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Presidents’ Message
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2015 saw democracy lose a lot of ground in Wisconsin. After legal challenges succeeded in blocking voter photo ID for a few elections, the law was ultimately upheld, and we are now mounting a huge effort in assisting those who need help in getting a valid ID for voting, and in raising awareness about the need to have a proper ID and to bring it to the polls.

Last year also brought devastating changes to Wisconsin’s election system in laws that dismantle the Government Accountability Board, exempt politicians from being subjects of John Doe investigations, and allow coordination between issue advocacy organizations and candidates’ campaigns, which will result in almost unlimited amounts of anonymous money going into campaigns.

We saw rulings in federal court and in the Wisconsin Supreme Court that led to the John Doe II case being dropped and all the records sealed.

On the horizon in 2016 is the possibility that three district attorneys, including Dane County's Ismael Ozanne, may appeal the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s decision in the John Doe II case to the US Supreme Court.

Legislation to allow electronic voter registration (good) and disallow registration by Special Registration Deputies (bad) may be back on the table in 2016.

And a case brought by Wisconsin Democrats, appealing the Republican Party's gerrymandered 2011 state redistricting plan has been approved for appeal directly to the US Supreme Court.

As we await the outcome of these legal decisions and the passage of new legislation, we have a lot of work to do to inform and prepare Dane County electors to vote in four crucial elections.

May the Force Awaken!

Wednesday, February 3, 2016
Special Meeting, 7:00 pm
LWVWI Urban Policy Discussion
The Capitol Lakes Encore Room, 333 West Main St., Madison
(Free parking in the ramp across the street)

Encouraging informed and active participation in government.
Trash Talking
Karen McKim

Attendees at the November Issues Forum, “Recycling: An Urban Policy to Love,” learned that a colorful way with words is a byproduct of a career in recycling. Paul Abramson, of Paolo Verde Consulting Services; Steve Hanrahan, of ReStore; and George Dreckman, City of Madison Recycling Director, peppered their remarks with humor and word play. Abramson began the forum warning that participants would hear a lot of ‘trash talking,’ and Dreckman spoke of the “Waste Watchers” program that helps participants “lose a pound a week” from their refuse stream.

Dreckman used cutting humor to take issue with one item in the League’s study materials. John Tierney, a self-described “Cornucopian” (optimists who believe there will always be abundant energy and resources), wrote an October 2015 New York Times editorial as follow-up to one he’d written in 1996. In both, Tierney argued recycling is more costly and ineffective than sending waste to a landfill.

“I think of Tierney like a cicada,” Dreckman said. “He comes around every 10 years with background noise that contributes nothing but distraction.” Dreckman ridiculed Tierney’s contention that “landfills have been welcomed” in rural areas, and provided figures to refute the claim that recycling is more expensive than landfilling during periods when prices for recycled materials are low.

While November’s study materials highlighted multiple goals for recycling programs (reduce disposal costs; reduce our carbon footprint; preserve natural resources; and more), the forum’s presenters focused on only one: Keeping refuse out of landfills.

In his remarks, Dreckman reinforced the remarkable results of building-material diversion. When the Rodefeld landfill opened in 1984, it was projected to have a useful life of 8 years. The landfill has now been receiving waste for 31 years and is still going. Advances in engineering produced much of that success, Dreckman acknowledged, but “Recycling and composting make a huge difference.” In 2014, Madison diverted 65.1% of its waste into composting or recycling. Building-materials ‘waste’ made up 43% of that amount.

Despite these past successes, Dreckman focused mostly on the future, specifically on food waste and “organics,” which include standard compost material (fruits, vegetables, grains, and coffee grounds), along with dairy, meat, fish, bones, and food-soiled paper products like napkins and pizza boxes.

Organic waste makes up the largest recoverable portion of the waste stream—40% of Madison’s waste. Allowed to rot in a landfill, it creates methane, 70% of which escapes to the atmosphere, where it is 23 times more damaging than power-plant emissions. But when organic waste is diverted to a digester, methane can be captured as a source of renewable energy, while the remaining organic material can be used to enrich the soil.

