November 2013

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Officers:
Co-Presidents – Kathy Fullin
Ingrid Rothe
Vice President – Sybil Better
Secretary – Barbara Mortensen
Treasurer – Mary Conroy
Office Administrator – Elaine Sinagra
Bulletin Editor – Karen Gunderson

Presidents’ Message
Kathy Fullin, fullin@execpc.com, 238-9465
Ingrid Rothe, irothe@ssc.wisc.edu, 256-8124

It is surprising, and maybe a bit disheartening, that an organization founded nearly 100 years ago to protect suffrage rights is still so relevant.

The rights of Wisconsin citizens to vote are at risk today. A law has been introduced that would make it easier to challenge votes cast by same day registrants. A bill has been drafted to end evening and weekend early voting in Clerk’s offices. Another proposed law would increase the opportunity for partisan influence on appointments to the Government Accountability Board, which administers Wisconsin’s elections.

The Voter ID law is in the courts. If held to be constitutional, this will severely impact the ability of minority, low-income, elderly, and disabled citizens to vote. (For instance, a 2005 study by UW Milwaukee found that only 22% of black WI men aged 18-24 had a valid driver’s license.)

Our Dane County League has a proud history of registering people to vote. We currently are working at the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, where we also offer information on access to health insurance under the Affordable Care Act. We are registering voters during health insurance enrollment fairs at the Dane County Job Center. This fall we registered voters and did health insurance outreach at Farmers Markets.

Our November issues forum focuses on a related aspect of voting - turnout. Although in presidential elections WI turnout can exceed 70%, in the spring 2012 election in Dane County turnout was only 24%.

Dr. Richard Matland is a professor of political science who has examined the research on voter turnout and has run some experiments in conjunction with our League to determine what might increase voter participation. We look forward to learning from Dr. Matland at our Nov. 6 issues forum about what influences eligible voters to actually cast a ballot.

Please join us in our core mission of increasing participation in our democracy! Come to our forum, and contact our office if you can help with our voter registration efforts.

Wednesday, November 6, 2013
Issues Forum 7:00 pm

Mobilizing Voters in Dane County

Dr. Richard Matland
(Visiting Fellow, Kellogg Institute of International Studies, University of Notre Dame and Professor of Political Science, Loyola University Chicago)

The Capitol Lakes Grand Hall, 333 West Main St., Madison
(Free parking in the ramp across the street)
Improving Voter Turnout
Gail Bliss, Voter Service Chair

On Wednesday, November 6, 2013, we will hear from Dr. Richard Matland, Visiting Fellow, Kellogg Institute of International Studies, University of Notre Dame & Professor of Political Science, Loyola University Chicago.

This past spring, the LWVDC teamed with Professor Matland and ran a series of experiments in Dane County aimed at better understanding whether the League can influence turnout. This talk will present the results of those experiments and discuss ways to increase voter turnout.

Wisconsin is among the states with the highest voter turnout during presidential elections (~70%). But turnout drops by about 20 points in gubernatorial (off year fall) election (~50%), and spring election turnouts are dismal - generally below 20% statewide. Spring elections include State Supreme Court and local judges, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, school boards, alders, and county board supervisors.

To try and reverse this trend, political scientists have teamed with both non-profits and partisan groups, and with a new found passion for using experimental methods, have tested a wide variety of mechanisms for raising turnout.

Plan on joining us for this very informative presentation.

More about Big Money
Katie Mulligan

Speakers at the October 2 Issues Forum described the pernicious effects on the democratic process of the Supreme Court decision Citizens United vs. FEC in January 2010. Program Chair Kathy Johnson told the audience that the topic was a continuation of the examination of the role of money in politics that began with presentations at the January Lively Issues Forum.

The Citizens United decision found that a corporation can be regarded as a person and have rights previously accorded only to human beings, including rights to free speech and privacy. That ruling was coupled with a decision that a right to free speech can be linked with the right to spend money on political campaigns, thus eliminating previously legal restraints on political expenditures by corporations, unions and other entities.

Co-President Kathy Fullin told the group that the LWVUS President had spoken publicly against Citizens United. To see the LWVUS statement on Campaign Finance and a brief history of LWVUS actions on Campaign Finance, go to: www.lwv.org/content/campaign-finance.

