



# GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

Fall 2008

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## Board Adopts Calendar for 2008/09

The LWVVT Board has adopted the following calendar for the 2008/09 League year. Details will be added as they are determined. Please take special note of our Legislative Day, and plan to attend!

### September

GMC out  
Monday, 8: Naturalization Ceremony, State House  
Monday, 15: Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m.

### October

Candidate Forums (tentative)  
Monday, 13: Board Meeting 4:30 p.m.

### November

Saturday, 15: Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m.

### December

GMC out

### January

Saturday, 17: Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m.

### February

Saturday, 14: **89<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the League of Women Voters**  
Saturday, 21: Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m.

### March

GMC out - Call to Convention; Proposed Budget  
Tuesday, 10: **Legislative Day**

### April

Local Units should hold LWVUS NPV Study Consensus Meetings  
Monday, 20: Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m.

### May

State League Convention  
League display in the State House Card Room

## President's Message Fall 2008

When I last wrote, we were waiting for summer to begin. Now, what passed for summer this year is officially over, and I feel like we're still waiting. But we are having some beautiful early fall weather, and my tomatoes did ripen, among beautiful zinnia, cosmos and scarlet runner blossoms.



Now it's time to turn back to League business.

We will be working with others on a number of League issues:

The House and Senate Government Operations Committees have established a committee to look for ways to make Vermont's public financing of elections law more effective. More about the committee can be found on p. 7.

LWVCV member Jean Hopkins will represent the League in a coalition initiated by the Vermont Workers Center to mobilize activity around the concept of health care as a human right. See p. 7.

We'll be working again during the new legislative session to bring election-day voter registration to Vermonters. We will be joining the lobbying firm Kimbell Sherman Ellis and others to bring an effective campaign to put EDR on the books this session.

Turning inward, the LWVUS will be studying the advisability of using the mechanism of the National Popular Vote Compact to effectively bring about the popular election of the President without the necessity of a Constitutional amendment to eliminate the Electoral College. Information about the compact can be found on the League's website ([www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)) and on that of the LWVNY website at <http://lwvny.org/npv.html>. I have several copies of the book *Every Vote Equal*, which describes in detail how the compact would work.

Let me know if you would like one.

This is a fast-track study, so local units should be planning to have consensus meetings in April.

And last but far from least (for me anyway). We are still in need of a GMC editor and someone to keep our website up to date. Neither job takes any real technical knowledge or an inordinate amount of time. I have taken over these tasks until someone else steps up, but it would be better all around – especially for the connection to the League it would provide the volunteer – if someone out there would choose one of these means to be active in League.

Looking forward to a productive year in League.

*Kate*

**The Green Mountain Citizen**  
Is published four times per year by  
The League of Women Voters of Vermont

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Kate Rader, Editor *pro tem*

Membership in the League includes a  
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***At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man walking into the little booth with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper. No amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point.***

***-Sir Winston Churchill***

## LWVVT Honors June Carmichael

At the LWVVT Council in May, the membership voted to honor June Carmichael for her dedicated service to the League and to her community. This will be her last year as Treasurer and she has served faithfully for many years.

The League of Women Voters of Vermont has had June Carmichael at its side for several decades now. I first met her when she was President of the Rutland League in the early 1970s. She was a great leader then and after she moved north to Essex, she continued to fill a role that was hard to follow.

She joined the state League board when Peg Garland was president, and became the Land Use Chair. Under her leadership an all-encompassing study was done on land use in Vermont that included a large well-attended conference at VT Technical College on that subject. State officials attended that conference and were hearty participants.

June then put herself to work for us again and became the treasurer. She has gone on to manage our finances for these many years, including the Education Fund which was begun with a bequest from Nicki Keyes. When our *Citizens Guide* needed updating, June took that on and later in 2004, she updated the *Guide* for us again.

June filled a community role as well, serving the town of Essex on their Planning Commission and their Select Board. The town showed its appreciation of her efforts by naming a street at the Lang Farm in her honor – Carmichael Way.

