



GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

Summer 2008

Quad States Leadership Conference

The second Quad State Leadership Conference took place in Wells, ME on May 17th and 18th. The conference provided an opportunity for the Leagues in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont to spend time together discussing issues as they relate to small states. Approximately thirty League members attended with representation from all four states, Vermont providing five of the attendees. This event was not only for Board members but was open to any League member who wished to attend. A synopsis of the workshops follows.

Advocacy and LWVUS Positions

LWVUS Board member and regional liaison Judy Davis led the workshop on advocacy. The key to successful advocacy, she said, is that everyone be “on the same page”, speaking with one voice. This applies to all levels, national, state, and local. At the national level, day to day lobbying is done both by staff lobbyists and volunteers. An article in the National Voter, October 2005, had an article about the LWVUS Lobby Corps which was founded in 1970. About 20 Washington DC area volunteers meet monthly at the League office and then head for Capitol Hill where they advocate on League priorities with members of Congress. Together with the Grassroots Lobby Corps (staff members), these Leaguers have in recent years helped to win passage of the National Voter Registration Act, the McCain- Feingold Campaign Finance Reform Act, and the Help America Vote Act. This year’s priorities include campaign finance reform, Health Care Reform, Global Climate Change, and DC Voting Rights.

Candidate Debates and Forums

LWVRI president Hollie Courage and Helen Marie Casey, LWV Sudbury MA, conducted the workshop on candidate debates and forums. It takes a lot of effort and manpower to put together a successful debate including initial planning, finding an appropriate location, contacting the media, inviting the candidates, and setting up the venue and the rules. Emphasis was placed on the following items which are critical to ensure an effective event.

- ❖ The criteria for candidate selection must be fair, impartial, non-partisan, and clear, and candidates must meet all the criteria to be included.
- ❖ An effective non-partisan moderator must be found.
- ❖ Each participant must have an equal amount of time
- ❖ The debate must be kept civil and if questions are asked by the audience, the moderator must not allow the audience to “hog the microphone”.
- ❖ Questions could be screened ahead of time by the moderator or a committee to facilitate the flow of the debate.
- ❖ A debate can be timed or round-table.

(cont'd on p. 6)

President's Message Summer 2008



As I fret over my garden as it and I wait out our some-what cool, very wet weather in the hopes of some *real* summer days, I remind myself that we are not personally facing recovery from the devastating floods in the midwest. What are a few slugs and snails in contrast to what our farm belt is going through?

Back on the League front, there are some bright spots:

We had good response to our new state Action Alerts, on groundwater withdrawal regulation, IRV, campaign finance, and time off for Town Meeting. Thank you for contacting your legislators about these issues.

So far two local groups, the Upper Valley League and members in the Northeast Kingdom, have begun planning for candidate debates this fall. We'll have details and updates in the Fall GMC.

Nancy Lynch, President of the LWVCEN did an outstanding job as our delegate at the LWVUS Convention in Portland, OR last month. Her report appears elsewhere in this issue.

The Southeastern (Brattleboro) MAL unit has joined the Champlain Valley and Central Vermont Leagues in the pleasure of registering new citizens to vote.

The Quad States presented another well-received leadership conference in Wells, ME in May. We were encouraged to make this an annual event, and ideas for workshops came from attendees. Claudette Sortino covered the event, which was attended by five VT Leaguers, for the GMC.

And with that, I have the duty to tell you that at its meeting of June 24 the LWVVT board accepted, with profound regret, Claudette's resignation from the board. For personal reasons, she has found it necessary to withdraw from active participation in League activities. We will sorely miss her energy, her enthusiasm for the League, and her keen mind.

Kate

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Kate Rader, President
Claudette Sortino, Editor

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 8266, Essex, VT 05451
802-657-0242
e-mail: League@lwvofvt.org

P.S.

With the departure of Claudette from the board, we now find ourselves once again in need of an editor for this newsletter. The job does not require extraordinary skills, nor an inordinate amount of time. While acceptance of a position on the Board of directors is desirable, it is not necessary.

If any of you are willing to take on this task, or if you know someone I could try to persuade personally, please let me know at 802-229-4737 or catherine.rader@verizon.net.

