



GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

Winter 2008/09

The 51st Convention of the LWVVT

will be held on

Saturday, May 2, 2009

Noble Hall, Vermont College of Fine Arts

Montpelier

Save the date!

Campaign Finance Committee at Work

The special committee appointed by the Chairs of the House and Senate Government Operations Committees has met twice, and has gathered information about how public financing works in states where it has been established or is being tested.

Most information is available from Maine and Arizona, where public funding of elections has been in effect for some time. Connecticut also has a public financing law, but it went into effect for the 2008 election, and no statistics are available. New Jersey has implemented a pilot program, but not yet adopted a statewide public finance option.

Antony Gierzynski, Professor of Political Science at UVM presented statistics on expenditures by winning state House and Senate candidates in 2002, 2004 and 2006, along with a calculation of public funding levels based on averages of actual spending. The committee discussed potential sources of funding for elections, including: qualifying (small) contributions from supporters; transfer from general funds; income tax check-off; and surcharge on state fines. Prof. Gierzynski commented that Minnesota has a mixed public and private funding structure, with almost 100% participation. He will bring more detailed information on the Minnesota system at the next meeting of the committee.

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President's Message

Winter 2008/9

First, I want to express my sincere thanks to the congregation of the Champlain Valley (Middlebury) Unitarian Universalist Society for their generous contribution of over \$400 to the LWV of Vermont. It couldn't have come at a better time, and it is greatly appreciated.



It's been a busy month since the election:

At its meeting of November 15, the board voted to hold our biennial convention on Saturday, May 2. In addition to the regular business meeting, the program will emphasize energy issues, with a keynote speaker and a panel discussion. Once again, the convention will be held in Noble Hall, on the campus of the (new) Vermont College of Fine Arts in Montpelier.

On November 20, the Quad States presidents met in Portsmouth, NH to begin plans for the third annual Quad States Leadership conference. The conference will be held in Portsmouth, NH on May 30 and 31, and this year will feature a keynote speaker as well as the usual workshops. Details will be provided in the March GMC and on our website as they are developed.

NH League President Jane Armstrong and I met with members of the Upper Valley League on December 9, to discuss the state Leagues' priorities for the coming legislative session. The meeting gave the bi-state members an opportunity to become familiar with state positions and learn where the states have advocacy positions in common. We appreciate Upper Valley President Barbara McIlroy's efforts to find areas where we can work together for Voter Service and advocacy issues of mutual concern. They have an active committee looking at groundwater issues, which the Central Vermont League is studying. Along with energy, this may be an issue that the Leagues can address together.

Legislative day has been scheduled for Tuesday, March 10. This is a bit later than in past years, which *may* mean that the weather will be more amenable, but more importantly for this first year of the legislative biennium, will allow more time for bills to be filed and for us to become familiar with them. After having found a format for this event that has worked well, the board was disappointed to learn that the venerable Thrush Tavern, site of our legislative lunch for the past two years has closed. An alternative venue is being sought.

I am happy to report that LWVCEN member Tara Rogerson has volunteered to take over the maintenance of our website. Thank you Tara!

We are still in need of an editor for this journal, however. There must be someone out there in need of an outlet for her talents?

My best wishes for the holidays and the coming year, which promises to be an exciting one.

Kate

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

Membership in the League includes a
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Program Planning: Who and Why?

January is the month for local Leagues to make suggestions to the national (even-numbered years) and state (odd-numbered years) for program for the following biennium.

“Program” is the League's reason for being, the basis for both advocacy and education efforts.

League program arises from the suggestions of members. At every level of the league, the board of directors is responsible for reviewing and discussing these suggestions, formulating them in appropriate language, and recommending all or some of them for adoption according to procedures specified in the bylaws.

A local League's action or advocacy program is determined by members at its annual meeting; state and national programs are voted upon by delegates at their respective conventions.

But it all starts with you. The state League convention will be held on May 2, and local League annual meetings are coming up as well. The boards need your suggestions in order to make valid recommendations to the membership for League activity for the next year or two. Experience has shown that in order for adopted program to be successful, the ideas must come from the membership.

So watch your local League calendar for your program planning meeting. Think about what you want your local and state Leagues to be doing, and let the boards know. The vitality and effectiveness of the League depends on you.

Request for League Advocacy Priority Suggestions

With the advent of the 111th Congress, the LWVUS Board of Directors will be adopting legislative priorities for 2009 at its January meeting. The goals are to:

Enhance the League's effectiveness by concentrating resources on priority issues;

Build the League's credibility and visibility by projecting a focused and consistent image;

Ensure that the League has sufficient issue and political expertise to act knowledgeably; and

Enable the League to manage resources effectively.

