



Voter

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March Calendar

March 5, 2013 – 7 pm

LWV SLP Board Meeting
 Location: Carlota Medus’ Home

March 13, 2013 – 12:30 pm

Unit 2 Meeting
 Topic: Missing & Exploited Children Paper
 Location: Parkshore Card Room

March 16, 2013 – 10 am

CMAL
 Topic: TBD
 Location: TBD

March 21, 2013 – 7 pm

Unit 3 Meeting
 Topic: Missing & Exploited Children Paper
 Location: St. Louis Park City Hall

Upcoming Events

April 2, 2013 – 7 pm

LWV SLP Board Meeting
 Location: Deb Brinkman’s Home

April 10, 2013 – 12:30 pm

Unit 2 Meeting
 Topic: TBD
 Location: Parkshore Card Room

April 20, 2013 – TBD

59th Annual Meeting
 Topic: Art In The Park
 Location: TBD

Plastic Bottle Tip: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Everyday choices about beverage bottles add up—1.5 billion beverage bottles are purchased each year in Minnesota; 15,000 will be purchased during the 5 minutes it takes to read this article.

Your small decision to use a reusable bottle filled with tap water, instead of a single-use water bottle that is tossed in the garbage, will [reduce energy consumption by 85% and greenhouse gases by 79%](#).

Help us eliminate plastic bottles from the trash. Here is how you can do it, and help others do it, too.

- Use Less – Buy 1 or 2 reusable bottles and drink tap water
- Make It Trendy – Compliment Others
- Recycle More – Recycle Every Bottle

Please join us:

***12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 13th at Parkshore or
 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 21st at the St. Louis Park City Hall when Mary Santi, a member of LWV White Bear Lake and the Missing & Sexually Exploited Children Study Committee, will lead the discussion.***

Please see page 6 for details

President's Message

Here's a brief update on some legislative activities:

1. After a short rest to recover from all the work and worry about the Voter ID bill, several ideas are being discussed to improve voting. District 46B Representative Steve Simon is chairing the House Elections Committee which is hearing bills on early voting, popular vote for the President, ranked choice voting by jurisdictions among others.
2. District 46A Representative Ryan Winkler has authored a bill limiting corporate contributions as well as changing how constitutional amendments are developed.
3. District 46 Senator Ron Latz is chairing the Senate Judiciary Committee which is hearing proposals on gun violence.

You can follow these and other issues at the legislative web site of www.leg.state.mn.us . You can also sign up for the action letter from LWVMN by emailing sknuth@lwvmn.org

LWVUS is carefully watching the Supreme Court who will rule on the constitutionality of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act which was the basis for challenges to a cut back in early voting hours in Florida and to the Texas redistricting plan. The continued relevance of the VRA in protecting the voting rights of all Americans is clear.

For these and other reasons, it's clear that access to voting and the integrity of the voting process deserves our ongoing attention and dedication to achieve our collective goal of access to voting for all those who are eligible to vote. LWV is as relevant today as it was 93 years ago when it was founded.

Thanks for your participation in this important effort.

Quick reminder that our annual meeting will be Saturday April 20 from 10 to 1. The location is being finalized so watch for more details in the April Voter and an invitation. In addition to our annual business meeting, we'll be learning about the work of the local organization "Art in the Park". I hope to see all of you at the meeting.

—Aggie Leitheiser, LWV SLP President, 952-938-6255

Highlights from the February 2013 LWV SLP Board Meeting:

- * Beth Johnson, Development Coordinator LWV Minnesota joined the board for a discussion about fundraising issues and ideas. The Board is interested in additional fundraising ideas for our scholarship fund.
- * Finalized details for February and March meetings on the Affordable Care Act and Missing and Exploited Children
- * Signed up for shifts for the Empty Bowls event on March 7th. This project benefits the STEP food shelf. Interested volunteers should contact Dorothy Karlson at 952-935-4051
- * Reviewed the slate of candidates proposed by the Nominating Committee.
- * Discussed topics and agenda topics for the LWV Minnesota Convention – May 17 to 19 at the Schwann Center in Blaine.
- * Reviewed the results from the Lively Issues program planning discussions to finalize for submission to LWV Minnesota.



