

The NH Voter – the newsletter of the League of Women Voters NH

Winter 2013

Word from the President...

The 2013 NH legislative session promises to be an exciting one. When Sally Davis went to the Capitol recently to pick up some documents, she noted a palpable change in atmosphere there. Gone was the sense of anxiety and dread that some of us had noted in the last year or two. So let's be optimistic.

We know that not everything we support will pass. Occasionally we'll have to settle for less than we'd like to see happen. At this point we have no idea whether a prison privatization plan will be presented to the Governor and Executive Council. The report on the bids submitted has been delayed...multiple times. We don't know whether expanded gambling will be seen by legislators as a clever idea or a nail in the coffin of the state's traditional way of life. Nor can we be sure of the state Supreme Court's ruling on the voter registration requirements that were put on hold last fall. We do know that changes to the constitutional role of the state in school funding won't be heard until the 2014 session, by agreement of both parties.

What we certainly know is that your board members and others will attend committee meetings on issues of League interest, testify when appropriate, and send out appeals for action to our members to call their legislators when crucial votes are imminent. Our members' voices mean a great deal. Please respond when we need your voice.

Sally Davis and I can both be reached by email via the League's website: LWVNH.org. You may also leave messages for us on the office phone, though it may take a few days for us to reply: 225-5344.

Liz Tentarelli, co-president

Guns/Mental Health

We've all seen in the past months how guns and untreated mental health issues can become a tragic combination. As President Obama moves forward with his proposals to reduce gun violence, some of our members have asked us about the League's position on gun control. Here is the text of LWVUS president Elisabeth MacNamara's letter to Vice-President Biden (January 10, 2013) stating the League's position:

“The League of Women Voters of the United States has a long standing position, reached by consensus of our members, in support of Gun Control. Since 1990, we have used this position to lobby in support of the assault weapons ban, legislation requiring all dealers to run criminal background checks at gun shows and in opposition to laws that grant special protection for the gun industry.

“The League of Women Voters position on Gun Control is: The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States is a major health and safety threat to its citizens. The League supports strong federal measures to limit the accessibility and regulate the ownership of these weapons by private citizens. The League supports regulating firearms for consumer safety.

“The League supports licensing procedures for gun ownership by private citizens to include a waiting period for background checks, personal identity verification, gun safety education and annual license renewal. The license fee should be adequate to bear the cost of education and verification.

“The League supports a ban on 'Saturday night specials,' enforcement of strict penalties for the improper possession of and crimes committed with handguns and assault weapons, and allocation of resources to better regulate and monitor gun dealers.

“On behalf of our 140,000 members and supporters, we urge you to propose common sense solutions to the gun violence that is plaguing our nation. It is time to advocate for measures that will ban assault weapons, place limits on magazine size, close the gun show loophole and mandate annual reporting on gun violence in America. Gun control is a matter of public safety and public health.”

LWVNH encourages its members to contact their US Senators and Representatives urging support of whatever common sense measure the President and Vice-President submit to Congress.

Here in NH we will follow a number of bills addressing the need for better mental health community resources so that mental illness will not be an underlying cause of gun violence.

Expanded Gambling in New Hampshire?

LWVNH is a member of the Granite State Coalition Against Expanded Gambling, ably headed by Jim Rubens. The state board adopted the LWVNH position opposing

expanded gambling in 2001, based on concurrence with Pennsylvania's study, supplemented by information we gathered in NH

Now a gambling casino in southern NH is being discussed as a possible revenue source, with Gov. Maggie Hassan appearing to favor it.

The coalition offered legislators many pieces of evidence about the negative effects of expanded gambling last year. That effort is continuing in the new session. Visit the coalition's website: www.noslots.com to see some of the evidence.

While some of us may personally enjoy an occasional trip to a casino in Connecticut or Las Vegas, and many people play the lottery responsibly in NH, building a major casino in NH because we think it will bring in big revenue for the state would be a mistake. The coalition will present evidence of steadily declining gambling revenue of billions of dollars in Delaware, New Jersey, and Connecticut from 2006 to 2012. When the four planned casinos in Massachusetts are built, NH will be in the midst of a saturated market of 15 casinos. It is unlikely actual state revenues will be anywhere near the projections given by the companies eager to bid on the project.

We should be wary of the negative impact of a single revenue source on political decisions. The coalition is also demonstrating loss of established motel, restaurant and other recreational business that will go to a slots barn instead.

The coalition also has evidence that what is promised as a “high-end casino” to draw people to NH and bolster the economy has, in at least one case in a neighboring state, become a “bait and switch”—a huge slots barn only—no hotel, spa, or convention center as the original proposal promised. Who plays there? Certainly not out-of-state families spending their vacation dollars in the local economy. Instead it is local people spending their money on slots, rather than in the community.