In the City of Madison, 2,000 households and 33 businesses (mostly restaurants) are already participating in a program for the diversion of organic waste, and with citizen support (contact the mayor or your city alder), Dreckman said the program is ready for city-wide expansion.

Abramson, a zero-waste advocate, described methods used by local events, businesses, and even individual homes to reduce landfill-bound waste. Emphasizing food waste—40% of American food is discarded—Abramson explained “people will do the right thing if you give them clear instructions.”

As an illustration, he showed how three side-by-side containers were labeled at Madison’s La Fete de Marquette to enable festival goers to put the right items in each and turn the event into a zero-waste affair. The food-waste container’s sign used photos of the types of food that belonged in that bin.

Hanrahan focused on building materials. Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore staff—mostly volunteers—will assist in “deconstruction” of some buildings, diverting everything they can from the landfill. The salvaged materials, along with new and used materials donated by homeowners, contractors, and retailers, are used in building Habitat homes (4-5 each year in Dane County) or sold at ReStore’s two locations (Odana Road and Monona Drive) to finance Habitat’s work. The inventory in the ReStores changes daily, but reliably includes cabinetry, flooring materials, plumbing fixtures, hardware, and appliances. Hanrahan reported that the ReStores have diverted more than 6,000 tons of building materials from the landfill.

April Forum Needs You
The April Issue Forum will focus on water issues. If you are interested in helping organize this forum, please contact Sue Larson at salarson83@gmail.com. This should be a fascinating and very timely topic!
Urban Policy Consensus  
*Edith Sullivan, Program Chair*

To review and discuss LWVWI’s proposed revised Urban Policy position, we have scheduled a special meeting for Wednesday, February 3, at 7 p.m. at the Capitol Lakes Encore Room.

In November, units prepared responses to the LWVWI’s survey about its Urban Policy position. These responses together with a detailed response from Sara Markham were submitted to LWVWI, which plans to send its proposed revised position to local leagues for discussion by January 8. The next step for local leagues will be to submit comments regarding the proposed revisions to LWVWI by February 29, 2016.

We will share the LWVWI’s proposed revisions via email, along with a copy of the responses from our unit discussions and Sara Markham’s analysis.

It will be very helpful if you will let us know that you plan to attend this meeting by letting either the LWVDC office or Edith Sullivan (etsesq@aol.com) know.

No New Jail  
*Katie Mulligan*

Last spring, the Dane County Sheriff’s Office issued a report that proposed the building of a new jail. Many community groups responded with demands for "no new jail" and an overhaul of the Dane County criminal justice system. Their frustration with the current system was echoed throughout the country when people reacted to deaths of black men and youth at the hands of police officers.

The Dane County Board responded with Resolution 556, "Investigating Solutions to Racial Disparities and Mental Health Challenges in the Dane County Jail and throughout Dane County’s Criminal Justice System." The resolution called for three task groups: Alternatives to Arrest and Incarceration; Length of Stay; and Mental Health, Solitary Confinement, and Incarceration. (Sharon Corrigan, Chair of the Dane County Board of Supervisors, discussed these issues at our September forum.)

Each group was to produce five recommendations that would require county expenditures and five recommendations requiring no cost. Eleven members for each group were selected from among 130 applicants. The groups met over the summer, hearing testimony from outside experts, county staff, and heads of community agencies.

Corrigan issued the final report in mid-September. Somewhat surprisingly, the highlighted and consensus recommendation from all three groups was improvement in data collection. Dane County leaders were urged "to take immediate action to increase capacity to collect, monitor, analyze, and produce data disaggregated by race, gender, and ethnicity." Other consensus recommendations concerned training of staff about implicit bias and cultural competence and hiring staff who reflect the racial and ethnic identity of their clients.

Among other recommendations were: offer alternative sentencing via community service work and diversion programs; hold bail hearings on weekends and holidays; use and strengthen volunteer programs to reduce involvement with formal criminal justice system; increase the number and reach of mobile crisis response teams; and develop a culturally relevant community-based crisis, assessment and resource center.

