



League of Women Voters New Hampshire

April 2017

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LWVNH Convention Sat., June 3, Slusser Center, Hopkinton (next to the Library)

For members and their invited guests

Join us at this biennial event to share with League members from around the state the excitement of beginning a new state study (see related article on p. 4). Two guest speakers, reports from local and state League boards, election of officers and adoption of a budget—yes, we’ll do bit of work. But what a great time to be part of the League. With our membership growing you’ll meet new people as well as renew acquaintances from other areas. Mark your calendars and send us an email to reserve your place. Cost is \$18 per person to cover lunch and venue rental, payable at the door. Reservations due by May 30. Email LWV@kenliz.net or send a note to LWVNH, 4 Park St. #200, Concord NH 03301.

Tentative schedule:

9:30 am Coffee, registration, socializing

9:45 am Welcome Liz Tentarelli, president

10:15 am Guest speaker NH Commissioner of Education Frank Edelblut

11:30 Update on League work:

Membership Liz Tentarelli

Local Leagues and Units reports local board members

Election law Nancy Marashio

Other legislative work state board

noon-ish Lunch and conversation

12:30 Dessert and business meeting:

Election of officers and directors Nominating Committee: Nancy Marashio, Laura Crawford, Sally Embley will propose the slate for 2017-2019

Nominations from the floor

Budget 2017-2019 Mary Perry

Proposal for statewide study of education in New Hampshire - Peg Fargo

Direction to the board from members

1:00 Guest speaker Professor Elaine Rizzo, St. Anselm College and member of the Citizens Advisory Board to the women’s prison, update on the new women’s prison and re-entry preparation for women offenders.

2:00 Adjourn

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League Observer Corps

LWVNH–Greater Nashua is excited to have new and “renewed” interest in instituting a League Observer Corps in the city of Nashua. Members Pam Jordan and Emily Caswell have agreed to head up observer corps efforts to monitor Nashua’s Board of Education and Board of Aldermen meetings. After a long period of contemplating how and where the Nashua League could best concentrate its immediate efforts, and be of most benefit to local citizenry, state board member Mary Davies suggested that an active and diligent observer corps was critical to being able to effectively cover local issues in anticipation of local elections.

LWVUS has an observer manual available online, and Liz Tentarelli has offered to help us decipher its contents and determine the best way to implement League corps structure. A similar effort is underway in Peterborough as a first step in forming an area League unit there.

If there are any long-time League members who have experience in establishing and running observer corps, we’d like to hear from you. Please email Gwen Mikailov at mikailov@comcast.net, or call (603) 320-7770.

The State House -- Still Standing

For those of you who use email and have been reading or even just skimming our weekly Legislative Alerts or Calls to Action, you know that it has been a very busy and very partisan session at the State House. You can look at past alerts on our Hot Legislation webpage, some of which have been Updated to show the resultant status of bills. You can also see League testimony on key bills on our Action and Testimony page. Much too much to summarize here, but do pour yourself a cup of tea (or something stronger) and take a look. In spite of all the “sturm und drang” the state government still stands and we will eventually have a state budget. Board members will be happy to answer your questions on legislation at Convention—or at least we’ll try. Thank you for your responses to our calls to action, especially your calls and emails to your own reps and senators on key bills. They’ve made a difference!

LWV/Hopkinton Town Library Program on “Fake News, Tweets and Facts in our Democracy”

On Sunday, March 26, a standing room only crowd filled the Community Room at Hopkinton Town Library eager to learn what a distinguished panel had to share with them about “Fake News, Tweets and Facts in our Democracy.” NH League of Women Voters President Liz Tentarelli served as moderator as Dan Barrick, news director of NHPR; Ralph Jimenez, Concord Monitor editorial writer; John Greabe, UNH Law Professor, and documentary maker John Gfroerer discussed the proliferation of fake news across the media spectrum and the challenge this poses to voters seeking solid, dependable information upon which to make decisions as to what policies or political candidates they should support.

Professor John Greabe emphasized the difficulty of legally challenging Fake News given the central importance in our society of the First Amendment which states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” He cautioned his audience not to expect the courts to solve the challenges posed by fake news.

NH Public Radio News Director Dan Barrick spoke of the very human element of “bias” in all of us, and, reflecting fellow panelist Ralph Jimenez’s observations, noted that a journalist’s training is focused on the recognition of such natural bias and the intentional determination to examine issues from a variety of perspectives to ensure balanced and accurate reporting.