In setting legislative priorities, the Board considers: opportunities for the League to make an impact; program decisions made at Convention and/or Council; member interest; and resources available to manage effectively.

The LWV Board is soliciting your suggestions for legislative priorities for the upcoming year. Please send your suggestions by January 15, 2009, to: jduffy@lww@aol.com.

[Editor's Note: In past years, the LWVUS Board has made advocacy priority decisions without input from the membership, based on their evaluation of Congressional action. Take advantage of this new opportunity for grass roots input.]

Legislative Day Scheduled

The Board of the LWVVT has scheduled its annual Legislative Day for Tuesday, March 10.

We will attend the House session and selected committee meetings in the morning, and have lunch with legislators at noon, followed by more committee hearings in the afternoon as desired.

Members are urged to contact their Senators and/or Representative and ask them to join us for lunch (venue to be determined). This has proven to be an excellent means for one-on-one discussion of our legislative priorities.

Information about pending bills and committee hearings of interest will be posted on our website (www.lwvofvt.org).

Public Financing cont.d

Public financing seems to be popular in the states that have it. In Maine's 2006 election, 81% of the general election candidates for the legislature financed their campaigns through public funds, and party participation is roughly equal. In Arizona, public financing is strongly supported by the Democratic party, and used at a higher rate by Democrats, but over 50% of Republicans are currently using the option.

Reasons to support public funding are similar among all the states:

- Increases the competitiveness of elections by providing a viable alternative system of campaign financing for candidates;

- Allows participating candidates to spend more time communicating with voters;

- Decreases the importance of fundraising in campaigns;

- Reduces the actual and perceived influence of private money in elections;

- Controls the increase of campaign spending by candidates; and

- Allows average citizens a greater opportunity to be involved in funding a candidate's campaign by making a small (\$5) contribution to help candidates qualify for public funding.

The LWVUS is actively advocating for public financing of federal elections this year. In a letter to new members of Congress co-signed by the LWVUS, supporting the Fair Elections Now Act*, a bipartisan poll is cited, showing public support for public funding. The letter states that the poll “shows broad, overwhelming support for the public financing of campaigns, as well as voters' assessment of the impact of money in the political process. When coupled with small

*The Fair Elections Now Act was introduced in this current session by Senate Assistant Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), and will be reintroduced in the next Congress.

donations and a ban on lobbyist contributions, voters support public financing by 69 to 13 percent. In one important finding in our polling, 77 percent of voters are worried that large campaign contributions will impede Congress's ability to tackle many of the major issues facing the nation.”

The committee will meet once more, and consider proposing a pilot program. Among the questions still to be addressed concerning such a pilot are: what kind of district(s) to use; the goals and selling points; how long would the pilot program last; the sources of funding; and a possible public opinion survey.

The results of the committee's efforts will be known before the next issue of the GMC is published.

Secretary of State Candidate Forum Held

It was a dark and stormy night on October 20, the occasion for a forum sponsored by the LWVVT and the LWV of Central Vermont for the candidates for the office of Secretary of State: Eugene Bifano (R), Deborah Markowitz (D, Inc), and Marjorie Power (P). Bob Paolini, Executive Director of the Vermont Bar Association moderated. LWVCEN member Dottye Ricks taped the discussion for public access TV, and it was aired in Montpelier twice before the election.



Candidates Bifano, Markowitz and Power at the LWVVT/LWVCEN Secretary of State Forum

Southeast Unit Hosts Energy Forum

The Southeast (Brattleboro) Unit of the LWVVT hosted an renewable energy forum on October 23.

Three panelists shared excellent information, including current challenges and goals, with the audience. Carolyn Partridge, VT House Representative from Windham, was introduced by Frankie Knibb, co-chair of the local League unit. Partridge introduced the panelists and moderated the discussion. All spoke about the various roles that renewable resources (wind, geothermal, biomass and solar) might play in meeting the challenge of Vermont's energy needs.

Scudder Parker, Managing Consultant with VT Energy Investment Corporation, commented that his organization has been working on renewable energy for about 20 years. Community energy efforts have not been as cost-effective as statewide or corporate energy production, he said, and in response, he has created a nonprofit called New Generation Partners which aims to support community-based renewable energy projects. He also works with Efficiency Vermont (www.EfficiencyVermont.com) which has hired a staffer to identify projects.