Worth Noting

Important Links

<http://www.lwvmn.org/page.aspx>

League of Women Voters Minnesota

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

League of Women Voters United States

<http://www.lwvslp.org>

League of Women Voters St. Louis Park

LWV Minnesota Convention

Engaging the Voter: Past, Present & Future

Schwann Center

1700 105th Ave NE

Blaine, MN 55449



Empty Bowls March 7 St Louis Park Rec Center

Empty Bowls offers an opportunity to support STEP (St Louis Park Emergency Program). It is also a chance to hear good music and eat delicious soup and bread contributed by local businesses. Lunch is served from 11:00 to 1:30 and dinner from 4:00 - 7:00. The event is free, but contributions to STEP are welcome. LWVSLP has volunteered each year to take care of the donations table and that is once again true. Leaguers are needed during both the lunch and dinner times. Please contact Dorothy Karlson at 952-935-4051 or djkarlso@ties2.net. if you can help.

Children First Asset #6 Parent Involvement in Schooling

Did you know 32% of St. Louis Park young people report that their parents are actively involved in helping them succeed in school? As your children grow older, it may seem like they don't need your help, but they do need you to be involved! Go to school conferences. Make it a priority to attend school events. Keep track of them on a family calendar. Even if you're not a parent, share with young people how what they learn in school (math, writing, problem solving) relates to your job.

Hazards in our home

We spend nearly 90% of our time indoors. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, indoor pollutants may be two to five times higher than outdoor levels. And only a fraction of the more than 75,000 registered chemicals have gone through complete testing for human health concerns. Some of the chemicals in household products can lead to headaches, nausea, allergic reactions, and eye or respiratory irritations. Children have an increased chance of exposure to potential pollutants.

Reducing toxic chemicals in your home

Reducing toxics inside your house can be as simple as looking for a few key words on products when you buy cleaning products. The words "caution," "warning," and "danger" indicate that the product's ingredients are harmful. The U.S. EPA's Design for the Environment program can help you identify cleaning and other products that perform well, are cost-effective, and are safer for the environment. Look for products with the DfE label and protect your family's health and the planet.

Single-ingredient, common household materials such as baking soda, vinegar, or plant-based soaps and detergents can often do the job on your carpet or other surfaces. Soap and water has been shown to keep surfaces as free of bacteria as antibacterial soaps do.

Why I Joined the League of Women Voters

Barbara Aslakson

Over the years, LWV has helped me grow a lot. Being on a study committee, helping draft the results, leading discussions, serving as president, lobbying at the legislature - all of these were growth activities for me. Along the way, my passion for the environment was launched. League has helped me study this issue and act on my beliefs.

Editor's Note:

Why did you join the League? Send in a paragraph to me, deb.brinkman@gmail.com. I'll publish a story a month. It will be great information for the profile of our League members.

Public Forum Climate Change

**Public Forum
Thursday March 14, 2013**

A PUBLIC FORUM ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The League of Women Voters of Minneapolis will present a free public forum on Climate Change and its world wide impact on Thursday, March 14 at Mayflower Community Congregational UCC, 106 East Diamond Lake Road at 35W exit.

5:30 – 7pm Exhibits & Food samples from local restaurants and caterers

Exhibits include MN Environmental Partnership, U.S. Green Building Council, MN Solar Industry Assn., MN Renewable Energy Association, CenterPoint Energy, Xcel Energy, and many others.

7 – 9pm Program and Panel Discussion

Presenters include University of Minnesota climatologist Mark Seeley describing the effects of climate change on Minnesota; Science Policy Director at Fresh Energy J. Drake Hamilton explaining health effects of our changing climate, sources of carbon pollution in Minnesota, and suggested policies responding to climate change; Minneapolis City Councilperson Elizabeth Glidden showing how climate change fits into the Minneapolis sustainability project; City of Minneapolis Sustainability Coordinator Gayle Prest with data on local greenhouse gas emissions and the status of the city's Climate Action Plan; and Lilly Resident Minister at Mayflower Church Rev. Gretchen Deeg describing some of the responses of faith-based organizations and Mayflower's initiative to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Minnesota Representative Jean Wagenius and Senator John Marty will join the speakers for a panel discussion with audience participation.

