



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
NEW HAMPSHIRE

www.LWVNH.org

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Concord, NH 03301

N H Voter – February 2018 newsletter of LWVNH

From the President's desk:

For some of us, the most fun time of year is just starting: local elections and town meetings. No?, the prospect of going out in a storm to vote, or sitting for several hours in town meeting to discuss roads and fire stations doesn't make you all warm and fuzzy?

Let me explain my point of view: In town elections, I'm likely to know half of the candidates already (yes, I live in a small town). Usually I like them, respect what they contribute to the community, and even when we disagree we can discuss that comfortably and dispassionately at the library or the transfer station or the post office (yes, it's a really small town, as that about covers the chance meeting options).

When there is a contest for a town seat, I'm delighted, because the opposite is having no one filing for something like planning board or budget committee or ZBA. The work that those unpaid town officials do is important for the health and safety and well-being of our town, so it's sad when people don't even think about running. And it's exciting when someone new decides they have something to contribute to the governing of the town.

All of which brings me to my real point:

If your town has contested town elections coming up, **consider having a candidates' forum** so that voters can find out more about the candidates and the candidates can find out what matters to the voters. This could be an informal meet'n'greet at the town offices or library, perhaps on a Saturday morning in late February or early March. Or if there is a significant race for selectboard or school board perhaps, consider organizing a more formal event, with a moderator to facilitate the opening statements by candidates followed by Q&A with the audience.

The League of Women Voters has done this often in many towns. We have guidelines we can share with you, templates for invitation letters to candidates, advice for the moderator—all just an email away. Local people need to take the lead, getting lists of candidates from the town clerk, finding a venue, publicizing in the right places. But the League is willing and able to help, if you wish. Just ask.

Town meeting for most of us includes **elections on Tuesday, March 13**. Your deliberative session will be earlier, if you are an SB2 town. Otherwise your town meeting to vote on the budget and some warrant articles will be the same day as elections or later that week. Fleeing to warmer climes? You can get an absentee ballot from your town clerk. But how sad you'll miss all the in-person fun.

Three local forums are already planned by LWVKearsarge/Sunapee: In **Warner** on March 1, 7:00 pm at town hall. In **Newbury** on March 6, 7:00 pm at Newbury Town Offices. In **New London** on March 8, 7:00 pm at Tracy Library. Elsewhere, in **Rollinsford**, Meet the Candidates on March 6 at 6:00 pm at the Library. In **Bartlett** on March 8 at 6:00 pm in the elementary school. **Sunapee** is March 6, 7:00 pm at the Methodist church.

Liz Tentarelli, president, LWVNH

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Local League news:

The **Greater Nashua Area** unit is planning a membership drive for Sunday, March 25 from 3:30 – 4:30 at the Nashua Public Library. Come learn more about League; tell your friends.

Greater Nashua Area members Jean Lewandowski and Sherry Dutzy met with Matt Burdett, Opinion page editor at the Nashua Telegraph, who has agreed to periodically print League articles on topics of civic and legislative interest. Jean's first article in this series was published Sunday, January 21, and covered the state legislative process. Her next article is in the works and will cover a number of bills that are working their way through the legislature.

Mount Washington Valley may be the site of a new local League unit. A meeting in February to explore the possibility drew 10 people, who each knew several more to invite to their next meeting on **Tuesday, March 20 at Conway Public Library, 15 E. Main St., at 2:30 pm**. If you live in the area and want to learn more about the opportunities for a local unit to make a difference in the Mt. Washington Valley and meet others interested in League topics, please plan to attend. No commitment needed at this time; just come to learn more.

A report will be presented on the possibility of doing a voter registration event at the high school. Another group is preparing a report on voter registration issues in NH.

PeterboroPlus, a regional unit serving a dozen or so towns in the area surrounding Peterborough, is gearing up for projects to be done before the November elections. They include voter registration work. Check the Calendar page of the LWVNH.org website for date, time, and place of their meetings. Meetings move to different towns almost monthly.

LWV Kearsarge/Sunapee Area will have its annual Meet Your Elected Representatives event on Thursday evening, May 24, at Tracy Library in New London. State Representatives and Senators representing area towns will be invited to share their views of what's happening in the state legislature, followed by Q & A with the audience. Always a learning experience for all.

State League Event—You're Invited:

Save the Date: **Tuesday, March 27**, has been chosen for **LWVNH Day at the Legislature**. League members join state board members in attending hearings at the Legislature, with a briefing before and debriefing over lunch, and a short tour of the State House in the afternoon if desired. Final plans will be based on whether there are bills of interest being heard that day. We cancel or postpone if little of interest will be going on.

If you've been looking at our weekly Legislative Alerts, you know that it has been a hopping time at the State House this year. By March 22, all House bills will have had a hearing and vote. Those that passed the House move on to the Senate, where the process begins again. And vice versa. By March 27 we're likely to have hearings on bills "with legs" that have already passed the other body.

