



League of Women Voters of Central Vermont

Bulletin

December 2010

Co-Presidents' Message

Happy New Year! We hope your holidays were joyful and fulfilling. Now, with the busy-ness of the season behind us, it's time to look forward to plans for the future.

January is an important month for the League at every level, especially this year, when the state League will meet in convention to determine its path for the next biennium. And, of course, our own local League will begin planning for Annual Meeting in May.

In preparation for both those events, the respective boards turn to the membership for guidance. How should we direct our energies? Is there a state or local issue that requires a study to allow us to advocate for it? Are there issues for which we have a position that you would like emphasized for advocacy? A synopsis of state positions is included on page 5, or you can go to the state website at www.lwvofvt.org to read the full text of the positions. Then, on January 12, come to Hedi Ballantyne's to let us know your thoughts.

The LWVUS wants to hear from you as well. In the past, the LWVUS board decided the issues for action, based on their analysis of what was before Congress and the chances for successful lobbying by the League. In recent years, the national League has asked members to make recommendations for advocacy. We should take advantage of this change in policy and make our wishes known – either as a group or individually. If you would like to make suggestions for advocacy priorities, please email Judy Duffy, Chair of the Advocacy Committee at: jduffy1wv@aol.com. Suggestions must be received by January 15.

We are pleased to report that we have received a copy of the movie *Flow*, a documentary that builds a case against the growing privatization of the world's dwindling fresh water supply. We will be scheduling a showing of this important film at the January 12 meeting. Watch for it, or better yet, be there to provide your input!

In celebration of democracy,

Nancy T Lynch and Gia Biden
Co-Presidents

Transportation Study Consensus Coming Up

Since the summer of 2009 the LWVVT Transportation Study Committee has been gathering and sifting through data on how Vermonters travel around the state, and how that travel could be made more efficient and convenient.

On Wednesday, January 26 it will be the turn of the members of LWVCEN to analyze the information offered by the committee with the aim of reaching a consensus position that will allow the state League to advocate in our legislature on transportation issues. An explanation of the consensus process is given on p. 3. The process by which the LWV reaches its advocacy position can seem cumbersome, but it is that process that gives the League its credibility among lawmakers at every level. They know the League knows what it's talking about.

So play your part in this important last step of a study, and come to the consensus meeting at the home of Kate Rader, 1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier at 7:00 p.m.

Information gathered by the study committee, which will provide grist for the discussion, will be published in the December state newsletter and posted on the state League website, www.lwvofvt.org.

January Means Program Planning

LWVCEN members will meet on Wednesday, January 12 at 7:00 p.m. for state and local program planning at the home of Hedi Ballantyne, 20 Kent Street, Montpelier.

If the consensus meeting is the culmination of the League study process, program planning is the beginning.

Every year local Leagues meet to advise the board on how the membership wants the League to use its resources. The same thing happens in a at the

state and national levels. This year we will be making recommendations for state program. After hearing from the membership, the boards at each level make formal recommendations to be voted at the local annual meeting or at state or national convention.

Please come and make your voice heard, to ensure that the Leagues reflects your views and concerns. Program can consist of a new study of a local issue and/or emphasis on advocacy or voter service. It's up to you.

Washington County Senate Candidates Forum a Success

Despite miserable weather, there was a satisfying turnout for our first candidate forum since 2004. There was good press coverage in the *Times Argus* (front page picture) and it was recorded and shown several times by Onion River Community Access TV.

Two questions in particular brought varied answers from the candidates: "When voting on an issue, do you follow the party position, your conscience, or the wishes of your constituents;" and "What question would you have liked us to ask that we didn't?"

Your board of directors was encouraged by the the presence of all the candidates, the attentiveness of the audience, and the helpfulness of the Old Labor Hall personnel. We look forward to hosting more candidate events in two years.

Note of Thanks

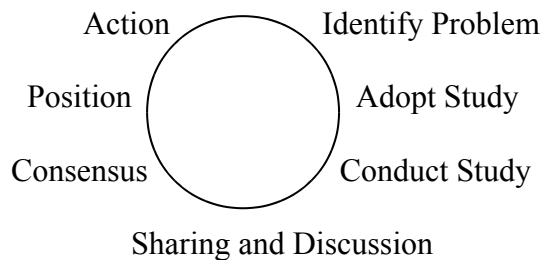
Thanks to Harrison Bushnell for collecting the written questions from the audience, and to all our members who contributed refreshments for this event.

Consensus: Linchpin of League Program

Several years ago, a national poll showed that 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 (action) positions. However, not everyone understands just what the process is, and new members, especially, need an explanation of how the League works. Below is a brief review, which we hope will demonstrate how important member participation is.

The process:



The League “program” (issues chosen for study and action) is adopted by the membership at the local annual meeting and at biennial state and national elections. There are local program planning meetings at each level in advance to determine the will of the membership and to guide the leadership in recommending programs.

Upon adoption of the program, study/action committees are self-selected. After several months of study by interested members, findings are presented and discussed by the general membership and consensus is (or is not) reached.