Mike Olneck, Professor Emeritus of Educational Policy and former Co-Chair of South-Central Wisconsin Move to Amend, described the explosion of spending in Wisconsin after the decision, much of it from a small number of “big donors.” The results are evident in bills concerning issues such as iron mining and rent-to-own.

Olneck and George Penn, Outreach Committee Chairperson, argued for a constitutional amendment as the only viable solution to the problems caused by the ruling. In April 2011, voters of Madison and Dane County passed referenda in support of an amendment that would stipulate that constitutional rights apply only to human beings and campaign contributions cannot be equated with free speech.

They circulated a petition and urged audience members to consult the website for Wisconsin Move to Amend at WIMTA.org for information about ways to help and upcoming events.

The Nation (September 30, 2013) includes a cover story, “Dollarocracy” by John Nichols which offers more detail about the destructive effects of Citizens United. He concludes, “…the most successful reform movement of the moment is the most ambitious: sixteen states and more than 500 communities—from the city of Los Angeles to the town of Mount Desert, Maine—are…calling for a constitutional amendment to restore the ability of cities, states, and the federal government to regulate money in politics.”

Missed Any Forums?

Have you missed any of our forums? If so, most of them are taped by City Channel. Go to our website, www.lwvdanecounty.org, and click on the link, ‘MadisonCityChannel Stream of LWVDC Programs’ to view them.
Judicial Selection in Wisconsin

Ingrid Rothe, Co-President

In October, 2013, at the LWVWI annual Issues Briefing, we heard from Attorney Joe Troy, Chair of the Judicial Task Force of the State Bar of Wisconsin. The State Bar has adopted a position calling for election of Supreme Court Justices to one 16-year term, without the option to seek reelection.

Proposals for changing judicial selection have arisen periodically since 1903, with most focusing on mechanisms for merit selection. Recently, increasingly expensive campaigns for Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice, coupled with rising controversy and public rancor, have resulted in multiple suggestions for improvements in how justices are selected. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Network has invited several speakers to its meetings to address this issue. In June, 2013, at the LWVWI Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, we heard Appellate Judge JoAnne Kloppenburg argue that election of Supreme Court justices should be replaced by merit selection with retention elections.

United States Supreme Court decisions, culminating in the 2010 Citizens United decision, have resulted in the possibility of virtually unlimited spending for all elections, including for Wisconsin’s Supreme Court. The proponents of both these proposals for changing the way we select justices are attempting to address perceived problems related to substantial expenditures on races for Supreme Court by independent groups from outside the state. Other concerns, many of which may arise from the enormous sums of money now needed for judicial races, include:

1) the appearance of increasing partisanship in judicial races, which are, at least in principle, to be non-partisan;
2) the question of whether voters are able to correctly discern whether judicial candidates have the proper qualifications to perform their duties;
3) reports of increasing incivility in the deliberations of the Wisconsin Supreme Court;
4) proposals for changes in the rules relating to when justices should recuse themselves, especially in regard to cases involving their contributors;
5) whether it is reasonable to require justices to shift from legalarbiter to politician in order to run for re-election;
6) whether concern about fundraising for the next re-election has a corrosive effect on a justice’s impartiality.

Appellate Judge Kloppenburg argued that because the infusion of so much money into judicial races has had such a corrosive effect on our ability to conduct fair elections, and because it will be so difficult to amend the U.S. Constitution so that campaign finance laws could be changed to limit private expenditures, that elections can no longer be counted on to result in the selection of the most qualified candidates. She argues that since we cannot get money out of elections, we must eliminate the election. Therefore, we should turn to merit selection. Appointed justices would face a retention election to be conducted after the selected justice has been in office for a reasonable period.

Attorney Troy, a former Circuit Court Judge, argues that merit selection does not eliminate elections (because of the retention election component), and has already generated strong political opposition, thus making it unlikely to succeed. While the State Bar’s proposal for a single 16-year term still involves an election, with attendant pressures for expenditures of enormous sums, it eliminates the perception that court decisions are motivated by concern for reelection, and, the Bar believes, structurally facilitates collegiality and functioning on the court by eliminating any reason for a sitting justice to engage in any efforts to unseat another sitting justice at the next election (since there will be no next election).

