

The Deciding Vote...

Local Teacher Selected as Democratic Presidential Elector For 9th District

by JoBeth Wampler

Staff Reporter, *The Virginia Mountaineer*

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History students and young voters throughout the United States often ask the question: Does my vote really count?

For Council High School History teacher Edgar Childress, every election season is the perfect opportunity to teach students about the electoral process. But, this year is different from all others.



Childress was selected as the Democratic Party's Presidential elector and will cast one of Virginia's 13 electoral votes for Barack Obama, if the Democratic nominee receives the popular vote.

But, casting one of those important votes isn't the only reason he's excited to take part in this fall's election.

His role in the election process offers him the ability to teach his CHS students all about the Electoral College "from a first hand experience."

"That was one of my hopes," he says. "It was to take my experience as an elector to benefit my students."

Composed of electors from each state, the Electoral College was created by our founding fathers as a compromise between allowing the popular vote to decide who would become president and allowing Congress to elect one.

The number of electors each state receives is determined by the number of U.S. representatives it has, plus an allotment for the state's two senators.

As each state's number of representatives changes with the fluctuation of its population, the number of electors each state receives also changes.

For instance, the State of Virginia has one elector for each of its 11 districts plus 2 for the state's senators for a total of 13 electors.

Political parties within each state then choose a number of individuals equal to the amount the state is allotted, who have pledged to vote for their

presidential candidate, and submit their names to the state's chief election official.

These individuals are normally selected at party conventions or through appointment by their state's party leaders.

In the case of Childress, he was selected by the Democratic Party during its 9th Congressional District Convention in Riner, Va., in May, when the party also elected incumbent U.S. Congressman Rick Boucher as its nominee for the November election.

After the polls close on Tuesday, November 4, 2008, the popular vote will be decided and whichever party's candidate receives the most votes will be awarded all of the electors for that state, with the exception of Maine and Nebraska where two electors are chosen by statewide popular vote and the remainder by the popular vote within each Congressional district.

In other words, if in Virginia, Republican presidential hopeful John McCain wins the popular vote statewide, the candidates selected by the Republican Party will vote as the state's electors.

However, if Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama wins the popular vote, those candidates selected by the Democratic Party, including Childress, will cast the deciding votes.

Though each party's candidates have pledged to vote for their respective Presidential nominees and normally cast their ballots in accordance with the popular vote, candidates may change their minds.

On the Monday following the second Wednesday of December, this year on December 15, each state's electors meet at their respective state capitals to cast their electoral votes – one for president and one for vice president.

Once the votes are cast, they are sealed and sent to the President of the Senate, who opens and reads them before both houses of Congress in January.

The candidate with the most electoral votes is then declared president and sworn into office later that month.

Childress' role in the Electoral College is one that he hopes will spark some excitement from his students.

"Maybe, this will be a story that will get them interested and a few more people will vote," Childress says.

Currently, he teaches students from freshmen to seniors at CHS in World Geography, World History, U.S. History and Dual Enrollment American History. He also teaches American History as an adjunct professor at Southwest Virginia Community College.

Because of his unique opportunity to serve as a Democratic elector while also having a special interest in teaching History and Government, Childress has offered himself as a guest speaker to local schools. It's a role he says he feels privileged to fulfill.

After living in Council for 23 years, he and his wife Nancy (Compton) moved to Rosedale around 4 years ago.

He continues to teach at Council High School, saying Buchanan County is still his home.

"I wouldn't still be teaching in Buchanan County if I didn't feel that way," he adds.

Childress is a 1967 graduate of Garden High School.

After briefly attending college, he says he quit to marry his wife Nancy and soon began working at Island Creek Coal Corporation.

In 1983, he decided to remedy the mistake of leaving college and began taking classes at Clinch Valley College, graduating a year later with a BA in History.

He received his Master's Degree from Emory & Henry in History in 1985 and began teaching at the former P.V. Dennis Elementary School.

Over the years, he was transferred throughout the Buchanan County Public School System, also teaching at Council, Garden and Twin Valley.

He and his wife have retained their Buchanan County ties, where they currently attend Jerusalem Primitive Baptist Church on Garden Creek.

Childress is the President of the Virginia Education Association for District 1 and represents six counties on the VEA Board of Directors.

He is also the Precinct Chair of the Russell County Democratic Party.