Through serious illness and difficult health periods she has continued to put through all those numbers – and she has been a one-woman cheering squad for all our efforts.

In recognition of her many contributions to the League, Council voted to establish the June Carmichael Award to be presented annually in recognition of outstanding League service.

We are looking for ways to make this award tangible. One suggestion at council was to establish a scholarship in her name to help members attend conferences. Members may send their ideas to the Board.

Vee Gordon

## **Restoring the Civic Mission of the Schools**

*[The following is a Letter to the Editor written by Vee Gordon.]*

This week marks the two hundred twenty-first anniversary of the signing of America's Constitution, and students across the nation will spend a few minutes hearing about the ideal that led to the birth of our nation. However, in this new school year too many schools will not teach the knowledge and attitudes necessary for active leadership.

Civic learning has been in decline over the past generation, and the last decade has witnessed an especially steep decline as high stakes testing forces schools to devote more time to literacy and math at the expense of civics. At this point in time most schools only feature one civics course in high school as a graduation requirement.

Today too few high school students are able to explain how citizen participation helps democracy. Most young people lack the tools to shape their communities through citizen participation. Low and minority students score even lower on these issues.

Since the American public education system touches the daily lives of more citizens than any other national institution, it needs to prepare every young person for a life of engaged and informed citizenship. If education doesn't prepare students to think critically about what they hear from politicians and the media, how can we expect them to answer the challenges – at home and abroad – that will face America in the decades to come.

Here in Vermont, the Legislature established the Council on Civic Education to get civics education on the books in every school district. We are working to restore civic mission of schools through teacher conferences, direct classroom contact with teachers and administrators, supporting the Social Studies department at the Department of Education, and building resources for teachers to use.

Only if we show a commitment to improving the quality and quantity of civic learning, can we fulfill the promise of our state and federal constitutions, and look forward to a thriving democracy for generations to come.

## **League of Women Voters Celebrates Constitution Day**

This September 17 marked the 221st anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. In this land-mark election year, the League of Women Voters is working nationwide to highlight the significance of our democratic process and reaching out to voters in an effort to encourage a better common understanding of the Constitution and the rights it ensures us.

“Constitution Day marks an important opportunity for us to reflect upon the foundations we still rely on today,” said national League president Mary G. Wilson. “In a year of unprecedented civic energy, it is especially critical for us to all realize why our constitutional rights are so important.”

In 2008, the League has been especially active in ensuring that the third branch of government—the judicial branch—is strong and impartial. In July, Wilson spoke before the Judiciary Council of California Commission for Impartial Courts, urging the Council to put more effort into citizen education:

“It is essential for Americans to remember key ideals such as responsive government, individual liberties and the separation of powers, especially an independent judicial branch. It is our responsibility to teach those lessons to future generations, and also to ensure our leaders are actively protecting the basic civil liberties we fought to obtain.”

For more than 88 years, League members all over the country have rolled up their sleeves to encourage citizen engagement and strengthen our system. Constitution Day serves as an important reminder of that work, and inspires us to keep working to build a better democracy.

# Election Matters

## Election Law Changes

The close of the last legislative session brought two important changes to Vermont's election law:

- 1) The deadline for voter registration is now 5:00 p.m. on the Wednesday before the election. For this year's general election that is October 29.
- 2) First-time voters in Vermont must still take the voter's oath. However, the oath may now be administered by a Town Clerk, Justice of the Peace, Notary Public, Commissioned Military Officer *or any person over the age of 18. The applicant may also sign the certification him/herself.*

When helping applicants register to vote, remember that a driver's license or state-issued personal ID number are required by law. Only if the applicant swears under penalty of perjury that s/he has neither may the last four digits of the Social Security number be used.

## Every League's Election Resource

Since 2006, [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org) has provided extensive up-to-date resources for voters nationwide.

