



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Spring 2015

Legislative Day in a Busy Session

The LWVVT Legislative Day was held during one of the busiest sessions in a while, certainly with respect to League priority issues. There was a lot to talk about with Legislators as they enjoyed coffee and bagels provided by the League.

Bills of particular interest to the League are:

Health Care

H.207/S.88: This bill proposes to establish the framework for universal, publicly finance primary health care for all Vermonters beginning in 2017. [Support]

H.1/S.20: An act relating to establishing and regulating licensed dental practitioners. [Support]

H.77: An act relating to increasing consumer access to health care cost information. [Support, provides transparency]

Education Funding and Property Tax Reform

H.79: An act relating to creating a statewide per pupil spending amount. Would also allow municipalities to increase spending, using just local property tax. [Oppose on grounds of inequity.]

H.76: An act relating to the requirement of mandatory binding arbitration and to the elimination of strikes and imposed contracts in connection with collective bargaining for teachers' and school administrators' contracts

Lake Champlain Water Quality

H.35: An act relating to improving the quality of State waters [Support]

Election Law

S.29: An act relating to election day registration [Support]

PR.2: Constitution amendment calling for a majority vote for Gov., Lt. Gov., and Treasurer, followed by a run-off if necessary. [Support, plus support for IRV]

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<http://www.facebook.com/pages/League-of-Women-Voters-of-Vermont/193029977406840>

Message from the Board Spring 2015

Wow!! 2015 is off to a rousing start. The Legislature is dealing with a number of things that are high priority for the League—round two on single payer health care; majority or plurality for election of Governor; clean water initiative; and education funding.

As this goes to press, we are really excited about the Spring Fling – March 21st and the Luncheon speaker. Peter Levine is a nationally recognized activist and author for civic renewal. He is Director of CIRCLE, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, at Tufts University. The Board decided to make his talk free in order to encourage attendance. Please come and invite a friend to join us for the luncheon. He also has a new book on civic education, so the talk will be of particular interest to teachers.

Plans for Quad State, May 15 -17, are underway. The conference will be in Wells, Maine again so we know the venue as well as the company will be great.

Sonja Schuyler, State Board

*Sonja Schuyler,
State Board*

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Kate Rader, Editor

Membership in the League includes a subscription.
If you would like to join the League, e-mail, or write:

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RI Sec. of State Headlines Quad States*

Nellie Gorbea, Rhode Island's Secretary of State, will be keynote speaker at the 9th annual Quad States Leadership Conference, to be held on May 16 and 17 in Wells, ME.

Election Law is the theme of this year's conference, with related issues the focus of workshops to enhance leadership skills (focus issue in parentheses):

Membership Recruitment: using an issue to recruit members (Redistricting) – Nancy Marashio (NH), invited.

Working With Others, including LWVUS (Money in Politics) – Ann Luther, (ME).

Conducting a Study (Open Primaries) – Kate Rader and Sonja Schuyler (VT).

A panel of women in public life who have used League experience to launch or inform their careers will conclude the conference on Sunday.

Registration form for this event is found on the last page of this issue. *Please note that the LWVVT will subsidize attendees \$60/night*, half the cost of the guest room. Share a room and your lodging is free (plus tax and tip).

**Last year, the LWV of Connecticut and Massachusetts were invited to join this annual leadership conference, which has been designated New England (NE) Regional Leadership Development Conference. The editor opted for the simplicity of "Quad States" for this article.*



First Call to Convention 2015

***The 54th Convention
of the League of Women Voters of Vermont
will be held on Saturday, June 13.***

***The Honorable William Sorrell, Attorney General,
will be the keynote speaker.***

*Registration fee for the event will be \$40,
payable to the LWVVT.*

*Negotiations for the venue are now under way, but
the convention will be held in or near Montpelier.*



LWV Celebrates 95th Anniversary

In February the League of Women Voters kicked off a year-long celebration marking the organization's 95th anniversary. The League's nearly 800 [local and state chapters](#) in communities nation-wide will join in honoring this milestone.

"Ninety-five years after its founding, the League continues to make a difference to American lives and in Making Democracy Work®. The League has involved millions of voters in electing government decision makers at all levels of government and in holding them accountable for their actions," said [Elisabeth MacNamara](#), 18th president of the LWVUS

"Today's barriers to the ballot might look different than they did when the League was founded in 1920, but they remain threats to our democracy and voter participation all the same," MacNamara said. "Equal access to the ballot box is about fair-ness and equality, something that Carrie Chapman Catt understood as she led efforts to secure women the vote and founded the League to continue to fight discrimination and improve our democracy."

