



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Spring 2016

Legislative Day 2016

League members gathered at the State House on March 11 to meet with Legislators, talk about our priorities and be briefed on bills of particular interest.

After hosting coffee and bagels in the cafeteria (unfortunately a bit more chaotic than usual) we met in Room 10 to hear from three legislators who generously gave their time to tell us about important issues now in process.

Senator Anthony Pollina is sponsor of S.184, an act relating to establishing a State Ethics Commission. This bill proposes to establish an Ethics Commission and its support staff to receive and investigate complaints alleging unethical conduct committed by legislators outside the scope of their core legislative duties and by elected and appointed officials in the Executive Branch. The bill would establish a Code of Ethics for those public officials, by which the Ethics Commission would judge ethics complaints. The Code of Ethics would include, as applicable, disclosures and prohibited conduct, including prohibitions for limited periods of time on accepting certain employment. The LWVVT testified in favor of this bill.

As introduced, the bill called for an Executive Director and investigative staff, but concerns about cost has pared to one staff person and volunteer commissioners made up of a chair of the Commission, who shall be appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; one member appointed by the Vermont chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union; one member appointed by the Vermont Press Association; one member appointed by the Vermont Bar Association; and one member appointed by the Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission.

The original bill gave the Commission investigative and enforcement authority. As now amended, the Commission would have a half-time Executive Director, who would evaluate complaints, decide if a complaint should be dismissed, resolved through discussions with the Commission, or passed on to a State's Attorney for prosecution.

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Message from the Board

Spring 2016

As you can see from this chock full GMC, spring has seen a lot of activity. The March 19th Civic Engagement luncheon on Human Trafficking was an enormous success. The hotel had to bring in another table to accommodate the crowd! Interest in the presentation was high and we had to close the discussion at 2 PM. We already have identified an interest group to follow this issue and Champlain Valley is planning to have a program on the topic soon. Let us know if you have ideas for the topic for next year.

Since this is an election year we will have much to do. The Castleton group publicized rides to the polls for Town Meeting and plans more voter registration efforts. Our effort to register new citizens continues, and we also plan to work with the state prisons on voter registration. Yes, prisoners and ex-prisoners can vote in Vermont. If you would like to help with these activities, let us know at league@lwvofvt.org. We are also offering an internship with a modest stipend to a high school or college student to work on our electronic voter's guide and other voter information activities. If you know someone who would be interested, have them contact us.

The "Use Your Voice" concert in St. Johnsbury was a good opportunity to promote voter participation and the League. Also, through the generosity of Patti Griffin, we have received a \$500 grant for voter participation work this election season. We are also encouraged by interest in League in the Northeast Kingdom and look forward to the get together on April 17th at Catamount Arts in St. Johnsbury.

Sonja Schuyler

Democracy is not a Spectator Sport!



Show your pride in the League. Buy one of our great T-shirts! \$15 plus \$3 S&H. E-mail your order to hertzrader@myfairpoint.net.

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Kate Rader, Editor

Membership in the League includes a subscription.
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Spring Lecture Draws a Crowd

LWVUS Board member and Observer at the United Nations Rosalee Keech, and Det. Lt. Lance Burnham of the Vermont State Police informed and engaged a full house at the LWVVT second Annual Spring Lecture.

We were pleased to be joined at the event by a group of students from U32 High School, the Women's International Issues Club.

As mentioned in the Winter issue of the GMC, Keech is also a member of the New Jersey Atty. General's Human Trafficking Task Force and former chair of its Outreach and Awareness Committee. Lt. Burnham is Commander of VT State Police "A" Troop Bureau of Criminal Investigation and Polygraph Unit, and member of Steering Committee for Human Trafficking Investigation of the State of Vermont.



An engaged audience for Rosalee Keech's talk.

It was noted that the term "trafficking" is somewhat of a misnomer that implies movement ("traffic")...a victim can be "trafficked" (imprisoned, forced, sold for money, sex or drugs) without ever leaving his or her neighborhood.

Much (but not all) trafficking in Vermont is related to drugs. Traffickers will use a person's drug dependence to coerce her or him to trade sex for drugs, and Lt. Burnham told us this is a large problem in Vermont. He also stressed that his primary job is to help victims escape this situation.

Keech explained that trafficking shows up in a few specific occupations, including massage parlors, nail salons, and restaurant workers. Here in

Vermont farm workers as well can be exploited. One "red flag" is when workers are transported to and from work in groups, and are not free to come and go on their own. These people are virtual slaves. One attendee told as when a Methodist minister, a child came to her door selling cookies in support of her "church." Requesting entrance into the house, she then sought shelter, wanting to escape from the organization. She was returned to her parents.

What can be done? Other than being aware, we can ask what the Attorney General's office is doing about this issue. The National Association of Attorneys General nor the National Attorneys General Training & Research



State Police Det. Lt. Lance Burnham talks about human trafficking in Vermont.

Institute publishes a summary of state Attorneys General reports of their state's activities with respect to human trafficking. Vermont has never submitted such a report.

