

La Crosse Wisconsin Voter

No. 110

League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area Newsletter

December 2010/January 2011



THE PRESIDENT'S PODIUM

By Nancy Hill, President, LWV of La Crosse Area

Leaguers know that the last couple of months have been about as busy as things ought to get. I am so proud of our group. League people have worked at and attended so many venues. We *are* the grassroots - not the people who let grass grow under our feet. We get informed and we do something. We have just had an election where many policy decisions may be made under the guise of fiscal restraint. It looks like we cannot let up. There are many issues dear to League that may be at risk. One of our best ways to create the community we want, is to take a stand, get busy, have a good conversation. We have our League positions and need to act upon them.

Our newly formed **Observer Corps** is a great energizer. People who have gotten involved are reporting learning new things about their community, and making the League more relevant and visible. Writing letters and getting involved is important, too. I'm sure some observers will become even more involved as elected officials and policy makers.

Of the past year's work, I'm hearing very often about the **90th Anniversary** - "why don't we do that every year?" Wow. This is from younger people... Also, voter service and the great programs have been major conversation starters. We are visible and getting results. We have increased membership, and that is an important outcome. We need to remember to ask our friends and neighbors to join us at meetings, and join us as members. We really need to include the new members and younger people whom we meet - **mentoring** and easing them into our arcane vocabulary. And very importantly, draw in the visitors and newcomers and get them included in our

discussions and fun. Soon, they too, will be our friends and life-time Leaguers.

About the work of League: Positions we have taken drive our action. We get to those positions by having a study and working to learn all we can about it. Then we use key questions to come to consensus. This two year process will be kicked into gear again as we start studying the **TWO National studies**. Note also that we **adopted by concurrence TWO positions and several important resolutions. We will be busy.** I really want to start a list of who will help lead each study. The schedule looks demanding.

We formally adopted two studies :

- A study of the federal role in public education. The study will focus on the role of the federal government in education policymaking, with possible consideration of funding, common standards and/or governance relationships among all levels of government.
- A study on privatization: The policy agenda to transfer government functions, services, and assets to the private sector.

The convention adopted by concurrence the following positions:

- An updated arms control position.
- We added this statement to the position on the 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."
- The LWVUS supports legislation to equalize the legal rights, obligations, and benefits available to 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."

The convention also supported the following resolutions:

- To support the lifting of travel restrictions for Americans going to Cuba.
- We support lobbying for significant strengthening of appropriate regulation, oversight, inspection, and penalties associated with the development of fossil fuel resources.
- To call upon the Senate to change its rules to limit the use of the filibuster.
- To add the principle of TRANSPARENCY to the SARA Resolution of 2005. Revised, it should include the following Principles: Security, Accuracy, Recountability, Accessibility and Transparency.
- To call upon the LWVUS Board to advocate strongly for bills that legislate for improved Medicare for all.
- To call upon the LWVUS to 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.

So welcome to 2011. We will be busy... and we will make a difference. Thank you for all that you do.

Lunch and Learn



**December 14, 11:30-1:00
Radisson**

The new La Crosse County Mental Health Crisis Center has been opened for about six months. Donna Christianson, Clinical Supervisor of La Crosse County Human Services and Vicki Riley, Program Director for the CARE Center, will provide information about the new center and the continuum of services provided to meet mental health needs in the community.

Donna has worked in a variety of roles in Milwaukee, Monroe and La Crosse Counties that relate primarily to adult and children's mental health

and substance abuse. Donna has been the supervisor of the La Crosse County Crisis Program for the past 6 years.

Vicki is employed by Tellurian, UCAN, which is the contracted agency for the CARE program. She worked for 20 years as the program supervisor of the Monroe County Community Support Program, Supported Living Program, and Representative Payee Program that assisted persons with disabilities to live independently in their home communities.

Please make your reservations for the lunch by contacting Betty Kruck, krux@mwt.net or 608-689-2222, or call and leave a message at 608-782-1753 by **Thursday, December 9.**

**January Program
Democracy Feeds on News: Who Cooks Yours?**

January 11, 5:30-7:00
Southside Neighborhood Center
1300 6th Street

This special monthly program will be co-sponsored by the LWV and AAUW. The program will be at our regularly scheduled second Tuesday date, but at a different time- **5:30 P.M.**, and a different place- **Southside Neighborhood Center.**

Information and citizen participation is a key to a strong democracy. How do citizens get comprehensive, accurate news? Considering the downsizing taking place in newspapers and other media, how do newspapers, radio, and television deal with the enormous amounts of information, disinformation, partisan pressures and attacks? How does the media shape public opinion, and how does public opinion shape the media?