"The League's true power arises from the efforts of civic volunteers and activists who successfully take on a [range of key issues](#). The indelible mark of this organization will always stem from the individuals who roll up their sleeves to do whatever is most needed in their communities and the country," said MacNamara. "Today, and over the decades, we've undertaken sustained efforts to improve the voting process. We have also made significant contributions in other public policy areas, such as our multi-year efforts to protect the environment through passage of such legislation as the Clean Air Act and to create the United Nations."

"As we look to the latest challenges to our democracy, we're excited to see dedicated local members being joined by significant numbers of online activists across the country. Today, as we mark the League's 95th anniversary, we celebrate our many accomplishments, but with our eyes firmly on the future," concluded MacNamara. "As it has been from the beginning, the League of Women Voters remains actively engaged in Making Democracy Work® for all Americans.

[Adapted from a press release by Kelly Ceballos, Senior Director, Communications for the LWVUS]

The Long Road to Voting Rights

Ed. Note: Voting rights are unfortunately again (still?) at risk in many states. Here Claudette Sortino gives a brief history of changing voting rights in this country.

While it might seem somewhat strange, very little about voting rights is written in the body of the U.S. Constitution. Article I, Section 2 mentions that the House of Representatives shall be composed of members chosen every other year by the people of the states, but that is all that is said about it. While democracy was chosen as the form of government, many colonists thought it was nothing more than mob rule, and so voting rights were limited to citizens who were white, male, and property owners who paid taxes. There would be numerous Constitutional Amendments and federal laws passed before voting became an almost universal right of American citizens.

In 1790 there were some religious prerequisites to voting. Catholics were denied the franchise in five states and Jews in four. That came to an end by 1810. By 1850, property ownership had disappeared as a requisite and almost all white men could vote. Things began looking up...until 1855, when Connecticut and Massachusetts adopted literacy tests to deny the vote to Irish-Catholic immigrants. Literacy tests were later used against African-Americans until 1965 despite passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870, which gave all adult male citizens of every race the right to vote. Passing the literacy test in Louisiana for example required that 43 questions be answered in ten minutes. One error meant failure.

The first poll tax was adopted in Florida in 1889. Ten other southern states followed suit. But there was an unanticipated glitch. Some white men became disenfranchised because of poverty considerations and so were not able to vote. To get around this, anyone who was able to vote before 1870 or their descendants were grandfathered into the voter checklists. Problem solved!

Until 1913, senators were appointed by state legislatures. That was changed by passage of the 17th Amendment. In 1920, with the passage of the 19th Amendment, women were given the right to vote. Native Americans did not get the right to vote until 1924.

With federal laws and Constitutional Amendments making it more difficult to deny the right to vote to "those people," southern states instituted primary systems that were run by private associations and resulted

in "white primaries," no minority candidates allowed. In 1944 the US Supreme Court outlawed this practice. In 1957, the Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress. In 1960, the Court prohibited "gerrymandering" in setting up voting districts, preventing district boundaries designed to favor one race over another. In 1964, the 24th Amendment banned the poll tax. In 1961, citizens living in the District of Columbia were given the right to vote with the passage of the 23rd Amendment. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 included the elimination of literacy tests which until then were still the practice in 18 states. The last of these disappeared in 1970.

With all these changes, are we there yet? Not by a long shot. Numerous states have in recent years passed voter identification laws that make it very difficult for certain people to get the required I.D. Drivers' licenses and passports are suitable documents but frequently the urban poor don't possess them and cannot afford to acquire something deemed acceptable. Also, the Supreme Court recently negated a part of the Voting Rights Act, removing federal oversight of states that had historically suppressed voting by minorities. And so the struggle goes on.

The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution leaves to the states those powers that are not specifically assigned to the federal government. Unfortunately, voting regulations are in that category. For over 200 years, this has allowed every state to make its own rules and regulations as to its voting procedures. Seven Constitutional Amendments have been passed to bring some sense to the process. But depending on the motives of each state legislature, length of early voting period, number of polling places, design of ballots, ease of voter registration, and clarity of voting instructions can vary significantly.

In a more local attempt to expand the franchise, two items on the spring ballot would have granted new rights to noncitizen residents of Burlington. With a university, a large hospital and the global IBM nearby, the city has become an international. Many of its non-citizen residents have lived in the city for years, paying taxes and sending their children to the public schools. If passed, the ballot articles would have allowed non-citizens to serve on city boards and as city department heads, and would have allowed them to vote in municipal and school elections (this would have required amending the Vermont Constitution).

