



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Summer 2016

The Time Has Come...
“Making Democracy Work for All” – LWV National Convention – 2016

Dotty Ricks

“The time has come,” the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things:
Of shoes – and ships – and sealing-wax –
Of cabbages – and kings –
And why the sea is boiling hot –
And whether pigs have wings.”
Lewis Carroll – Through the Looking-Glass

I was so reminded of these words as I sat in sessions at the 2016 League of Women Voters National Convention, June 16-19. Indeed, the time had come to “talk of many things.” The theme of the convention was “Making Democracy Work for All” and it also became the League program for the next two years. Delegates came together to connect and learn and to become a unified force committed to registering, educating, and mobilizing voters while continuing to protect the right to vote in every state in the union. Issues of concern and reflection included voter rights and protection, environmental protection, money in politics, and election reform. But the main take away from the convention was that of accelerated change, increased action, and improved engagement.

When I could divorce myself from the issues at stake, I sat back and people watched. There were contingents of older women and men who had participated in League activities for many years and who were so well suffused in League rules and actions that they were comfortable with things as they were. There were young women and men (although I did not personally see any of these, but am willing to suspend disbelief and assume there were indeed some there) who eagerly and passionately sought quick change in League structure, social issues, policies, and procedure. And there were many like me – not quite old enough to have memorized or even embraced the rules/procedures, not young enough to fling themselves at the wall of tradition and change, but feisty enough to stand and challenge positions, to thrash through and voice dissent, and to work the system/rules on the side to bring about a perhaps more modest change. It was exhilarating meeting all of these intelligent, articulate, and passionate women attendees, whether young or older. With all of us, the time had come, as a group, to review League sacred cows, to take a leap of faith in excitement and concern for upcoming elections, and to embrace a changing society both demographically and technically. It often wasn't easy, but as a body of delegates, we persevered.

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Message from the Board

Summer 2016

I want to start this time with my sincere thanks to the contributors to this issue: Karen Bufka, Madeline Motta, Dotty Ricks and Sonja Schuyler. They have greatly enlivened these pages with in-depth personal reporting on Quad States, LWVUS Convention, and the legislative and election processes.

Dotty gives us a vivid account of the LWVUS convention this month, and it *was* exciting. As in Vermont's government, there was a broad turnover in administration: New officers, new Executive Director, nine new directors on a twelve-member board.

And a new emphasis on our mission to Make Democracy Work – for All. That is the theme of the League's program, and was the theme of all the speakers. You can see all of them through YouTube videos – They are online for you to review and share. Use this link and scroll down to the bottom row to find the convention videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/LeagueofWomenVoters>. We especially recommend Ari Berman's banquet address on current efforts to suppress voting rights in America.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, our local Leagues and MAL units are diving into the election season with enthusiasm. The Castleton unit will be registering voters on July 4; the Northeast Kingdom group has met with the St. Johnsbury Town Clerk for voter registration training, and they are planning voter registration and get out the vote activities; LWVCEN will host two forums for state Representative candidates; and LWVCV is planning another Speed Dating event for Chittenden County Senate candidates. At the state level, the League will host Montpelier Independence Day celebration Democracy Tent and march in the parade on July 3. We will also host a pre-primary Lt. Gov. candidate forum, and co-sponsor a Gubernatorial debate with VCW and BPW in September.

It's heartening to see our Leagues so engaged in this important election-season work. We are carrying out the League's mission in a big way. Thank you!!!

Kate Rader

P.S. We're also participating in National Voter Registration Day on September 22.

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DMV Motor Voter Registrations Still Problematic in Chittenden County

Sonja Schuyler

After hearing reports from a League member working the polls Town Meeting Day elections that a number of the Motor Voter registrations were not on the checklist, the Champlain Valley League of Women Voters polled Town Clerks in Chittenden County about the March Town Meeting Day elections. We found that over 600 voters who thought they had registered at the Department of Motor Vehicles were not on the Checklist. Fortunately, most of these people were allowed to vote after signing an affidavit saying they had registered and that they were legal residents of the Town or City where they wanted to vote. However, some voters were unwilling or unable to sign the affidavit, so did not vote.

This situation raises a number of concerns. Preparing and signing affidavits adds time and hassle to the voting process for both voters and poll workers. The question is, did some voters just leave without voting? When Election Day registration goes into effect in 2017, most of these registration problems will go away. However, Vermont has two important elections before then.