The report provides an excellent summary of the reasoning behind the 30 recommendations. It is available at board.countyofdane.com/initiatives.

For the Record

The following Letter to the Editor from our LWVDC co-presidents was published by the Wisconsin State Journal on December 12, 2015:

**DA should appeal campaign finance ruling**

The League of Women Voters has worked for decades to combat corruption and undue influence in campaign financing. Our democracy depends on a system of campaign financing that is fair and open to all candidates while maintaining a level of integrity that benefits all citizens.

Unfortunately, the Wisconsin Supreme Court in July ruled that outside issue ad groups may coordinate with candidate campaigns. If this ruling stands, candidates can direct big donors to contribute to an “independent” group, which can accept unlimited amounts of money while keeping donors’ names secret. Then the candidate can tell the group which ads to run in which markets.

Voters will then have no way to know who is behind the often misleading ads that dominate the airways, and money will have even more influence in our elections.

Fortunately, Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne has an opportunity to appeal this ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court if he acts within the next week. We hope he becomes involved on behalf of the citizens of Dane County and all Wisconsin residents.
Upper Mississippi River ILO
Sue Ann Larson

On October 24, the first annual meeting of the Upper Mississippi Region ILO took place in Dubuque, Iowa, as 19 delegates from Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois Leagues met to choose officers and confirm bylaws. Bonnie Cox of Galena, IL, member of the Jo Davies LWV and newly elected Director of Communications, convened the meeting. Delegates chose Gretchen Sabel, member of the Anoka, Minnesota League and the LWV Action Committee of MN, and the Anoka County Water Resources Task Force, as the ILO’s first president. Ms. Sabel is a lifelong environmentalist and has 26 years of experience working with the Minnesota Pollution Control Board and the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board.

Ms. Sabel delivered the keynote address, “Launching our ILO, Protecting Our River: Bringing the Passion of Carrie Chapman Catt to the LWV’s Newest ILO.” She linked the creation of the ILO to the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association and its focus on the upper half of the river from Minneapolis to Cape Girardeau. Ms. Sabel emphasized the river’s economic importance, noting that sixty counties along the river withdraw 70 million gallons of water/day. The river is a vital transportation venue, but with heavily laden barges, the river conveys large amounts of pollutants from feeder rivers and streams to the ‘Dead Zone’ at the mouth of the Gulf of Mexico.

As the first major program item, delegates adopted a resolution recommending that the reduction of nutrient pollution be a key emphasis. Since each state’s plan differs, the ILO “provides the structure and the organization to share information about each state’s plan, how the plans are working, and opportunities for interstate and regional education and advocacy efforts.” ILO members will educate themselves and others on the issue, advocate for needed programs and ways to fund them, facilitate collaboration and action with other organizations, and partner with governmental and environmental groups on best practices and projects to alleviate pollution.

Delegates received copies of the Nature Conservancy’s “Mississippi River Watershed Report Card.” It rated the categories of recreation, ecosystems, economy, water supply, transportation, and flood control and gave the Mississippi watershed a grade of D+. It stressed that the current downward trajectory, especially for infrastructure, is unsustainable and that innovative funding and collaborative actions must be taken.

Membership report
Mary Anglim, Membership Chair

As of early December, the Dane County League had 252 current members, including 28 50-year members (11%).

About half of our members “replied in July” to our June renewal campaign, making the task of sending reminders much easier. We heard from over 80% of new and renewing members by Labor Day, which is greatly appreciated.

On the down side, about 20 members who were new in 2014-15 have so far failed to renew for this year. It’s not too late! Members who join or renew after January 1 will be reinstated for the remainder of the fiscal year. Dues for the half-year are $40.

In this critical election year, there is lots of work to do to become informed and to encourage our fellow citizens to obtain acceptable ID and to vote. Please invite your friends and acquaintances to consider joining the League to help with these important efforts.

Leadership Opportunities
Clare McArdle, Nominating Committee Chair

Take an active part in choosing LWVDC leaders for 2016-17. We have been very fortunate to thrive as an organization with Board members whose skills match the tasks required. Soon however, we will ask more members to help with the challenges a busy election year will introduce.