Action Alert

Modernize Elections - Early Voting

Please contact your Senate and House Member Or Write a Letter to the Editor

Urge support for Early Voting, S.F. 535, H.F. 334

Action:

- Please call and/or email your state senator and state representative and urge them to support the Early Voting bill in their respective houses, Senate File 535 and House File 334. **Contact information for legislators:**
<http://www.gis.leg.mn/OpenLayers/districts/>
- Attend your legislators' town hall meetings and support early voting.
- Write a letter to the editor supporting early voting.

Messages to share with legislators on early voting:

- Minnesota should modernize its system to provide more choice and convenience to voters. Thirty-two other states now offer early voting, while Minnesota does not.
- Early voting saves money by reducing the number of absentee ballots. Processing an absentee ballot is more than twice the cost of processing a regular ballot.
- Local election officials have strongly supported early voting in testimony to the House Elections Committee and to the Senate Elections Subcommittee.

Background:

Minnesota's election system is the envy of the other 49 states, both for its accessibility and for its integrity. However, long lines and continued rejection of absentee ballots indicate that it is time to modernize this splendid system.

Early voting would make it more convenient for citizens to vote and also reduce the waiting time on Election Day. Early voting allows voters to come into a local election official's office in the days and weekends leading up to an election and actually cast a vote in person that day. There are no extra forms to complete. Voters mark their ballots and feed them into the ballot tabulating machine, just as they do at the polling place on Election Day. If a mistake has been made on the ballot, the machine will reject the ballot and the voter will get a new ballot, again as it is done on Election Day. The ballots would not be counted until Election Day, as is done with absentee ballots.

A [Star Tribune](#) article describes a hearing in the Senate Elections Committee on Feb. 20, 2013. (Senate counsel will research the constitutional question raised and report back to the committee.)

[SF 535](#) is authored by Sen. Katie Sieben (DFL-Newport), Chair of the Senate Elections Subcommittee. [HF 334](#) is authored by Rep. Connie Bernardy (DFL-Fridley) and coauthored by Rep. Steve Simon (DFL- Hopkins), Chair of the House Elections Committee. Both bills deserve support.

For further information, please see the [Capitol Letter](#).

LWV US Position: *Voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. (1982)*

LWV Minnesota Position: *Support improvements in election laws regulating election procedures, voting and school district elections*

Missing and Sexually Exploited Children Briefing Paper

In March of 2012, in just two days, all of the following stories appeared in the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

- She was 12. He was the pimp who raped her.
- Man gets 24 years for child molestation.
- Ex-city official faces 16 counts of child porn.
- Defendant pleads guilty of prostituting girl, 17.
- Coach arrested in player sex inquiry. Police found woman in car with member of basketball team.
- Man charged in sex with runaway, 14.

We hear about this kind of crime all the time. Yet the issue is clouded by secrecy and denial. It doesn't happen here. At unit meetings in March you will hear about some of the facts we do know. Who are the missing children? Who are the victims? Who are the offenders? Official statistics about the extent of missing and exploited children in Minnesota are hard to come by. We will learn what statistics do exist and how we might get better numbers. Finally, we will talk about some public policies surrounding this issue where League of Women Voters might make a difference.

Please join us at 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 13th at Parkshore or at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 21st at the St. Louis Park City Hall when Mary Santi, a member of LWV White Bear Lake and the Missing & Sexually Exploited Children Study Committee, will lead the discussion.

Missing and Exploited Children Quiz

Answer True or False

1. Most sex offenses against children are committed by strangers.
2. All child molesters are pedophiles.
3. Children who were sexually assaulted will grow up to sexually assault others.
4. Child molesters spontaneously attack when they see a vulnerable potential victim.
5. The majority of sex crimes are reported.
6. Youths do not commit sex offenses.
7. Victims always tell someone about what has happened to them.
8. You can identify sex offenders by looking at them.



Voting Rights

February 26, 2013

[Voting Rights & Elections](#)
[Restricting the Vote](#)

The right to vote is a fundamental American value that must be protected. For generations, the Voting Rights Act has been instrumental in protecting this right. On February 27, 2013, the Supreme Court will consider a key provision of this landmark civil rights law in [Shelby County v. Holder](#). This summary explains the history and importance of the Voting Rights Act for minority voters, and why the Supreme Court must uphold the law.