The League asked Town and City Clerks about any other problems on Election Day. The Clerks had praise for the on-line Voter Registration system provided by the Secretary of State's Office. A few voters who registered on-line after the registration deadline were not able to vote. Other than the DMV registrations, the most common problem reported by the Clerks was voters who were in the wrong place. Some did not realize that they had to change their registrations when they moved. Also, some people were confused by a mailing address in a Town that is different from their Town of legal residence.

Will Senning, Director of Elections and Campaign Finance, spoke to the Champlain Valley League about the elections process at their Annual Meeting. Will outlined the efforts that have been made to improve the transfer of registrations from the DMV. At this time the Secretary of State's Office and the DMV are focused on getting the forms and software in place for the July 1, 2017 implementation of the automatic voter registration. Under the new law,

the Driver's license form will also serve as the Voter Registration form.

Representative Chris Pearson, sponsor of the automatic registration bill spoke briefly about the bipartisan support for the automatic registration bill. Under the new system, the Driver's license application or renewal application would automatically register the applicant unless the person opts out or is not eligible to vote due to age or citizenship. The system as envisioned by the law will also serve to update checklists when a voter changes residence, or fails to renew a license.



Rep. Chris Pearson addresses the LWVCV Annual Meeting about automatic voter registration.

Representative Joanna Cole, who is also a League member, serves on the Government Operations Committee. She spoke briefly about the efforts by the Committee to improve the current registration system as well as the implementation of election day registration, which goes into effect January 1, 2017. She also gave some history behind the DMV registration problems and improvements that have been made.

The Champlain Valley League also recognized Town, City, and Ward Clerks for their efforts to make the voting process work. Several Clerks were present at the meeting as guests, so a lively and constructive discussion about voter registration occurred. The take away message for the upcoming two elections is that voters should check to see if they are on the checklist prior to the election. This can be done through the Secretary of State's on-line voter registration website.

No State Ethics Commission for Vermont

Madeline M. Motta

Ed. Note: The League supported Senate bill S.184, to establish an ethics commission for Vermont state government and testified in favor of its passage.

Vermont is one of a handful of states that does not have an ethics commission, there is no provision in place to prevent officials from awarding contracts to campaign contributors and the state does not require financial disclosure from public agency officials.

As a Government and Corporate Ethics Compliance consultant, and former State employee, it was disheartening to watch the demise of S.184, an act relating to establishing a State Ethics Commission this past legislative session.

In May 2015, Secretary of State Jim Condos proposed that a Vermont comprehensive, independent ethics commission be created to investigate complaints concerning the legislature, executive branch, agency officials and municipal government.

Subsequently, in 2016, Sen. Anthony Pollina (P/D-Washington) in the Senate Government Operations Committee introduced S.184, an act relating to establishing a State Ethics Commission and Rep. Donna Sweaney (D-Windsor) in the House Government Operations Committee introduced H.557. Neither ethics bill was as comprehensive as the Secretary of State's proposal.

From January to April 2016, extensive testimony from interested parties was ongoing in the Senate and the House Government Operations Committees. Eventually H.557 gave way to S.184, which initially focused on the Legislature and the Executive branches of government.

S.184 recommended that legislators be subject to a one-year lobbying ban upon leaving office. In addition, candidates for state office, and executive branch appointees were required to disclose income of \$10,000 or more and the bill would prohibit elected state officers from contracting with campaign donors. However, the Legislative Council determined that the Vermont Constitution gives the Senate and House sole power to regu-

late their own members - hence any new financial disclosures required of legislators would have to be enacted by a rule change, and not by statute cut these standard conflict of interest provisions short. While some on the Senate Government Operations Committee hoped that an agreement to disclosure guidelines could be worked out with the Senate Rules Committee, it didn't and the trumpet blast for inclusion of the legislative branch under the regulation of an ethics commission fell to a faint din.

As the debate of ethics oversight of the legislative branch dwindled, the Committee heard testimony on extending an ethics commission to include State and Municipal officers and employees and agreed. Providing public sector employees the opportunity to benefit from a comprehensive ethics education and compliance program early in their career is logical given that State and Municipal career employees are on track to become future government executives and legislators.

Unfortunately the Senate Gov. Ops Committee disregarded this first precept of an ethics commission: that it must be an independent entity separate from the rest of government. The Committee directed the Agency of Human Resources to draft the State Ethics Code and empowered Human Resources to perform ethics investigations of State Officials and employees. In all likelihood, it was to save money but authorizing Human Resources to perform ethics investigations does not confer impartiality, confidentiality or advance the integrity of State Government. An obvious issue is what happens when a Human Resource Official gives hiring preference to his cousin Millie when filling a State job or contract vacancy? Who will investigate conflicts of interest within the Agency of Human Resources? Employees in the Attorney General's Office, Auditor's Office and Human Resources, should not be utilized to train or investigate as such agencies may be subject to an ethics investigation in the future.