Robert Dostis, who just retired from VT Legislature as chair of the House Natural Resources and Energy Committee, is on staff at Green Mountain Power and described its goals. "We want to reduce our carbon

footprint as a company that seeks low carbon output with stable prices and reliable power." One of the goals is to "decrease purchases from Vermont Yankee over the next 20 year" while developing new renewable resources at low cost." Part of this is to identify the best sites for various sources (of which 17% may be nuclear).

Paul Cameron, Director of Brattleboro Climate Protection, described efforts the Town of Brattleboro has taken to reduce carbon emissions after joining the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign in 2002. The Town completed an energy-efficiency project in fifteen town and school buildings that reduced fuel oil consumption by one-third, and switched to a biodiesel blend in the town fleet.

As a result of these and other projects, the Town's initial reduction goals have been met or exceeded. The Town is now supporting an effort by Brattleboro Thermal Utility, Inc. (BTU, Inc.) to develop a plan for a biomass district energy system that would supply Brattleboro with electricity and heat from renewable wood chips. If the project is built, it would be the first of its kind and a model for other towns and cities across the country. BTU will be conducting a feasibility study over the next year to determine whether the project is economically viable. For more information, see www.brattleborothermalutility.org.

LWVUS Establishes Climate Change Task Force

The Climate Change Task Force was established in response to the LWVUS Board designating climate change as a priority for advocacy. While the LWVUS supports efforts to mitigate climate change, many of the issues within this broad category need discussion and explanation. The task force was charged with researching and writing substantive supporting materials (background papers) for the LWVUS position on climate change.

In the future, the task force will continue to provide research and respond to specific issues, including

questions arising with federal climate change legislation. Occasionally, other papers and articles will be written as the issues present themselves. Leagues may also convene local authorities to discuss the myriad issues of global climate change. The issues are many and building the bank of knowledge is an on-going activity.

A report on carbon offsets is on pp. 7&8. Others are posted on the LWVUS website (www.lwv.org).

National Popular Vote

The LWVUS National Popular Vote (NPV) study committee is posting information about the issue on the LWVUS website (www.lwv.org). The following was provided by National Popular Vote, an advocacy organization supporting the concept of the NPV compact.

The National Popular Vote bill would guarantee the Presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states (and the District of Columbia).

The National Popular Vote bill has been enacted by states possessing 50 electoral votes - 19% of the 270 necessary to bring the law into effect. The four states are Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, and New Jersey. The bill has passed 21 state legislative chambers, including one house in Arkansas, Colorado, Maine, North Carolina, and Washington, and both houses in California, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The bill is currently endorsed by 1,181 state legislators — 439 sponsors (in 47 states) and an additional 742 legislators who have cast recorded votes in favor of the bill.

The shortcomings of the current system stem from the winner-take-all rule that awards all of a state's electoral votes to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in each state.

Under the winner-take-all rule, a candidate can win the Presidency without winning the most popular votes nationwide. A shift of 60,000 votes would have elected Kerry in 2004, even though President Bush was ahead by 3,500,000 votes nationwide.

Another shortcoming of the current system is that candidates have no reason to poll, visit, advertise, organize, or pay attention to the concerns of states where they are comfortably ahead or hopelessly behind. Instead, candidates concentrate their attention on a small handful of closely divided "battleground" states. This means that voters in two thirds of the states are ignored in presidential elections. In 2004, candidates concentrated over two-thirds of their money and campaign visits in five states; over 80% in nine states; and over 99% of their money in 16 states.

The U.S. Constitution gives the states exclusive and plenary control over the manner of awarding of their electoral votes. The winner-take-all rule is not in the Constitution. It was not the Founder's choice (having been used by only three states in the nation's first presidential election). Maine and Nebraska currently award electoral votes by district - a reminder that a federal constitutional amendment is not required to change the way the President is elected.

The National Popular Vote bill would take effect only when enacted, in identical form, by states possessing a majority of the electoral votes - that is, enough electoral votes to elect a President (270 of 538). When the bill is in effect, all the electoral votes from the states that enacted the bill would be awarded, as a bloc, to the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states (and DC).

The bill has been endorsed by the *New York Times*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*, and *Sacramento Bee*, Common Cause and Fair Vote.

A recent *Washington Post*, Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard University poll shows 72% of Americans support nationwide election of the President. Polls in 11 states are similar.

The National Advisory Board of National Popular Vote includes former congressmen John Anderson (R-Illinois and later independent presidential candidate), John Buchanan (R-Alabama), Tom Campbell (R-California), and Tom Downey (D-New York), and former Senators Birch Bayh (D-Indiana), David Durenberger (R-Minnesota), and Jake Garn (R-Utah).

