

THE ALABAMA VOTER

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REPORT ON LWVAL COUNCIL May 15, 2010

Kathryn Byrd, LWVAL Co-President

The League of Women Voters of Alabama held its biennial council meeting in Auburn, with LWV of East Alabama President Laura Hill and her committee serving as hostesses. We had a very full agenda, and completed everything on the list. All six local leagues were represented, and the usual business of treasurer's reports and minutes were quickly dispatched. Because of the schedule requirements of one of the speakers, we did Ed Fund business first, including our proud discussion of the impressive LWVAL Voter Guide on judicial candidates posted on our website. Bob Sims from al.com indicated he had posted notice about it in his papers.

Health Care Reform

Our first speaker, Auburn Professor Dr. Rene' McEldowney, provided an excellent workshop entitled "Fact of Fiction: Key Issues in Health Care Reform," during which she described the US as the "Country of the Status Quo," leading to fear of change in the health care arena. This presentation provided important information for use in the current LWVAL study on health care reform. After providing a historical overview, she made the following points regarding the new federal health care act, cautioning that much needs to be worked out for the details:

1. Low income individuals whose annual income of 133% of the poverty level will qualify for Medicaid.
2. There are mandates for employer contributions and for individuals to have health care. The largest group that is currently uninsured is the 19-35 year old age group.
3. There will be some sort of insurance exchange for the self-employed or small businesses that will offer regulated plans to everyone without another source of coverage. For individuals, income will be considered, and there will be no lifetime maximums.
4. Children can remain on their parents' insurance policies until age 26, even if they are not in school, but premiums will surely rise.

Some changes have to be implemented six months after passage, which will be this fall. Other regulations won't

Report on LWVAL Council *Continued*

go into effect until 2014 and some changes will not be phased in until 2017.

For all plans there will be some sort of insurance rate regulation, but, again, the particulars need to be worked out. Changes to be considered include streamlined paperwork (ha!), prohibiting gender discrimination, denial on the basis of preexisting conditions, etc. Medicare, whose overhead is about 3%, was touted as the model to adopt. Currently private insurance administrative costs can be as high as 33%.

There also needs to be improved quality control. An estimated 90,000 lives are lost annually to medical error. Another needed reform is further reliance on primary care. Ours is a national of expensive specialists. The bill says more money should go to primary care. In addition, preventative measures should require no co-pay.

Another trend is evidence-based medical practices. Also, the bill addresses the “donut hole” in current plans, with a \$250 rebate this year to those who are eligible.

One down side to these changes is reduced privacy issues, especially with the way paperwork will be handled.

Finally, Dr. McEldowney noted that Alabama was the last state to adopt Medicaid. As Dr. Wayne Flynt noted, Alabama takes pride in being “poor but proud.” Currently Alabama pays \$1 and the federal contribution is \$3 but 1/3 of the general fund budget does to Medicaid. Alabama also needs to reduce the number of uninsured that remain in Alabama and lower uncompensated care for hospitals and providers.

“Coaching” Local Leagues

Our luncheon speaker was Mobile President Mary McGinnis, who chairs the new coaching program in Alabama on behalf of the LWVUS Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI). Mary and Mobile League member Deb Butler attended a two-day workshop in Charlotte, NC, learning how to increase membership numbers and effectiveness in our state. Through her PowerPoint presentation, Mary stressed that the purpose is to help increase League visibility, and, hence, attract and retain members. The goal is to increase membership at least 5%, targeting especially women who have retired or are about to retire.

Scarlett Gaddy, LWVAL Membership Chair, and Kathy Byrd also serve on the Coaching Team. Each League will be assigned one of the coaches, who will provide a workshop to help Leagues implement the program. This initiative is not one more layer of work to be imposed on already busy local leagues, but rather provides ways to streamline and become effective in what each local league is already doing. Each local league has already received a worksheet to help develop a current profile, and to help identify needs.

Charter Schools: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

Dr. Lynn Patrick from Auburn University addressed Council participants on the history of charter schools and the issues involving charter schools. Dr. Patrick has served as a charter school principal.

According to Dr. Patrick, a local school board approves a charter for a charter school for 3 years (5 years in some cases). Unlike private schools, a charter school charges no tuition, has no religious affiliated, or admission requirements. The parents apply for their child(ren) to attend, and students’ names are selected by lottery. Charter schools should to be confused with private-for-profit and private-nonprofitschools, or with magnetschools, who screen potential students on the basis of predetermined criteria. Charter schools are required to teach the state course of study, but are allowed much greater latitude in teaching methods.

In Alabama, the issue of charter schools caused very heated debate and a flurry of media ads this past year. Apparently a state’s receiving some of the federal “Race to the Top” awards from President Obama’s administration include demonstrating the use of “innovative programs” such as charter schools. In Alabama, the Alabama Education Association vehemently fought the adoption of charter schools,

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claiming, among other things, that teachers in charter schools do not receive the benefits of tenure. Other opponents argue that charter schools potentially lead to greater “white flight” from the schools, and drain badly needed money from the public schools. Also some data show that students in many charter schools have not performed well on standardized measures.