Dave Skoloda, former reporter, editor and newspaper owner, will moderate a panel to discuss these and other issues. Participants on the panel will include Rusty Cunningham, Publisher of the La Crosse Tribune, John Gaddo, Wisconsin Public Radio Regional Manager and Drake Hokanson, professor of media/communications at Winona State University. The program is free and open to the public. No reservations are needed.

LWV Fall Forums

By Peg Perri

The La Crosse League of Women Voters sponsored four forums this fall: Assembly Districts 94, 95 and 96, as well as the 3rd Congressional District elections.

The forums were co-sponsored by UW-La Crosse, the La Crosse Tribune and WXOW-TV.

The forums were well-attended and interesting. For me, the most outstanding memory is the involvement of so many members of League. We were extremely well-represented. The League membership certainly stepped up to help. The discussions that followed the forums were sometimes more interesting and informative than the structured question and answer format.

Thanks to all of you for helping. I will look forward to working together on the spring elections.



Observer Corps Off to Rousing Start

By Marybeth Clark

LWV's Observer Corps is off to a tremendous start thanks to the energy, enthusiasm and dedication to democracy of its 15 members who have already adopted 11 government entities to monitor.

An additional 17 individuals, some of whom are not yet LWV members, have expressed interest in becoming involved in this important project. On Tuesday, Dec. 21 from 11a.m. to noon there will be another Observer Corps Orientation meeting at the Myrick Park Eco Center. Anyone who is interested in serving is invited to attend. The next Orientation will not occur until May 2011.

If you're concerned about committing to a long-term assignment, consider job-sharing with a friend who might have similar interests. According to Observers Marilyn Hempstead and Susanne Hayes, "Observing was a valuable experience of County government in action."

Observer Corps is a non-partisan attempt to provide governmental oversight, educate our members, and alert LWV on issues that affect our studied community or state positions. A Corps member agrees to "adopt" a government committee/board and attend all meetings (usually one a month). Their role is to watch and listen, not speak, during meeting.



They then complete a one-page report on the meeting and send it to Corps coordinator. It's simple but vitally important for League and the community.

Any questions? Contact Marybeth Clark, mbc@mbclark.com or 772-285-6939.

Youth Leaders from Kyrgyzstan

By Nancy Hill

An impressive delegation of youth leaders, ages 19-26, from the Kyrgyzstan Republic was in La Crosse for a two week period late October- early November. The group was in La Crosse as part of the Community Connections Program sponsored by World Services of La Crosse, Inc in cooperation with World Learning and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The particular interest of this delegation was to observe the role of community leadership, advocacy and volunteerism in bringing about positive changes for communities. The LWV was invited to present information to the group about the role the League plays in encouraging citizen involvement in the governance process.



Nancy Hill and our visitors from Kyrgyzstan

Tara Johnson presented a very clear description of the structure of the U.S. government at the national, state and local level. Nancy Hill explained the role the league plays as a nonpartisan organization working to ensure open, fair and accountable government. The role of league in sponsoring debates, monitoring elections, education and advocacy of fair policies was discussed. The delegation was able to observe the pre-election blitz of campaign ads, a debate, and they were able to witness the election on November 2. It was a wonderful experience to meet these vibrant,

inquisitive, engaged and friendly youth leaders from Kyrgyzstan.

“Third Stage of Ownership in Our Society”-Mike McCabe

By Carolyn Mahlum-Jenkins

Wisconsin Democracy Campaign’s Mike McCabe informed the La Crosse Area League of Women Voters this last October in a presentation at the Southside Neighborhood Center. Just prior to “Election Day” Mike provides a historical perspective to the “campaign arms race” which is pricing a lot of citizens out of the political marketplace.

Bill Proxmire used to run statewide for the U.S. Senate in the 1960s and 70s and never spent more than \$300 on one of his campaigns. In 1978, total spending in the election for governor was about \$1 million. In 1986, total spending grew to \$3 million. By 1998, the total amount spent electing a governor was up to \$8 million. Then spending really exploded. Four years later in the next election for governor in 2002, total spending nearly tripled to \$23.5 million. It continued to grow, reaching \$32 million in the next election in 2006. When all the spending is finally counted up in the 2010 race for governor, the cost will likely exceed \$40 million.

What has been created is a political marketplace where participation is prohibitively expensive for all but a few. None of this is happening by accident. This is by design.

This is now the “Third Stage of Ownership in Our Society.” What did/does Mike mean?