Consensus is a process which aims at arriving at some general agreement through group discussion. It is not determined by a simple majority, nor is it unanimity, but an overall sense of the group.

A position statement is drawn up on the basis of consensus, and is in turn the basis for League action.

It is because League positions are based on research, discussion, and critical examination by the membership that the LWV has such credibility when it takes political or educational action.

The process is the same for every level of the league: information is presented to local units which then take consensus. Results from all over the state or country are then tabulated to develop a position at the study level. Local action may be taken under state or national positions. Members or local Leagues need not agree with a state or national position, but may not take action as a League (or League member) in opposition to it.

It is easy to get the impression that the study (or research) portion of the program is the most important part. But as you can see for the chart, there is much more involved. Up to this point, except for adoption at the annual meeting, only a relatively small group of league members have been involved. But the work is only half finished.

All members now have a chance to participate in a study through consensus. Consensus questions should elicit responses that will give the League the basis for an action position. Information is provided, through the newsletter and/or at a consensus, to allow members to give informed responses. Without broad participation in consensus, a study is of benefit only to those who conducted it. A handful of people cannot presume to speak for the League membership on controversial issues. Without a position backed by research and the informed opinion of the membership, no action can be taken.

You joined the League because you believe in its mission as a force for political action and voter service. We recognize that not everyone has time for active involvement in League program. But please make a commitment to come to consensus meetings – two or three hours out of 365 days in the study year. The life of the League depends on it.

LWVCEN 2010/11 Calendar
(Public events are in boldface)

January

- Wednesday 12 7:00 p.m. State and Local Program Planning, home of Hedi Ballantyne, 20 Kent Street, Montpelier. *This is your chance to make your official opinion known about what you want your state and local Leagues to do in the next year/biennium. Please save the date, and make every effort to be there!*
- Wednesday 26 7:00 p.m. State Transportation Study Consensus Meeting, home of Kate Rader, 1186 Towne Hill Road, East Montpelier. *This is the culmination of the state League's two-year study. Help us reach an advocacy position on getting people around our rural state.*

March

- Wednesday 9 7:00 p.m. Board meeting, home of Kate Rader. *All members welcome.*
- Wednesday 16 LWVVT Legislative Day, State House
- Tuesday 22 **6:30 p.m. Dr. Deb Richter, speaking on the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Kellogg-Hubbard Library, Montpelier.**

May

- Wednesday 11 6:00 p.m. LWVCEN Annual Meeting, location TBA
- Saturday 21 LWVVT Convention

NB: We would like to continue our public movie series. If you have any suggestions for an issue-oriented film, please let Nancy (Nancyt1213@gmail.com) or Gia (gia@ksefocus.com) know.

***LWVVT to Participate in Membership
Recruitment Initiative***

Since 2006, the LWVUS has worked in partnership with state and local Leagues to recruit grass-roots members into the League, and the results have been very positive. The most concrete measure of success has been net membership growth in many of the participating Leagues, but participating local Leagues have also reported less tangible successes, such as increased visibility; improved relationships with the media and other community organizations; focused, strategic planning for organizational growth; and renewed ties with the state League.

The LWVVT will be participating in this program

beginning this spring. After our state coach receives training, she will provide the following to our local League:

Mentor – the coach will listen and advise through calls each month.

Cheerleader – the Coach will help our League to “see” your successes and applaud them.

Accountability Coach – the Coach will help our League stay on track with the plans created at a training session. She will help support incorporation of best practices and new patterns of operating where outreach is built into our activities.

Communicator – the Coach serves as the main communication bridge between the levels of League.

The League of Women Voters of Vermont supports:

Voter Rights and Government

Instant Runoff Voting.

Efforts to streamline the legislative process.

Four-year terms for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, annual sessions of the General Assembly.

The principle of using alternative voting methods for legislative districts, to achieve both competitive elections and fair representation of both majorities and minorities within a district.

Fiscal Policy

The redistribution of the tax burden in Vermont, particularly the property tax, through land use assessment rather than fair market value; and strongly supports the present tax on Vermont-derived income of nonresidents.

Social Policy

A publicly funded, single-payer, comprehensive, universal, equitable health care system for Vermont.

Decent housing and a suitable living environment for every citizen (from LWVUS position on basic human needs).

Environment

Legislation which moves Vermont to predominant reliance on renewable energy resources and energy efficiency.

A regional approach (ME, NH, VT) to disposal of low-level radioactive waste.

The policy and purpose of the Act Relating to Solid Waste adopted in 1987 by the General Assembly.

Land protection and an integrated development plan for Vermont through a state organizational framework.

Education

Equality of educational opportunity for all public schools in Vermont.

Alternative high schools for special purposes and magnet schools with scholastic specialties, in order to strengthen Vermont's public schools, but does not support vouchers or charter schools.

Uniform pre-school screening for all Vermont children.

This is a short version of our positions. For the full text, go to our website at www.lwvofvt.org and click on Advocacy and Action.

