



Green Mountain CITIZEN

Fall 2010

VOTE411

This election season the LWVVT is proud to be part of the LWVUS Education Fund's online voter Guide at www.VOTE411.org.

Launched by the LWVEF in October of 2006, VOTE411.org is a "one-stop-shop" for election-related information. It provides nonpartisan information to the public with both general and state-specific information on the following aspects of the election process:

- Absentee ballot information
- Ballot measure information (where applicable)
- Early voting options (where applicable)
- Election dates
- Factual data on candidates in various federal, state and local races
- General information on such topics as how to watch debates with a critical eye
- ID requirements
- Polling place locations
- Registration deadlines
- Voter qualifications
- Voter registration forms
- Voting machines

An important component of VOTE411.org is the polling place locator, which enables users to type in their address and retrieve the poll location for the voting precinct in which that address is located. The League has found that this is among the most sought after information in the immediate days leading up to, and on, Election Day.

The LWVVT put its toes in the water for the primary election, posting information about candidates in primary contests for statewide office. This included biographical information and answers to questions posed by the League. The website allows the seeker to compare candidates' responses side-by-side, and to download and print a "ballot" indicating his or her choices. This can be used as a reminder when the real choices are made on the actual ballot.

While we received no responses from the Congressional incumbents, all the offices posted had answers from at least one of the primary candidates, and all the gubernatorial candidates replied to our invitation.

For the general election, all the candidates for statewide office, the state Senate and state House of representatives will be invited to participate, including independent candidates and those of minor parties.

Cont'd on p. 7

President's Message

Fall 2010

Boy, somebody switched summer off! It was a truly wonderful summer, and my garden pretty well made up for last year's poor showing.



We are really pleased to be participating in VOTE411 this election season. We posted the primary contests for state-wide offices, and are sending invitations to general election candidates as this issue goes to press. Check out the site in early October – we should have some candidate responses by then.

The Summer issue of the GMC reported on last spring's Quad States Leadership Conference. The Quad States Presidents will be meeting again soon to begin planning for next spring. Please let me know of any topics or issues that you would like to see covered in our workshops.

At convention in June, Leagues were encouraged to join the social media network, through blogs, Facebook, twitter or whatever, and there was even a workshop to provide some guidance. Unlike our Quad States workshop, this one assumed a certain amount of knowledge, and discussed how to use these media after you were set up. That was beyond my expertise, so I am soliciting the help of our workshop presenter, LWVCEN President Nancy Lynch, to start from scratch to set up our own Facebook page. We'll have links to and from our website. I'll send out a notice when we go online!

The Transportation Study Committee has reached the analysis stage of the study. Consensus questions will be published in the December GMC. In the meantime, you can go to the LWVVT website and download interview reports and written materials we have gathered for the study, to help you prepare for consensus in January. We hope to have a position for adoption by Convention in May.

I'm really pleased at all the election year activity being carried out by our local Leagues. See page 3 for details. It's what they call an off-year election, but there seems to be plenty of excitement to go around, and it's good to be part of it.

The state nominating committee will soon be at work, in preparation for Convention in May. We all have talents that we can bring to this wonderful organization, and I urge you to consider what you can contribute. When a member of the committee calls you, please consider the rewards of serving on the board, as well as what you might bring to it. The continued health and vitality of the League depends on its members. Like Uncle Sam, the League needs YOU!

Kate

P.S. Follow LWVUS President, Elisabeth MacNamara, as she tours the country this election season. Go to <http://participate.lwv.org/blog/Election2010>.

I also remind you to check out the LWVUS website regularly (www.lwv.org) to keep up with what the League is doing in Congress and around the country.

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

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
802-734-9709
e-mail: League@lwvofvt.org

Local League Activities

Champlain Valley

Louise Ransom has spearheaded a voter turnout project in Burlington. The goal of the program, culminating in the November 2010 election, is to reduce the gap between the number of registered voters and the number who actually vote. In some election districts the turnout is as low as 50%.

The program will be implemented by a non-partisan volunteer corps of concerned voters in each election district. A volunteer Coordinator in each district has will recruit three core volunteers, one for each of the three areas vital to sound voting practices: Registration, Voter Education, and Get-Out-The-Vote. The three core volunteers will recruit as many more volunteers as needed to work in one of the three vital areas in their own election district.

For more info and/or to volunteer: call 985-8706, or e-mail louise.b.ransom@gmail.com,

Central Vermont

The LWV of Central Vermont (LWVCEN) is pleased to be sponsoring their first Washington County Senate Candidate Forum since 2004.

All seven candidates for the three-seat district have agreed to participate in the event, which will take place on Wednesday, October 6 at 7:00 p.m. in the Old Labor Hall, Barre.

LWVCEN member and Middlesex Town Moderator Susan Clark will moderate the event.