Kate

Report from Convention

First of all, I would like to thank the State League for allowing me to represent Vermont at the convention and for providing the majority of the funding I needed to attend. I had a fabulous time and am committed to attending every national convention I can in the future—the next one being in Atlanta, Georgia in 2010, ya'all!

I arrived in Portland late Thursday evening and spent most of Friday sleeping and then prepping for my role as a voting delegate for Vermont.

Friday evening I attended the opening reception sponsored by Nordstrom. I must admit I found it hard to pass through the shoe department on my way and not buy a thing—but I only paused to touch a few pair along the way! I mingled at the reception and met some great women before heading over to my first caucus—on Instant Run Off Voting. The IRV caucus was informative although I already understand the concept. I was able to speak a bit to our own experience in Burlington with this system.

I also attended a wonderful workshop on Friday evening called *Running and Winning*. This is a project being implemented by many Leagues across the country and involves working with local high schools to organize day long workshops for high school juniors and senior girls. The workshops allow them to meet local and state elected officials to learn about their jobs, their campaigns, and their passion for holding office. This is a collaborative activity with other community citizen groups and inspires young women to become informed on issues, to think about participating in government through voting, service on commissions, campaigning and possibly running for office! Those who have held these workshops raved about their successes. I brought home a dvd that folks can use to help them get started on this project. If you have interest, please let me know and I will share the dvd with you [nancy@safelinevt.org].

Saturday morning things got underway quite early and didn't really stop until Tuesday afternoon! I attended a delegate briefing in the morning and participated in a very lively caucus

on Redistricting. I talked about our position briefly and asked that if not open to using Vermont's position they at least include some new language in their proposal. However, I must admit that as a first time convention attendee, I was a bit lost in the dialogue between more seasoned Leaguers! *More on this later.*

Saturday afternoon's opening plenary included a keynote address by the former governor of Oregon, Barbara Roberts, who spoke of the challenges and joys of being that state's first and to date only woman governor. She was eloquent, funny and inspiring. Our own president of the League, Mary Wilson, followed up with her own remarks addressing the state of today's League. Her biggest message was twofold: 1) commenting on the decline of members and the importance of new member recruitment, and 2) encouraging us all to work on visibility for our local and state Leagues. She too, inspired me and I have been thinking about ways to work on these two issues back at home in Vermont ever since. We also adopted our rules of convention, the order of business, and had the first half of the roll call of the states.

Saturday evening I attended a caucus on National Popular Vote. Our newest League member, Chris Pearson, was one of the presenters, and although I had a sense of what this was all about before attending, I came out of that caucus more informed and intrigued by this pragmatic approach to working around the Electoral College. We had a lively dialogue regarding what the compact meant and how it might or might not be in conflict with the LWVUS position on abolishing the electoral college.

Sunday we moved into motions and clarifications of recommended and non-recommended program, concurrences, the budget, etc. It was a great learning experience for me and I must admit this process gave me the convention bug! I was hooked. Listening to all the great discussion (the discourse remained civil while at times a bit heated), I was most impressed with Mary Wilson's ability to stay calm under pressure—

always civil, polite and able to keep things moving. Wow, she has mad skills!

We also enjoyed an amazing presentation from another former governor of Oregon, Dr. John Kitzhaber, whose mother was president of the Oregon state League for years. He himself is a professed League junkie. His talk was about our country's health care dilemma and he stressed the need to refocus the discussion from how we finance health care to how we structure the system itself.

Monday's activities included an informative if disturbing panel on Climate Change. One of our national Board members, Heather Kaplan, who also works for Oxfam, explained the impact of Climate Change on developing countries—and specifically how the women of these countries are particularly affected. We saw a clip from a dvd that Oxfam is distributing. I hope to order that and make it available for the state or local Leagues to use.

We voted on National Program and we passed all of the recommended items—including retaining all current positions in the areas of Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources and Social Policy. We also voted to adopt a health care program to educate members and communities in order to better prepare us for advocacy when needed. A “Multi-level Education and Advocacy Campaign to promote solutions to global climate change” as an added program also passed.

