



GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

Fall 2009

State and Local Boards Hold Leadership Retreat

The leadership from the state and local Leagues met in retreat in the meeting room of the Cabot town library on Sunday, September 13 to consider the Leagues strengths and challenges and to arrive at a group program for action.

The meeting resulted in the adoption of two action items: to create a comprehensive public relations plan and to make use of personal invitations to increase member participation and attendance at League-sponsored public programs.

The PR/communications plan will utilize a wide variety of media outlets, including print, radio, television and the Internet. This will allow the state and local Leagues to communicate clear, targeted, effective messages to appropriate audiences in a timely and proactive way. The desired result is increased visibility and education about who we are as an organization, our mission, goals, programs, studies and activities at the Statehouse. Our intent is to engage the public, other organizations, law-makers, decision-makers and stakeholders and to increase our membership and civic participation in the state.

Susan Clark, LWV Central Vermont member, was the facilitator for the day's discussion. Clark used an interesting methodology. I'm including a fairly detailed description of events, so the result will be understood and recognized as providing the potential for more interaction among the state and local Leagues as well as ideas for action by the individual Leagues.

In the first exercise, attendees were to note three organizational strengths of the League and three personal points of pride or pleasure in being a member of the League. Each one was to report one of the three from each list to the group. The same was then done for challenges to the League as an institution and personal frustrations found in working within the framework of the League.

During a break for coffee and muffins, event organizers Nancy Lynch and Kate Rader joined Clark in determining recurring threads or themes from the initial lists. These were Membership, Communication, and the power and credibility of the League. The group then was divided into three subgroups, each addressing the following visions for the League:

- A) Membership: the ideal League would have a large, diverse and active membership;
- B) Communication: the ideal League would have both its members and non-members know what we stand for and what we do;
- C) Power and Credibility: the ideal League would be and be recognized as a force for positive change.

Cont'd on p. 4

President's Message Fall 2009



I'm sure you've all be enjoying our recent brief summer as much as I have. Except for my tomatoes (which did not have the blight), in the end the garden produced well, and I have a bumper crop on my old wild apple tree.

The information-gathering stage of our transportation study is underway, and the report of one interview is found on p. 3. We would still like more geographic distribution among the committee members, especially from SE, SW, and NW Vermont. If you are willing to talk with any organization(s) focussed on transportation issues, or can tell us who they are, let me know.

At the invitation of Tara Rogerson (LWVT Treasurer and the Clerk/Treasurer of the Town of Cabot), on September 13 officers and board members of the state and local Leagues met in an attractive, wood-paneled meeting room in the Cabot town library. There, through a process led by LWVCEN member Susan Clark, we identified a number of actions that are intended to enhance our membership efforts and increase our presence in the community. A detailed report of this meeting is our lead story.

As part of the program adopted at the retreat, we will be making a concerted effort to have exhibit tables at appropriate events. To that end, we will have a table at Senator Leahy's 13th Annual Women's Economic opportunity Conference on October 17, and the Vermont Environmental Action Conference, sponsored by Toxics Action on November 7. Both are held at the Vermont Technical College in Randolph. If anyone would like to attend one of these conferences, and cover the League's table for a few hours, please let me know at 802-229-4737 or catherine.rader@myfairpoint.net

Another suggestion made at the leadership retreat last Sunday (not by me!) was to recruit an editor for

this journal. Great idea!! It's not an onerous job. It is desirable but not necessary for the editor to serve on the state League board. It takes me two or three days every three months to produce and mail it. Not a big deal, but I shouldn't be doing it. One job per person is better for that person and for the organization. I know that there are more than a few of you out there who could do it with your hands behind your back (figuratively speaking). Please consider making this contribution to the League.

Once again I am appealing to you to give us your e-mail addresses. Only about 2/3 of you have provided your addresses, and I'm sure that more than that have e-mail access. Please let us keep in touch with you electronically. It's doubly important for you members-at-large who have no local League to keep you connected to the organization.

Finally, write to our Congressional delegation in support of meaningful health care reform. Helpful information can be found on the LWVUS website at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Health_Care1

Kate

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Kate Rader, President
Kate Rader, Editor *pro tem*

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

League of Women Voters of Vermont
P.O. Box 94, Cabot, VT 05647
802-657-0242
e-mail: League@lwvofvt.org

LWV Registers New Citizens, Hosts Reception

At the fourth annual September Naturalization Ceremony to be held at the State House, the LWV of the Champlain Valley and the LWV Central Vermont again hosted a reception for the new citizens and their guests in the Cedar Creek Room and registered the newly franchised to vote.

This year, LWVCEN member Gia Biden interviewed two who had just taken the oath of allegiance to their new homeland:

Jane Hill was born in a little town in Australia called Grenfell in New South Wales. She came to the United States because of a relationship and in search of adventure. She landed in upstate New York in 1993 and has been in the United States ever since. She's been in Vermont for two years and says she chose this state because of its beauty and the quality of the people here.