Please indicate your interest in this event by emailing LWVNewHampshire@gmail.com. We'll let you know by March 24 if a date change is necessary (we find out each Friday, in the weekly Calendars, what is scheduled for the following week). We'll provide parking/carpool info, and all the details later to those who express interest.

Testimony and Action:

Our Legislative Alerts sometimes include the notation “League will testify.” When the League has a position on an issue and we have facts and current research to back that up, one of us will attend the bill’s public hearing with copies of written testimony in hand for committee members. We also will present an oral summary to the committee. Usually it is a state board member who presents testimony, but sometimes we have a member who has worked on the issue and is authorized by the board to testify. (Visit our Action & Testimony webpage where you can read the testimony we presented on various bills.)

Other times state board members don’t testify but we do attend a hearing on a bill that we consider important. If it clearly falls into an area where League has done work in the past and has a position, we may sign in as representing the League of Women Voters NH, either for or against the bill, but we don’t necessarily speak. There is no need to repeat what others have already said, and we can’t possibly have new research to present on each bill. But signing in for LWVNH puts us on record in support or opposition to the bill.

Taking action on a bill, however, is something that every League member and supporter can do. If a bill is being heard by a committee and you know one or more of the committee members, please do tell them your views. Their committee’s recommendation to the full House or Senate will often determine the fate of the bill, and your conversation with a key member could make a real difference. Then when a bill is going up for vote in the full House or Senate, your connection with your own representative(s) or senator is very important. Elected officials care about what their constituents say. Call them, email, or bump into them at the transfer station and share your ideas about the bill. Sometimes you will agree to disagree; other times they will look differently at a bill because their constituents have shown them a new view of it.

With close to 1000 bills going through the Legislature each session, no representative or senator can be an expert on all of them. The testimony and advocacy of groups like the League and of individuals with personal experiences to share are the cornerstone of our legislative process. NH definitely has a people’s legislature, with voters’ personal connections to all 424 legislators!

LWVNH Study of Public Education

We’re well on our way! In last month’s NHVoter we published the new (temporary) position on education, based on Dec. & Jan. consensus meetings. Now we’re onto phase two, after which we will add to our position.

On our Education Study webpage <http://lwvnh.org/Education.html> you will find a number of Fact Sheets prepared by study committees. There are **three fact sheets on Charter Schools**, prepared by the Nashua committee. Here are some tidbits to get you started, then get details from the website.

In NH, **charter schools are public schools**. They are funded by the state, according to guidelines in the adequacy funding formula. You’ll notice that the per child amount from the state is more than the regular school districts receive. That’s because for the most part the charter schools don’t get funding from local taxes. Charter schools may be specialized. Some cover just a few grades. One charter school is a virtual (online) school. Find out more on our webpage.

We also have some **fact sheets on Early Childhood Education**, prepared by the Kearsarge/Sunapee study committee. Research shows that pre-school through kindergarten ages are a critical time in the formation of educational concepts and attitudes. Full-day kindergarten is not yet required in NH schools, but it is becoming more common since the Legislature voted for more funding to local schools that offer it. The study committee highlighted five areas of discussion for consensus. Read the Fact Sheet on Early Childhood Education to find out more.

Report on some bills in the NH Legislature:

SB 313 is the Medicaid Expansion bill. Sponsors of the bill, members of a bipartisan commission that studied the issue last year, expect there will be many changes made before it is ready for a vote. The first committee hearing is Tuesday, Feb. 20 at 1:30 in Representatives Hall. A big crowd is expected in support of continuing the healthcare provided to 50,000 NH residents under the current plan, which expires in December 2018. League has a position in support of healthcare for all, but specifics are not spelled out. None of us on the state board have studied the issue enough to testify, but we encourage all members to stay informed via the news media about the aspects of the bill as they develop.

The bill released on Feb. 16 continues the program for 5 years, but changes to a managed care system. The bipartisan commission made that recommendation. How the state would fund the program is complicated but includes at least one new idea, which is to use 5% of state liquor store revenue. More details to come.

The League in coalition with several other groups in the NH Campaign for Voting Rights has worked on a number of **election law bills** this session, with very little good news to report.

HB1773 was a long-shot, to provide public funding for campaigns for governor, executive council and state senate as a step toward getting big money out of state politics. It has already been voted down by the House, but it has at least started people thinking about the topic.

SB 440 was also defeated, a bill that would have put some teeth into enforcing laws about campaign donations from corporations and such that are in violation of campaign funding law.

Two other campaign finance reform bills are coming out of committee with Inexpedient to Legislate recommendations (likely to be voted on by the House in early March). HB 1667 would have banned some corporate donations and made public the names of top donors on political ads. It's on the Consent calendar so unlikely to have much chance of passage. HB1368 would close the LLC loophole for campaign contributions, a sensible bill we'd love to see pass. It has a chance with enough pressure from constituents. Call your reps.