See Laura Hill’s report below for more details.

Advocacy Report

Anne Permaloff spoke on behalf of the LWVAL Advocacy Committee. She noted the impact of current economic factors (i.e., recession, upheaval in the financial and housing markets and high unemployment) have combine to “reducetherevenue stream” into the General Fund and Education Trust Fund. Revenue actions are restricted greatly by the 1901 Alabama Constitution. Therefore, most League-supported action either failed to leave committee, or else passed the House, only to be buried in the Senate. These included Rep. McLaughlin’s bill to

end PAC-to-PAC transfer and Rep. Holmes bill to grant subpoena power to the Ethics Commission.

A few League-supported bills did pass to help protect our natural resources and address causes of climate change by supporting the purchase of energy efficient products, improving fuel efficiency of large trucks, and creating a staffed Legislative Energy Policy Office. Sen. Ted Little’s bill establishes energy development grants and takes other positive steps toward an energy policy for the state.

Adoption of Emergency Charter School Study

The LWVAL board voted to recommend the adoption of an emergency study on charter schools. Although we voted at the 2009 LWVAL convention to adopt a study to see whether we should update our current education, the board realized that we are unable to weigh in on the charter school issue until we study and possibly come to consensus. The charter school study will need to be recommended again by the board for study at the 2011 convention. ♦

“CHARTER SCHOOLS – THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY”

was the title of the presentation given by Lynne Patrick, Ed.D, Instructional Leadership Program Coordinator/ Associate Professor/ Clinical Supervisor at Auburn University. Patrick’s professional experience includes serving as director of the Renaissance Advantage Charter School—an urban K-6 school in West Philadelphia.

The first charter law was passed in Minnesota in 1991. Today 40 states and the District of Columbia have implemented charter schools in some form. On average 300 to 400 new charters open each year. Nationwide, three percent of students attend a charter school. The data on these students show:

- 62% of charter students are non-white (vs. 47% in traditional public schools)
- 48% of charter students qualify for free and reduced price lunch (vs. 45% in traditional public schools)
- 56% in cities, 25% in suburbs, 6% in towns, and 14% in rural areas

Patrick also addressed some of the myths surrounding charter schools. First, charters are open to all students who want to attend; if more students enroll than there are seats available, schools must conduct lotteries to fill seats. They cannot teach religion, charge tuition, or have admission requirements. And they must meet state standards, take state tests, and participate in state accountability systems.

Researchers have looked at common practices of five highly effective charter schools. These practices included autonomy for teachers, hiring teachers from non-traditional sources, schools deciding what will be taught in the classrooms and how.

As for the ugly side of charter schools, she mentioned instances of mismanagement of funds, missed opportunities to apply for federal grants (facilities funding), and poorly managed faculty/staff resulting in not meeting goals and loss of charter.

Source: *Free to Lead: Autonomy in Highly Successful Charter Schools*. Issue Brief by Joe Ableidinger and Bryan C. Hassel of Public Interest. Published by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. www.publiccharters.org

— Laura Hill





(above) *Alabama delegation at a plenary session: Debra Butler, holding sign. Seated: L-R, Leonette Slay, Charlotte Ward, Kathy Byrd. Standing, L-R, Martha Collier, Scarlett Gaddy, Mary Lynn Bates, Paulette Fedor*



(below) *At the banquet: Kathy, Mary Lynn, Charlotte, Myra (Evans), Martha, Laura (Hill), Paulette, Mary (McGinnis), Scalett, Jeanine (Normand). Sarah McDonald also attended, but missed both pictures.*

Some good quotes from the Convention:

“Women won the vote, they weren’t ‘given’ it.” — Robert Cooney, Jr.

The League should “continue to get in trouble, continue to get in the way” [in the cause of justice]. — John Lewis

There are three classes of people, those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and the overwhelming majority who have no idea what is happening. Save a friend from the majority. Bring her to a League of Women Voters Meeting. — Ruth S. Shur

“...these women know what they are talking about.” — Former NATO General re LWV delegation to NATO

“WHEN EVERYONE’S LOST INTEREST BECAUSE IT’S NOT FUN ANYMORE, WE’RE THERE.” — FORMER LWV PRESIDENT

“State legislators voting on the 19th Amendment thought if it passed the ‘world as they knew it would end.’ Thank God it did.” — Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Sec. of Health and Human Services

“Women’s suffrage is an excellent example of how you can change the whole country without killing people.” — Robert Cooney, Jr.

A good election process is one when “no eligible voter is disenfranchised because of the process.” — Commissioner Gracia Hillman, U.S. Election Assistance Commission

“The League of Women Voters will not be a party to the hoodwinking of the American people.” — Former LWV President re Presidential Candidate Debate procedures.

“Harry, I have always counted on you to do the right thing.” — Kathleen Sebelius quoting Harry’s mother’s message just before Harry changed his position and cast the deciding vote ratifying the 19th Amendment.