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Report from Quad States 2016

Karen Bufka

I am new to the LWVVT, a member only since February. Attending the 10th Annual Quad States Conference in Wells, Maine in early April provided a big shot in the arm of information and inspiration. I came away from it thinking, "So THIS is what the LWV is like. Wow!" I am very glad I went, I will definitely go again and I would highly recommend that you put it on your list of destinations for next year, too!

First of all: great location. Wells is easy to get to but far enough away from Vermont to provide a little springtime road-trip relief from winter's cabin fever and, of course, they have an ocean there! The Hampton Inn where the conference took place has a very pleasant and comfortable atmosphere, and is delightfully clean. And, when we went out to dine together on Saturday evening, the food and atmosphere were excellent at the restaurant I went to with a group of fellow participants.

Second: great people. Even though I felt quite shy and uncertain at first, that quickly dissipated once the work-shops began and we started to engage as a group with the material offered by the presenters. People asked thoughtful questions and the resulting conversations were really constructive and empowering. It began to dawn on me how rare and wonderful it is to be in a room in which the combination of clarity of thought and generosity of spirit is so apparent. It was this perception that prompted my first inner exclamation about how cool the LWV is, if this group was any indication. As interesting and helpful as the information presented in the work-shops was, for me the conference was really about being in the same room with those ordinary yet remarkable people who are bringing their hearts and minds to the shared purpose of bettering our communities.

So what were the workshops? Tim Ashwell of UNH offered "Working with the Media", giving us tips about communicating with the different audiences that you want to inform about the League and how it serves the community. He discussed the wide variety of local media we need

to use, encouraged us to use media lists created by other groups, described the basics of writing a good press release and prompted us to reflect on what different kinds of "news" we have to offer from our League. He surprised me by saying that for local media, our well-prepared content is a welcome gift since they don't have to produce it. Tim inspired and empowered us to make the League a pillar of the community with the media's help.

"Access Delayed is Access Denied: Equality of Information in the Age of Social Media" was James Cook's presentation. An Assist. Prof. of Social Science at the Univ. of Maine at Augusta, his point is that social media can help us track the sources of monies donated to political campaigns in a more timely manner than going through the usual channels. He detailed how campaign finance data that is supposed to be available to the public is often filed and presented in such a way that it is almost impossible to sort through it in a reasonable amount of time. For instance, because the US Senate allows the filing of campaign finance reports in paper form, it takes weeks to months for that data to be entered into the record so that citizens can read it, and by then it is too late to do anything with that information. Using social media, one can follow the links between lobbyists and politicians to find out who is talking intensively with whom. This is amazing stuff, like something out of a spy novel! You can check it out at:

http://lwvme.org/files/Quad_States_Cook.pdf.

Jill Ward, President, LWVME discussed citizen advocacy. She encouraged us to feel that we can communicate effectively with legislators and provided practical insights into doing so. She emphasized the importance of personal contact and long-term relationship-building, that they are perhaps even more important than getting across the "right" message or achieving your desired policy outcome.

LWVUS board member Anne Schink presented our fourth workshop on Sunday morning,

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Convention cont'd from p. 1

“Of shoes – and ships – and sealing wax“
Representatives attended from 48 states, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia to elect a new slate of officers to chart the new seas, and approve a budget for the LWVUS for the next two years. We adopted new advocacy positions on redistricting, behavioral health, and money in politics. Attendees participated in convention workshops covering topics of League interest including gun safety, prison reform, get out the vote, and immigration. In preparation for the November elections, we trained to help voters overcome challenges in voting.

“Of cabbages and kings“ I wondered if Hilary were not from the ruling elite, if there would be a woman running for the highest office in the land. Few were feeling the Bern and got many puzzled almost sympathetic stares from those swept away by the deep tide of support for the first female candidate for the United States presidency. While League discussions and decisions remained unbiased, the elephant in the room was the euphoria that, almost 100 years after that first suffragettes galvanized for the vote, there is finally a chance for a woman to become president.

“And why the sea is boiling hot“ I came away from the meetings knowing that elections and voting rights are at grave risk in 22 states and that the Supreme Court seems determined to disenfranchise voters and still the voices that overthrew the status quo and elected the first black president of the United States. Ari Berman appalled us with his description of the gutting of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice John Roberts.