Protecting our democracy has been and will continue to be a work in progress. It does not promise to get easier. The work of the LWV will be required for a long time to come.

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Campaign Finance

H.81: An act relating to prohibiting lobbyists from making campaign contributions to political parties and legislative political committees while the General Assembly is in session

S.37: An act relating to requiring that lobbyists disclose conflicts of interest, to encouraging lobbyists to wear identification, and to creating a pilot project to livestream the proceedings of two committees

S.93: An act relating to disclosure of lobbying advertisements.

Following coffee, members gathered in Room 10, where we were joined by Lt. Gov. Phil Scott, discussing his listening sessions around the state, hearing about the concerns of small businesses. Rep. Tony Klein reported on this session's energy bill coming from the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the bill he introduced to license dental practitioners, who would have the authority to provide primary dental care.

To end the morning, we met with Gov. Shumlin, for a wide ranging conversation covering topics from health care to education funding.

Lunch at the State House cafeteria gave us further opportunity to talk with our Legislators and make our advocacy positions known.

This is the most exciting Legislative sessions in a long while, in terms of the LWVVT's concerns. We need more Leaguers in the State House, observing committee hearings on bills of interest and following their progress. We have written letters and testified on some of the bills in play, but we could do more. Please contact Sonja Schuyler, sonjapeter@comcast.net or 802-299-3857 if you could spend a few hours at the State House, tracking some of the bills listed above. More bills could still be introduced.

Flo Young

The League has lost another stalwart. Flo Young died at her home in East Montpelier on January 27. Flo served on the boards of both the original Montpelier (later Central VT) League and the reinstated LWV Central VT after a six-year hiatus. She helped bring the League back to Central Vermont. She also served on the board of the LWVVT for many years.

Flo was an institution in the State House, where she led tours on the legislative process to school groups from grade school to college, and to foreign visitors. Her tours included a stop at the House Education Committee, where her groups were often invited to testify. She professed to dislike politics and politicians, but she loved the State House, and reminded her charges that its occupants work for us.

A woman of strong opinions, Flo was also able to laugh at herself. A colorful character with many interests, the League in Vermont was dimmed a bit by her passing.



SPOTLIGHT ON ISSUES



February: Kate Rader with Rep. Tony Klein on this Legislative session's energy bill (H.40) and dental practitioners (H.1). Watch it at <http://vp.telvue.com/preview?id=T01221&video=227339>

March: Jean Hopkins with Dr. Deborah Richter on publicly funded primary health care for all (H.207/S.88). See it at <http://vp.telvue.com/previewid=T01221&video=229733>

April: Sonja Schuyler with Sue Minter, Sec. of Agency of Transportation (tentative).

May: Lakes and Rivers, Sonja Schuyler with Michaela Stickney, ANR

Legislative Day in Pictures



Rep. Kitty Toll chats with League member Claudette Sortino



Sen. Jane Kitchel, Rep. Marcia Martel and Sen. Joe Benning taking coffee and bagels in the cafeteria.



Lt. Gov. Phil Scott



Gov. Shumlin with League members in the Governor's ceremonial office.



Megs Kier, Claudette Sortino and Sonja Schuyler at lunch, talking with (not shown) Sen. Anthony Pollina and Rep. (and League member) Betty Nuovo.



Register for Quad State Leadership Conference!

Fill out the registration form below and return with a check for \$25, payable to LWVME. Note Quad States in the memo field, send to LWVME Education Fund, PO Box 863, Augusta, ME 04332

Make your own hotel reservation at Hampton Inn & Suites, 900 Post Road, Wells, Maine 04090 (207-646-0555). Be sure to say you are with the League of Women Voters and the room rate will be \$109.00. Upon request, the LWVVT will underwrite half the cost of a room. Our block of rooms will be held until May 1, but the rate will be in effect until the event. Breakfast is included in the room rate, Saturday lunch is included in your registration fee. We will have dinner in area restaurants on Saturday.

Name _____

Address

Phone _____ Email _____

_____ I plan to attend just the Saturday workshops.

_____ I plan to stay at the hotel Saturday night and attend workshops on Saturday and Sunday.

_____ I plan to stay at the hotel Friday and Saturday nights and attend workshops Saturday and Sunday.

_____ If staying overnight, I have already booked my room at the Hampton Inn.

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