CONVENTION 2010 REPORTS

Charlotte Ward, Editor/Co-president

I attended my first LWVUS convention as a new local league president in 1962, in Pittsburgh. It was wonderful! I got to participate in an unexpected way. The caucus that was urging a reluctant National Board to step up to the civil rights question needed a spokesperson with a southern accent, and I gladly provided it. The result was the adoption of our “Human Resources” study that allowed us to speak out for keeping schools open and the desegregation of public facilities, among other important things.

This National Board was also somewhat reluctant to jump into a current fight, for preserving government functions and property from privatization. The recommended item, a study of the role of the federal government in education, is important, because the National League has never had a position on education. (I got a chuckle out of this, too – as a high school senior in 1945 I once drew the topic of federal aid to education out of the hat in an extemporaneous speaking competition!) But the League has tackled two studies at once many times before. Cost was a serious consideration, but someone figured that if everyone who voted to adopt the privatization study chipped in \$30, we’d have the needed \$10,000 for the first year’s study. They had collected \$3000 by Tuesday morning. Like many others, I didn’t have my checkbook, but the check is going to be in the mail.

Resolutions are another avenue of expressing the League’s positions on issues of importance. They must, of course, be in line with League positions, but they can be used to emphasize aspects that are especially timely. See our run-down of all the resolutions adopted elsewhere in the VOTER.

National conventions require stamina. Friday’s sessions went from 1:00 to 10:00 PM (we did go out for supper). Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, caucuses, plenary sessions, networking opportunities, and workshops were scheduled from 7:30 AM to about 10:00 PM. Convention ended with Tuesday’s plenary session, 8:30 until noon, in which final budgets and board nominations are adopted. Rarely is a decision taken by a routine vote. There are pros and cons to be argued, points of order, voice, standing, and, if it’s too close to call, card votes: you turn in a green card for “yes” and a red card for “no.” These take a while to count.

Highlights of the plenary sessions and banquet were the speakers, about which more in this VOTER, and the roll call of states. Each state president has one minute to report/prag, and we heard a total of 45 minutes of remarkable achievements. Six states were not represented, mostly because of costs. Nearly every state and local league is running on a very tight budget.

I think we all came home “on a high” about possibilities – and about what we, a small state league, are already doing. I hope you will all join you conventioners in making those possibilities realities. ♦

LWVUS ADOPTS FIRST NATIONAL EDUCATION STUDY *by Charlotte Ward*

As we are very aware in Alabama, education has, throughout this nation’s history, been considered a state concern, if it was the concern of government at all. We may need to be reminded that the idea of free public education for all is not all that old. In our region, in particular, public education arrived in many communities only late in the nineteenth century. A look at the LWVAL education positions will show that in 1960 we were still working to get the state to provide textbooks beyond sixth grade and to add kindergartens to the public schools.

Anyone who has lived more than one state is aware that standards and curriculum vary widely from state to state. National programs such as “No Child Left Behind” have tried to bring some uniformity in basic standards. A few non-governmental groups, some with public funding, have attempted to suggest curriculum standards (a list of topics that should be included at various grade levels in science, for example; I have served as a reviewer for some of these) but efforts to create a national curriculum have been mightily resisted by many states. The results of state control over curriculum can sometimes be bizarre, as recent events in Texas demonstrate.

With current federal efforts such as “Race to the Top” as well as NCLB, it is time for the League as a national organization dedicated to encouraging informed voting, to look at education as a national issue. We may decide the current state-centered system is best, or we may decide to support radical changes, but at present we have no voice at all, because we haven’t studied the topic. I hope we are all looking forward to getting – or perhaps influencing - the National Board’s guidelines, so that we can work toward correcting this void in the League’s ability to act. ♦

MARY LYNN BATES REPORTS FROM ATLANTA

Some things that surprised me at the 2010 LWV Convention:

Bylaws changes: Discussion on the proposal to adopt a two year budget to be approved at Convention dominated an information meeting because one League had strong concerns about a change to which the Bylaws Committee did not anticipate any opposition. In the formal debate on the bylaws, the major discussion was whether Leagues should be able to contact their Congressional delegation on national issues without LWV approval. Many delegates had concerns about LWV's support of the new health care legislation and perceived abandonment of the single payer position but the majority recognized that League must speak with one voice on national issues to avoid confusion and be effective.

Immigration caucus: The degree to which Leagues can make a difference by educating their communities to combat misunderstanding about immigration issues, prejudice, discrimination and an increasing problem with law enforcement. Immigrant communities are afraid to report crimes for fear of overzealous law enforcement and immigration enforcement. Practical advice about how Leagues can help and a DVD that can be the basis of a League community program was available.

United Nations: LWV's retiring lead U.N. observer, Doris Schapira, has been extraordinarily influential in working for the rights of women, and particularly the girl child, in the U.N. and in facilitating the collaboration of NGOs through meetings and committees at the U.N. She also arranged for the League to be a part of global climate change discussions. In 1944, the League trained 5,000 volunteers to advocate across the country for a United Nations organization in order to insure Congressional support for the United Nations when it was established the next year. Shockingly, when the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women was established, a "woman" was defined as a female between the ages of 18 and 49....child bearing years...and League advocates have worked for years for recognition of the needs and rights of girls. Only the United States and Somalia have not ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. The effort to address the needs of older women is a major focus of the League's other full time observer who co-chairs a subcommittee on the subject. Our "observers" at the U.N. do much more than observe.

