



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Winter 2014

Voter Service the Focus of Fall Activities

Leagues around the state participated in voter service activities during the fall of this election year.

The LWVVT again joined the voter guide website **VOTE411** asking candidates for U.S. House, the statewide offices (Gov., Lt. Gov., Sec. Of State, Treasurer, Auditor of Accounts and Atty. Gen.), and State Senate and House to answer questions submitted by the League. This year approximately 30% of the candidate responded. Access by users of the site was up by approximately 25% over 2010.

September brought **National Voter Registration Day**. The League was out registering voters before and after as well:

Central Vermont members registered voters at the Twin Valley flea market in August, the Berlin Mall on the 23rd, at the Montpelier Food Pantry on the 24th, and at U32 High School on October 10.

SE (Brattleboro) members registered voters in August, and expect to pick up their game again in the new year.

The Champlain Valley League continues to register new citizens to vote, they had a voter registration table at their candidate event on October 18, and on National Voter Registration day, registered voters at Mt. Mansfield High School.

Only officials may register voters in New Hampshire, but the Upper Valley League passed out information to Dartmouth students about their voting rights before the town of Hanover held Voter Registration at the college.

Candidate Forums came to the fore in October.

The Upper Valley League tried to hold a Forum in Lebanon but the Republican candidates declined participation. All the Democrats were elected. The League did hold a forum in Enfield/Cannan - quite successful with over 60 in attendance. A new format was tried: a round of quick responses - each candidate had a "yes" and "no" paddle which they raised as soon as the question was posed. They're not sure the candidates were completely thrilled with it but the audience seemed to love it. The excellent newspaper coverage emphasized the new format.

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

Message from the Board Winter 2014

As the year comes to a close, it is a good time to reflect on the past year and look forward to the New Year. Since this was an election year, voter service was a major emphasis. We again used VOTE411 as the election guide for Vermonters with voting information and candidate questions. Nationally, 1.5 million voters visited the VOTE411 site for election information.

State and local leagues hosted candidate forums and events. The Lieutenant Governor's Candidate Forum was our only statewide candidate forum and it was a success. We had a reasonable attendance that night and it was re-broadcast on public access TV channels statewide.

Nationally, the League has been able to defeat two dozen anti-voter laws, and provide 50,000 letters of support for the Voting Rights Amendment Act. While we have not had to respond to new limits on voter access, we do need to monitor the application of Vermont's laws. The Champlain Valley League is appealing the Burlington City Clerk's ruling that barred League poll watcher in Burlington. See the article about this issue.

Looking forward, we certainly can do more to register voters and encourage voter participation. Town Meeting March elections will be our next challenge. It really only takes one (although two is more fun) to do a Voter Registration event. We also need to come up with creative ideas to encourage voter participation.

And keep posted for legislative action! Two long-time League issue will be hot topics this legislative session—funding of education and health care financing. Claudette Sortino will be our legislative observer and she will welcome company!

On behalf of the State Board, I wish you all a Happy Holiday season and a prosperous New Year

*Sonja Schuyler,
State Board*

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

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Education Funding Looms as Big Issue

As property taxes increased, candidates in last month's election heard from their constituents. As a result, education funding will be high on the Legislature's agenda in the coming session. To help our members address the issue, we bring you the LWVVT's position on education funding:

The League of Women voters of Vermont supports equality of educational opportunity for all public school children in Vermont, and to that end supports the following measures:

1) A method of state aid distribution to produce that equality which recognizes the differences and needs of individual school districts and the needs of their students. Specifically, it should insure that every child should have access to high quality teachers and that competition between school districts for high quality teachers should be minimized. State negotiated teachers salaries and benefits would accomplish this goal as long as other conditions of employment were negotiated by the individual local school districts. Also, specifically it should insure that every student should have access to educational programs sufficient to accommodate individual differences and special education needs. Also, specifically the state should stipulate minimum curricular requirements and minimum graduation requirements, and should stipulate and monitor educational quality. Funding should not depend on quality, but the continued existence of a locally controlled school district should depend on achieving standards.

2) Determination of each school district's fiscal ability which takes into consideration income as well as property wealth and the presence of non-resident property and industry. Taxation should be based largely on the ability of individuals to pay.

3) Strongly favors the redistribution of the tax burden in Vermont, particularly the property tax. Resident's homes may be taxed differently than non-residential property. Supports land use assessment for farm and forest land rather than fair market value. Property tax relief should be used to aid low income property owners.

4) Administration reforms in the property tax, including mandatory training of local listers; consistent updating of appraisal techniques; the use of computers in appraising and listing; and keeping assessments up to-date across the state.

The LWVVT opposes total state takeover of education funding, but believes the decreasing percentage of state aid over the past years has been a hardship on many school districts. The League of Women Voters takes the following additional positions regarding finance:

Encourages the raising of additional revenue for education by state government via new taxes or increases in existing taxes to meet a minimum state funding of fifty percent of the total cost of education in Vermont. The most appropriate sources of state funding for education are income taxes and property taxes with more emphasis on the income tax. The most appropriate sources of local funding are income taxes and property taxes with more emphasis on the income tax.

Supports long-range fiscal accountability of local school districts to include long-range program planning; maintenance of adequate facilities; and the impact of federal funding on local programs, priorities and objectives.

Supports encouraging school districts to merge into new, larger school districts for the purpose of reducing administrative costs; improving programs; and providing more efficient use of facilities, staff and teachers.

Encourages the adoption of sound accounting systems for local, state and federal funds at the local and state levels which would allow fiscal information and administrative objectives to be readily available to the public. This would earn support for education programs and for the schools as a whole.