Southeast Unit

Members in Brattleboro are registering voters outside the Post Office on Saturdays. They also have held a special voter registration drive at Marlboro College.

The Southeast Unit is also sponsoring a forum of candidates for state Senate from Windham County, in partnership with BCTV. At least four candidates have accepted our invitation to participate in the event. The Conversation with Candidates is scheduled for Thursday Sept. 30, 6-7 p.m., in Brattleboro's Selectboard room. League member Janet Cramer will be moderator. It will be broadcast live, and the public is invited.

Naturalization Ceremony

On a beautiful late summer day, sixty people were sworn as citizens at the fourth annual fall naturalization ceremony at the State House on August 20.

Photos deleted

Once again, members from the Champlain Valley and Central Vermont Leagues registered the newest Americans to vote and hosted a reception for them, their families and friends. Twenty-two took advantage of the League's registration services.

LWVVT Calendar 2010/11

November

13 Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Board Meeting, location TBA. All members welcome

December

GMC out – First call to Convention

January

TBA State Program Planning

TBA Consensus Meetings, state Transportation Study

15 Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Board Meeting, Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Montpelier. All members welcome

February

12 Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Board Meeting, location TBA. All members welcome

March

16 Legislative Day, The State House, Montpelier
GMC Out

April

11 Monday, 4:30 p.m., Board Meeting, Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Montpelier. All members welcome.

May

21 LWVVT Convention, location TBA

June Carmichael Award

It's time again to solicit nominations to the June Carmichael award, recognizing outstanding service to the League. It was established in 2008 in memory of long time member and leader June Carmichael, and was first awarded at convention 2009.

Please send you nomination, and why your nominee should be given the award to me at catherine.rader@myfairpoint.net, or by U.S. Mail at 1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier 05651.

CURBING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS — TWO APPROACHES

By Eleanor Revelle (LWVIL and LWVUS Climate Change Task Force Member)

Facing the growing evidence that burning fossil fuels is contributing significantly to global climate change, policymakers are evaluating strategies for reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. They have two general approaches to consider.

Cap-and-Trade

With a cap-and-trade system, policymakers set a limit on the quantity of a pollutant (e.g., CO₂) that can be emitted in a given period. The total emissions allowed under this cap are divided into permits representing the right to emit a given amount (e.g., one ton of CO₂). The permits are then allocated to the sources covered by the program (e.g., power plants). At the end of the compliance period, each source must report all emissions and surrender an equivalent number of permits.

Since the number of permits is limited, they have financial value. Companies able to reduce their emissions at low cost can sell the permits they don't need to companies for whom the cost of reducing emissions is high. Each company has the flexibility to choose how to meet its emissions target, but market incentives encourage them to develop new, cleaner technologies. Over time, the cap is lowered to achieve more aggressive emissions-reduction goals.

Carbon Tax

A carbon tax is imposed on fossil fuel suppliers at a rate that reflects the amount of carbon that will be emitted when the fuel is combusted. The tax is included in the price of the coal, oil, and natural gas supplied to wholesale users and ultimately is passed on to consumers in the

price of electricity,

gasoline and other energy-intensive products. By raising the price of carbon-based energy, the tax creates incentives to reduce energy use, stimulates demand for more energy-efficient products, and promotes a shift to cleaner fuels and renewable energy.

Emissions Certainty

The strength of the **cap-and-trade** approach is that it sets firm limits on emissions. The cap is set at a level designed to achieve a desired environmental outcome (e.g., a reduction of CO₂ emissions to 80 percent of 1990 levels by 2050).

A **carbon tax** allows the quantity of emissions to fluctuate as the demand for energy rises or falls. Allowing emissions to vary from year to year gives firms the flexibility to abate less and pay more in taxes when abatement costs are unusually high (and vice-versa when abatement costs are low). In order to achieve climatic goals, the tax rate can be adjusted over time to attain greater emissions reductions.

Price Predictability

The advantage of a **carbon tax** is that it fixes the price of carbon emissions. It creates a permanent incentive to reduce emissions, thereby encouraging investment in alternative fuels and energy-efficient technologies that have high up-front costs.

Under a **cap-and-trade** system, the price of emissions permits may vary considerably from year to year. An especially cold winter, for example, could increase the demand for energy and cause a spike in the price of permits. This volatility could weaken incentives to invest in cleaner technologies.

For illustrative purposes, this paper focuses on a cap-and-trade system for carbon dioxide (CO₂).

To address volatility, most cap-and-trade proposals include cost-control mechanisms.

- Safety valve—establishes a ceiling on the price of permits. If the price reaches this level, the government can sell additional permits at this price to the capped entities.
- Circuit breaker—freezes a gradually declining emissions cap if the permit price rises above a predetermined level.
- Banking—allows companies to save unused allowances for future years.
- Borrowing—allows companies to borrow permits from future years and pay them back, with interest, later.
- Offsets—allow companies to cover some of their emissions by purchasing credits created by carbon mitigation projects (e.g., tree planting) from sources outside the cap-and-trade system.