There are a number of groups in Vermont addressing human trafficking. If you are interested in pursuing the subject, contact Jean Hopkins at seaheidi@earthlink.net.



There is such a thing as a free lunch!

Last Call for Quad States!

Time to sign up for Quad States 2016!

The plans for the tenth annual New England States Leadership Development Conference are now complete, except for you.

Register now, to join State League leaders from CT, MA, ME, NH, RI and VT have been developing an agenda for this year that is sure to be the **best yet**.

We will gather once again at the Hampton Inn in Wells, ME. This year's theme is **Money in Politics: Is Their Money Drowning Out Your Voice?**

Agenda

Friday evening, April 8 (optional): dinner out and socializing with other League leaders.

Saturday, April 9

Registration, 9:00 - 9:30 am.

Introductions and Welcome, 9:30 - 10:00 am.

Workshop #1, 10:00 - 11:30 am. *Working with the Media*. [Tim Ashwell](#), University of New Hampshire.

Lunch & LWVUS Update, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm. Included with Registration Fee.

Keynote Speaker, 1:00 - 2:00 pm. *Money in Politics: Winning Messages*. [Celinda Lake](#), Lake Research Partners.

Workshop #2, 2:15 - 3:45 pm. *Social Media Networks (working title)*. [James Cook](#), University of Maine - Augusta.

Workshop #3, 4:00 - 5:30 pm. *Advocacy and Communications*. Jill Ward, President, LWVME.

Dine Around, 6:00 pm. Join other League members for dinner in small groups at local area restaurants.

Sunday, April 10

Until 9:00 am. Breakfast, included with room reservation.

Workshop #4, 9:00 - 10:30 am. *Community Conversations: Talking Face-to-Face*. Anne Schink, Director, LWVUS.

Wrap-up and adjourn, 10:30 - 11:00 am.

To register, go to http://www.lwvme.org/donate_form.html to download the registration form or register electronically.

Fix It: Healthcare At the Tipping Point

Would you like to see the documentary that's going viral in health care communities across the country? Physicians for a National Health Plan and many League of Women Voter groups are showing it.

The facts that support a single payer universal health care system are clearly presented in the DVDs produced by Unfinished Business LLC and inspired by Richard Master, CEO of MCS Industries, Inc.. Richard realized that his employees and therefore his business would benefit from a single payer system, so the movie starts out at his factory in Pennsylvania.

Then professionals from all across the country, such as Wendall Potter, Dr. Don Berwick and Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, speak in favor of Single Payer.

If 58 minutes of the facts and figures is too long for your particular program, you can order the shorter, 38 minute version or the 3 minute trailer.

There is no cost but the promoter asks you to sign people up for their support of single payer universal health care.

To get to see this documentary go to:
www.fixithehealthcare.com.

You can also contact League member Jean Hopkins who has the 58 minute DVD. She can be reached at 802-863-5359 or seaheidi@earthlink.net

Upper Valley Unit Hosts Candidate Forum

The Candidates forum for Norwich Selectboard candidates was held at Tracy Hall on February 23. The forum was co-sponsored by the LWV and the Norwich Women's Club and moderated by Jack Candon. There was a new and very successful feature added to the format: each question was paraphrased by the moderator, typed into a computer and then projected on a screen in the front of the room. This enabled everyone in the overflow audience to see the question as the candidates gave their answers. The forum was filmed by CATV and made available for those people who were unable to attend.

LWVVT Plans Voter Registration Drive in Vermont's Prisons.

In the December Green Mountain Citizen, the LWVVT laid out their plan to register incarcerated felons to vote, and gave the rationale for that plan. We hope to carry this out during June and July, a traditionally quiet time for the League.

Now help is needed to carry that plan out. We are looking for someone committed to civic participation to contact the state's correctional facilities to determine the procedure for registrars to go into the prison, or, barring access, who within the prison we might train to register the voters and complete requests for an absentee ballot.

Teams of Leaguers would then go to prisons in Newport, Swanton, S. Burlington, St. Johnsbury, Rutland, Windsor and Springfield to complete registration in time for the August primary.

We should be proud that Vermont is one of very few states who will even let former felons vote. Let's keep these people engaged in their communities. If you can help, contact any of the state board members: Jean Hopkins (seaheidi@earthlink.net), Kate Rader (radercatherine@myfairpoint.net), Sonja Schuyler (sonjapeter@comcast.com) or Claudette Sortino (AASCJS@charter.net).

**The final test of a leader
is that she leaves behind
in other women the
conviction and the will to
carry on.**

- Walter Lippmann

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The House Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, chaired by Rep. Tony Klein, has been addressing H.584 - An act relating to miscellaneous timber harvesting, forestry, and State lands issues. About half of Vermont's forest lands are enrolled under the current use program, but the rest is not. For these lands, the state does not know if or when or how logging takes place.

This bill is meant to address some of our water quality problems, involving erosion and runoff. The bill would create a voluntary program under which landowners can notify the state in advance of logging activity. They can then receive information about best practices and the names of foresters, loggers, saw-mills, and a sample contract between the land-owners and loggers. The hope is this will help ensure best practices in logging.

