

La Crosse Wisconsin Voter

No. 94 League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area Newsletter Nov./Dec. 2007



THE PRESIDENT'S PODIUM

Nancy Hill, President, LWV of the La Crosse Area

This fall, we have now learned a great deal about our national issue—immigration. The tremendous effort Betty Kruck, Program Chair for that aspect, put into getting the four Brown Bag lunches going was formidable and worth it. The four sessions in as many weeks is unheard of for League, but did help us comprehend the complexity of immigration. The sessions were well-attended, and the presenters were very well-informed and interesting. The immigration session at UW-L was impressive. Now we are looking forward to discussing the issues in small groups with Shirley Haas, Carla Townsend and Bev Mach, to prepare for consensus in January. People have expressed interest in the Units system League used to use, and this is our chance to discuss and learn from each other. Our lives as women have changed so League needed to modify to fit our schedules. With meetings available either at noon or in the early evening, we should reach a lot of people. Please attend.

League also has been involved with a Making Democracy Work seminar in Milwaukee, where a major focus was campaign finance reform. We will continue to follow this issue until it is resolved. I will continue to link us to discussions in the community, whether League is sponsoring or not. Our League received a nice local grant to help us attend this important event.

League is concerned about the environment and can take action. There are some local initiatives which we need to be a part of. I will try to remind you about the meetings that seem relevant to us as Leaguers. The Natural Step program has been adopted by the city and county.

We can learn from it and see how we fit with it. Also, there is a Clean Energy Coalition which is trying to impact both existing life and new building in La Crosse area, as well as helping us understand our options for energy in the present and future. Informed citizens need to be heard and to help.

We finally have a state budget and I am not sure at this writing what has happened to our coalition working on dental health for low-income children.

Ellen Rosborough will take the helm as Program Chair now, and let Betty work more with the AAUW as she is serving as president this year. Thank Betty and Ellen, for their work is invaluable to the success of League. You will read more about up-coming programs in another part of the newsletter. Ellen is Treasurer at the state level, which gives us/me more insights into how things work. Also at the State level, Jane Klekamp is on the nominating committee. I will send more about state issues to all of you soon.

We will be hosting either in the winter or early spring a group of five jurists from Kazakstan for about five days. They want to learn more about our jury system.

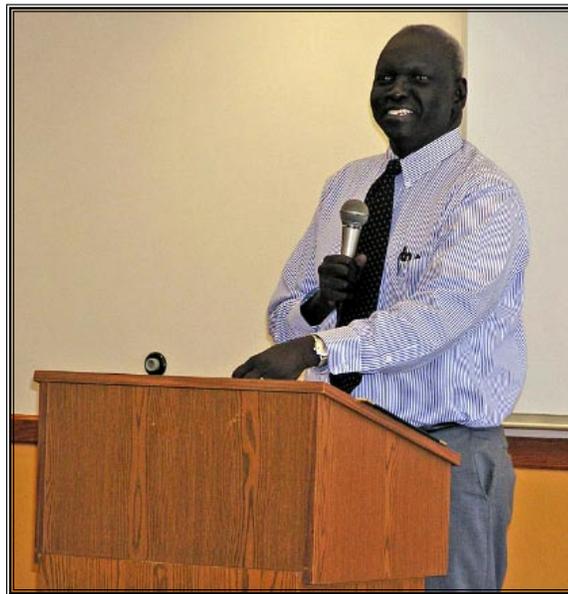
Voter Services has been quiet. I'm sure it's the lull before the storm. Please let Catherine Kolkmeier know you are willing to help.

Membership is in the capable hands of Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins. If you know someone

who should be contacted, or if you have questions, call or e-mail her. (608) 782-5727 cgjenks@earthlink.net.

If you are interested in attending the National Convention, go to the national website. It will be in Portland, Oregon in June, 2008.

Thank you all for your attending program sessions, and for helping and supporting the Board and me. I am always impressed with the amount of work each Board member does, and how it gets done without fanfare.



Dr. Jonathan Majak at LWV Immigration program on Sept. 27

Sustainability & the Eco-Municipality Movement

By Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins

If you've not yet heard of Sustainability, The Natural Step or the Eco-Municipality Movement, you soon will be hearing more in the media and from your friends. Several community organizations brought into the community a presenter, the former mayor of Ashland, Fred Schnook, to talk with the community about "Economic and Social benefits of a Sustainable Community." Fred presented at the UW-La Crosse Cleary Alumni & Friends Center on Monday, October 8, 2007.