“And whether pigs have wings.” Well, I guess they do in our messy, resilient democracy where strange creatures, with few morals and less concern for the common person but with enormous egos, greed, and determination to destroy voting rights and maintain an oligarchy, can run for office and be taken as seriously as those speaking with a voice for the people. With a concern for those strange creatures, we recognized the huge importance of voting in the upcoming election

and felt the urgency of making the vote easier and more accessible to all.

As the League steps through the looking glass – moving forward towards a leaner, more inspirational League model ; embracing technology and its many options for engagement; welcoming and vigorously seeking young people to our cause; and actively and activistically continuing to pursue voting rights for all – I feel encouraged and excited. As we left, there was a firm belief that there is much work to be done to “...reclaim our democracy and protect the right to vote” and to use the power of women in the League to continue the effort at creating “...a more perfect democracy.”

S.184 cont'd from p. 4

As the 2016 session wore on, it was clear that S.184 as drafted did not offer a comprehensive ethics compliance program for Vermont. The fundamental elements of an effective ethics compliance program are to administer organizational risk assessments, development of an ethics code, ethics training, monitoring of ethics compliance, investigation of ethical misconduct and enforcement of penalties for ethics violations.

After receiving testimony on the importance of ethics education versus enforcement alone, the Senate Government Operations Committee added the directive of ethics education into S.184.

In regard to ethics investigation, government and corporate ethics compliance programs rely on an anon-ymous Ethics Helpline. Consider that the callers will most likely come from individuals internal to or within the organization, all employees must first be trained to recognize fraudulent or unethical conduct, in order to seek assistance on a ethics question through the anon-ymous Ethics Helpline.

The excitement of S.184 adopting an enlightened ethics education approach was somewhat dampened when the Senate Operations Committee decided to not include municipalities in the bill. Which is pretty amazing con-sidering a large percentage of complaints to the Sec. of State Office concern Municipal government. To date,

no data is available on whether Vermont municipal governments even have ethics codes.

When it came to composition of the Ethics Commission appointees and staff, the earlier draft of S.184 reflected the Senate Government Operation Committee's focus on enforcement of ethics violations. A review of government and corporate ethics programs in the US and Canada, indicates that Ethics Officers are not former prosecutors or from the legal department but they are experienced Certified Ethics Compliance professionals. Investigators need not have graduated from the police academy or hold a law degree. You do need seasoned ethics officers who are well trained in government ethics to provide regular ethics education, monitoring and investigation. The final draft of S.184 offered no leeway for a certified ethics professional trained in ethics compliance to be appointed to the Ethics Commission but it did remove the requirement that the Ethics Program Director must be a former prosecutor.

In the end, S.184 lost its momentum somewhere between the Senate Government Operations Committee, Appropriations and the hallways leading to the House and Senate Floors.

It is worth noting that in many States, it is the Governor and not the Legislature that creates the Government Ethics Commission for the Executive branch and state agencies. When queried whether they would create a State Ethics Commission, the 2016 Vermont gubernatorial candidates agreed to implement a State Ethics Commission or at least support the idea.

Madeline M. Motta MSW, JD, JSD is a Certified Corporate Ethics Professional and a member of the League of Women Voters of Vermont.



Quad States, con't from p. 5

"Community Conversations: Talking Face to Face." We broke into groups and practiced the technique of using small-group conversations to make the leap from study to action on League positions. The idea is to have a series of meetings in your locale that brings different elements of the community together to create dynamic conversations about particular issues. It was illuminating to see that even in our room of all LWV members, each of our five groups brought very different insights to the sample topic under discussion. For me it was a great workshop to begin easing us back into the world to put the rubber to the road in doing the League's work.

As if the workshops weren't enough, we also had the fabulous Celinda Lake of Lake Research Partners as the keynote speaker on Saturday. She described the results of some of the market research she has done relevant to voter engagement and this year's elections. I would strongly urge you to check out her presentation at http://lwvme.org/files/Quad_States_Lake.pdf. Thought-provoking stuff indeed! I came away from her presentation with a strong sense of the importance not just of what you say, but of HOW you say it in order to have the right impact. For instance, people don't respond well to the word "politicians" anymore. If you want them to keep listening to you, use the words "elected leaders" or "elected officials" instead. Or, if you are going to use a strong emotion to mobilize people, anger is preferable to fear since fear can actually demobilize them in the end. So interesting...

The conference began with Anne Schink discussing the LWVUS board changes, budget and membership. The conference ended with a member from each of the state Leagues reporting their League's current work and achievements. For me as a newbie to the LWV, these details went over my head a bit but did once again impress upon me how much the LWV does and how well it does it.

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