Hill attended Yale University and Rensselaer Polytechnical Institute, and holds a Ph.D. in bioengineering. She is now professor of Engineering at the University of Vermont.

She lives in South Hero. Her journey brought her from New South Wales to South Hero, so we joked that she traded sheep & wheat for cows & corn.

Almost immediately following the naturalization ceremony, Hill registered to vote at the League of Women Voters' table at the Statehouse. To her, being able to vote means being able to really participate in the community, not just voice her opinion. She considers voting a privilege.

Keeping the big day low-key, Hill attended the naturalization ceremony by herself, letting only a few friends know what she was doing that day.

Hill appreciated the story told by Sec. of State Deborah Markowitz about former Gov. Madeline Kunin, who became a citizen after her family migrated from Switzerland to the U.S. What she likes about Vermont politics is that lawmakers and

decision makers, such as U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy and Gov. Jim Douglas, are accessible and that you can "rattle the cage" in such a small state.

Pierre Akposani is from Benin in West Africa. He came to the United States in 1974 after meeting his wife of 35 years, Ramona Goddard, while she was in the Peace Corps in Africa. When they met, he couldn't speak any English.

Akposani worked for 30 years as a Xerox service technician in Rochester, New York, where they lived for 32 years. Now, Pierre and Ramona live in Orwell, Vermont, where they built their retirement home.

When asked what naturalization/citizenship means to him, Pierre responded with several interesting answers. He considers the United States the greatest country in the world and he feels blessed to be here and is proud to now be an American. He said that he feels peaceful, joyful and happy living here and that he experiences very little hardship or trouble.

He chose to become an American because he sees deep values in the hearts of Americans. He believes this is the best system in the world, even if it is not perfect. He believes that Americans work to right the wrongs of history.

His parents have passed away, but his entire family still lives in Benin. If he lived there, he would be a village elder.

Ramona attended the naturalization ceremony with her husband. As our conversation ended, Pierre told me he was very joyful and eager to greet friends and other well-wishers.

Gia Biden

Leadership Retreat Cont'd.

In the first round of this activity, the groups listed just the negatives, i.e., the *obstacles* to achieving the vision for the topic. They were encouraged to be as explicit and as negative as possible. The groups then shifted to the next topic (group A moved to topic B, etc.) and proposed *solutions*, in the form of an explicit action, to the obstacles listed.

Each group then chose the top five action items from their list of solutions. The 15 choices were (in no particular order):

- Use Public Access TV for League programs;
- Create a comprehensive Public Relations Plan;
- Designate a Press Secretary;
- Train and use spokespersons as issue experts for both lobbying and speaking to other groups;
- Market the League at colleges;
- Explore web links with compatible organizations and PSAs;
- Seek nonpartisan events (conferences and the like) for tabling opportunities;
- Recruit web-savvy member to maintain website;
- Use personal invitations to increase attendance and participation in League events and activities;
- Hold orientation meetings for new members;
- Co-host events with nonpartisan organizations with common interests;
- Use more diverse faces on promotional materials;
- Make use of the resources offered by the LWVUS;
- Televise public programs.

As they were read out, the ideas were posted on a grid that charted impact against feasibility (ease of achievement, personnel willing to do the job, etc.). The position on the chart was determined by the consensus of the attendees. Naturally, action high on both impact and feasibility is most desirable, but low impact/high feasibility can provide quick results which can have a valuable positive reinforcement effect.

I can't reproduce the chart here, but following that step, the 15 actions were listed and each attendee used five dots to vote for those activities they would personally be able and willing to contribute to. The five votes could be distributed any way the voter desired: all on one; three on one, two on another; one on each of five choices, etc.

This poll served to indicate that we should make those two activities - PR Plan and personal invitations - high priority for the state and local Leagues. The former was judged to have high impact and medium feasibility, and the latter to have both high impact and feasibility.

Attendees were urged to take the next steps to make the two choices a reality.

Therefore, the next steps for the PR Plan are: to complete an assets inventory; determine what skills are needed beyond our boards' own; and to reach out to members who have the needed skills.

For the push to issue personal invitations to League events, a template invitation will be developed to be customized for the event and e-mailed to potential attendees.

Clark emphasized the point that the group should not forget about the remaining actions, but to keep them in mind as options, as opportunity arise and willing personnel become available.

Transportation Study Report

The Transportation Study Committee has begun the information-gathering phase of the study.

On September 2, Kate Rader interviewed Steve Gladczuk, Transportation Planner for the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission. That interview is excerpted below.

Transportation Planner Steve Gladczuk is responsible for the creation of the Regional Transportation Plan, staff to the Region's Transportation Advisory Committee, develops multi-modal project priorities, conducts special transportation studies, and coordinates regional input to the VTrans project development process.

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) was established in 1967. It comprises the municipalities of Washington County plus the towns of Orange, Washington and Williamstown in Orange County.

