

Redwood ACLU Presents Keynote Speaker Steve Chessin at Local Election Reform Forum

At the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Directors of the Redwood Chapter, American Civil Liberties Union today, election reform activists looked forward to a special Local Election Reform Forum to be held one week from today, headlined by a special keynote speaker, Steve Chessin, flying in from out of town to address ACLU members and the public concerning efforts to reform elections across California.

“We’re very proud to be able to provide this forum featuring such a prominent statewide advocate of choice voting, which would greatly improve the functioning of our local and state elections.” said Redwood ACLU chair Christina Allbright. “It’s about time our community leaders sat down in the same room to discuss what positive steps can be taken to reform our election process in ways which conform with our constitutional values.”

Steve Chessin is the President of Californians for Electoral Reform, the leading statewide organization pushing for choice voting, which would allow voters to rank candidates by order of preference, ensuring winners would receive majority support. In the 2002 statewide election, the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, controller, treasurer, and insurance commissioner were put into office with the support of a minority of voters; on the local level, the Mayor of Eureka, the Second District Supervisor and other local officials won office with less than 50% support.

Chessin, a software engineer from Mountain View, is also a member of the Democratic Party state executive board. The forum’s panel, however, features local speakers from across the political spectrum, including:

- Carolyn Crnich, the Clerk-Recorder of Humboldt County, will discuss the Humboldt Transparency Project and the recent decision to move away from the Diebold/Premiere vote-counting system for local elections.
- Patrick Higgins, a Humboldt Harbor Commissioner and an advocate of the California Clean Money Campaign, will review efforts to establish public financing of election campaigns.
- Chris Crawford, a Eureka Chamber of Commerce boardmember and the organizer of “No on Measure T,” will present his proposal for campaign contribution limits on private financing of local election campaigns.
- Greg Allen, a founding member of the Humboldt County Election Advisory Committee and the Vice Chair of the Redwood ACLU, will provide an overview of the use, and misuse, of the local ballot initiative process and his idea to provide prior legal review of ballot measures before they are presented to voters.
- Dave Ogden, the founder of the Eureka Civic Association and the Chair of the Eureka Finance Advisory Committee, will look at reform of Eureka’s Ward system to make it a “true” ward system where only residents of a particular ward would vote on that ward’s City Councilmember.

“The Redwood ACLU has an important role to play in improving this process, not only as a public service, but to make sure that election reform measures we do support are given a fair hearing, instead of being tainted by the immature and unprofessional conduct associated with recent campaigns,” Allen said. “We have a real duty, a professional responsibility to do it right.”

For more information, call the Redwood ACLU at 707-442-4419 or visit redwoodaclu.blogspot.com.