The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965 to ensure state and local governments don't pass laws or policies that deny American citizens the equal right to vote based on race. As the leading democracy of the world, the U.S. should work to keep voting free, fair, and accessible. That's why the Voting Rights Act is so important. It makes sure every citizen, regardless of their race, has an equal opportunity to have a say and participate in our great democracy. The Voting Rights Act is the most effective civil rights laws ever enacted, and it's something we should all be proud of.

Section 5 is the heart of the Voting Rights Act. It requires covered jurisdictions to submit any proposed changes in voting procedures to the U.S. Department of Justice or a federal district court in D.C. — before it goes into effect — to ensure it does not harm minority voters. This blocks discrimination *before* it occurs. This process is known as "preclearance." Section 5 applies to all or part of 16 states. See [here](#) for a complete list.

Section 5 is an essential and proven tool. Although progress has been made since the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965, voting discrimination still persists. Between 1982 and 2006 (when Congress overwhelmingly renewed the law), the Voting Rights Act *blocked more than 1,000 proposed discriminatory voting changes*. Without Section 5's protection, these changes would have gone into effect and harmed minority voters.

Section 5 is still needed to prevent and address real and continuing threats to Americans' right to vote. States continue to enact laws to restrict minority voting access. Section 5 is a proven remedy to protect voters. In 2012, it blocked a highly-restrictive voter ID laws in Texas and a law in Florida that eliminated early voting days, which would have made it more difficult for hundreds of thousands of minority voters to cast a ballot.

Background: Shelby County v. Holder

In 2010, Shelby County, Alabama, a largely white suburb of Birmingham, filed suit in federal court in Washington, D.C., seeking to have Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act declared unconstitutional. Shelby County claims that Congress did not have the required constitutional authority when it reauthorized Section 5 in 2006. Shelby County's challenge seeks to invalidate the law not only in Alabama, but everywhere Section 5 applies, including 9 full states, and 57 counties in 5 partially-covered states.

The Shelby County challenge claims the Voting Rights Act is unconstitutional because it hurts states' rights. But this argument was rejected by the U.S. Supreme Court shortly after the Act was originally enacted in 1965. In total, four separate U.S. Supreme Court decisions have upheld the Voting Rights Act through the decades. In 2006, Congress also voted overwhelmingly to reauthorize this essential law (98-0 in the Senate, and 390-33 in the House), recognizing that serious threats to our voting rights continue today.

Voting Rights Act, continued

Shelby County's own record of voting discrimination provides a good example for why this core protection is still necessary. In 2006, the City of Calera, which lies within Shelby County, enacted a discriminatory redistricting plan without complying with the Voting Rights Act, leading to the loss of the city's sole black councilman, Ernest Montgomery. Under Section 5, however, Calera was required to draw a nondiscriminatory redistricting plan, and to conduct another election. In this lawful election, black voters selected their candidate of choice, and Mr. Montgomery regained his seat on the city council.

The passage of the Voting Rights Act is a reflection of the promise of our Constitution that all Americans would truly have the right to vote without facing discrimination, poll taxes, and other abuses. We can't go back to those days, and the Voting Rights Act is our nation's promise that we never will.

The Voting Rights Act and Section 5 represent the values of America — freedom and equal rights under the law. If America wants to live up to this promise of equality, states shouldn't be able to ignore the Voting Rights Act and make it harder for some eligible Americans to vote.