The League of Women Voters was one of the sponsors of this event. Fred led Ashland through the sustainable process and now is a consultant for the Foth & Van Dyke firm of the Green Bay area. As the former Mayor of Ashland, Economic Developer and Public Administrator, Fred brought a unique perspective to the topic of sustainability. He had an important message for elected officials, business people, government managers, students, church members and all those who care about the future direction and prosperity of the greater La Crosse area.

In June the county and the city council approved to have La Crosse become an eco-municipality. What is an eco-municipality? The municipal government and community it serves will make a commitment to sustainable change. The goal of sustainable change is to reduce use of fossil fuels, metals and minerals, chemicals, encroachment upon nature, and to meet human and community needs fairly and efficiently. The hope is that all city/county departments and governing agencies in the area will work together to bring about change.

The Natural Step is a comprehensive, common sense, proven approach that can carry us into the new millennium. Its potential for combining economic success with social well-being and environmental responsibility is creating tremendous interest throughout the public and private sectors. The county and the city have adopted the Natural Step framework to bring about change. The Natural Step framework is a comprehensive and tested methodology for sustainable community development. Not only does it take a critical understanding of what sustainable grassroots practices are, but also it is crucial to have a robust and vital democratic process behind it. The study circles bring together people with different levels of familiarity about environmental matters—the common element is that they are all concerned about our future and want to know how they can move our communities toward practices that will allow us to meet our economic, social, and environmental needs.

Come join the brown bag "lunch bunch," for an informal discussion on Thursday, November 1 at 12:00-1:00 pm at the Southside Neighborhood Center to learn more about what is going on in your community in regard to sustainability. If you are eager to become an active participant in the study circles, sign up then to join.

The League will hold a brown bag lunch discussion about immigration issues on Thursday, November 8 at noon at the Southside Neighborhood Center at 1300 S. 6th Street. This will be a follow-up to the recent series of speakers on immigration sponsored by the League. The public is welcome to attend.

An evening discussion will be held for members who have been unable to attend the noon meetings on immigration issues. We will meet in the La Crosse Public Library's Main Branch Auditorium from 6:30 to 8 p.m. on Thursday, November 15. Although this meeting is not being publicized to the general public, feel free to bring friends who are not members. Also, please bring your own beverage since we will be meeting in the half of the auditorium which has no coffee pot.

On Thursday, December 6 there will be a brown bag lunch meeting at the Southside Neighborhood Center, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Ellen Rosborough is reviving the Lively Issues meetings of the past, without the part where all positions are reviewed (please do that on your own and bring your suggestions for changes to the meeting). What are you interested in learning more about? In taking action on (that other organizations you belong to are not already doing)? What should the State or National League be working on?

This is also a social and member recruitment activity. Bring a friend. Bring some cookies. We will have coffee. I will also bring poster pads and marking pens, so bring many ideas. Let's talk!

Making Democracy Work Summit

By Ellen Rosborough

Earlier this year the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Ed Fund, now known as the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Network, received a significant grant from the Joyce Foundation. The purpose of the 2 year grant is to leverage the knowledge of the League and its members and utilize our organizational skills to host a series of events such as the Summit in Milwaukee. The purpose of the Summit, and a series of smaller events around the state in the next two years, is to bring together the individuals and groups who are interested in election reform. The local meetings will be public forums on a specific topic, with experts and knowledgeable activists presenting their views on what is happening, and what we can do about it. An integral part of each meeting will also be the opportunity for local individuals to participate.

The specific areas of election reform that this series will focus on are: campaign finance and ethics, voting rights, media, judicial independence and redistricting. The Making Democracy Work Summit had expert speakers on all of these topics and was the kickoff event. Now the work begins!

The keynote speaker in the morning was Deborah Goldberg, from the Brennan Center for Justice, New York University. She talked about campaign reforms across the country—from Voter registration to ballot access to financing elections. She has been involved in many reform movements across the country and helped write legislation. I also attended a breakout session that she and Jay Heck of Common Cause of Wisconsin hosted. I would recommend visiting the Brennan Center website for a wealth of information.

The luncheon speaker was The Honorable Wanda Bryant, North Carolina Court of Appeals, who helped pass legislation to make all Appellate and higher court contests publicly funded in North Carolina. After this past spring's Supreme Court contest, with way too much money running the election, I think everyone in Wisconsin is ready for this—not only would individuals without political connections or personal wealth be able to compete, but there could be limits to what they spend. We need to understand this issue fully and get our legislators to act. Locally, we may want to pursue bringing this down to the County level after witnessing the Circuit Court contests of the century last spring.