Advocacy workshop: The League's efforts to pass health care reform included running targeted television advertising in the district of a key swing vote congressman at a critical time and using its Washington Lobby Corps of 19 trained League volunteers to make frequent visits to Congressional offices. Being a Lobby Corps member is physically as well as intellectually demanding with members spending whole days walking long halls, going from five minute appointment to five minute appointment and listening and memorizing to report back what they learn. We also heard our chief lobbyist's analysis of the Disclose Bill and the problem presented by the NRA's opposition. He got a message about the proposed compromise to handle that issue while talking with us.

International Election Observers: The international election observers discussed were not observers of elections in third world countries and emerging democracies but observers from international organizations wanting to observe the conduct of elections in the U.S. Such observation has been strongly resisted by U.S. state and local election officials, many of whom have a great deal of autonomy under state law in running elections. Leagues have been successful in improving local election procedures and practices by auditing the process before, during and after election day and reporting problems and suggesting solutions to local election officials.

Gulf Oil Catastrophe Resolution: It was Wisconsin, rather than any Gulf state, that offered a resolution on the Gulf Oil disaster but it focused on the question of who would pay for the damage, not on committing government resources to limit and mitigate the immediate damage to the environment and economy. While our amendment calling on the Federal government to respond quickly and vigorously to the current emergency easily passed, there was more interest in a resolution calling for broad changes in the regulation of mining and drilling. Generally I believe that it is better not to adopt resolutions at Convention calling for action that has not been through the study and consensus process, but I offered an amendment to the pending "BP" resolution because it was evident that it would pass and I did not think the League should go on record on the issue focused solely on who will pay for the damage when the more critical immediate issue is getting the resources and authority to try to stop the damage that once it happens may not be reversible no matter how much money BP spends. ♦



Former League Presidents Participate in Panel Discussion

Sunday afternoon's panel discussion was wonderful! The eight past LWVUS Presidents since 1964 (**Lucy Benson, Ruth Hinerfeld, Dorothy Rydings, Nancy Newman, Susan Lederman, Becky Cain, Carolyn Jenkins, and Kay Maxwell**) shared an overview of their experiences as President and answered questions. Each former President shared personal stories from her tenure as President and then answered questions about League.

What have been the LWV's most significant accomplishments/strengths? (Identified by Past Presidents)

- The passage of the Motor Voter Bill
- Trade Legislation gained through advocacy
- Maintaining our reputation and integrity while fighting "city hall". The League was chosen by advocacy partners to spearhead the fight for campaign finance reform and health care because the public trusts the LWV.
- The League has maintained continuity of staff over the years.
- The League's willingness to adapt to technological changes of the 21st century

How do we continue to preserve the League's reputation?

- Stick to the facts - conduct the study carefully and stick to the position
- Continue to do what we do best - brand the issues and keep them, choose the program carefully because it helps create the perception about your League
- Be persistent - the League persists when others tire of the fight and move on
- Presidents have to DELEGATE and not try to do it all.
- Figure out what your League does best and stick to it.
- Maintain the membership - continue the training, culture, and methodology
- Nurture the grassroots of the organization because without them, the organization is not effective.

What is the one piece of advice you would like to share with new Local League Presidents?

- Delegate and have some fun
- Have the courage to walk into a room and strike a conversation with others you don't know - introduce yourself
- DELEGATE!
- Keep your cool and exercise common sense in difficult situations. Think carefully before reacting.
- ASK people to join the League!
- The President cannot do it all - others have to share the mantle of responsibility, you have to prioritize your League interests and involvement
- Aid in the transition of Leadership. Transition is not moving a box of "stuff" from one place to another. Develop the leadership potential of your Local League's membership.

What can the League of Women Voters do to bring back civility in public discourse?

- Set an example for others to follow.
- Sticking to our process of discussion will aid you in keeping discussion civil.
- Choose your media representatives carefully.
- Remember when we have studied an issue and formulated a position, we don't have an exclusive on the "truth". The most effective testimony is to suggest League has studied an issue, has decided what is best, but identify what others believe as well.
- Don't spend your time with media "celebrities" who make their living exaggerating the differences in political opinion.

S. B. Gaddy (6/13/10)

First Southeastern Regional Environmental Causus HELD AT ATLANTA LWVUS CONVENTION

After helping plan the initial meeting of Leaguers from the southeastern states to discuss our common environmental issues, Joyce Lanning was unable to attend. Most of the Alabama delegates did attend the caucus on Sunday, June 13. Here is Martha Collier's report on the session.

Delegates from fourteen southeastern states caucused early on a Sunday morning to determine common issues such as water quality and quantity, climate change, coal (mining and burning), mountaintop removal, nuclear waste, off-shore drilling, incinerators, landfills, and other problems stemming from waste shipped in from beyond the region. Related issues such as pockets of poverty, air quality, were mentioned. Energy production was cited as the common factor in nearly all the issues mentioned.