A non-recommended study item—“The advisability of using the National Popular Vote compact among the states as a method for electing the president” was passed also. [The LWVVT and the LWVCEN both recommended this study during national program planning process last January.]

We voted to amend our Principles by adding “The LWV of the US believes that all powers of the US government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among

the three branches of government; legislative, executive and judicial.”

Finally, we voted to allow the 2009 Council to pass a rule regarding adopting a resolution procedure for convention 2010. This will give Leagues more time to properly formulate and proposal resolutions to the convention.

Monday evening I attended the banquet and met loads of interesting women from around the country. The dinner was yummy and our speaker was a former Colorado Supreme Court Justice who now heads up the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System. She spoke about the need for reform of our current civil justice system.

Wow—finally, Tuesday and with the convention end in sight—we still had important work to do! We voted the budget in, and passed an increase in PMP to \$28.00 in 2008-2009 and \$29.20 in 2009-2010. We had the opportunity for rich discussion and dialogue on the previous days of the convention and these two items passed overwhelmingly on Tuesday morning. Additionally, we voted in a new board, which now includes the first man elected to the national board—a milestone in League history. While current members are thrilled and excited at the break in our glass ceiling, I can't help but wonder what our foremothers think about this bold act!

I hope you can glean from my report that much work was accomplished at convention 2008. I learned so much, met some great women, tried my hand at participating in convention procedures, gave some guidance to the board at the appropriate time, and proudly represented Vermont during roll call.

I wholeheartedly endorse any member who is interested in attending convention. It was exhilarating, challenging, thrilling and stimulating—all at the same time. But remember to bring your vitamins, I am sure glad I did!

Nancy Lynch

VT Keeps its Own Council in 2008

The League of Women Voters of Vermont Council was held May 3, 2008 at Langevin House, Vermont Technical College in Randolph. This was the first time since the formation of the Quad States Compact that all four members of the compact (ME, NH, RI, NH) have held separate Council meetings. Council is held in alternative years with Convention; its primary purpose is to adopt a budget for the coming year.

Seventeen delegates and two guests attended council, which was Joanna Cole's last function as a Board Member. She resigned in order to run for the Vermont House of Representatives.

At the morning business session, delegates approved the budget for July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009. The approved budget included a 6.5 percent increase, with income and proposed expenditures going up from \$16,926 to \$18,032. In other business, delegates adopted the consensus position on redistricting and reviewed existing LWVVT positions. Because the Vermont General Assembly meets every year, delegates approved a motion to delete the section of the League position on the Vermont Constitution relating to annual sessions of the legislature. The League positions, with that one amendment, were reaffirmed by the delegates. During discussion of League positions, delegates expressed interest in taking action on education funding issues and two delegates, Dottie Ricks and Claudette Sortino, volunteered to join the League's Education Committee.

Following lunch, guest speaker Tanya Stone, a member of the Champlain Valley LWV, spoke about books she has written and read *Elizabeth Leads the Way*, her recently published children's book about suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Stella Bukanc

Brattleboro MAL Unit Registers New Citizens to Vote

Sixteen Vermonters from 12 different countries took the oath of allegiance at the U.S. District Court on May 7, with the Hon. J. Garvan Murtha presiding and administering the oath. Nine of them registered to vote following the ceremony, with assistance from the Southeastern Unit of the League of Women Voters of Vermont.

To be eligible, each was required to have five years' residency in the U.S. and three months in Vermont, to have a knowledge of civics and English, and to pass a test, which, according to Judge Murtha, "many Americans probably could not pass." He also noted in his brief address that "America is a land of immigrants," and that "Vermont was the first state to forbid slavery."

The countries represented by the participants were Bosnia, Pakistan, France, Lebanon, the Philippines, Vietnam, Ukraine, Brazil, Thailand, Congo, Argentina and Canada.

Members of the American Legion Post 5, Brattleboro, bore the flags, escorted by Deputy U.S. Marshal Leigh Marchegiani. District Adjudication Officer Gary Edelson presented the petitioners.

Music was performed by band members from Grade 4, Academy School, West Brattleboro.