Throughout the 2008 election year, VOTE411 has been recognized by media outlets, partner organizations and various corporations as a premiere source for accurate, accessible election information. Go to [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org) to register to vote, find out your polling location, obtain candidate information, and learn specific election information for your state such as election dates, early voting and voting absentee. Check it out.

## Primary Statistics

The Secretary of State's office shows 431,631 registered voters in Vermont (with the caveat that this number is inflated due to statutorily mandated delay in removing names of persons who have moved to another voting district, but who have not notified the clerk in writing of the change).

Only 36,716 (8.5%) voted in this month's primary election. This is to be expected, we suppose, given the dearth of contested offices, but discouraging nevertheless.

However, individual municipal turnout varied widely, from Guildhall, where 29.4% (of 194 registered voters) turned out, to Stowe, with a 2.3% turnout.

It will be interesting to see the difference in the turnout on November 4!

## Political Yet Nonpartisan

A reminder has come from LWVUS to review your Nonpartisan Policy.

Soon after the League's founding, the decision was made to take positions on issues but to neither support nor oppose any political party or candidate (appointed or elected) for public office. Today, this policy continues to ensure that the League's voice is heard above the tumult of party politics.

To ensure the credibility of the League as a nonpartisan organization, each League's board of directors is responsible for drafting and carrying out its own nonpartisan policy and for seeing that both its members and the public understand the League's nonpartisan role.

Leagues should also have a conflict of interest policy related to board members' paid employment, service on other boards (including League boards at other levels), personal lobbying, etc.

Information about developing and implementing a nonpartisan policy, the nonpartisan policy of the national League board and sample policies for local and state Leagues are included in the Tools for Leaders section of the League Web site ([www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)). Sample conflict of interest policies are also included on the Web site.

## ***Legislators Look at Campaign Finance***

The Chairs of the Senate and House Government Operations Committees have requested the League's participation in a study group looking at the issue of public financing of elections in Vermont.

Main and Arizona have had success using public financing. Connecticut has a statewide program ready for the 2008 election. Vermont's limited (just Governor and Lt. Governor) program of public financing has not been as successful, and the committees want to consider the reasons for that and possible remedies.

The purpose of the study group is to make recommendations of ways to operate and fund a voluntary system of publicly financed elections in Vermont. They want the committee to evaluate at least: the successes and failures of Vermont's public financing system; the experience of other states with publicly financed elections; what races should be publicly financed; and how should the system be funded.

Besides the League, the following have been asked to participate on the committee: an appointee of Gov. Douglas; Sec. of State Deb Markowitz; State Treasurer Jeb Spaulding; and representatives from Legislative Counsel, the Joint Fiscal Office, VPIRG, Common Cause VT, VT Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Assoc., and the VT Republican, Democratic and Progressive Parties.

They would like to have the committee's recommendations for consideration by January 15, 2009.

The Board of the LWVVT is looking forward to working with this important committee.

## ***Debate Plans Falter***

Efforts by the LWVUV, the LWVCEN and the LWVVT to sponsor some statewide candidate

debates this year have been disappointing. We are still negotiating with the gubernatorial campaign offices and with the candidates for Secretary of state, but as of this writing, there is no real progress to report.

Please check the website ([www.lwvofvt.org](http://www.lwvofvt.org)) for any news regarding candidate forums.

## ***Health Care is a Human Right***

December 13 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that *"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care."*

The Vermont Workers' Center (VWC) has asked the LWV to join them in a campaign to mobilize the political will to make that concept a reality.

The Health Care is a Human Right campaign aims to change what is "politically possible" in the health care debate through grassroots organizing and a strategic reframing of health care as a basic human right and the health care crisis as a human rights emergency. While the long-term goal is a universal, single-payer health care system, the focus in the immediate period is not on policy, but on educating, organizing and mobilizing the broad working class around the demand that health care is a human right.

Last June, the LWVUS convention voted to adopt a Health Care program to educate members and communities in order to be better prepared to do health care advocacy as needed.

We believe the VWC project fits well with both the LWVUS program and the LWVVT advocacy position on health care.