We encourage our members to stay aware of expanded gambling bills and to contact their legislators and Governor Hassan as decisions draw near. To get weekly updates of bills being heard in committees, including gambling bills, you may check our Hot Legislation page of LWVNH.org or request to be on Sally Davis's weekly email alert list. Email Sally at sally.davis36@gmail.com and ask to be added to her coming legislation list.

New Hampshire 2012 November Election – Report on Technical Issues

Thanks in large part to the efforts of groups like the League of Women Voters and newspapers statewide that published news releases about the voter ID requirements, the November election ran fairly smoothly.

The issue of long lines in some cities needs to be addressed. But voter ID seems to have worked better than we had expected. This was a lenient form of photo ID—almost anything was acceptable. Most people were prepared to show something. Those who didn't show ID and weren't known by a ballot clerk signed a “challenged voter affidavit.” Statewide, 5,424 people signed these. The Secretary of State sent each of them a letter. Only 211 of them were returned as “undeliverable.” Once they are checked to eliminate “clerical error” the list will be given to the Attorney General, who will follow up with those people, to find out whether any fraud occurred.

The League still believes that requiring a photo ID is unnecessary. In the past decade, only three cases of voter fraud in NH were ever confirmed. The expense and additional paperwork of these challenged voter affidavits is a high price to pay for a problem that scarcely exists. Also, just having a voter photo ID requirement may discourage elderly, disabled, and newly enfranchised people who are qualified to vote. Some people were unaware of the affidavit option, despite publicity ahead of time, and may never have gone to the polls. If the more stringent requirements that are slated to go into effect next fall are not repealed, there will be more people having to sign affidavits in our next big election.

There are several bills in the Election Law committee of the NH legislature to repeal voter ID, to repeal the more stringent future requirements, and to repeal the voter registration/car registration requirement. These will be important to watch. The League will testify in support of repealing these efforts to suppress voters.

The board thanks all our members who did their part to spread the word about voter registration and voter ID requirements. Many of you passed out our informational fliers; others talked to friends and neighbors. It made a big difference! In NH 718,830 people cast ballots. This was the third highest turnout nationwide in percent of voting age population. Pats on the back all around.

Our Big Project, preceded by A Sad Tale

Meet Jenny Sunshine, who has recently forsaken her busy life in New York or Chicago and moved to beautiful New Hampshire. Jenny has figured out how to get TV reception here, she's hired a plow guy, she's got an internet provider (though sadly it may be dial-up because that's all she can get here), and now she wants to register to vote. How to do that, she wonders. Hmmm. Maybe she'll go online, to her nice little town's website.

And she finds—almost nothing. Oh, she can register her dog at the town clerk's office. Good to know, if she decides to get a dog. She discovers there's a winter carnival at the town common. Sounds like fun. But does she see anything on the town website's home page labeled “Voting” or “Election”? Not if her town is one of the vast majority whose official websites are woefully inadequate at giving new residents voting information.

League members around the state were contacted in January and asked to fill out a survey for 8 towns each, from the Secretary of State's list of town websites. **A huge thank-you to all those members who undertook this challenge, and to Sara McNeil who is collating the surveys.**

We are starting to analyze them right now. Without all the results in yet, we can only summarize what we've observed so far:

Many town websites ignore voting, voter registration, absentee ballot applications, and voter ID requirements entirely.

Many others have some of the information, but it is buried. One must "guess" that clicking on Town Clerk will get to this information. (Sadly, Jenny Sunshine from the big city didn't think of that—she assumes the town clerk handles just the dog licenses.)

Others offer incomplete or even inaccurate information—too many town sites do not explain that a voter without picture ID can establish identity or domicile by signing an affidavit. This is an important item if Jenny's elderly father has moved with her, as he no longer has a picture ID.

Some websites offer partial information but skip what Jenny might find interesting—there's a town meeting on March 12 and she can vote on local issues! Oops, no mention.

Finally, there are some town websites that are pretty good. They have a button to click on the home page clearly indicating Voting or Elections. On that page are links to the Secretary of State's explanation of what is needed to register. Another link is a pdf explaining voter ID requirements. And in a very lucky town, such as Raymond, there is also a sample ballot and explanation of the upcoming town meeting warrant articles.

When our results are compiled, we will do two things: first, we will design a rubric for a good town website (concerning voting only). Second, we will try to work with the Secretary of State to pass along this information to the towns, with links from his site that can be easily added to the town's site. If that partnership doesn't materialize, the League will undertake contacting the towns ourselves and urging improvements.

How does your town's website stack up? Check it out. And if you'd like, jump the gun and suggest improvements yourself—it's your town!