A nominating committee will begin the search for new Board members in January. If you are interested in serving, go to our web site to see position descriptions and/or read minutes of Board meetings to see what may be required.

Please call Clare McArdle (255-3557), if you wish to serve on this nominating committee or know of someone you think would serve on the Board. More information will be coming in the next Bulletin.

New Members
The following members joined our League from October 6 through December 31, 2015. Welcome!

Harriette Burkhalter
Brian Kane
Mary Rutter
Wanda Williamson

Jennifer Cole
Claudia Pogreba
Mary Ellen Schmit

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Voter Service Report

Gail Bliss, Voter Service Chair

It has been a busy fall for voter education and registration activities. Since September 1, we registered 84 at farmers markets, 36 at St Vincent de Paul food pantry, nine at various locations and an amazing 249 people in five hours at Epic! Excluding Epic, Special Registration Deputies were able to register only 25 to 50% of people interested in registering. Over 300 others could not be registered, either because they did not have proof of their current address or they lived in an area the Special Registration Deputy was not certified to cover. We shared voter ID information with about 400 people, including some long time voters who were unaware of the new photo ID requirements.

In the October LWVDC Bulletin, Ingrid Rothe reported that the Voter ID Coalition was testing whether the Coalition could effectively canvass neighborhoods using data from the GAB that indicated residents who did not have a valid Wisconsin driver’s license nor Wisconsin ID. Six volunteers canvassed a near west side ward, registering three voters and providing ID information to 10. However, most of the individuals contacted were not the people listed in the GAB data. Surprisingly, three individuals contacted in their home did not have adequate proof of residence.

The LWVDC, as part of the Voter ID Coalition, has taken on the task of reaching out to senior centers and senior housing units. So far, 14 of 18 Senior Centers have been adopted and 10 housing complexes are represented. If you are interested in more information, go to: lwvdanecounty.org/srd-senior-center-liaisons. If you would like to volunteer for a senior housing facility not on the list, contact our office.

Thanks to the following people who worked on one or more of our voter registration drives this fall!

Ann Benishek-Clark
Gail Bliss
Grace Fleming
Susan Fulks
Sue Hoffenberg
Ellen Karlson
Virginia Link
Marian Matthews
Clare McArdle
Carolyn Pfasterer
Ingrid Rothe
Kathy Shurts
Consuelo Lopez Springfield
Deborah Turski
Cathy Berndt
Susan Byrns
Kathy Fullin
Shirley Haidinger
Rita Kades
Elizabeth Kohl
Joan Lundin
Paul Malischke
Janet Mills
Mary Ploeser
Pat Sammataro
Brook Soltvedt
Priscilla Thain
Bonnie Webber

Thank You, Volunteers!

Along with the volunteers noted in other articles in this bulletin, we’d like to thank the following office volunteers:

Fran Bicknell
Joyce Knutson
Pat Levine

Sally Carpenter
Merilyn Kupferberg
Myrna McNatt

Contributions

Between October 6 and December 31, the following people contributed to our League. Thank you to all of our generous donors.

James Cain
Irene Durbak
Doug Knudson in memory of Lyn Knudson
Marian Matthews
Frederic A. Ogg Trust
Brook Soltvedt
Rose & Trevor Stephenson
Marilyn Townsend & Fred Wade
Mary Van Hout

Candidates’ Answers:

Barbara J. Arnold
Martha Christensen
Sheila Coyle
Mary Dick

Paul Buckner
Margaret Coluccy
Barbara Crabb
Janice Grutzner

Alice Kissling
Judith Klehr in memory of Ren Kiemel
Mary Elizabeth Kunkel
Rita Lloyd
Evelyn Mazack
Deborah Kleinman McNeil
Leigh Mollenhoff
Jennifer Neuls
Mary Jeanne Palmer
Joanne Harper Plunkett
B. J. Schmitt
Blanche Singer
Roland Richard Wagner

