On April 1, voters will have an opportunity to choose School Board members in most communities in Dane County.

We hope League members will examine how candidates approach the issue of racial disparity in educational outcomes in our communities. Some surprising statistics can be found in recent reports.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation report on Early Reading Proficiency points out that according to one national test, 80% of lower income fourth grade Wisconsin students tested below proficiency level in reading in 2013. Wisconsin, which prides itself on its good schools, is right in the middle of the states on this measure.

Using a different test, the Department of Public Instruction found that 42% of Non-Hispanic Black 3rd graders in WI tested “Not Proficient at Reading” in 2011. In Dane County, the percentage was 48% – a worse performance than the statewide finding.

In contrast, Dane County’s performance by Non-Hispanic Whites was better than the statewide finding: 11% were below proficiency in Dane County vs. 14% statewide. (See Race to Equity by the WI Council on Children and Families at www.wccf.org)

These alarming differences surely reflect the differences in poverty rates between blacks and whites. In 2011, the statistics for black children living below the poverty level were worse in Dane County (75%) than for the state (49%) or for the U.S (39%). However the percentage of white children living below the poverty level was lower in Dane County (5%) than in the state (12%) or the nation (14%).

While schools cannot be expected to make up for all the disparities in our communities, it is critical that schools address these issues in order to create a brighter future for all our children.

Come to the Issues Forum on April 2 to learn about programs for homeless students – one part of the efforts to reduce these educational disparities.
A Good Start for Redistricting Reform

Katie Mulligan

Jay Heck, Director of Common Cause of Wisconsin, told attendees at the March Issues Forum, "I've never been as optimistic as I am now." The assessment came about prospects for redistricting reform, a topic that often leads to frustration about the refusal of the state legislative leadership to allow public hearings about proposed reform legislation.

Before offering his hopeful prognosis, Heck brought the group up to date on activities in the legislature. Wisconsin is one of 28 states in which the legislature has authority for redistricting. In the past, the results have been "not terrible" because there was divided government between Republicans and Democrats, allowing compromise. In 2011 a single party controlled both houses of the legislature and the governor's office. The result was "one of the most secretive processes in the nation" for redistricting and a decrease in the number of competitive seats.

Heck worked with legislators to produce a single bill (SB163) that was introduced by Sen. Tim Cullen (D) and Sen. Dale Schultz (R) and has a number of co-sponsors. The legislation, modeled on a system in Iowa, would give the Legislative Reference Bureau authority for redistricting. It does not require a state Constitutional Amendment.

"No organization has been more helpful than the League," said Heck about gaining support and publicity for the legislation. Well-attended public forums have been convened throughout the state. Nineteen newspapers endorsed the idea that a non-partisan body should be responsible for redistricting.

Carolyn Castore, Project Director for the LWVWI, is the principal organizer for the League's efforts. She said that the League had been pushing redistricting reform since the 1980s but always began "too late" to make a difference. The most recent effort began in 2011, with a timeline that extends until the end of the decade. She developed a PowerPoint presentation and offers League members training to enable them to speak to local groups.

Castore described reasons why redistricting reform is central to the League's mission. Legislators with safe seats have little reason to listen to the people in their districts. A legislator fears the loss of a seat through redistricting if he or she challenges the party leadership. Citizens of a town or locale might be represented by several legislators, none of whom responds to local concerns.

John Hendrick, Dane County Board Supervisor and chair of its redistricting subcommittee, described a "community-based" redistricting method that promotes preservation of "communities of interest."

Reform Forum

Gail Bliss, Voter Services Chair

On February 17, LWVDC co-sponsored Reform Forum, hosted by Common Cause Wisconsin (CC/WI) at Edgewood College. Approximately eighty-five people attended the forum. The panel of speakers included State Senators Dale Schultz (R-Richland Center) and Fred Risser (D-Madison), Andrea Kaminski, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, Edgewood College Social Science Professor Steven Davis, Conservative blogger and activist David Blaska and CC/WI director Jay Heck. Wisconsin State Journal Editorial Page Editor Scott Milfred moderated the program.

Redistricting and gerrymandering were discussed by all the speakers. At a similar meeting in Stevens Point, 300 residents showed up to express their displeasure at being moved from the Congressional 7th district to the 3rd. Senator Schultz recalled a time when Wisconsin had 10 seats in the US House of Representatives, and 9 of the 10 were competitive. We now have 8 seats, and none are competitive. Professor Stephen Davis provided pictures of gerrymandered districts, including the 4th Congressional district in Illinois, which uses expressways to connect two Hispanic areas in Chicago. It surrounds the 7th District like "earmuffs." He used Iowa and Arizona as examples of non-partisan redistricting. David Blaska stated that because Republicans didn't contest 23 districts in the WI Assembly in 2012, the argument that Democrats got a higher percentage of votes than their representation in the body is specious.