These mechanisms (with the exception of banking) could delay emissions reductions and undermine the integrity of the cap.

Environmental Effectiveness

The impact of a **cap-and-trade** system depends on a number of factors. How stringent is the emissions target? How will baseline emissions be measured and a corresponding and appropriate number of emissions permits be determined and distributed? Will the cap be applied economy-wide or only to certain sectors? Does it include cost-control measures that are likely to break the emissions cap?

The impact of a **carbon tax** depends in large part on whether the tax rate is set high enough to create real market incentives to develop and adopt climate-friendly technologies. Although a carbon tax does not establish a firm limit on

emissions, it applies economy-wide and provides a constant incentive for companies to make carbon-saving investments. The tax rate can be increased over time to provide stronger incentives to reduce emissions.

Equity

Under many **cap-and-trade** proposals, a substantial portion of the emissions permits are to be distributed free to the capped entities. Research indicates that only a modest portion of the permit value is needed to offset the costs of the cap, but the full amount is passed along in increased prices to consumers. This would disproportionately affect lower-income households because they tend to spend a larger fraction of their income than do higher-income households and because energy products make up a bigger share of their spending.

A **carbon tax** directly raises substantial revenues. These could be used in part to fund "progressive" tax-shifting policies that would reduce the burden of higher energy costs on lower-income groups.

Simplicity and Transparency

A **cap-and-trade** system requires new institutions (e.g., a system to allocate permits, markets where firms can buy and sell permits, a means of monitoring emissions and trades). Auctioning permits rather than distributing them free could help promote simplicity and transparency.

A **carbon tax** can be levied and collected via existing institutions with experience in enforcing compliance. It is simpler and less expensive to administer and enforce than a cap-and-trade system. Its underlying premise—the price of energy should include the environmental costs associated with its production—is transparent and readily understood.

Produced by the LWVUS Climate Change Task Force © 2008 by the League of Women Voters of the United States

VOTE411 cont'd

We are able to send out this large number of invitations cheaply and efficiently through the magic of a program provided by E-the People.org. The LWVEF is funding this project for state and local Leagues.

Letters of invitation can be sent by e-mail to all the candidates in a category at once. The appropriate questions are inserted through a “merge” process, and the invitation includes a URL through which the candidate can send his response by e-mail. Automatic acknowledgments are sent to responding candidates.

All this efficiency allows us to include a number of candidates that it would be impossible to do if it had to be done by regular mail.

The LWVUS reports that in 2008, half a million voters used the VOTE411 site to find their polling places. That was the second election the League used the site for online voter service. Vee Gordon, who coordinated the LWVVT's input to DNet, VOTE411's predecessor, said it took a few years for that site to take off. Based on that experience, we can expect more activity during this and future elections.

In 2012, we hope to train more of our members around the state to help with the project, allowing us to provide information for contests further “down-ballot.” It would be a great service if the League could provide information about offices and candidates that voters usually know little about.

Participate in National Studies!

In accordance with the approval of delegates at Convention 2010, the LWVUS will undertake a study of the “Federal Role in Public Education.” The study would focus on the role of the federal government in education policymaking, with pos-

sible consideration of funding, common standards and/or governance relationships among all levels of the government.

Later in the year, the second study adopted by Convention will be formally begun. This study, which was a nonrecommended item, will examine the policy agenda to transfer government functions, services and assets to the private sector.

Members of the committees will be responsible for developing study materials and consensus question, participating in reviewing/ tabulating all of the responses submitted by participating Leagues, and based on those, recommending position language to the Board.

But you don't have to be a member of the LWVUS study committee to take part in the study. State and local Leagues can do their own studies, gathering information that will be useful for those participating in reaching consensus, to say nothing of becoming more informed about the issues.

Local Leagues are encouraged to forming their own committees to research one of these issues. They are both important and controversial. We are all aware of the complications presented by No Child Left behind. Privatization of functions historically carried out by government at ever level has also had mixed results and is worthy of examination. Either of these issues could attract new members.

If the interest or resources are not there on the local level, a group (or two) of members from around the state could also look at the issues. With the magic of electronic communication, actual travel can be kept at a minimum. The LWVUS Immigration Study committee never met physically.

If this idea strikes your fancy, contact Kate at catherine.rader@myfairpoint.net, or 802-229-4737 and get the ball rolling.

GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

League of Women Voters of Vermont

Post Office Box 94

Cabot ,VT 05647



At www.VOTE411.org you can access:

Election dates

Factual data on candidates in various federal and state elections

Candidates' answers to key issue questions

Polling place locations

Registration deadlines and absentee ballot information

Voter qualifications

Voter registration forms

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government.