Debra Butler of the Mobile LWV concisely summarized the issue by pointing out that we tend to focus on the end product, the life style we want to maintain, instead of the more important matter of the life we live day by day. Her remarks were followed by a round of applause from the assembly. Debra was then asked by the chair to spearhead the writing of a letter stating the League's environmental positions by the end of August. This letter would be sent to legislators, EPA officials, and other pertinent people and agencies.

The League has a long-standing Natural Resources position promoting an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest, including air and water quality. LWVUS positions also support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize conservation, and encourage the use of renewable resources. These positions offer a strong basis for both national and state action on environmental issues. ♦



LWVUS CONVENTION 2010: WORKSHOPS

Reported by Kathy Byrd

FEDERAL ROLE IN EDUCATION

There were several caucuses related to promoting the adoption of the LWVUS study of the federal role in education; I attended three. The key issues were discussed, distilled, refined, and both Scarlett and I spoke on the floor in support of the adoption of this study. It passed overwhelmingly

The key points of the discussions can be distilled to a few key ideas:

- What is and what should be the federal role in education? Originally education was a state and local responsibility? But now, with federal programs have emerged and taken on an increasing presence across the land. Examples are those addressed in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was passed in 1965 (and is now called “No Child Left Behind”), and what is now called the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, which was passed in 1975. More and more federal money comes to the states—with strings attached. Each state has a different system of taxation and funding education, as mandated by the individual state constitutions, as well as different ways of handing out federal money, within certain constraints.
- What positions should the League take with regard to reauthorization of “No Child Left Behind,” which may have been well intentioned, but which has been problematic in so many ways. We need to study the issues and come to consensus on at least some of these issues in the next two years.
- Another key issue involves nationwide standards for students. Standards have recently been released for reading and math, and a draft is being circulated for social studies.
- The problem of failing schools

The LWVUS board has appointed Peggy Hill to head the LWVUS study committee. Both Scarlett Gaddy and I have expressed interest in participating in this study. It is also an excellent companion to the LWVAL study on charter schools, recently adopted at our LWVAL council as an emergency study, and in our larger education study that will eventually update our state position in education. Laura Hill is the LWVAL Education Chair.

REDISTRICTING

A workshop on redistricting was held on Monday, with two attorneys from the Brennan Center for Justice presenting. According to plan, the Census is mandated to deliver population counts to President Obama on December 31, 2010, and President Obama will present the apportionment count to the U.S. Congress on January 10, 2011. Alabama (and the other states) must receive their last data by April 1 according to PL 94-171. Then the real fun begins: states conduct redistricting, with the deadline for most states at the end of the 2012 legislative session. Redistricting must be completed before the filing deadlines for the 2012 state primary elections.

Obviously district lines are drawn to put voters in groups. The dicey part is deciding the factors which will determine which voters should be placed in which districts. For example, is the goal to include, exclude, or limit a certain economic or racial/ethnic group or political party? (Different people in power have different motives...) In Alabama,

the legislature draws the lines for both state legislative districts and congressional districts, with the governor being given the power of a veto. If the districts are not drawn by the deadline, then the courts intervene.

Mary G. Wilson, outgoing LWVUS President, will chair the LWVUS Task Force on Redistricting. Alabama Leaguers will be able to have input based on our national position for this very important process.

ELECTION INTEGRITY: SEEKING TRANSPARENCY

On Sunday evening, a panel developed by the LWVUS Election Audit Task Force described the need and process for establishing transparency in elections. Transparency in this context refers to making sure our vote is secure, accurate, recountable, and accessible. (The recount of votes for Robert Bentley and Tim James was going on when this workshop was presented—how timely!) In Alabama, we use the Opti-Scan, and there is a paper trail (which isn't entirely fraud-free), but in some states there is no paper trail—only computer print out.

Accessibility remains a problem in Alabama, though. League member and Senior Advocate of the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP), Brenda McComb, noted accessibility problems in a number of sites during the recent primary, including the voting place she and I use! The LWVUS Election Audit Task Force demonstrated the need for systematic audits at the various levels of the election process. Clearly the LWVAL and our local leagues need to be vigilant in this important arena. ♦

PETTICOATS AND POLITICS

On Saturday evening the Atlanta/Fulton County LWV held a dessert bar fundraiser featuring a one woman show by Kate Campbell Stevenson that recounted the history of the woman suffrage movement. Actor/singer Stevenson portrayed women from Abigail Adams through Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Eleanor Roosevelt (among others) who were important in women's struggle to get the vote and use it. Changing costume, make-up, and props in mid-performance required remarkable “sleight-of-hand” as she told the story of the historical women with “can-do” attitudes that inspire us all.

Martha Collier attended the event and was enchanted by it. To find out how to schedule Ms. Stevenson for a performance in your community, contact the Atlanta/Fulton County League.

From Martha Collier's notes



CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS MAKE FORCEFUL STATEMENTS OF LWV CONCERNS.