All but Blaska agreed that the 2010 Supreme Court decision in Citizens United needs to be overturned.

Andrea Kaminski talked about the various lawsuits related to Voter ID (Act 23). Senator Schultz made news by announcing he regretted his 2011 vote in favor of voter photo ID and would not be voting for any attempts to further restrict voting during his remaining time in office.

There was also discussion of various ways of choosing Wisconsin Supreme Court Justices, without a consensus on the best option.

Question time included questions about third parties and other options for breaking the log jam in Wisconsin politics.
For the Record

Our co-presidents recently had two opinion pieces printed in the Wisconsin State Journal.

The following article appeared on December 29, 2013:

Schedule a redistricting reform hearing -- League of Women Voters of Dane County

Wisconsin needs to change the way we redistrict our political boundaries. Our citizens deserve districts drawn with their interests in mind, not gerrymandered to serve the interests of the party in power.

Two proposals were introduced in the Legislature last spring. The proposals would adopt a plan similar to Iowa, where a nonpartisan agency drafts district maps for approval by the legislature.

In Iowa, the first iteration is routinely approved, and there has been no litigation. Iowa has compact districts and many more competitive races than we do, and the state has saved millions in lawyer fees.

This is certainly an improvement over Wisconsin’s system. In 2011 the law was changed to eliminate the traditional input of local redistricting officials and commissions. A private law firm drew the state districts behind closed doors. By the time the ensuing litigation concluded, the cost to taxpayers was $2.1 million.

Yet state leaders are refusing to hold a hearing despite persistent calls by editorial boards across the state. They are also ignoring contacts from constituents, according to the Center for Investigative Journalism.

We urge the majority leaders and committee chairs to schedule a hearing to hear what the people have to say about how districts are drawn in Wisconsin.

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

On January 26, 2014, the following article was printed:

Wisconsin should reinvest its budget windfall

As tax collections exceed projections, this is an opportunity for the state to do what responsible individuals would do with unexpected revenue -- pay bills and make responsible investments.

While some politicians in this election year call for more tax cuts or a “tax holiday,” it’s smarter to use the funds to pay down debt incurred by borrowing to balance the budget. And some funds should be used to fill holes in the budget, such as those in Medicaid and the welfare-to-work program.

Having just come through a recession, we should know it is wise to bolster the state’s reserves. Adding to the rainy day fund would put us in a better position to weather a recession without further cutting government services.

We urge lawmakers to use this unexpected revenue to spark our economy. One way to do that is to bolster the health and well-being of those who were hardest hit by the recent economic downturn. This includes children, the elderly, people with disabilities and those in poverty.

Tax cuts have not proven effective at boosting a sagging economy. The unexpected revenue offers a chance to take a more positive approach, one that has worked well in neighboring states.

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

Next Bulletin in September

The next LWVDC Bulletin will arrive in early September. There won’t be any bulletins during the summer months.

If you have suggestions for articles that you would like to see included in the bulletin, or any other comments about the bulletin, contact the Bulletin editor, Karen Gunderson, at jokarjen@gmail.com or 608-249-1366.
Fundraising Report

Pat Kippert, Fundraising Chair

*Thank heaven for little girls…..they grow up in the most delightful way….*

This melody has been running through my mind the past week. I learned that the 94th Birthday/Valentine request resulted in $5,067 donated by fifty-four members of LWVDC! This will cut our chronic budgetary shortfall almost in half.

In a most appreciated and earnest effort to defray that shortfall even more, anonymous donors have challenged us one more time in May. Their generous offer is to match $2,000 of our contributions, making a $4,000 (or more) total for us. For every $1 we contribute, LWVDC will receive $2! The 2013 Challenge came up short ($350/$700). If every member would make a modest donation in May, LWVDC would be almost solvent for 2014. That is a desirable goal for us.

Watch for the May Challenge letter and respond with whatever amount suits your budget. Remember that any contribution at any time is welcome. This May challenge provides a great reminder of the fiscal responsibility of belonging to an organization we value.

Thank heaven for all of you and the “little boys” too.

*Allen Jay Lerner for the 1958 movie GIGI. Sung by Maurice Chevalier*

Contributions

Between January 18 and March 4, the following people contributed to our league. Thank you to all of our generous donors.

