2007.

CB10-2007 is fully supported by the Senior Tax Credit Task Force. The Task Force’s recommendations are as follows: Adding an asset test, modifying the income test 4 times federal poverty level for a family of two, removing the freeze aspect from the existing property tax deferment and substituting it with a 25 percent discount, clarifying that other credits are applied first, and requiring an outreach and education program by county government.

Tax Break Continued page 7



Benefits Connection



Dec 18 Days End Farm Benefit  
(from left to right) Mearl Grabill, Mona Brinegar, Jim Adams, Don Dunn, Helen Dunn, Charles Feaga, Barbara Feaga

It's been said that Days End Farm is at the forefront of equine neglect rehabilitation. To understand the importance of the work that is done, you would need to see their newsletter and the condition of some horses that came to them compared with how they appear after rehabilitation. The results are no less than astounding.

To find out how to contribute (funds, gear, tack, feed, hay, equipment), visit their site or phone the number provided below:

The Days End Farm  
15856 Frederick Road  
Lisbon, Maryland, 21765  
  
301/854-5037 or 410/442-1564  
  
<http://www.defhr.org/>

Late winter benefit for Juanita Robinson at Kahler Hall, (pictured at right), Juanita Robinson, Elaine Wallis

Pictured at right, Don Dunn, Helen Dunn, and Mona Brinegar attended Juanita's benefit to support her during recovery.



Juanita Robinson has truly been a tireless volunteer for Howard County. That is why so many people turned out for her benefit when cancer returned and she began treatment once again.

The benefit to provide a safety net for Juanita was held at Kahler Hall, attendance went beyond expectations at several hundred. The benefit was organized by Wendy Tzucker at Kahler Hall in Harpers Choice, Columbia.

Tax Break from page 6 continued

CB12-2007 as introduced would repeal the senior tax credit and enhance the county supplement to the state circuit breaker. However, Councilman Calvin Ball plans to introduce an amendment that would take out the repeal component of the bill. Consequently, this would provide more tax credits and lesstaxes.

Lastly, the Senior Tax Credit Task Force fully supports Council Resolution 22-2007, which would ask tax preparers to educate their clients about property tax credits.

(Bored of Elections continued from Page 1)

both national and state levels, there are changes needed there as well. First of all, there must be some uniform, universally applied form of voter ID instituted. The claptrap suggesting that requiring ID somehow overly burdens the poor and elderly is insulting nonsense designed to accommodate the indolent and irresponsible. If voting is such a precious right, then keeping track of one's voter's card should not be too much to ask.

Secondly, the myriad and muddled maze of campaign finance laws and rules serves only to encourage, and thereby ensure, corruption and obfuscation, and should be abandoned. There need be virtually no restrictions or limitations on campaign contributions, only full, clear disclosure of their source.

Finally, since EVERYONE cannot have a holiday for Election Day, then NO ONE should have one. Government and municipal employees have always had unfair representation and effect on elections since they, more than any other group, are usually given the day off. This of course would move polling places out of schools, which should be kept in session. We could use church halls, VFW halls, bingo halls, reception halls, and the like instead.

If as a practical matter, we must keep voting in schools, then teachers and administrators would not be given a day off, and since they would still be paid and not teaching that day, they should be charged with the responsibility of running the polling places. This would give us a large number of qualified workers who would be able to understand any method of voting that would be thrown at them. And if Maryland still has its ridiculous mandatory-volunteerism requirement for high school graduation, then students could also help in the endeavor and get credit for it.

Making primary elections totally private affairs of the parties would leave our boards of elections only one election per cycle to concentrate on - and screw up.

Independent Voters, and Democrats and Republicans: Visit [Unity08.com](http://Unity08.com) for non-partisan participation in 2008 elections.

**Who are Independent Voters?**  
by Mona Brinegar

John Avlon of “Independent Nation“ fame claims that people who register to vote outside of the two major political parties are centrists. I disagree.

Some of us are centrist, but there are equally strong groups of conservatives and liberals, and a group of Independent voters who have simultaneous strong positions from both ends of the political spectrum depending on the issue. One single description could not describe us all any more than one group could credibly claim to speak for all the registered Independents on issues.

Independents do possess some unifying precepts, but these wouldn’t be positions on issues as partisans might hope. We’re a quandary for members of the two parties who study our movements, voting, and opinions. Like any voter, what we really want is to know the basis for support on all sides of particular issues, in short concise presentations and available when convenient. Unlike other voters, we don’t trust a political party to represent our positions on issues across the board, in total.

We care about the same things as other voters: Government waste, sensible decisions, patriotism. But our priority order of the issues is what makes us Independent. Practicality wins, idealism is trumps being on the winning team, and cynicism is peppered throughout opinions which ultimately relate to the power bestowed on elected people who have won. Occupying the most space on the winning team isn’t everything.

Independents (including Unaffiliated and Other registrants) are growing in numbers. Astoundingly so. Marketers are likely as baffled as politicians regarding the psychology of citizens individually going against the mainstream, and already forming a majority in some states.

In Howard County, 35,000 people have registered as Independent, going against the mainstream, in the complete absence of any sales campaign or celebrity endorsement or other method of persuading people to do something new. With no group to join or follow, the registrations were individually determined, one by one and now amounting to the fastest growing voter registration

category.

While 35,000 is about 20% of registered voters in Howard, it represents the early stages of a major, fundamental shift in our political culture. 20% can decide most elections today.

Contrary to the claim that we registered to vote as an afterthought, we vote in about the same percentages as party affiliated registrants, a possible indication that we consciously registered as Independents.

Hundreds of Independents in Howard County have been phoned and asked the same questions. Typically, the answer starts with, “I’m not well versed on political things..” immediately followed with decidedly clear answers on where they get their news and why they do or don’t like particular candidates. Because Independents do not have a unifying voice does not mean they are inattentive to voting and issues.

The Democrats and the Republicans are doing what is necessary. Their work has been incalculable. But also, it’s time to come to terms with the contribution Independent voters and third party candidates want to share.

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*Writing contributions are encouraged. Please email Mona Brinegar at [mona@howarcountryissues.org](mailto:mona@howarcountryissues.org). Next issue topics to include Columbia Downtown development, West County items, 2008 elections, Independent views, and topics on which readers write us, or recommend we solicit input.*