If any of you attended the session last Monday with Jay Heck of Common Cause of Wisconsin, you know that we do need to get campaign finance laws improved. The League, Common Cause, Wisconsin Democracy Campaign and many others have been working on this for years. The Ellis Erpenbach Bill is in its 5th version. The Governor has promised to make this his priority issue this fall, and Jay Heck is going to hound him until he does! We can help by mentioning it to our legislators—frequently. Also, mention it to anyone you talk to. The laws have not changed since all of the legal shenanigans of several years ago. The process has not changed. The amount of money and the influence it controls has grown. The public is also very engaged and maybe we can help get everyone who is asked, “What is your number one priority” to answer “Campaign Reform.”

Several of the other topics included in the Summit are interesting for their inclusion. Why is the media included? Redistricting? These have become more important pieces of the political process and are due our attention. Of course the League has always been interested in the redistricting topic. What has become more evident is that the results of political redistricting are not healthy for our democracy—only for political parties. The role of media is complicated. With free speech issues, legislating what they do during campaigns is difficult. One area the state has taken them on is their licenses to use the public airways—and not provide the public with free air time.

The 5th topic is close to our mission as an organization. Voters Rights is what we know and what we work to protect, constantly. We understand these issues, and continue to work and lobby and educate. Next year, during the presidential primary and election cycle, registering and voting will be more important to not only the League, but to all voters. There are several bills already in the state legislature that would remove access to voting. More public knowledge and dialog is needed so that everyone understands the issues. Are all of you ready to go out and register voters? We could all be trained by early next year to do that—and not just in the City of La Crosse. By State law the new Government Accountability Board, Elections Division, will provide training for individuals and organizations to do just that. We can set up registration booths at the Mall, on campuses, at Hospitals, etc. We can help reduce the lines and congestion at the polling places.

So we are going to have an interesting 2 years, with the additional funding from the Joyce Foundation to help us.

Immigration Program Summaries

By Carla Townsend

Program one, September 3, dealt primarily with the aspects of language acquisition and attitudes of new immigrants toward learning English. Janis Hanson, TSOL Coordinator at UW-L, explained that people, who were literate in their native language, had an easier time learning English as opposed to those who did not know how to read and write in their native language. She said that children from families who read to them in the native language actually had more success in school than those who tried to use English at home. The reasons given were that the children picked up English that was incorrect or badly pronounced, which conflicted with what they were hearing in school. Jennifer Brunk, Associate Lecturer, ESL Language Institute, spoke about the myth that immigrants did not want to learn English. She addressed the issue of varying abilities of students to pick up on learning English and that it takes time to learn to speak and comprehend. She said that her students were enthusiastic about learning English and did not want to miss classes. Even in one of our awful snowstorms, they made the trip when she just assumed that they would not risk coming in such severe weather. Rob Tyvoll, coordinator of English Language learners, addressed the programs available to the students in the public schools. Some students, whose language skills were very limited, were in a self-contained classroom, but most others were integrated into the regular classes with help available from his department. A representative from Western Technical College mentioned that conversation partners were needed for Hmong adults learning English. All those who spoke mentioned that by the third generation of immigrant families, the native language has been replaced by English.

Program two, September 20, related to immigration law and the steps one has to take to get permanent residency or citizenship. Victoria Seltun, an attorney from Eau Claire, addressed the visa quota system. The annual family sponsored preferences limit is set at 226,000 per year and employment based preferences at 140,000 per year. Each category has set priorities as to the order in which the visas are granted. Visa quotas for citizens of China, India, Mexico, and Philippines are oversubscribed, and it can take some families and businesses many years to bring people in from these countries. Some have been waiting for up to 20 years for a legal visa. Immigrants are excluded from entry if they have a communicable disease or a criminal record. Green cards are not granted automatically based on marriage to a US citizen and can be lost if there is a criminal conviction. Green card hold-

ers are able to live and work in the US, and they can leave and return to the US freely. To apply for citizenship, a green card holder can apply after three years (marriage-based) or five years. Both Green cards and Naturalization require fees to be paid before an immigrant may reside in the US permanently. Naturalization gives the right to vote and hold certain federal jobs, and cannot be lost. Naturalized citizens can also be eligible for certain public benefits. Ms. Seltun also spoke of the need for immigration reform. One thing that hurts children of undocumented residents is that they cannot apply for Social Security numbers, cannot attend college and pay in-state tuition, cannot obtain a driver's license, and cannot apply for financial aid to attend college. She indicated that immigration reform needed to include a humane guest worker program, realistic quota systems, and reasonable filing fees. Ms. Seltun also mentioned the no-match letters sent to employers if an employee's name does not match the Social Security number on file. She included a hand-out on the procedure an employer should follow when a no-match letter is received. Edgar, a young man from Mexico, told of his experiences in obtaining a permanent resident card. He came to the US with his family when he was about two years old. He grew up speaking English and went through the public school system in California.

