

Munger, Luebke debate merits of Electoral College

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CHAPEL HILL -- "Tyranny of the majority" and Plato's thoughts on governing were tossed around Saturday as Mike Munger and state Rep. Paul Luebke, D-Durham, debated abolishing the Electoral College.

The topic of the morning at Extraordinary Ventures was The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which if enacted would effectively abolish the power of the Electoral College and replace it with a direct popular vote of the president of the United States.

Luebke argued that the nationwide popular vote would spur more civic participation.

"You will have more involvement because you can say, 'Your vote matters'," he said. "We're simply saying your vote will count wherever state you live in."

But Munger, former Libertarian gubernatorial candidate and chairman of the Duke University political science department, took the opposite stance -- mostly for the purposes of the debate format.

"The national vote compact dramatically reduces turnout," Munger said. "It makes your vote not count at all."

The U.S. is not a true democracy, he said, and the Electoral College was set up to prevent the tyranny of the majority.

However, the constitution also gives state legislatures the right to decide how to appoint its own electors.

Currently, most states award electoral votes to the winner of the popular vote in that particular state -- hence why presidential candidates shower more attention on California, with its 55 electoral votes, instead of Montana, with a meager three.

Munger argued that doing away with the Electoral College's system of apportionment by individual states would reduce the power of individual votes in certain states. For example, votes in Montana currently count for four times that of one in California, he said.

Many of those in attendance at the event hosted by the League of Women Voters of Orange, Durham and Chatham Counties disagreed with Munger's argument.

"The Electoral College is too complex for many people to understand," said Brenda Rogers, vice president of the state league. "With the Electoral College, people don't necessarily feel that their vote makes a difference."

Various states have already joined the interstate compact, including Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland and New Jersey. The House of Representatives of 22 states have passed the bill.

In May 2007, the North Carolina Senate also passed the National Popular Vote bill.