



League of Women Voters of Central Vermont

# *Bulletin*

Fall 2011

## Co-Presidents' Message

We hope that you are enjoying the start of fall. It is a wonderful time of change.

We believe that the League of Women Voters of Central Vermont is about to embark on a time of change, of shedding old ways of doing things and embracing some new ones. This change will gain momentum in October with the Membership/Leadership Development program that a few of our board members will be attending in Wells, Maine. We will receive valuable training in membership recruitment and leadership strategies. This is an amazing organization that we're a part of, with a long and rich history. Our hope is that we will find new and better ways to convey our mission and generate enthusiasm about the League. At a time when partisan politics is getting in the way of real progress, the League of Women Voters' policy positions, advocacy and commitment to nonpartisan democratic ideals is needed more than ever.

In late October, we will table at the Environmental Action Conference on October 29 at Vermont Technical College. The morning keynote speaker will be Gina McCarthy, an assistant administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air and Radiation and former Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. The afternoon keynote speaker will be May Boeve, the director of partnerships and policy and co-founder of 350.org, as well as the co-author of *Fight Global Warming Now*. There will also be morning and afternoon workshops.

On December 10, we will table at U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy's 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Economic Opportunity Conference. The date was changed from October 8. This event will also take place at Vermont Technical College. The morning address will be given by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. What a privilege and a treat it will be to hear her speak!

These conferences offer us a wonderful opportunity to meet and connect with people from all parts of the state, not just Central Vermont, and talk to them about the League, with the hope of sparking their interest and involvement. It will be fun to attend these conferences following our leadership training. We'll be able to put some of our newly gained skills into practice.

On November 15, our board meeting will be a consensus meeting, open to all members, where we will discuss the consensus questions and send our conclusions to the national League. They will compile responses from Leagues across the country in order to adopt an advocacy position on the role of the federal government in public education. This is a very important and timely conversation. Please join us for that.

We normally participate every year in the Montpelier naturalization ceremony, helping new citizens register to vote and providing refreshments. However, according to the U.S. District Court District of Vermont website, there is no Montpelier naturalization ceremony scheduled this fall. We want to extend a big congratulations to all of the new citizens in Vermont this year and remind folks that the League is a great resource for information about civic participation, voter registration and other issues important to new citizens.

Happy fall, everyone! Enjoy some hot apple cider, the colorful trees and the crisp air!

In celebration of democracy, Gia Biden and Nancy Lynch

## **Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor Headlines Leahy Conference**

It has been 15 years since the first annual Vermont Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, which provides women the opportunity to build on their career and professional goals, and to connect with other women who can help reach their career objectives.

This year's practical, how-to workshops will offer tools for women at all stages of professional development. Workshop topics will include how to expand and succeed in business and strategic media planning, sharpening leadership skills, and discovering and applying techniques in work-and-life balance.

Guest Speaker will be Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Born June 25, 1954 in Bronx, New York, Sonia Sotomayor is the daughter of Juan Luis Sotomayor and Celina Baez Sotomayor. She attended Princeton University for her undergraduate education and studied law at Yale Law School, graduating summa cum laude in 1979.

She served as Assistant District Attorney in the New York County District Attorney's Office from 1979 - 1984 and worked in private practice until the early 1990s. In 1991 she was nominated to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of

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New York by President George H.W. Bush. In 1997, President Clinton nominated her to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and in 2009, President Barack Obama nominated her to be Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. She was sworn in on August 8, 2009.

## **League to Table at Toxics Conference**

The LWVCEN will represent the LWVVT at the annual Toxics Action Conference on Saturday, October 29 at the Vermont Technical College in Randolph.

Toxics Action Center, along with other local environmental groups, hosts a series of conferences each year called Environmental Action. Their Fall conference is in Vermont and our Spring conference is in Massachusetts, and these conferences are two of the largest grassroots gatherings in New England. The events bring together more than 500 activists, community leaders, and experts. At the event, participants are able to meet other activists and citizens just like them, working to tackle the same issues. There are interactive workshops covering the hottest environmental issues, and advanced skills sessions to augment in-the-field training are also offered, such as how to work with the media and fundraise.

This year's workshops include Planning for Vermont's Renewable Energy Future, Cleaning Up Lake Champlain, Meeting Vermont's Environmental Commissioner and Learning how to Lobby, Fundraise, Get Media Attention and more.

Featured speakers are Gina McCarthy, Assistant Administrator of the EPA Office of Air and Radiation and May Boeve, Executive Director of 350.org.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The LWVUS is nearing the completion of a study of the role of the federal government in public education. The LWVCEN will hold a consensus meeting on the issue on November 15 (see Calendar). To help prepare members for the discussion, study papers appear in the current issue of the state newsletter, *The Green Mountain Citizen*, and below. More information can be found on the LWVUS website, in the "For Members" section under Projects and Programs.