Annie Liegel
Kirk Malnor
Mary McBride
Judith Middleton
Anne Monks
Mary O’Connor
Robert Persons
Patricia Roder
Amy Schulz
Shirley Swenson

Highway Cleanup

Gail Bliss

On October 19, Cathy Berndt, Gail Bliss, Doug Johnson, Louise Lund, Myrna McNatt and Jan Van Vleck cleaned our two mile segment of US Highway 14 west of Middleton. It was a beautiful, windy day. Many years when we clean the highway, the ditches have significant standing water. This year it was dry. We found everything from historic beer cans and bottles to broken road signs. We filled ten bags with garbage and eight bags with recycled materials, which Gail Bliss sorted and took to the Madison Recycling Center.
Planned Giving
Sue Ann Larson, Fundraising Chair

Now that we are in our late 60’s, my husband and I spend a good bit of time talking about our finances in retirement. We each have a pension fund and I began taking my Social Security benefit at age 66. He will be doing so at age 70. We discuss the variety of options we have when we begin to take withdrawals from our pension funds when we reach 70.5 and what we would like to do with any extra funds that we must withdraw but, at least in the near future, are not likely to need for our everyday needs. Since we make donations to a number of non-profit organizations from our taxable income, we look forward to being able to designate recipients for “Qualified Charitable Distributions”, or charitable rollover of funds without the penalty of having to pay income tax on them.

In 2006, the IRS instituted the Qualified Charitable Distribution program which allows people to make tax-free transfers of funds from a Roth IRA and/or personal pension fund of up to $100,000 directly to qualified 501.c3 organizations. This program became permanent in December, 2015. Being able to make such tax-free automatic withdrawals is a welcome and convenient way to make consistent, reliable donations to the League of Women Voters of Dane County.

Discussion Unit Reports
Diane Martin Liebert, Unit Coordinator

Twenty-eight members and two guests attended the September unit meetings titled “Critical Issues for Dane County”. Though all enjoyed the general meeting speaker, the members agreed there were too many issues presented for one program and that each one could be discussed separately. One unit suggested that we follow up on what Dane County has accomplished with the racial equity and homeless problems and another unit suggested that we set up an observer corps as in years past.

Twenty-five members attended the October unit meetings which required responses to consensus questions on the Constitutional Amendment issue requested by LWVUS. Most of the units reported that the issue and information provided was too complicated to discuss knowledgeable without more time to study it.

Upcoming Events Calendar
- Feb 3 – Special Meeting, 7:00 pm
  LWV-WI Urban Policy Discussion
- Feb 17 – LWVDC Board Meeting, 1:00 pm
- Mar 2 – Issues Forum, 7:00 pm
  Redistricting
- Mar 16 – LWVDC Board Meeting, 1:00 pm
- Apr 6 – Issues Forum, 7:00 pm

February Unit Locations
***Note that many units will not meet in February.***
League members meet monthly in one of four units to discuss the topic of that month’s Issues Forum, using study materials provided by the program planners. The discussion concludes with recommendations for further study or action. Please let the host know that you plan to attend.

If any of the units have questions or issues, please contact the Unit Coordinator, Diane Martin Liebert, at dwliebert@gmail.com or 608-698-4143.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2016
Tuesday Afternoon - 12:45 pm
Oakwood, Oaks D-76 (Jean Freese’s apartment)
Parking on grounds or in P1 Heritage Oaks Parking Ramp
Nancy Simonsen, 230-3014, njsimonsen@gmail.com

NO FEBRUARY MEETING:
Monday Evening West/Middleton
Panera, 3416 University Ave.
Barbara Mortensen, 233-7563, morten21@att.net
Priscilla Thain, 233-5578, priscillathain@gmail.com

Northeastside
Lakeview Public Library
2845 N. Sherman Ave.
Dorothy Wheeler, 244-4711, dorothywheeler@tds.net

Downtown Dinner Group
Capitol Lakes Retirement Center
Restaurant “The Seasons”
333 West Main St. - Free parking across street
June Weisberger Blanchard, 238-7337, jmweisbe@gmail.com
Katie Mulligan, 250-1896, katiemulligan@yahoo.com

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