Ralph Jimenez challenged the audience to “not think of an elephant.” In doing so Jimenez demonstrated the views of cognitive science and linguistics professor George Lakoff, whose research helps to explain how fake news works. Simply by hearing presidential candidate Hillary Clinton called “crooked Hillary” over and over, voters automatically made a negative association. Filmmaker John Gfroerer, whose presentation “Television: The Art and Ethics of Manipulation” is included in the NH Humanities Humanities to Go catalogue, shared a series of examples of the acceptance of far-fetched, unsubstantiated stories by uncritical news consumers.

The panelists spoke of a time not so long ago when there was justifiable public confidence in the solid reporting of journalists like Walter Cronkite. The internet and the growth of “infotainment” sources make the creation and proliferation of fake news a growth industry. Still, today there are many excellent and dependable journalists working diligently to provide the solid information citizens in a democracy rely. However, Ralph Jimenez cautioned his audience, it is now imperative that citizens practice “discernment” and rely on multiple reputable news sources and utilize fact-checking services whenever there is reason to doubt a news report.

As Doris Haddock, NH’s own “Granny D.” said, “Democracy is not something you have, it is something you do.” In the era of fake news, that means we need to do what is necessary to get the information we must have to exercise our rights as citizens.

(League member Janet Ward was the driving force behind this program and wrote the above summary for us. More than 110 people attended. For more information on the topic of Fake News, people might want to seek out area libraries that offer presentations on how to recognize internet fake news sites, given by library personnel or by guest speaker Randall Mikkelsen.)

Submitted by Janet Ward, League member from Hopkinton.

Do I Hear School Bells Ringing?

As we look forward to the LWVNH convention in June, a new excitement is building as League members learn that a new study may be proposed by the board of directors. Following the updated education position of the national League, NH should update its position on education.

Both the national position and the LWVNH position can be found on the Positions page of our website – LWVNH.org.

What better way to engage in an in-depth policy discussion that can involve the community than to plan programs around education? This study will increase the League's impact locally and may increase our membership as we intensively review the important role of education for our children. An updated study will look at the state and local role in education. Of course the topic is far too broad for a two-year study and the most difficult part for the next few weeks will be determining the scope of a study. The scope of the study would outline the broad parameters to ensure that appropriate research and study can be conducted to form a position that would adhere to solid principles and become a standard for advocacy.

The recommendation for the new study will be presented to the convention for discussion and the members present would determine any amendments to the proposal and then the adoption or rejection of a study. Here's where we need your input. So your homework is to answer the following question: What are the areas you would like the League to consider for a study?

- Financing – ex. State role, local share, vouchers, etc
- Kindergarten and pre-K programs – benefits and challenges
- Post-secondary opportunities in NH
- State vs. local control
- Charter schools
- Role of standardized testing
- Content material – e.g. common core, standards
- Roles and responsibility of the state
- Special education
- Other areas

If you have preferences for any aspect of this topic or just want to comment, don't pick up your chalk and blackboard, but please contact Peg Fargo at pfargo@hotmail.com before May 12, 2017.

NH Correctional Industries Begins Braille Transcription Program at the Women's Prison

It's not just fancy painted birdhouses anymore. In March the NH Department of Corrections and the NH Department of Education jointly announced that a Braille Transcription program began at the NH Correctional Facility for Women in Goffstown. The women in the prison are learning to transcribe textbooks to Braille as part of a Correctional Industries job skills development program.

A vision professional was contracted through a two year grant. She coordinates and provides training to prison staff and inmate participants to transcribe Braille in conjunction with the Library of Congress and National Federation for the Blind Braille Transcription Certification Course. Fourteen women are currently participating in the class, which began on February 27, 2017. The goal is to complete the training to coincide with the completion of the new women's prison in Concord. Once the new facility is open, the women will move from learning Braille to the actual transcription of textbooks as a paid prison industries job, which upon release offers a good-paying job opportunity. Corrections Commissioner William L. Wrenn said, "This is an exciting new opportunity for the women as well as Correctional Industries. It fills an educational void for students who are blind or vision impaired and helps the women in the program to develop potentially marketable skills and abilities." "The program will provide a dedicated source for the transcription of textbooks and related educational materials in Unified English Braille to agencies and school districts not only in New Hampshire but across the country to meet the need for accessible textbooks for students in grades K-12," said Education Commissioner Frank Edelblut.