America's **first stage** of ownership: At the dawn of our nation, slavery and disenfranchisement were the control mechanisms. Only white male property owners had access to the ballot and, consequently, any say over affairs of state.

Second stage of ownership: An end was put to slavery and women, blacks and unpropertied men won voting rights. But those who succumbed to the abolitionists and the suffragettes had no intention of surrendering control or relinquishing power. They

moved on to poll taxes, literacy tests, Jim Crow laws, and relied on Covertures and the like to achieve their objective.

Third stage of ownership: It is no coincidence that the great civil rights and women's rights breakthroughs of the 1960s and 1970s were followed in short order by the 1976 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Buckley v. Valeo* establishing that money is speech. *Buckley* marked the beginning of the third stage of ownership. Then just recently, January of 2010, the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United vs. FEC* allows corporations to spend as much as they want on elections. **Corporations are not people and money is not speech.**

There is a concerted movement to disenfranchise the individual of common means, “We The People”! But don’t despair! Here are some things that the League of Women Voters can do. Take action! Write, call, e-mail your state Representative and Senator. (For where to write or call check out the Contact Information for State Issues of the LWV NEWSLETTER.)

- ❖ Ask for full disclosure of all election spending and all of the sources of funds used to pay for that campaigning.
- ❖ Ask for is publicly financed elections. (We currently have elections paid for by less than 1% of our population, and we get elected officials who dutifully cater to that small segment of the population. We could move to a system where we all have a small financial stake in elections, and for \$3 to \$4 per taxpayer per year we could have elected officials that are financially beholden to all of us, not just the less than 1% that put them in power now.)
- ❖ Get your legislature to pass corporate accountability laws requiring corporations to inform their shareholders of their plans to spend their money on elections and get the shareholders permission to do so.
- ❖ Ask for free air time allowing candidates to use the public airwaves free of charge to communicate with voters instead of having to

raise private donations from special interest donors to pay for the air time.

- ❖ Fifth, we need to protect net neutrality so we continue to have a free and open Internet.
- ❖ Finally, we should push for a 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution clarifying that it is not a violation of free speech rights to put reasonable limits on campaign contributions and election spending.

Contact Info for State Issues

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

<http://www.lwvwi.org/>

Governor's Office <http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/>

Government Accountability Board

<http://elections.state.wi.us/>

Court System <http://www.wicourts.gov/>

Senate:

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senhome.htm>

- District 31 Senator Kathleen Vinehout, 608-266-8546 or 877-763-6636, Sen.Vinehout@wisconsin.gov
- District 32 Senator Dan Kapanke, 608-266-5490 or 800-385-3385; Sen.Kapanke@legis.wisconsin.gov

Assembly:

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/asmhome.htm>

- District 91 Rep. Chris Danou, 608-266-7015 or 888-534-0091, Rep.Danou@legis.wisconsin.gov
- District 92 Rep Mark Radcliffe, 608-266-7461 or 888-534-0092, Rep.Radcliffe@wisconsin.gov
- District 93 Rep. Jeff Smith, 608-266-0660 or 888-534-0093, Rep.Smith@wisconsin.gov
- District 94: Rep. Michael Huebsch, 608-266-0631 or 888-534-0094, Rep.Huebsch@legis.wisconsin.gov
- District 95: Rep Jennifer Shilling, 608-266-5780 or 888-534-0095, Rep.Shilling@legis.wisconsin.gov
- District 96: Rep. Lee Nerrison, 608-266-3534 or 888-534-0096, Rep.Nerrison@wisconsin.gov



Local contact information

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

La Crosse County: Staff <http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/directory.htm> County Board <http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/CoDirctry/2SupervDist.pdf>

City of La Crosse Staff <http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/index.aspx?nid=94> Council <http://www.cityoflacrosse.org/index.aspx?NID=338>

For neighboring counties, check websites [[Buffalo](#), [Crawford](#), [Eau Claire](#), [Jackson](#), [Monroe](#), [Pepin](#), [Pierce](#), [Trempeleau](#), [Vernon](#) Counties]

Note that the website addresses are linked in the electronic version of this document – available on our website.

Calendar for December 2010 – January 2011

League of Women Voters La Crosse Area

New Mental Health Crisis Center – The First Six Months
Radisson Hotel, 200 Harborview Plaza, La Crosse

December 14, 11:30am -1:00pm

Democracy Feeds on News: Who Cooks Yours?
Southside Community Center, 1300 6th Street, La Crosse

January 11, 5:30pm-7:00pm



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