Judy Myrick

"Democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing. What is necessary now is one thing and one thing only that democracy become again democracy in action, not democracy accomplished and piled up in goods and gold."

Archibald Macleish

- ❖ The moderator must be prepared to handle surprises and/or participants who choose not to follow the rules.
- ❖ The debate should be well publicized.

As the workshop leaders pointed out, the results are never guaranteed, but good preparation will ensure that a forum or debate will not get out of hand.

Membership Strategies—What Works

Research shows that the League of Women Voters is well respected, trusted, and has good name recognition, but there is no clear understanding on the part of non-members of the value of being a League member. Kelly McFarland Stratman, LWVUS staff member, conducted this workshop and focused on the following strategies: To expand membership, League members should focus on underscoring the value of a League membership and share a passion for what the League does. The League offers many different ways to get involved in non-partisan political action and community education. Many women and men would find this organization a wonderful place to be if they knew more about what we did. With the League now involved in many election activities, we are more visible. It's a great time to reach out, tell people what we do, and *ask people to join the League!*

Conducting a League Study

One of the handouts at this session began with the statement (author unknown) that a few years ago a national poll had shown the LWV was judged for trustworthiness only below the National Heart Association. That credibility comes from how the League works, how it arrives at its lobbying positions.

Leagues at the local, state, and national level engage in program planning, deciding which issues will be studied. This is a grassroots effort, with the membership determining what should be studied and directing the leadership accordingly. Interested members then form committees, investigate and study the selected issue, and bring their findings to the membership for consensus. The members then come to some general agreement (not necessarily unanimous) as to whether or not the material gathered warrants the drafting of a position

statement. If a position statement is drafted, it becomes the basis for League action. Every position lobbied by the League has followed this process. Consensus is the operative word.

LWVVT president Kate Rader and LWVMA member Marianne D'Angelo chaired this session, and both have participated in many League studies. An example as to how the League studies and reaches consensus on an issue: Three years ago the VT League decided to study the issue of health care at the state level. A committee was formed consisting of members from all over the state. Key players in health care in the private and public sectors were interviewed. The state legislature's health committees were observed. A round table discussion with high level staff members from the Veterans Administration Hospital in White River Junction was conducted. Relevant books and reports were read and summarized by committee members and circulated to the membership. Several consensus meetings were held so that every LWVVT member had the opportunity to participate and contribute. The consensus was that a position statement on health care should be developed, and it passed at Biennial Council in 2006. LWVVT can now lobby that position in the legislature and advocate for it in the news media.

Members who attended Biennial Council a few weeks ago voted on accepting the LWVVT position on redistricting, for which there was unanimous consensus. This added another weapon to the armamentarium that we have available to lobby our legislators for what we believe works best for Vermont.

Editor's note on lobbying: With the flow of private interest money and favors that have become attached to lobbying, one almost shudders when using that word in describing what the League does. Yet the First Amendment to the Constitution specifically gives people the right to "peacefully assemble and petition their government". Despite recent Supreme Court decisions stating that money equals free speech, LWVUS has a position that supports removing money from the Constitutional right to lobby. That untainted lobbying efforts can be credible and effective is reflected in the first sentence of the first paragraph of this article.

Claudette Sortino

LWVVTEF Awards Scholarships

The League of Women Voters of Vermont Education Fund Board of Directors has awarded two Winona Smith Scholarships. This year the board awarded a \$500.00 grant to Brittany Stark of the Lyndon Institute and \$500.00 to Emily Coon from Mount Mansfield UHS. In addition, \$100.00 was contributed to Works for Women.

Each year we see an increase in applications for the Winona Smith Scholarships; this year 16 high school seniors applied.

The Ed Fund, with help from League members around the state, continues to register new voters at each naturalization ceremony at the request of the Court.

The board will miss Sally Schober, who resigned for reasons of health. Jean Norton was appointed to fill the vacancy.

If you would like further information about the Ed Fund, contact Marge Gaskins [879-0003; margegaskins@verizon.net]. Our appreciation to those who make contributions!

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League of Women Voters of Vermont

Post Office Box 8266

Essex ,VT 05451-8266