Civics 101—Understanding Government

A National Public Radio podcast series explains how government works, such as the oft-used but not always understood terms such as filibuster, gerrymander, veto power, and the duties of the various government offices. Each podcast can be viewed at your own schedule, lasts about 15 minutes, and is presented clearly and simply. Give it a try and we're sure you'll learn something new, as we have. <http://nhpr.org/topic/civics-101-podcast#stream/0>

League board members have also been conducting NH-specific programs in how government works and how bills become law with public input. We have done presentations in Peterborough, Concord, Kearsarge area and Hancock to people hungry to learn how they can make their voices heard.

Making its way through the legislature right now is SB45, which would require a half-credit course in civics for high school graduation. Some high schools already include civics, but for those that don't this would require an addition to the curriculum. League hopes that school districts in setting their own curriculum for the course will consider more than memorization of facts and take a project-based approach that will encourage civic engagement. All well and good to know about checks and balances among three branches of government; more important to learn first-hand how individuals can have an impact on legislation.

Conference Report

The 11th Annual New England League Leadership Development Conference (formerly called Quad States) was held in Wells ME, April 7-9. Thirteen LWVNH members joined attendees from ME, VT, MA and RI. The theme this year mirrored the national League theme: Making Democracy Work. Our keynote speaker was Toni Zimmer, Secretary of LWVUS board and State Liaison to our New England Region. She described the new National Board's goal to make LWV the go-to organization on political issues. They will use Podcasts, YouTube, Facebook and Facebook Live to focus on us and our positions. A new website will improve sharing information and finances between local, state and nationally recruited members.

Integrity of Journalism. John Christie and Naomi Schalit, founders of the Maine Center for Public Interest Reporting, addressed the changing face of news. Journalistic fact-based values are being replaced by 24/7 Breaking News reports filled with reporter opinion and anonymous sources. 99% of anonymous sources advance their own purposes. Sadly, Opinions outsell Facts.

Civic Education. Tom Kerr-Vanderslice, RI Executive Director for Generation Citizen, laid out the need for teaching civic knowledge and civic skills across all grade levels. Civic projects can teach how to look at local and far-reaching effects, how to compromise and how to win gracefully, how to take action and then reflect. He encouraged us to ask local schools if and how they teach civics and to reward those teaching participation, not merely citizen tests.

Distrust of American Institutions. Dan Shea, Professor of Government at Colby College and Director of the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, says confidence in Congress and trust in media are dropping. Americans feel government is not run for the benefit of all and politicians do not care. He attributes this, at least in part, to a decline in associational life – when we come together we feel better – but now we see declines in church attendance and union membership, increased polarization and narrowing of perspectives. Majorities dislike other parties, no longer disagree respectfully and do not compromise, increasing inequality.

Hillbilly Elegy, by J.D.Vance, was the subject of Sunday morning's book discussion led by Barbara McDade, past president LWVME, and director Bangor Public Library. Vance describes the struggles of a large segment of poor white working class young men. Several conference members described these same struggles in their families.

Wrap-up – State League activities and priorities were summarized:

NH – Election Law bills >40, providing other groups with Activist Training, Fake News Panels

VT – Civic Engagement Luncheon, two new members at large groups, candidates forums, new citizen registration

RI – Online voter registration, early voting, abortion legislation, Good Citizen and Merit Awards, civic awards

ME - 4 active Leagues, strategic planning, Making Democracy Work, rank choice voting (passed, but facing a court challenge)

MA – Election reform, League in larger urban governments, civics contest for HS students.

**The League thanks the LWVNH Education Fund for their generosity in helping with expenses.
Mary Perry for LWVNH**

LWVNH Social Media Beacon

Compared to other states, the League in NH is a little behind in establishing a social media presence. Focus has been on our website, which is chock-full of information but not as immediate as Facebook or Twitter. We currently do have active public Facebook pages for the Greater Capital Area, Nashua and Seacoast league units, and would like for all LWVNH members with Facebook accounts to “like” and follow our public presence.

Additionally, we have a Facebook group for NH League members only called “League of Women Voters NH Members Forum,” where all NH League members with Facebook accounts are encouraged to join and network with other League members around the state. Please visit that group and select “Request to Join.” This group is for League members only, and content and discussion are closed to the public.

If you have any questions about how to locate and navigate any of these pages, please contact Gwen Mikailov at mikailov@comcast.net, or call (603) 320-7770.

