



GREEN MOUNTAIN
CITIZEN

Autumn, 2007

A Brief Synopsis: Positions Supported by the League of Women Voters of Vermont

Voter Rights and Government

- Instant Runoff Voting.
- Efforts to streamline the legislative process.
- Four-year terms for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, annual sessions of the General Assembly.

Fiscal Policy

- The redistribution of the tax burden in Vermont, particularly the property tax, through land use assessment rather than fair market value; and strongly supports the present tax on Vermont-derived income of nonresidents.

Social Policy

- A publicly funded, single-payer, comprehensive, universal, equitable health care system for Vermont.
- Decent housing and a suitable living environment for every citizen (from LWVUS position on basic human needs).

Environment

- Legislation which moves Vermont to predominant reliance on renewable energy resources and energy efficiency.
- A regional approach (ME, NH, VT) to disposal of low-level radioactive waste.
- The policy and purpose of the Act Relating to Solid Waste adopted in 1987 by the General Assembly.
- Land protection and an integrated development plan for Vermont through a state organizational framework.

(Cont'd on Page 3)

President's Message Fall 2007

Our too-short summer is drawing to a close as I write this. My garden provided abundant chard, but only a handful of tomatoes. However, this is a glorious day, and I could handle a whole season of this weather.



As the League starts another year of activity, and among the items demanding the board's attention is planning for Legislative Day, February 6, the highlight of the League winter. Information about the day will appear in the Winter GMC, our website, and through e-mail* to our members. On that day, we ask our members to come to the State House to present our positions to our legislators. To help you be familiar with those advocacy positions, you will find them summarized in this GMC. There is also an article about Catamount Health and how it fits (or not) with our health care position.

On other fronts, we are looking for volunteers to serve on the following *ad hoc* committees:

Help is needed to plan for and implement a successful *Legislative Day* (contact Vee at vernagordon@verizon.net or me at the address below).

It is time to review our candidate *debate criteria* in a way that makes any debates we sponsor useful to the voters and fair to the candidates, and we need a couple more people for that committee (contact me). I want to have our criteria posted on the website by the first of the year, so all potential candidates can be aware of them well in advance of the election.

We're looking for a committee to evaluate *alternative organization* schemes in the hope of

getting our scattered members-at-large more involved in the League. There is more about that on p. of this issue.

Last but not least, we have secured the *Card Room* in the State House for a *display* on February 13. We have a three-panel display board which badly needs some buffing up. If any of you creative types out there would like to lend your talents to this task, contact Sonja Schuyler sonjapeter@comcast.net.

All of the jobs listed above are of limited duration and well-defined. Become an active member of the LWVVT by making your contribution to our program.

And one last appeal that you participate in the LWVUS Immigration Study Consensus. More information about that can be found on p.

Kate

*This is a gentle reminder to send your e-mail addresses to me at catherine.rader@verizon.net. We want you to get all the information about our activities that you are due!

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

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(Positions cont'd.)

Education

- Equality of educational opportunity for all public schools in Vermont.
- Alternative high schools for special purposes and magnet schools with scholastic specialties, in order to strengthen Vermont's public schools, but does not support vouchers or charter schools.
- Uniform pre-school screening for all Vermont children.

This is a short version of our positions. For the full text, go to our website at www.lwvofvt.org and click on Advocacy and Action.

Naturalization Ceremony Takes Place at State House

They came from six continents, thirty-seven countries, from as near as Canada to as far away as Australia. From the tiny country of Benin in Africa to the massive Peoples Republic of China, from Croatia, Nigeria, India, Japan, and Russia; from Vietnam, the Sudan, Germany, Greece, Argentina, and Peru, they found their way to the State House in Montpelier and took the Oath of Allegiance to become citizens of the United States of America, all 104 of them. The eldest was a 74 year old from Czechoslovakia, the youngest an 18 year old from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The diversity of ethnic groups and nationalities in this one building at one time was indeed a rarity in the state of Vermont.

As Governor Douglas put it in his comments, we don't know why they came or why they decided to stay on as citizens. Some no doubt are refugees from war or oppression; some may have married American citizens. Some may have come for economic reasons, some because they desire a new beginning. Whatever the motivation for what they have done, the word that comes to this writer's mind is courage. It takes a courageous person to give up his or her place of birth for the uncertainties of a new country. They were reminded of their responsibilities as American citizens and wished a prosperous future in their new land.

Ten members of the League of Women Voters of Vermont attended the Naturalization Ceremony, four from Champlain Valley (Joanna Cole, Vee Gordon, Jean Norton, and Marge Gaskins) and six from Central Vermont (Nancy Lynch, Hedi Ballantyne, Susan Clark, Flo Young, Kate Rader, and Claudette Sortino) and subsequently provided the new citizens with the opportunity to register to vote. Sixteen took advantage of our presence with others taking a registration form with them to be completed later. Refreshments served after the ceremony were provided by the League. That the League was present to provide these services was included in the program and announced by U.S. District Judge William Sessions III as he concluded the ceremony.