Wisconsin’s current system was adopted in 1903, and calls for election of the seven Supreme Court justices to 10 year terms, with the unlimited option to run for re-election. In the last 96 years, only one Justice (George Currie in 1987) who was initially elected to his position lost his reelection race. The average term of Supreme Court Justices during that time is about 13 years, with 80 percent serving for 16 years or less.

Changing the judicial selection method will require amending Article XXII of the Wisconsin Constitution. The League will continue to gather information about proposals for ensuring that judicial elections promote the election of qualified candidates in a fair and impartial manner.

Encouraging informed and active participation in government.
For the Record

The following Letter to the Editor from our LWVDC co-presidents was printed in the Wisconsin State Journal on September 17, 2013.

The League of Women Voters of Dane County applauds the common-sense explanation of the new health care exchange by State Journal health and medical reporter David Wahlberg in Sunday's article "Sticker prices' only one factor in cost of insurance on exchanges."

As the article explains, the majority of people who enroll on the exchanges will get financial help with the costs. He also points out the higher premiums some people will pay will generally buy more comprehensive coverage.

The article suggests people looking for more information can go to healthcare.gov, excellent advice for anyone considering buying insurance through the exchange.

For people who want to learn more so they can discuss potential enrollment with adult children, relatives or friends who live in Wisconsin, state-specific information is on our website: www.lwvdanecounty.org.

This information is provided by the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, the Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association and the League. The League is committed to universal access to affordable health care for all U.S. residents.

-- Kathleen C. Fullin and Ingrid E. Rothe, co-presidents, League of Women Voters of Dane County

Real Estate Committee

Barbara Mortensen, Secretary

The building where LWVDC's current office is located, 2712 Marshall Court, has an offer-to-purchase from Ronald McDonald House (RMH), next door. RMH hopes to eventually demolish this building in order to enlarge its facility. Some contingencies in the offer must be satisfied before the closing, and the Village of Shorewood Hills must approve rezoning before RMH can construct its new facility. The entire process may take several years.

The Board has established a Real Estate Committee to negotiate a new lease with RMH and investigate other options for new office space. Sybil Better, Barbara Mortensen, and Edith Sullivan are the committee members.

If you have any suggestions regarding a location for the new office space, please contact Barbara Mortensen, 233-7563.

Meet Your Board Member

Karen Gunderson, Bulletin Editor

I'm happy to be the new LWVDC Bulletin Editor and Board Member. My two-year term started in June. I have been a member of the LWVDC for two years. Before joining the League, I volunteered with the League at voter registration drives and as a poll observer. I give my life partner, Joanie Kanter the credit for getting me involved with the League. Though I had read Candidates' Answers for years and admired the work of the League, I needed a bit of a push to volunteer with the League and then to become a member.

Since becoming a member of the League, I have attended as many of the meetings as I can since I find the Forum topics timely and interesting, joined a monthly unit meeting, continued to help with voter registration efforts, helped proof Candidates' Answers and assisted with pulling Candidates' Answers from The Isthmus.

When the opportunity to serve as Bulletin Editor/Board Member came up, I didn't have to think too long about jumping into that. When I was first choosing a career path in my 20's, I wanted to go into journalism, but was redirected into Computer Science as a better way to earn a living. I enjoyed my 25+ years in Information Technology and now have come full circle back to my initial calling.

I am amazed at the hours of work that have gone into the League over the years and honored to work side-by-side with such concerned, active and involved people.

I am a fairly recent retiree - both Joanie and I retired nearly three years ago. We enjoy having the time and energy to volunteer, garden, cook, travel, read and get caught up on so many things that we didn't find time for when we worked full time. As many retirees assured us before we retired, we have no trouble keeping busy!

If you have any suggestions for the Bulletin, let me know.
Local Business Helps Out
Kathy Fullin, Co-president

Thanks so much to Margo Dixon, owner of The UPS Store at 1213 N. Sherman Ave, for letting the League keep our voter registration materials at her store. Volunteers who register voters at the Job Center on Aberg Ave. have a convenient way to pick up and drop off the materials, saving time and gas!