Revised March 1994

LWVCV Challenges City Clerk Ruling

Inspired by LWVWI program of nonpartisan observation at the polls

(<http://lwv.org/blog/observing-elections-and-protecting-voters-wisconsin>), Champlain Valley

LWV's Leadership Team wished to strengthen this tradition in Vermont. We met with Jim Holway, the elected clerk of Burlington Ward 4, where LWV member Lea Terhune votes and volunteered to observe. Jim welcomed the presence of observers, reviewed decorum of observing, and assured us that we would have a seat in an area routinely set aside for observers.

On election day, however, Burlington's unelected City Clerk, Scott Schrader, issued last minute instructions that limited observation to partisan appointees registered at the City Clerk's office in advance by candidates. LWVCV has asked the Secretary of State to clarify election law in regard to observers at the polls. It is our understanding that orderly observers are not prohibited by law, welcoming observers is a longstanding Vermont tradition, and elected Ward Clerks have the authority to make decisions at the polls. A formal request for clarification will take place on the record in January at the Sec. of State's office.

A Pictorial Review of



Lt. Governor moderator Steve Pappas



Lt. Governor candidates Dean Corren, Marina Brown and Phil Scott



Washington County Senate candidates, L-R: Dennis LeFavour, Pat McDonald, Ann Cummings, Anthony Pollina, Sandy Gaffney and Bill Doyle. Moderator Susan Clark at the podium.

Below: LWVCEN member Lindy Biggs with Washington County State's Attorney candidates Scott Williams and Tom Kelly



Above: Kate Rader, LWVCEN registers voters at the Twin Valley Senior Center flea market.

Voter Service Activities



Left: Chris Racanelli, LWVCEN, registers students at U32 High School



Right: Kate Rader and Hedi Ballantyne at Berlin Mall on National Voter Registration Day



Left: Chittenden County Senate candidates are introduced at LWVCV's Speed Dating event. L-R: Tim Ashe, Phillip Baruth, Ben Bosley, Dawn Ellis and Joy Limoge.

Principles of the League of Women Voters

Ed. Note: At the LWVCEN Senate Candidate forum, one of the candidates told me she had looked up our principles on the LWVUS, and that she had been impressed. She said, "How could anyone disagree with these principles?" So I looked them up, and decided they were indeed worth sharing. They serve as the basis for taking action under our advocacy positions.

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States. The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people; that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic

policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

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SPOTLIGHT

ON ISSUES



October: Washington County State's Attorney debate with Lindy Biggs, LWVCEN. See it at <http://vp.telvue.com/preview?id=T01221&video=212800>

December: Money in Politics, Sec. of State Jim Condos with Kate Rader. See it at <http://vp.telvue.com/preview?id=T01221&video=220051>

January: Legislative Forecast (Lindy Biggs)

February: Health Care

March: Property Tax

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

The Champlain Valley League repeated its successful “Speed Dating” format for its forum for candidates for state Senate from Chittenden County. The audience was divided into groups, with one candidate addressing each group in turn for a limited amount of time. When time was called, the candidates each moved to the next circle for questioning by the audience. This has proved to be an efficient and engaging way to handle a large group of candidates. Chittenden County public access television (CCTV) recorded the event. You can see it at <http://www.cctv.org/watch-tv/programs/speed-dating-senate-candidates-0>

The Old Labor Hall in Barre was the venue for two traditional candidate forums in October. The LWV Central Vermont hosted a forum for Washington County Senate Candidates, moderated by LWVCEN member Susan Clark. The following week the LWVVT partnered with the Central Vermont group to sponsor a forum for Lieutenant Governor candidates. Times Argus editor Steve Pappas moderated the event. Both were recorded by ORCA. They can be seen at orcamedia.net, click on 2014 Elections and scroll down to the desired forum.

Earlier in the month the LWVCEN hosted an in-studio debate between candidates for Washington County State's Attorney, incumbent Tom Kelly and Scott Williams. The League hopes to hold more such “down-ticket” candidate events in 2016.

Marie Griffin

Longtime League member Marie Griffin passed away last month, leaving a legacy of service to the League and to the arts.

She was a founding member of the LWV of Piscataway, NJ, and also helped to establish the Piscataway chapter of the American Field Service, which sponsors international exchanges of high school students.

At the Rutgers Institute of Jazz Studies in Newark she created a uniform system for cataloging the Institute's vast collection that became a model for other jazz collections around the country.

Marie joined the League in Vermont in 1986. Here she served on the LWVVT's board and was the leader in attending meetings (discussion and developing a bill) for instant runoff voting. She led the study and consensus for the LWV on this issue.

She also headed up the Kids Voting for Democracy program for the League. The program's goal is to teach children about the voting process and their democratic right to vote, create informed future voters, and involve parents in students' civic education.

Contributions in her memory may be made to the League of Women Voters of Vermont, P.O. Box 1391, Montpelier, VT 05601-1391 or the Vermont Chapter of the Alzheimer's Assoc., 300 Cornerstone Drive, Suite 128, Williston, VT 05495.



Some events to remember, and put on your calendar:

Wednesday, February 18 – LWVVT Legislative Day. Meet with your legislators, and tell them about the League and our advocacy positions. The State House.

Saturday, March 21 (tentative) – Spring Renewal! Take a day off to get to know your fellow Leaguers, take a dip in the pool, maybe visit Ben and Jerry's or Cold Hollow Cider Mill. Best Western Hotel, Waterbury. Check the LWVVT website (www.lwvofvt.org) for more information.

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