Claudette Sortino

Quilt Raffle

LWVCEN is raffling a beautiful 4 1/2 x 5 1/2 foot quilt hand made by member Polly Ellerbe. Tickets are \$1.00, six for \$5.00. If you'd like to purchase some, contact Neely Washington at 223-0133 or occasional@madriver.com. The drawing will take place on October 10th. The winner will be contacted by phone and the quilt will be sent by mail to the winner if the distance warrants it.

Immigration Study Consensus Meetings Scheduled

The LWVUS immigration study is approaching its conclusion. Information gathered by the study committee is available on the LWVUS website (www.lwv.org) and in the last three issues of the national *Voter*. The study has been set up so that the consensus process is through discussion meetings. The compiled responses from each local League will be submitted to the LWVUS. *No individual responses will be accepted.* Local League consensus meetings have been scheduled as shown below. If one of them is reasonably convenient for you to attend, you are welcome to do so.

However, individual members-at-large and MAL units can participate by downloading the study information and consensus questions from the website, completing the questions, and sending their responses to the state League, c/o Kate Rader, 1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier 05651. They will then be compiled and submitted to the LWVUS as from a local League.

Your are urged to participate in this important study. If you have any questions, contact Kate at 802-229-4737 or catherine.rader@verizon.net.

Consensus Meetings

Champlain Valley: Wed., Nov. 14, 12:00-1:00 p.m., at the Fletcher Free Library, Pickering Room.

Central Vermont: Tues., Dec. 4, 7:00 p.m., Woodbury College, Montpelier

SE MAL Unit (Brattleboro): Tues., Nov. 27, 7:00 p.m., Hanna Cosman Room, Brattleboro Municipal Center

Civics Education

The League of Women Voters is an active participant in the Vermont Council on Civic Education. The council was authorized in 2005 and includes the LWV, the Vermont Bar, the new Social Studies coordinator representatives from all the education associations and representatives of the Legislature. In 2005 and 2006 the Council held a conference in each year attended by teachers and

very much appreciated. This year the council members decided we had to get down to the nitty-gritty and begin processes to bring about Civics Education all around the state.

The survey the council did in 2005 showed spotty and sparse civics learning, and there are few if any mandates (and there are a few specific mandates for specific courses in the law). Civics learning depends on the individual teacher or another person in the school system itself.

We met this past week and it was a small group of specific organization Representatives: The Commissioner of Education and the Secretary of State attended as well as three legislators, reps from the NEA, the Principals Assn., the Superintendents Assn, the Humanities Council, Snelling Center, Leahy's office, the Bar Association, yours truly and others. We were very pleased to have the Commissioner there actively participating.

Working in small groups we looked at the Civic mission of the schools report, that 2005 survey, the school quality standards that we have here in Vermont and then we had a roundtable discussion on how we can work together to create more civic learning opportunities for Vermont students.

We then went on to determine what objectives the council would work toward. We actually came up with nine and then we ranked those nine by importance and settled on the top of three objectives to work on now. They are: assessment of civics learning in all the Vermont schools and then the assessment of the content and student participation in those learning opportunities; how to raise the money we will need to accomplish the goals for this year; and what Civics Education opportunities can be offered to start off the new effort. (The winning idea is a pilot project turning one school into a civics/service learning school).

Uniquely, there was unanimous agreement to not approach the Legislature. There will be no mandates, and we already know how difficult it is to ask them for money. (The reply is always "we have no money"). The Council will meet again in about two months to report on preliminary work so we have to get busy.

Vee Gordon

Catamount Health and Vermont Health Care Reform: How Close Are They to the LWVVT Position?

The state of Vermont officially launches Catamount Health on October 1st. While the state government's plan to provide health insurance to all Vermonters falls short of what LWVVT believes would be the ideal solution, now is a good time to look at where the plan will take us in terms of providing health care for all. The goals of Catamount Health are limited to increasing access to affordable health care to all Vermonters, improving the quality of health care across the lifespan, and containing health care costs. The goals of the overall health care reform package address more universal health concerns.

LWVVT supports a single payer system that is comprehensive, universal, equitable, separated from employment status, and supported by broad based taxes on earned and unearned income. Catamount Health is not a single payer system. It is directed primarily at those Vermonters who do not now have health insurance and uses a combination of government funds and private health insurance companies to achieve its goals. Eligible participants will choose between two private insurers, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont and MVP Health Care. There will be monthly premiums based on income levels and co-payments for services and prescription medications.