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Students who move from one part of the United States to another during their K-12 school careers are likely to encounter substantial variations in requirements for graduation. The Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI, 2010) stated: "We need standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students."

Currently, standards for student performance vary widely by state. The roots of current state-to-state inconsistencies lie in the fact that public education in the United States has traditionally been a local responsibility. However, textbook publishers have created something of a "de facto" national curriculum, based on market needs. Consequently, many textbooks from major publishers have reflected the curricular choices that were made by educational groups in the largest states. Some publishers do create textbooks and other curricula for smaller markets. Rothman (2009) summarized the efforts of

various groups to create common standards across the United States. Initial efforts to foster development of national standards and a related system of assessments in the core subject areas began in the early 1990's through awarding grants to a dozen national organizations.

The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) launched the Common Core State Standards initiative in March 2009 after the nation's governors agreed in concept to adopt a uniform set of standards. The final report was issued on June 2, 2010 (NGA, 2010), and, by early 2011, 40 states have adopted the Standards. The adopting states are currently aligning them to their own state standards.

The Fordham Institute (Carmichael, et al. 2010) reported that the Common Core standards received high marks when compared to state standards across the country. The Institute suggests that Common Core Standards represent an opportunity for creating consistency and raising standards in all states.

## Assessments

The implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has created a 50-state and 50-test environment in public education. As a result state-to-state expectations and performances vary greatly. States publish annual reports of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which are required by federal law, but the meaning of "proficient" in those reports can vary widely from one state to another (Cronin, et al. 2007).

Larger testing companies market a variety of norm-referenced standardized tests. However, they are designed to rank students, rather than to determine how well students have mastered curricular objectives as criterion-referenced tests would do. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) publishes results that are technically adequate for state-to-state (and international) comparisons, but that assessment is not designed to produce individual student scores. NAEP requires a large sample of students to produce results. Most school systems

are too small to qualify for testing that would produce local NAEP results. The tradition of local governance has led to inconsistent requirements and standards for student performance across the country. Thus, in 2010, the United States does not have a consistent set of academic assessments for grades K-12.

Two coalitions, together representing 44 states and the District of Columbia, won a U.S. Department of Education competition for \$330 million dollars federal aid to design “comprehensive assessment systems” aligned to the Common Core and designed to measure whether students are on track for college and career success. The awards, announced in September 2010, were divided between the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), comprised of 26 states receiving \$170 million, and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium that comprises 31 states and received \$160 million. At least 12 states participated in both coalitions and are waiting to decide which assessment system will best meet their needs. An advantage of having assessments that are used in more than one state is that results from all participating states could be compared.

### **Why not national standards or assessments?**

The most common arguments against adopting the Common Core Standards for K-12 center on two issues: 1) the cost and difficulty of changing the existing curriculum and assessments and (2) the sovereignty of states in issues related to education and local control. Governor Rick Perry of Texas stated that the Race to the Top funding would only generate a one-time amount of \$75 per student, yet cost Texas taxpayers an additional \$3 million. A third argument is that the individual state standards might be more rigorous. However, states that adopt the Common Core are permitted to add 15 percent more in content.

Another concern is the potential to use scores from the student assessments as a major component of teacher evaluations and merit pay plans, an idea that has popular appeal. (*TIME*,

2010). In August 2010, ten of the nation’s premier educational researchers (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravtich, Rothstein, Shavelson & Shepard, 2010) co-authored a report that cautioned against relying on student test scores as a major indicator for evaluating teachers, citing the technical problems associated with using scores from standardized student assessments in value-added statistical models.

### **Does the United States need a national curriculum?**

The U.S. Department of Education presents the view that, since the developers of the Common Core Standards and the proposed assessments have been groups with state representation rather than the federal government, neither program is a federal initiative. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, March 13). In March 2011, the Albert Shanker Institute issued a call for common curriculum guidelines (Albert Shanker Institute, 2011; Gewertz, C. 2011, March). This document voices the concern that common assessments are being developed from the common standards with no curriculum in between. In May 2011, another group published an article with a different view: “Closing the Door on Innovation: Why One National Curriculum is Bad for America” (2011), discussed by Gewertz, C. (2011, May). The article also cites the prohibition against a federal curriculum contained in the 1965 ESEA.

*Produced by the LWVUS The Education Study: The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education © 2011 by the League of Women Voters of the United States*

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**LWVCEN 2010/11 Calendar**  
(Public events are in boldface)

October

Friday -	14-16	Quad States Conference: LWVUS Membership/Leadership Development program, In-state Training, Wells, ME
Sunday		
Saturday	29	Table at Toxics Action Conference, VTC, Randolph

November

Tuesday	15	Board meeting and LWVCEN Consensus meeting on LWVUS Study of the Federal Role in Public Education, home of Kate Rader, 1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier. All members are encouraged to attend.
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December

Saturday	10	Table at Sen. Patrick Leahy's annual Conference on Women's Economic Opportunity, VTC, Randolph.
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