Senator Diane Snelling has sponsored a proposal to amend the state Constitution to provide for a four-year term for Governor, a position the League supports. She reported to us, however, that there is very little chance that this proposal will be voted out of the Senate Government Operations Committee.

The official day's agenda ended with a brief meeting with Governor Shumlin.

Our League Is Growing!

We have new members in the Castleton, Shrewsbury, and St. Johnsbury, presenting us with the opportunity to form new Member-at-Large units in the Rutland area and the Northeast Kingdom.

Last month Sonja Schuyler and Kate Rader met with new member Maisie Wood and others in Castleton to advise on how the League might help with a problem of transparency and possible conflict of interest in local government.

Later in the month, Rader and Claudette Sortino met with Karen Bufka, who joined the League after the LWVCEN Happy Hour. Her concern is encouraging civic participation. By lucky happenstance the opportunity to register voters at

the Patty Griffen "Use Your Voice" concert at Fuller Hall in St. Johnsbury came just in time to involve Bufka in a very visible voter service activity. Central Vermont and state Board members will meet with Bufka and others next month to talk about forming a NEK MAL unit.

We welcome new members Karen Bufka, Maisie and Bill Wood, Susan Day and Jodie Woodside, and look forward to working with them to expand the League and its reach in this important election year.

Gun Safety Coalition Taking Shape

Since last fall, Patti Brigham, chair the Gun Safety Committee for the LWVFL and Greg Waples at the Center for American Progress (CAP) have hosted a monthly conference call with League members from around the country who are working on the issue of gun violence prevention in their states.

The calls are one hour long and feature a different guest speaker each month. On each call, Waples gives a brief summary of what is happening at the federal level. During the last portion of the call, League members report on what is happening in their states.

The goal of these calls is to form a coalition among League members working on gun safety in the states so that we can learn the issues, share information, provide resources, and build relationships. It is our hope and belief that, as a result, we will raise awareness and develop safer gun legislation at the state level. The LWVUS is aware of our coalition and has given us its blessing as long as we focus at the state level.

The LWVVT is invited to join the coalition in the belief that we are at a crucial point in our country and are seeing the tide beginning to turn towards gun safety.

If you are interested, let us know, and contact Patti at pattibrigham@gmail.com.

Outlining the League's Priority Federal Issues for 2016

By: Jessica Jones 01/12/2016

The League of Women Voters has the opportunity to play an active role on many priority issues in 2016. In addition to lobbying the 114th Congress in support of League priorities, we are working on a number of important policy proposals put forth by the President and agencies of the federal government. We will also be participating in litigation that could have a major impact on laws and regulations supported by the League.

Here's a sample of some of the important work the League will be focused on in 2016:

Voting and Elections: [Restoring the Voting Rights Act \(VRA\)](#) continues to be a top priority for the League. It's now been nearly three years since the [U.S. Supreme Court gutted key provisions of the VRA](#) and Congress has failed to act on historic legislation to restore the voting rights of Americans across the country. The League will continue to lobby House and Senate leadership, and engage grassroots support, to ensure that legislation to restore the VRA gets hearings and a vote in both houses of Congress.

In the area of voter registration, [LWVUS has called on the Obama Administration](#) to comply with the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) when applicants apply for health insurance through the federal health exchanges under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The League believes the exchanges are public assistance agencies and therefore must provide voter registration opportunities to all applicants, similarly to [other social services such as the Department of Motor Vehicles or Medicaid enrollment](#). Some states, [like California](#), that offer state-run health exchanges under the Affordable Care Act have begun to offer voter registration opportunities following pressure from the League. We believe proper implementation of the NVRA at the health benefit exchanges is an incredible opportunity to help every eligible American citizen participate and contribute to our democracy.

Money in Elections: As we enter a Presidential election year, billions of dollars are flooding into our political system and yet, voters still have no idea where the money is coming from. The League continues to push Congress to move the [DISCLOSE Act](#) to the forefront. We also continue to [address disclosure and independent expenditures](#) with the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The League hopes to build on our success of sending [nearly 30,000 comments](#) to the FEC encouraging them to redefine these two terms and end corruption in politics.

Climate Change: Now that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has [finalized the Clean Power Plan](#), the historic regulations to limit carbon pollution from power plants, the implementation of these regulations heads to the states. State officials and legislatures must now follow the common sense building blocks developed by the EPA to meet the goals established in the plan. Leagues across the country are working to [build support for, and promote compliance with, the Clean Power Plan](#).

Redistricting: Late last year, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in [Evenwel v. Abbott](#), a major case that could forever change the way we view the political map. *Evenwel* has the potential to upset the criteria for drawing state and local legislative districts so that districts would be determined by the total number of voters instead of total population. The League submitted [an amicus brief in Evenwel](#) that supports the current practice of drawing district lines based on population counts. Leagues around the country are also involved in their own redistricting processes. The [League of Women Voters of Ohio](#) helped pass a major ballot initiative to amend the state constitution and [change how the lines are drawn in Ohio's state legislative districts](#) (PDF).

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