LWVVT supports covering all medically necessary services, using evidence-based practices, and including preventive, chronic, dental, home, and licensed alternative care. Catamount Health includes a chronic care plan which will roll out over the state over a five year period. The plan includes preventive care, the use of evidence-based standards, information technology, and the linking of financing mechanisms and insurance reimbursements with the attainment of chronic care treatment goals.

LWVVT supports making the necessary up-front investment in order to take advantage of the benefits of a coordinated, statewide information technology system. The state of Vermont has as a strategic goal that all Vermont providers will be able to share real-time clinical information with other providers across the state to improve patient outcomes, reduce service duplication, and decrease the growth of health care costs, while ensuring patient confidentiality. The state intends to develop a statewide, integrated, electronic, health information infrastructure for the sharing of health information among health care facilities, health care professionals, public and private payers, and patients.

LWVVT supports education and incentives for healthy lifestyles. Vermont health care reform includes free immunizations. CHAMPPS (Coordinated Healthy Activity, Motivation, and Prevention Program) will be introduced to provide competitive multi-years grants to communities to assist them in promoting healthy behavior and disease prevention across the lifespan of the individual. Included will be the promotion of good nutrition and exercise for children, community recreation programs, elderly wellness, obesity prevention, and substance abuse prevention. Catamount Health will include coverage of preventive care and private insurers are required to waive cost-sharing for preventive care.

LWVVT supports increasing provider availability by forgiving tuition loans for new providers practicing in underserved areas of Vermont, and greater use of nurse practitioners and physician's assistants. Vermont is committed to having a sufficient number of health care professionals in all communities to meet the needs of all Vermonters. Funding will be provided to help recruit and retain providers and educators in underserved communities. Vermont intends to have an adequate supply of dental hygienists and nurses to meet the needs of its population.

LWVVT supports the establishment of mechanisms to adequately control total system expenditures for health services while maintaining standards of quality care.

Vermont's health care reform plan includes numerous proposals for containing health care costs. Catamount Health will reduce the number of uninsured which helps reduce cost shift. Better reporting systems will enable the state to monitor and evaluate cost shift and measure the effects of cost shifts on hospital and insurance rates. All Vermont insurers and providers will implement simplified administration procedures to lower administrative costs and provide more understandable processes for consumers, providers, and insurers. Information technology will play a role here.

The LWVVT position includes support of community health centers, telemedicine, mobile treatment units, and the use of existing space in public buildings as medical centers.

LWVVT also supports oversight by a citizens' commission. The Vermont health care reform plan and Catamount Health don't address these. As described above, other parts of the League's position are partially supported with the new legislation. These plans are not sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy the LWVVT position on health care....that health care in the U.S. resemble closely the single-payer comprehensive plans that are available in most countries considered our economic equals. Certainly the Vermont plan is a step in the right direction, but only a step, not a solution.

Claudette Sortino

Members Sought for New Ad Hoc Committee

One of the workshops at the Leadership Training Conference in Saco, ME last June dealt with alternative League board organization.

When nominating committee of the LWV of the Acton Area (MA) League was not able to recruit a president, they met with past and potential League leaders to brainstorm on how things could be organized to make leadership positions

less daunting. Jobs were broken into smaller pieces, and members sought whose interests fit the job, or, a job was created to fit the interest of the individual members, and a larger steering committee replaced the traditional board. The Laramie County, CO League went through much the same process.

The result for the Acton Area League, which has a membership of about 100, was an astounding 80% member participation in the various League activities.

Attendees at the conference from Vermont agreed that our local Leagues are probably too small for this approach. But our state League has only a couple of hundred members, half of which are members-at-large, with no local League to work with or through. It occurred to us that some of the ideas used by the Acton and Laramie County Leagues could be applied at the state level – not to replace the current board organization, but as a way to engage our scattered MALs, and to become better acquainted with the organization and each other.

Vee Gordon and Kate Rader are recruiting a small committee – preferably of members-at-large – to evaluate the materials available on alternative organization, to see if the philosophy can be adopted to the Vermont League. If it should be deemed feasible, the same committee, or an expanded one, could propose how such a scheme could be implemented.

We hope some of you organization people out there will be intrigued by this idea and step up to help us out. Please contact Vee at vernagordon@verizon.net or Kate at catherine.rader@verizon.net. We're looking forward to hearing from you.

GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

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CALENDAR

October 10, 2007	Immigration Panel, State House
October 18, 2007	VPT “Public Square”, LWVVT audience
October 23, 2007	Brattleboro SE MAL Immigration Consensus Meeting
November 10, 2007	LWVVT Board
December 8, 2007	LWVVT Board