One way of calling attention to concerns of immediate significance is for the Delegates assembled in national convention to adopt resolutions. One of special interest to the Alabama delegation related to the Gulf oil gusher. It was introduced by the Dane County, WI, League. Mary Lynn Bates added a strong amendment, and the amended resolution passed unanimously. It will be the basis of a public statement by the LWVUS, which may have appeared by the time this VOTER reaches you. Its content in full is as follows:

Motion to move the Emergency Resolution of Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill: Therefore, we request that the LWVUS highlight the need for those responsible for the oil spill to be held accountable. Further, the LWVUS demands that our government hold those responsible for the environmental disaster accountable for the clean-up. The LWVUS further urges the legislative and executive branches of the federal

government to immediately take all necessary steps to maximize to the extent practicable the ability and efforts of all relevant federal agencies and departments to take action, and to work with the U.S. coastal states and communities most directly and immediately affected, to respond creatively, efficiently and effectively to the environmental, health and economic crisis created by the oil flowing from the out of control BP oil well in the Gulf of Mexico and by the efforts to contain and disperse it.

The other resolutions adopted, their source and disposition, are these:

Resolved that the LWVUS support lifting the travel restrictions for Americans going to Cuba. (This motion, from a Florida League, was ruled out of order, that ruling overruled on a card vote, and then adopted by the convention.)

Resolved that we, representatives at the 2010 National Convention of the League of Women Voters, call upon the Board to use the resources of the League to support and lobby for

significant strengthening of appropriate regulation, oversight, inspection, and penalties associated with the development of fossil fuel resources. This strengthening should include elimination from national legislation of the exemptions for drilling and mining, as well as additional legislation requiring the federal agencies to regulate drilling and mining in a manner consistent with the preservation of a healthy environment. We also call on the Board to communicate with the President and the Congress putting them on notice that Leagues across the country are deeply concerned about this issue.

LWV of Tompkins County, NY.

Resolved that the League of Women Voters call upon the Senate to change its rules to limit the use of the filibuster.

LWV of Kalamazoo Area, MI.

Addition of the principle of TRANSPARENCY to the SARA Resolution, as adopted by the LWV Biennial Convention on May 17, 2009. Revised to include the following Principles: Security; Accuracy; Recountability; Accessibility; and Transparency.

LWV of Monterey Peninsula, CA.

Resolved that we, the representatives of local and state Leagues assembled at the 2010 LWVUS Convention, call upon the LWVUS Board to advocate strongly for bills that legislate for improved Medicare for all.

LWV of Bloomington-Monroe, IN.

The resolution process was also used to adopt several concurrences, as follows:

Concurrence with the LWVMD & LWVME position on Marriage Equality to be added to the Equality of Opportunity position: The League of Women Voters of the United States supports equal rights for all under state and federal law. LWVUS supports legislation to equalize the legal rights, obligations, and benefits available to same-gender couples with those available to heterosexual couples. LWVUS supports legislation to permit

same-gender couples to marry under civil law. The League believes that the civil status of marriage is already clearly distinguished from the religious institution of marriage and that religious rights will be preserved.

LWV of Saratoga County, NY.

Concurrence, that the following words be added as the third sentence to the LWVUS position on selection of the president: "We support the use of the National Popular Vote Compact as one acceptable way to achieve the goal of the direct popular vote for election of the president until the abolition of the Electoral College is accomplished"

LWV of Arizona.

Both concurrences sparked considerable debate. One concern about the equality of marriage statement was the last sentence, but the accepted explanation was that the LWV supports civil unions and believes the right of any religious group to refuse to perform ceremonies in violation of its beliefs must be preserved. There was some question as to whether the National Popular Vote movement was an attempt to sidestep the Constitution or to weaken the League's long-time effort to abolish the Electoral College. It was finally agreed that the NPV plan, which is to give all electoral votes of the states in the NPV Compact to the winner of the national popular vote, would be an interim measure in force until the Electoral College is abolished, and that the Constitution only establishes the Electoral College, leaving to the states to determine how their electoral votes are to be counted.

A concurrence recommended by the National Board and adopted without opposition involved minor amendments to our arms control position, mainly by adding stronger statements about control of materials, proliferation, and monitoring and environmental concerns. The entire lengthy statement may be found on the LWVUS website. ♦



Impressions of a First Time Conventioneer

by Myra Evans

Ding! The door opens. Ding! Another round of voting. Ding! The door opens. Ding! Yet another caucus/workshop or gathering. Exhausted yet? I was. This is the reflection of my time at the 45th National League of Women Voters Convention. As we celebrated the 90 years that had passed, and looked forward to see where we were going (with lots of parallel roads), I made some new friendships, renewed others, and strengthened yet others. The elevators in the hotel were sort of symbolic of the way I experienced the time there. It seemed that each encounter was seemingly as random, and yet controlled as elevator doors opening and shutting, only to open again, with a new vista.