The League expresses our condolences on the passing of two NH legislators recently.

In Senate District 16: Dunbarton, Bow, Hooksett, Candia and Wards 1, 2, 12 in Manchester on March 21, Senator Scott McGilvray (D). An educator, coach, and inspiration for many young people, he served too briefly in the Senate. A special election has been announced for that Senate seat: Primary on June 6, general election July 25.

In Manchester Ward 8: on March 26, Representative Steve Vallancourt (R), who was serving his tenth term in the House where he was known for his outspoken and passionate statements. He served on the hard-working Finance committee. A special election will be announced.

Former League Members who have recently passed away

We also note with the sadness that League member Heidi Beckwith, from the Kearsarge/Sunapee Area, passed away in March. She had served on the local League board a decade ago and often wrote articles for the local papers on League events. She will be fondly remembered.

Selma Pastor of Nashua passed away in April at the age of 93. She lived in Nashua, where she had been a member of the League of Women Voters for many years. She was among the founders of the League of NH Craftsmen where she studied pottery, weaving, and enamel on copper. Selma served on the Nashua School Board from 1971 to 1977, was elected to the NH House of Representatives and served from 1978 to 1980. She was very active in Democratic politics at the local, state and national levels.

Selma was appointed a commissioner on the Nashua Housing Authority and served from 1978 to 2013. She was appointed by former Governor Jeanne Shaheen to the NH Health Services and Review committee and served from 2001 to 2004.

Moments in Women's History

As we draw closer to the 100th anniversary of the League's founding (Feb. 14, 1920), a direct outgrowth of the women's suffrage movement, your state president intends to indulge her love of women's history with occasional tidbits in this newsletter. Hope you enjoy them.

NH's State House "Grand Dame": Hilda C. F. Johnson Brungot (1886-1982)

Hilda Johnson Brungot of Berlin, NH, was called by some the "Grand Dame" of the NH House. She served in the House from 1931 to 1937 and from 1941 to 1975, retiring when she was in her late 80s. At that time she was the oldest female legislator in the United States. (A few years ago, the late Angeline Kopka of Nashua broke that record, completing her last term in the NH House when she was 98 years old.)

Brungot first explored politics when she went to the constitutional convention as a Republican delegate in 1930. She had already experienced public service by watching her father, Hans Christian Johanson, who had served in city government and then was elected in 1895 to the House. His last term was in the 1929 session. Two years later Hilda succeeded him. She was 44 and the mother of six when she was first elected. She was re-elected 18 times. Her final campaign was run from a hospital bed because of severe phlebitis in her legs. By then Berlin had become increasingly Democrat, and the long-serving Republican woman from Berlin lost.

In her long career in the House, she was respected on both sides of the aisle for voting her conscience and for being passionate about issues, often years ahead of their popularity as causes. For example, she fought for labeling of food products...in the 1940s! She was also a great talker and used the telephone as a weapon, haranguing people even if it was suppertime. Her Democrat colleagues from the Berlin area didn't want to carpool to the State House with her, knowing she would try to persuade them of her views during the entire long drive.

A 2003 letter from one of Brungot's granddaughters reports that Hilda early on "broke with the Republican party over woman's rights and the vote. She was a suffragette and chained herself to a tree on Main Street in Berlin and said she would stay chained until she got the right to vote. Grandpa came down to get the children. She chained them also."

Brungot commented on the size of the NH House: "This giant House gives better representation for all the people than any other Legislature in the nation. The special interests and selfish lobbyists cannot often fool 400, and never can buy them."

During all this political activity, Hilda not only raised her own six children, but also was a foster mother to four. Like many immigrant children of her era, she had only a grammar school education. She worked as a cook, she was a justice of the peace, and also found time to hold positions in local and state organizations including the women's auxiliaries of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Grange, the Berlin Historical Society, and her Lutheran church. When she was in her eighties she attended night school and got her high school equivalency diploma. In 1968 the NH Business and Professional Women's Clubs named her the state's "Outstanding Career Woman."

Her portrait (painted by Willey Fromm in 1978 with funds raised by fans statewide) hangs in the NH State House, one of only nine portraits of women among the 200 men honored there. She attended the unveiling in her wheelchair, surrounded by many who loved and respected her. Hilda Brungot died in May of 1982 at the age of 95.

(thanks to cowhampshireblog.com and the book More Than Petticoats by Gail Underwood Carter and www.nhsearchroots.com for much of this information)