HB 1666 is a bill that would have reviewed the 2021 redistricting using a mathematical model (complicated, but we are sorry it was voted ITL in committee unanimously) and HB 1540 would have created ranked-choice voting in the top races in the state (Maine has it, but it is facing a court challenge), recommended ITL nearly unanimously. Both very intriguing opportunities.

A bit of good news on the topic of campaign finance reform: SB 363 bans political donations from foreign nationals (how timely in view of the national news Feb. 16 about Russian interference in elections). It passed the Senate on Feb. 15; encourage your reps to support it when it appears in the House. Also semi-good news: SB 33 closes a loophole about registering as a campaign spending organization passed in the Senate, and "is on life-support," as Open Democracy describes it, in the House where it was voted to Interim Study. That won't help in the 2018 elections, but could be worked on and passed in time for the presidential election of 2020.

In **education**, the school "voucher" bill is still in House Finance, with lots of work being done by the committee figuring out the costs to the state of implementing the plan as well as the effects on the public school districts. (See our Education Study webpage for more explanation) Within a couple of weeks they must recommend something to the full House, very possibly an amended version. SB 193 is opposed by the League (per our newly adopted position of January 2018). HB 1492 is the "manifest hardship" bill, which could change how children can be moved from school to school at parental request. This should be studied extensively before a vote is taken; not sure what is planned right now.

Other education bills—and there are many!--are in the process of being exec'd by the House Education Committee. They run the gamut from good but simple bills (such as including technology and digital skills in the list of “adequate education” requirements) to complicated bills about cooperative school districts that may seek to disband. Our observation is that the committee is looking very seriously at bills that seek to clarify processes, reporting, and definitions, all with the intention of improving NH’s public schools. Accountability is mentioned often.

On a more general note: A surprising number of bills heard in committees are discussed extensively and then voted Inexpedient to Legislate. In Judiciary last week we heard one representative explain the dilemma poignantly: She lamented that bills are often well-intentioned, and members agree with the larger goal; but the bills are either badly written or have unintended consequences that prevent their going forward. She pleads for constituents to understand that a vote of ITL is not a statement that they don’t care about the issue, but that the bill as written can’t even be amended well enough to work. “It’s just not ready for prime time.”

We should all remember that we have to look at more than a bill’s title when we question how our legislators vote. It’s complicated!

A word about CACRs: These bills propose state constitutional amendments. Apparently there are 22 of them proposed in this session! The process is that both the Senate and the House must pass the CACR by a 3/5 vote in order for the measure to appear on the ballot. Then in November, two-thirds of the voters voting on the question must agree in order for it to become part of the NH Constitution. This is a high bar, as it should be for something as serious as changing our constitution.

In committees we hear legislators say that they will vote ITL because the constitution should not be changed lightly; others say we need to address issues of overarching importance to the state, and the voters have the right to decide at the ballot box in November.

We will pay more attention to CACRs when they have passed one body. If any make it to the ballot, League will work to gather information from supporters and opponents and then produce nonpartisan information for use by the voters.

Upcoming Event: **Citizen Action Against Gerrymandering — A Forum**

Saturday, March 24, 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm

University of New Hampshire School of Law, 92 Washington Street, Concord, NH

[RSVP by clicking here. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/citizen-action-against-gerrymandering-a-forum-tickets-43003068335?aff=OD](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/citizen-action-against-gerrymandering-a-forum-tickets-43003068335?aff=OD)

The right to vote is among the most fundamental of our constitutional rights. However, partisan gerrymandering has created an electoral system that allows politicians to choose their voters, rather than voters choosing their politicians. Both Republican and Democratic legislators have engaged in gerrymandering, drawing lines that effectively give more weight to the voters of one party than the other. As a result, our system no longer operates according to the principle of “one person, one vote,” and our state legislatures and Congress do not fairly and honestly represent the electorate. It is time to restore one person, one vote in our state. The New Hampshire legislature will once again draw district lines in 2021. New Hampshire’s voters must demand that candidates running for the legislature in 2018 and 2020 commit to support fair, non-partisan redistricting.

The sponsors are pleased to announce a forum for New Hampshire citizens to learn about action they can take to restore honest districting in this state. The afternoon begins with a keynote speech by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-Or.), an advocate for independent, citizen-led redistricting. The program includes panels addressing national and state redistricting issues, featuring political, legal, and historical perspectives. The program will conclude with a panel focused on political organization and action as we head into the 2018 election season.

Some speakers are Ruth Greenwood and John Bisognano; more to be announced soon!

Sponsors: Capital Coalition, Open Democracy, America Votes New Hampshire, Granite State Progress.

Free and open to the public; register online at link on preceding page.