Lucille Allen Award

This award is given at each LWVNH Convention by the League of Women Voters of NH Education Fund. Lucille Allen was a charming lady and a dedicated League member

with a passion for environmental issues. When she died her obituary referred to her as a “Renaissance Lady”. Among her many talents, she served as a long-time member of the State Board and a Trustee of the Education Fund. In her will, she left a generous bequest to the Ed fund, and many local leagues have benefited from her generosity as they have received grants.

The Trustees of the Ed Fund voted in 1996 to establish a Lucille Allen Environmental Award to be given at each State Convention to a member who has best exemplified the LWVNH commitment to the protection of the environment.

Local leagues may nominate persons they believing deserving of the award. Send nominating letters describing the accomplishments of the nominee to:

Lillian Nelligan
164 Federal Hill Road
Milford, NH 03045 by March 31, 2013

Get Your NH Voter by Email?

For those snowbirds whose winter mail isn't forwarded and for those who prefer email to paper mail—you may sign up to receive our LWVNH newsletter by email rather than in paper copy. We are no longer using bulk mail; it was just too slow and didn't save us much money. We're now sending the newsletter via first class mail.

Like to read your NH Voter in paper copy? That's fine. We'll keep sending it.

But if you prefer reading news online, want to save the League postage and still get all our state League information, let us know. Send an email that includes your name and snail-mailing address, with a message requesting emailed newsletter instead. The NH Voter will come in pdf form as an attachment—almost any email program and computer can open it. Send your request to LWV@kenliz.net

Note from the LWVUS 2014 Nominating Committee

“Your **LWVUS** nominating committee is beginning its outreach to local and state Leagues for the two-year 2014 slate of nominees for the national board as well as the nominating committee. This is the time to consider all that you and your colleagues have to offer our organization and our country and respond positively to our call. We live in interesting times and you can help shape the future. We would be delighted to hear from you with any questions that you might have regarding the process. We will send out the official call for nominations in a few months at which time you can nominate yourself or others you see as potential national leaders. Contact us at NominatingCommittee@lww.org”

SAVE THESE DATES!

LWVNH Convention

will be held in the Concord or Hopkinton area on Saturday, **June 1**. More details will be in the spring issue of the NH Voter. We promise exciting speakers, good food, a wee amount of business, and discussion of our League projects. Maybe we'll even have good news to report on legislation we support.

Quad State

Wells, Maine, April 27 and 28

An exciting weekend opportunity for League members from NH, Vermont, Maine, and Rhode Island to gather to share ideas, learn new skills at varied workshops, and socialize with other League members who are excited about the same issues you care about.

Specific workshops have yet to be determined. Check the LWVNH.org web site in late February or early March for more details and registration information. Or phone any state board member with your questions.

Day at the Legislature

Join League members for our annual Day at the Legislature, **Tuesday, March 5**. Snow date is Tuesday, March 19. If the weather is bad call 763-9296 for a recorded message about postponement.

We will meet in a conference room at 4 Park St* at 9 am for coffee and an introduction to the bills being discussed that day. Then in small groups we will visit the state house, sitting in on committee hearings of interest to the League. We will return to 4 Park Street at noon for lunch. Please bring a bag lunch. We will serve drinks and dessert. We will debrief during lunch and hear from some members who are following specific legislation. Then we'll be done by 2 pm (plenty of time left to enjoy the lovely shops along Main St in Concord).

*The League office is at 4 Park St. This is on the corner of Main St. and Park St., adjacent to the capitol. Signs will direct you to the conference room. Use the elevator. Parking is available at 50 cents an hour in nearby parking garages.

Please reply by Feb. 26, via email to LWV@kenliz.net or phone Liz Tentarelli at 763-9296 (evenings). Give us your email and phone number in case we need to reschedule(at this time we don't know what hearings/meetings are going on in the legislature in March) or mail the form below.

Mail this form by Feb. 26 to Liz Tentarelli, 27 Bowles Rd., Newbury NH 03255

I/we would like to attend the League of Women Voters Day at the Legislature on March

Name _____ town _____

Phone _____
email: _____

Live and In Person:

Reporting on Incarceration of Women Study- Peg Fargo and Liz Tentarelli, co-chairs of the study have taken their report on the road to church groups and adult education classes. Participants have found the information fascinating, even though some of it is sad to hear.

We believe that rather than make a formal report destined to gather dust, we can reach more people and provide more information about the issues facing women offenders in these personal presentations.

Anyone who would like to arrange a presentation to a community group is encouraged to call Peg or Liz to work out details. They can be reached via email, through our website LWVNH.org or leave a message on the office phone: 225-5344

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