As I reflect on all that I encountered, it is almost overwhelming. Over 800 people gathered to ensure democracy works at all levels, locally (like here in Mobile), at the state level (like Alabama) and at the national level with all of the pomp and circumstance, complete with pro and con microphones, time keepers, numbered red no cards and matching green yes cards, and minutes from previous sessions to be read. Some of the voice votes were so close ballots were called for. This was the role of the cards: you were to hand in the green if you agreed/supported or the red if you were opposed/against the motion on the floor. While this happened, the doors to the hall were locked! No one in or out until the ballots were collected. They were opened while the ballots were counted and reported. The motions were projected onto large screens at the front of the room, read carefully and discussed in great detail. This of course happened after extensive caucus meetings and materials posted on the website. Very complicated at first glance. The roll call of states was also intriguing. Each state present was asked to share about a minute with the assembly. Some ran through their place in the history of suffrage or milestones, others told what they had been up to.

Interspersed with all of this formality, there were workshops where folks shared either best practices (like the workshop I attended, in my role as Nominating Chair in Mobile, on how to grow leadership) or resources such as the Treasury for Treasurers. LWVUS staff and Board members were either in attendance or leading these sessions. Some of the caucus meetings I attended included an impromptu one hosted by the state of Florida on lifting the travel embargo to Cuba (subsequently allowed on the floor and favorably voted on as an item for LWVUS to work on) to an overview by the Climate Change Task Force of their new toolkit (on the LWVUS website – see link – great stuff!). Some of the ideas I heard about included a poll worker outreach effort (in Iowa) where they reached out to 18-25 year olds, recruiting them to work the polls, and participating in the education of the workers, helping to further broaden the area knowledge of democracy. Another was a program *Ready to Run* and *Running to Win*. Both focus on helping people, particularly women, have information to prepare them to consider submitting their name as a candidate for office, or at least for a position on a Board or Commission. Tucson, AZ, shared a lot of this information.

Ding! The door opens again – this time for us to pack up and go home for another 2 years, until Ding! The door opens in Washington DC in 2012 – make your plans now, rest up, get your pencils sharpened and your wits sharper! It will be a wild ride! ♦

MEMORABLE MOMENTS WITH MEMORABLE PEOPLE

In addition to the eight past presidents, four other speakers entranced the convention attendees. First was representative John Lewis, civil rights hero and long-time Congressman from Atlanta. This last survivor of the leaders of the march on Washington that culminated in MLK's famous speech told of growing up in rural Alabama, and of the importance of "getting in the way" when things are going the wrong way. He commended the LWV for a tradition of doing just that.

Columnist and former Bush advisor Leslie Sanchez, referring to her new book, *You've Come a Long Way, Maybe*, reminded us that the work begun by our suffragist forebears is not yet done.

Banquet speaker Robert Cooney, Jr., reminded us of our history on the 90th anniversary of the 19th Amendment with fascinating pictures and stories from his book, *Winning the Vote; the Triumph of the Woman Suffrage Movement*.

At the last plenary session, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius thanked the League for our efforts on behalf of health care, and reminded us that there is still much to be done. Her speech in full can be read on the LWVUS website. ♦

More Convention Impressions

by Leonette Slay

After 34 years as a League member, I attended my first national convention this month in Atlanta, and it met all of my expectations. We were offered interesting, timely caucuses beginning at 7:30 up until a general session or organized LWVUS workshop at 9:00, then offered more state or local caucus meetings from 8-10 p.m. at the conclusion of other LWVUS sessions. The convention was full of enthusiastic, well-informed, and engaged League members who were eager to share their research and experiences in caucuses and workshops. Not surprisingly, League delegates also were happy to share plenty of strong opinions at "pro" and "con" microphones on the convention floor. We also had the opportunity to browse through exhibits and wares markets and get some great LWV-themed buttons, posters, and note cards to support other Leagues' fundraising efforts. I think my favorite part of the convention, however, was the panel discussion of former LWVUS national presidents going back to the 1960s. They each provided a summary of the highlights of their tenure and we were reminded how much the LWV has been a part of key national and international policy development and legislation during the past five decades. ♦

NATIONAL TOWN MEETING ON THE U.S. BUDGET

Leonette Slay and Mary lynn Bates participated in this webinar. Here is Leonette's report.

On Saturday, 26 June, I participated in a six hour discussion on our national budget with more than 3500 people linked in 19 cities, 40 community conversations, and countless more citizens on line (including Mary Lynn Bates). The town hall I attended, in Columbia, SC, included 700 other interested Columbia-area citizens and was opened by SEN Lindsey Graham (R, SC).

This remarkable national town meeting was orchestrated by AmericaSpeaks, a nonprofit and nonpartisan group that has been set up to gather American views on political issues. This group has previously organized town halls on social security reform and recovery of New Orleans. AmericaSpeaks will forward the results to the ranking majority and minority members of the Senate and House budget committees as well as President Obama's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

Why the focus on the national budget? Once our economy recovers and the annual budget deficit falls below its current level, the deficit will begin to rise again and reach unsustainable levels, driven primarily by health care costs and an aging population. If we continue with current policies, the annual deficit will total 7% of our economy in 2020 (as measured by GDP), 9% in 2025, and 22% in 2050.