CARBON OFFSETS: A CAUTIONARY TALE

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

The voluntary carbon offset market is booming. Dozens of companies are ready to help eco-conscious consumers compensate for their personal carbon emissions by contributing to projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere.

The idea sounds promising. By purchasing carbon offsets, individuals can mitigate their climate impact and help finance projects that keep greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere. In addition, as more people demonstrate their willingness to pay extra for green initiatives, they send a signal to lawmakers that there is public support for tough climate legislation.

But critics consider promoting offsets to be a flawed approach. They argue that it encourages a business-as-usual attitude toward climate change by suggesting that people can neutralize their emissions without altering their lifestyle.

Compounding the problem, there are as yet no agreed-upon standards to ensure that offset projects deliver the promised carbon reductions.

Nonetheless, well-chosen offsets can be an important part of a broader strategy to address climate change. They provide an additional opportunity for individuals who have already curtailed their energy consumption to reduce their impact on global warming even further. And, fortunately, there are resources to help consumers find credible high-quality offsets.

How Much Does It Cost?

Most offset providers have online calculators that allow potential customers to calculate their emissions and the cost of offsetting that amount. However, the various calculators frequently give quite different estimates of total emissions. This reflects differences in the level of detail that users are asked to provide and in the methodology used in the calculations. Estimating the climate impacts of air travel is particularly complex.

Moreover, the offsets which are offered range widely in price, from \$5 to \$25 per ton of emissions. For consumers trying to make a choice, analysts suggest that the quality of the offset project rather than the cost should be the determining factor. It's better, they say, to invest in high quality offsets than to buy as many offsets as possible.

Choosing a High-Quality Offset

Offset providers fund a wide variety of projects, but how can consumers be sure that the offsets they buy will result in real emissions reductions? A report published by Clean Air—Cool Planet suggests a set of characteristics to look for in an offset project:

- **Additionality.** Will the offset revenues make the project happen or would it have occurred anyway (e.g., because it is required by law)?
- **Baseline.** Has a credible emissions baseline been determined against which reductions will be measured?
- **Quantification.** Are rigorous accounting rules used to quantify the greenhouse gas reductions? Are emissions likely to increase elsewhere as a result of the project?
- **Verification.** Are emissions reductions independently verified and verifiable?
- **Permanence.** Will the emissions reductions be permanent or might they be subject to reversal in the future (e.g., if the trees in a carbon sequestration project burn or are cut down)?
- **Registration.** Are the offsets serialized and tracked to reduce the possibility that they could be sold more than once?

The bulk of the report focuses on the companies that sell the offsets. It evaluates the providers' understanding of carbon offsets and offset quality as well as the degree to which the information they offer enables consumers to make effective choices. The authors' longer term goal is to promote greater transparency in the retail offset market.

Another helpful resource for consumers looking for guidance is the Environmental Defense Fund's Carbon Offset Project, which identifies a small number of offset projects that meet the organization's quality criteria.

Renewable Energy Certificates

Another way in which consumers are encouraged to "offset" their carbon emissions is to purchase Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs), also known as green tags. RECs are created when a renewable energy facility generates electricity. One REC represents 1,000 kilowatt hours of renewable electricity that is added to the nation's energy grid in place of conventional electricity generated from fossil fuels.

Buying RECs helps build a market for renewable electricity. As a general rule, however, RECs are not considered equivalent to carbon offsets because they cannot be assumed to be "additional." This is an important consideration for consumers whose goal is to become carbon neutral. Only if the sale of RECs is a decisive factor in a company's decision to pursue a renewable energy project can the associated RECs legitimately be used to offset carbon emissions.

An important resource for potential REC purchasers is Green-e Energy, an independent certification and verification program. Green-e certified renewable energy options meet strict consumer protection and environmental standards.

The Bottom Line

For those who are serious about reducing their carbon footprint, the primary focus must be on cutting their energy consumption. And for real impact, everyone's goal must be effective public policy on climate change.

Online Resources for Additional Information

A Consumer's Guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers, Clean Air—Cool Planet, December 2006, www.cleanaircoolplanet.org/ConsumersGuidetoCarbonOffsets.pdf.

Voluntary Offsets For Air-Travel Carbon Emissions, Tufts Climate Initiative, January 2007, www.tufts.edu/tie/tci/carbonoffsets/index.htm.

Environmental Defense Fund's Carbon Offset Project: www.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=23994

Green-e Energy Web Site: www.green-e.org/gogreene.shtml

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