Thank You, Volunteers!
The following people helped with the mailing for the October Bulletin and other administrative office tasks:

Eileen Hanneman    Melissa Keyes
Patricia Levin      Sally Phelps
Ingrid Rothe       Edith Sullivan

Joanie Kanter assisted with the bulletin layout.
Thank you all!

January Lively Issues Luncheon

The January Lively Issues Luncheon will be held at the Inn on the Park, Saturday, January 25th starting with a social gathering at 11:30, lunch at noon and the program to follow at 1 pm.

The topic is “Restorative Justice and Voting Rights”. Our speaker is Colleen Jo Winston, Director of the Office of Victim Services in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

Reservation forms will be mailed in early January. We hope many of you are able to join us for this important topic.

WI Voter ID Lawsuits

The LWVWI maintains a webpage with the current status of four Wisconsin Voter ID lawsuits. The site is reviewed weekly and updated when there are significant changes on the lawsuits.

To view this information, go to the LWVWI website at www.lwvwi.org and click on ‘Voter ID Lawsuit’ under the ‘News and Events’ tab.

November Unit Locations

League members meet monthly in one of five units to discuss the topic of that month’s Issues Forum, using study materials provided by the program planners to guide the conversation. The discussion concludes with recommendations for further study or action. Units meet regularly at different times and locations. Find a meeting that is convenient for you and participate! Please let the host know that you plan to attend.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2013

Monday Evening West - 5:30 pm
Noodles Restaurant, 3600 University Ave.
Merilyn Kupferberg, 831-3267, joelmerkup@gmail.com
Barbara Mortensen, 233-7563, morten21@att.net
No meeting in December or January.

Middleton - 7:00 pm
Gardd Parc Condos
6767 Frank Lloyd Wright Drive
Park behind the building; walk through the courtyard to lobby; ring buzzer to #221, if the inside door is not open.
Diane de Vos, 836-0070, djdevos@chorus.net
No meeting in December or January.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2013

Tuesday Afternoon - 12:45 pm
Oakwood West, Oaks A-4
Parking on grounds or in P1 Heritage Oaks Parking Ramp
Marie McCabe, 230-3536, mmccabe4805@gmail.com

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2013

Northeastside - 3:30 pm
Lakeview Public Library
2845 N. Sherman St.,
Helen LeRoy, recording, 244-2377, haleroy@wisc.edu
Dorothy Wheeler, 244-4711, dorothywheeler@tds.net

Cookie Exchange/Social - December 18, 3:30 pm
Joan Lundin’s home, 5325 Lighthouse Bay Dr, 249-4874
No meeting in January.

Downtown Dinner Group - 5:30 pm
Capitol Lakes Retirement Center
Restaurant “The Seasons”
333 West Main St. - Free parking across street
Sally Phelps, 251-4834, phelpssa@charter.net
Priscilla Thain, 233-5578, priscillalthain@gmail.com
No meeting in December or January.
Blue Dot? Renew Soon!

Is there a blue dot on your mailing label? If so, our records indicate we have not received your membership renewal for fiscal year July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014 and this will be your last bulletin.

You can mail your renewal payment to the League office or pay your dues on-line at www.lwvdane.org.

If you have renewed and our blue dot is in error, please contact the office.

Keep Us in the Loop

If your contact information changes (address, email, phone), let us know so we can update our records. We want to keep in contact with you!

Please call (608-232-9447) or email (lwvdc@chorus.net) the office regarding your changes.

Upcoming Events Calendar

- **November 6** – Issues Forum
- **November 20** – LWVDC Board Meeting, 1 pm
- **December 11** – LWVDC Board Meeting, 1:30 pm
- **January 25** – Lively Issues Luncheon
- **February 5** – Issues Forum
- **March 5** – Issues Forum
- **April 2** – Issues Forum
- **May** – Annual Meeting

Receive LWVWI News Online

Brief, informative emails are sent by the League of Women Voters Wisconsin (LWVWI). Topics include legislative highlights, updates on the League’s Voter ID legal actions, and key policy initiatives.

It is very easy to subscribe. Just go to the State League website at www.lwvwi.org and fill in your name and email at the bottom of their home page.

Encouraging informed and active participation in government.