Debby McNeil
Pat Kippert in memory of Patricia Watkins

Lively Luncheon:
Sally Phelps
Edith Sullivan

Valentine Day Fund:
Frances Bicknell
June Blanchard
Mary Conroy
Claire Dick
Jean Espenshade
Edith First
W. Emy Gartzke
Shirley Inhorn
Betsy Jensen
Lori Kay
Patricia Kippert

Jeanne Bissell
Sally Carpenter
Liz Dannenbaum
Jane Eisner
Karen Faster
Jean Freese
Hazel Hiemstra
Margaret Jacoby
Nancy Jensen
Miriam Kerndt
Alice Kissling

Merilyn Kupferberg
Annita Lardy
Helen LeRoy
Patricia Levin
Alicia Lux
Marie McCabe
Maria Molzahn
Helene Nelson
Barbara Park
Sally Phelps
Sylvia Poppelbaum
Ingrid Rothe
Marilyn Schten
Stan Sheggeby
Rose Sime
Edith Sullivan
Carol Toussaint
Sandra Vandervest
Patricia Watson
Phyllis Young

Dr. Margaret Lacy
Jennie Larson
Nancy Lersch
Joan Lundin
Sara Markham
Marianne Meyer
Ann Nelson
Aileen Nettleton
Anne Perrote
Karen Pope
Pamela Rewey
Alyson Schmeisser
Eileen Schutte
Arlene Silveira
Suzanne Smith
Priscilla Thain
Dr. Deborah Turski
Thomas Vandervest
Dorothy Wheeler

New Members

The following members joined our league in the past month. Welcome!

Ruth Ann Berkholtz
Elizabeth Kohl
Carol Van Hulle

Thank You, Volunteers!

Our league would not be able to do all that it does without many hours from our volunteers. Thank you to the following members who donated their time this past month.

Office Volunteers:
Fran Bicknell
Joan Lundin
Steve Ploeser
Edith Sullivan

Candidates’ Answers & Forums:
Sybil Better
Cheryl Daniels
Susan Fulks
Helen Horn
Patricia Levin
Sylvia Poppelbaum
Beth Ross
Suzanne Smith
Caryl Terrell

Laura Chern
Irene Durback
Reta Harring
Judy Kleinmaier
Diane Liebert
Ed Reid
Ingrid Rothe
Brook Soltvedt
Priscilla Thain

Bulletin Layout:
Joanie Kanter
Know Your Board Member
Barbara Mortensen, Secretary

I have been secretary of LWVDC since June 2010 and have been a member since 1978. My volunteer activities have included unit leader, committee memberships, phone answering on election day, proofreading and other Candidates’ Answers duties, voter registration, delegate to LWVWI conventions, and reporting election night results when we used to do that.

Meeting so many intelligent and interesting people over my years in LWVDC has been what motivates my participation in it. I donate money to other organizations but I volunteer my time to this organization because it gives me a lot of satisfaction to interact with other members. I spent many years ushering at Overture Center and its predecessor, but I gave that up about two years ago because traveling interfered with that commitment. Occasionally I volunteer in research studies. Two studies that I have been involved in for many years are a sleep apnea study and an Alzheimer study.

I retired from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation in 1999. Working as a real estate agent there was very interesting, but I find retirement just as interesting. I enjoy traveling about three months a year. My favorite travels have been four trips to New Zealand.

I enjoy tap dancing. I started dancing about 1990 to get more exercise since I spent so many hours at a desk. I have found that besides the physical exercise there is a lot of mental exercise in learning the routines that my group performs.

I have one 12-year old grandson, who lives in Virginia, so unfortunately I don’t get to see him as often as I like. When I do visit, I enjoy watching him play hockey.

April 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. Find a meeting that is convenient for you and participate! Please let the host know that you plan to attend.

MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2014

Monday Evening West - 5:30 pm
Panera, 3416 University Ave.
Merilyn Kupferberg, 831-3267, joelmerkup@gmail.com
Barbara Mortensen, 233-7563, morten21@att.net
(Contact Barbara or Merilyn for date and time of May unit meeting)

Middleton - 7:00 pm
Gardt 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

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2014

Tuesday Afternoon - 12:45 pm
Oakwood West, Oaks A-4
Parking on grounds or in Ph Heritage Oaks Parking Ramp
Marie McCabe, 230-3536, mmccabe4805@gmail.com
(There will be no May unit meeting.)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2014

Northeastside - 3:30 pm
Lakeview Public Library
2845 N. Sherman Ave.
Helen LeRoy, recording, 244-2377, haleroy@wisc.edu
Dorothy Wheeler, 244-4711, dorothywheeler@tds.net
(We will gather on May 17, 3:30, at Diane Liebert’s home.)

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
(There will be no May unit meeting.)

2014 Election Dates
Spring Election – April 1
Fall Primary Election – August 12
General Election – November 4

Encouraging informed and active participation in government.
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.

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.

LWVDC Annual Meeting
Don't miss the LWVDC 2014 Annual Meeting on May 7th.

We will gather at 6:30 p.m. at Capitol Lakes for dessert and socializing. The meeting will begin at 7:00.

Meeting materials will be mailed in early April.

Upcoming Events Calendar
- April 2 – Issues Forum, 7:00 pm
  Homeless Children in Dane County
- April 16 – LWVDC Board Meeting, 1:00 pm
- May 7 – Annual Meeting, 6:30 pm
- May 21 – LWVDC Board Meeting, 1:00 pm

Encouraging informed and active participation in government.