Program three, September 27, dealt primarily with the history of immigration in the United States. Dr. Jonathan Majak from UW-L addressed this topic. His opening statement dealt with one of the first tests for eligibility for citizenship. One had to be "free and white" in order to become a citizen. He also indicated that immigration problems arise when the status and security of the "older generation of immigrants" are threatened by the newcomers. There were many laws passed, which limited who could immigrate to the United States and who would be eligible for citizenship. Many of these laws were ethnic and race-based such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the quota system put limits on how many immigrants could be admitted from each country. Preferences were given to reuniting families or people with certain job skills. In 1968, discrimination based on race, sex, place of birth and residence was eliminated. Current immigration laws and feelings about immigrants still reflect those of past generations.

Program four, October 4, Terry Hicks from the AFL-CIO and John Rosenow, a dairy farmer, spoke to the issues of immigrant labor. Mr. Hicks indicated that of the 11,000,000 undocumented immigrants in the US, 7,500,000 were Hispanic. The official stand of the AFL-CIO was support for immigration reform. Under present practice, there has been abuse of undocumented workers

as a result of our global treaties, which have failed to enforce labor laws. Independent contractors have certain advantages because not all of them pay unemployment taxes. Many undocumented workers agree to work for less than the prevailing wage. Some court cases, such as Hoffman Plastic Compounds v NLRB, have contributed to the abuse of undocumented workers by ruling that they are not entitled to back pay; and then in a later case, the court ruled that a worker would be entitled to back pay at the same rate he would have earned in Mexico. Mr. Hicks also expressed the concern about implementing a guest worker program, fearing that such a program would turn permanent workers into temporary ones, creating two classes of workers possibly making it easy to play one against the other. Mr. Rosenow told his personal story about how he has come to hire immigrant workers on his dairy farm. He comes from many generations of dairy farmers in Wisconsin. After a fire that destroyed most of his farm, he had to make a decision as to whether to continue or give up the dairy business. Because of his love of farming he decided to rebuild. In 1988, when he increased the herd from 300 to 500 cows he hired an employee, someone who had great qualifications but who eventually quit because he was not able to be trained to do the job properly. Mr. Rosenow tried to attract American workers who could be trained, but was not able to keep them. He finally decided to investigate hiring a Mexican worker. The Mexican worker turned out to have a great work ethic and stayed on. As the business grew, he found that the Mexican worker was able to locate others willing to do the work on the farm. Mr. Rosenow found that the language barrier was a problem and learned Spanish in order to better communicate. Presently his operation has eleven American and eight Mexican workers. Mr. Rosenow feels that a good employer must know the needs of his workers. As part of this knowledge, he has developed a minimal standard that the workers must meet, assuring them that he will work with and train them no matter how long it takes. In other words, he recognizes individual differences and offers each worker job security free from the fear of being fired.

LEAGUE CONTACT INFORMATION

League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area:
<http://www.lwvlacrosse.org/>

La Crosse Area League Phone: 791-1191

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin:
<http://www.lwvwi.org/>

County & State

La Crosse County web site (information on Board of Supervisors and Committees):
<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/Default.htm>

State Legislative Hotline:
(800) 362-9472

Wisconsin State Legislature (including Wisconsin Blue Book): <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>

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Send correspondence regarding *La Crosse Wisconsin Voter* to the Editor, Anita Evans, at anitalarry@centurytel.net

Calendar for Nov. - Dec., 2007
League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area

Sustainability Brown Bag Lunch *Thurs., Nov. 1 from Noon - 1:00 p.m.*
Southside Neighborhood Center, 1300 S. 6th Street

Immigration Discussion (Brown Bag Lunch) *Thurs., Nov. 8 from Noon - 1:00 p.m.*
Southside Neighborhood Center, 1300 S. 6th Street

CWV Board Meeting *Wed., Nov. 14 from Noon - 1:00 p.m.*

Immigration Discussion (repeat of Nov. 8 session) *Thurs., Nov. 15 from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.*
La Crosse Public Library Auditorium

Civily Issues *Thurs., Dec. 6 from 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.*
Southside Neighborhood Center, 1300 S. 6th Street

CWV Board Meeting *Wed., Dec. 12 from Noon - 1:00 p.m.*

Note: Contact LWV Board President or refer to the agenda for Board meeting locations. Board meetings dates and time are subject to change.



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