Enabling legislation for the establishment of Vermont's regional planning commissions was passed in the early '60's, and over the next few years, twelve commissions were formed by local governments. Links to all of them can be found at the website of the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Organizations, www.VAPDA.org.

The commissions act as a forum for local communities, and aid communication between those communities and the state. They provide technical aid to towns and make sure that town plans are in compliance with state regulations. A focus on transportation issues came in the early '90's, under a federal program.

Gladczuk noted that since last year's high gas prices, vehicle miles are down and the use of Park and Ride is up. This trend has not been reversed in response to this year's lower prices.

Several transportation projects are in the works for Central Vermont:

There are plans for a commuter route along Rte 2, connecting East Montpelier, Plainfield and Marshfield, which would connect with commuter routes to/from Burlington. This is under a federal program, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAC). The local contact for more information on this program is Dave Grundy, of East Montpelier.

The Plainfield Health Center is working on daily trips to Montpelier and Barre for their patients.

There are plans for a bus link for NECI students between downtown and their offices and dormitories on College Hill. I was also given the name of another East Montpelierite, Steve Jerome, who is working on the Vermont Local Roads Program.

I asked about freight traffic. The question of differing state and federal weight standards came up at Sen. Sanders transportation "town hall" meeting at the State House in February. Gladczuk gave me a summary of the Vermont Freight Plan, by Costa Pappis at VTrans. He also provided me with a printout of a presentation on transportation funding by Neil Schickner of the Joint Fiscal Office. Those documents will be made available to the study committee electronically.

Finally, Gladczuk provided a disc of the current Regional Transportation Plan, which was completed in Dec. 2008. It can also be found on their website at <http://www.centralvtplanning.org/Publications.html>.

I think it will be worthwhile to talk to each of the planning commissions, to get the kind of information given above about local efforts. Doing so may give us an overall picture, and maybe some ideas for coordination of planning efforts.

Kate Rader
Study Committee

The following is a press release from the LWVUS, which has filed an Amicus Brief in the campaign finance case currently before the Supreme Court:

SUPREME COURT CONSIDERS OVERTURNING PROTECTIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

Decision In Citizens United Case Could Fundamentally Change American Elections

Washington, DC – The League of Women Voters of the United States today submitted a [“friend of the court” brief](#) with the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of Citizens United v. the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The League and the Constitutional Accountability Center filed the brief to help put the case in historical context and to call attention to the pernicious and corrupting effects on American democracy if the Court were to overturn existing federal and state limits on corporate expenditures in candidate elections.

“The Supreme Court’s decision in Citizens United v. FEC has the potential to be more important than Bush v. Gore to American democracy,” according to national League President Mary G. Wilson. “This case will decide whether corporate wealth will be allowed to dominate our elections in years to come,” she said.

Corruption fueled by huge election expenditures by corporations at the end of the Nineteenth Century led Congress to pass the Tillman Act in 1907, which prohibits corporate expenditures in candidate elections and which started the era of campaign finance regulation. The Supreme Court upheld similar restrictions in 1990 in Austin v. Michigan Chamber of Commerce and again approved campaign finance regulations in 2003 in McConnell v. FEC. In the Citizens United case, the Court is considering whether to overturn the precedents established in Austin and McConnell.

“Voters are supposed to be at the center of our political process,” Wilson said. “Over time, we have constructed a solid foundation for modern American democracy through constitutional amendments, the Voting Rights Act, the principle of “one-person, one vote,” and protections against campaign finance corruption. By knocking out important prohibitions on corporate influence in the election process, the Supreme Court could threaten that foundation and radically alter our democracy,” she said. “This case could allow corporations to use their wealth to overwhelm our elections,” she said.

“For more than two centuries, American democracy has been moving in the direction of broader enfranchisement and more meaningful political participation of individual citizens,” Wilson said. “Legal arguments seeking political rights for corporations similar to those of individual voters run contrary to constitutional text and history and could reverse our centuries-long march of progress toward a more expansive, inclusive, citizen-based democracy,” Wilson said.

“This case and the resulting decision are not merely another set of run-of-the-mill technical, campaign finance regulations,” she said. “Basic principles that protect our democracy are at stake,” Wilson concluded.

LWVVT Calendar 2009/10

October

17 Women's Economic Opportunity Conference, VTC, Randolph
19 LWVVT Board Meeting, 4:30 p.m., location TBA

November

7 2009 Environmental Action Conference, VTC, Randolph
21 LWVVT Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m., location TBA

December

GMC out

January

16 LWVVT Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m., location TBA
National Program Planning

February

17 Legislative Day
27 LWVVT Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m., location TBA

March

GMC outstanding

April

19 - LWVVT Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m., location TBA

May

LWVVT Council, date and location TBA

Check out the LWVVT website (www.lwvofvt.org) for updates to the calendar.

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CITIZEN**

League of Women Voters of Vermont

Post Office Box 94

Cabot ,VT 05647