How did the town hall work? Participants in 19 cities signed up online or registered on site. We were divided into 8-10 person tables that were demographically and politically diverse, based on profiles provided upon sign up, with a trained facilitator at each table. We got a couple of short video primers on the budget, a workbook of possible options, and a mission: take the research materials, discuss with our table mates, and balance the federal budget in 2025 by eliminating \$1.2 trillion or raising revenues, or a combination of both. The hard choices made at each table were entered into a computer at that table and the results were immediately reviewed by data analysts. We also had keypads in which we could vote on a number of issues, including what our core values were and what key messages should be relayed to our national elected leaders. We saw the consolidated results just seconds later, displayed on screens in each participating city.

Caucus on sustainable water and food supplies LWV Glenview, IL

League members from Glenview organized this caucus so that various Leagues could share what was being done in their communities/states and provide resources that others could draw on to improve or start a local initiative or build a partnership with other organizations. I learned a lot listening to this discussion, such as Illinois imports 85% of its food. We agreed that food is a topic that will tend to draw people who do not want to get involved in related issues like climate change. It is also a subject that can bring organizations together that may not traditionally see themselves as partners. Here are examples of solid work that has already been done by other Leagues: the Nashville LWV conducted a study on food deserts; Bowling Green, OH LWV conducted a study on concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO) and now have developed a position; LWVMN has done a study on pesticides and CAFOs; LWVWA worked for legislation to get local food into local schools ("healthy food, healthy kids"). The Memphis/Shelby County LWV has an ongoing Project Green Fork; and Concord/Carlisle, MA LWV conducted a series of talks on sustainable food. The LWVNY is partnering with land grant universities and extension services to explore this area and has succeeded in getting media attention because of the overall coalition. One of the caucus participants was a retired scientist from the FDA. She reminded us that 80% of our food is regulated by the FDA (all except meat and poultry) and she urged us to express our concerns and suggestions to the director of the FDA. ♦

Here's just a sampling of what a majority across the country elected to do to balance our national budget by 2025. As you can see, citizens were willing to make a number of difficult choices:

- Raise the retirement age to 69
- Raise the limit on income that could be taxed for social security
- Reduce defense spending by 15% (and many wanted to go beyond 15% but that was the highest choice available on the options sheet)
- Create an extra 5% tax for people earning more than \$1 million per year
- Create taxes for carbon and securities transactions

We used savings estimates generated by the Congressional Budget Office to determine what combination of cuts and increased revenues would get our national budget into balance.

Here are other options that participants wanted on the table that were not part of our written options sheet:

- Remove the limit on earnings subject to social security payroll tax
- Reform the tax code by moving to a flat tax
- Adopt a single-payer system for health care

As one participant at a nearby table remarked, "If we had House and Senate members half as reasonable as the people around this table, we'd be a lot better off."

For complete results from the town hall, to include messages to elected leaders, go to www.usabudgetdiscussion.org. ♦



Updated LWVUS position on arms control

The LWVUS policy on arms control was developed and adopted in 1983, before the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the rise of organizations not aligned with a nation state. An effort to update our position was made at the 2008 convention but did not pass. A League task force spent two years conducting research and posting results of their research on the national web site. The task force held a caucus Saturday night to explain their methodology and seek support when the resolution came to the floor on Monday. The TF, which included our longtime LWV observer at the UN, had a sense of urgency because of the expiration of nonproliferation treaties and the existence of more nuclear-capable states than in 1983. The TF did a thoughtful job of adding key words that updated our position without having to completely overhaul the position. Two examples of language that gives us a much more current position: the TF recommended adding language to “oppose the proliferation of weapons, nuclear technology and fissile materials to non-state actors”; in another section, the TF included language which would impose limitations on the transfer or trade of all weapons. When this proposed update came before the convention, no one spoke in opposition, and it was quickly adopted.

Update on Gubernatorial Debates *Kathy Byrd*

The League of Women of Voters of Alabama is going full steam ahead with our plans for two gubernatorial debates this fall. The first will be held September 16th at the University of Alabama, and then second on October 19th at Auburn. We are cosponsoring the series with the two Student Government Associations (SGAs) at UA and Auburn, the respective local chambers of commerce, and the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP). Both forums will begin at 7:00 P.M. and last one hour. The forums will be featured in local newspapers through “al.com” plus other media, and broadcast statewide on Alabama Public Television and Alabama Public Radio.

Democratic nominee Ron Sparks has already committed, and we have been in touch with the Alabama Republican Party and the two candidates who will face each other in the July 13rd run-off, Robert Bentley and Bradley Byrne. The League is in charge of developing the questions, which will not be released in advance.

What can local leagues do?

1. First of all, contact your local media to promote the event: articles, letters to the editor, talk shows, whatever you can do.
2. Questions will be solicited from the public via the newspapers covered by al.com and other media, including APT and APR. We will start soliciting questions about 3-4 weeks before the first event, and soliciting again after the first debate. Individual League members are urged to submit questions as well. Local leagues should urge their communities to submit questions and watch the debates.

Stay tuned for future details.

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