The Continuing Need for Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act

- In 2001, the white mayor and all-white Board of Alderman for the city of Kilmichael, Mississippi attempted to cancel an election shortly after black citizens had become a majority of the registered voters. The Department of Justice denied preclearance under Section 5, finding that the cancellation was designed to worsen the voting strength of African-American voters. The town refused to reschedule the election until the Department of Justice forced it to hold one in 2003, at which time the citizens elected the town's first African-American mayor and three African-American aldermen.
- After the 2000 Census showed that Latinos had become a majority in five of eight districts, the city of Seguin, Texas proposed dismantling a Latino-majority district. The Department of Justice indicated that preclearance was unlikely, and the city withdrew its preclearance request but promptly closed the candidate filing period to prevent any Latino candidate from competing in the district. A subsequent Section 5 enforcement action blocked this discrimination.
- In 2004, an Asian American candidate ran for city council for the first time in the history of Bayou La Batre, Alabama. The white incumbent and his supporters challenged about 50 Asian-American voters at the polls during the primary elections, claiming that if they "couldn't speak good English, they possibly weren't American citizens." The Department of Justice determined these challenges were race-based. The Department of Justice prohibited the challenges in the 2004 general election because of Section 5. The Asian-American candidate won the council position in that election.
- One week before the New York City primary elections in 2001 — which had been rescheduled after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center — the Board of Elections planned to close a busy poll site in Manhattan's Chinatown without making any announcements in Chinese-language newspapers and without informing limited English proficient voters about this change. The Department of Justice informed the Board that the change could not take effect under Section 5. On primary day, hundreds of votes were cast at the original Chinatown poll site. Without Section 5, many of these voters would have lost their right to vote.
- In 2011, Texas lawmakers proposed redrawing political boundaries that would have created four new congressional districts. Despite the substantial growth in Texas's minority population in the past decade, not one of the new districts created the ability for the Latino or African-American community to elect their candidate of choice. A federal district court found that the maps were enacted to intentionally discriminate against Latino and African-American voters, and Texas's redistricting proposal was blocked under Section 5.

LWV Minnesota Capitol Letter



Educate. Advocate. Reform.™

ELECTIONS

LWVUS Position: Voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.

LWV Minnesota Position: Support improvements in election laws regulating election procedures, voting and school district elections.

Sherri Knuth, Policy and Outreach Manager

NEW Companion Bills SF 535 and HF 334 Early voting authorization. Sen. Katie Seiben (DFL-Newport) and Rep. Connie Bernardy (DFL-Fridley) (Support) These bills establish a system of early voting which would permit voters to vote within a specified time period prior to an election at their local elections office. The bill as introduced calls for a 15-day time period prior to Election Day. The voting procedure would be the same as the procedure in the polling place on Election Day.

NEW S.F. 564 Absentee Voting Modifications. Sen. Sieben (Support) This bill allows all voters to vote by absentee ballot without excuse or reason. It also amends the process for in-person absentee voting during the three days leading up to an election. During this period, an in-person absentee voter would place his or her ballot into the ballot box instead of into an absentee ballot envelope. Although not a companion to HF 193, authored by Rep. Steve Simon (DFL-Hopkins), the bill contains some of the same features. HF 193 was discussed in the Feb. 7 Capitol Letter.

The Senate Elections Subcommittee held a hearing on Feb. 20 on SF 535 and SF 564. A number of testifiers testified in favor of these bills, including Laura Wang, LWV Minnesota's Executive Director, city and county elections administrators, the AARP, an Accessibility Specialist from the Minnesota State Council on Disability, and representatives of labor unions. SF 535 and SF 564 were laid over by the Senate Elections Committee.

LWV Minnesota strongly supports passing these bills together. Early voting offers less complexity for both voters and election administrators. Voters sign the roster just as they do on Election Day and are able to cast their ballot directly into the ballot box. They know immediately whether their ballot has been accepted.

With early voting, administrators are required to complete fewer administrative steps, thus reducing their costs. Processing an absentee ballot costs at least twice what it costs to process a regular ballot. If no-excuse absentee voting is enacted, the number of absentee ballots is expected to rise in Minnesota, so it is important to enact early voting in conjunction with no-excuse absentee.

Thirty-two states now offer early voting and 27 states permit any qualified voter to vote absentee without offering a reason. Both of these methods help guarantee that all citizens who want to vote are able to do so.

NEW SF 540 and HF 591 Vacancies in Nomination for Partisan Offices. Sen. Ann Rest (DFL-New Hope) and Rep. Tim Sanders (R-Blaine) (Watch) These bills provide procedures for filling vacancies for partisan office if a candidate dies or is forced to withdraw due to catastrophic illness after close of the filing period and prior to an election. The procedures vary depending on the timing of the vacancy. If the vacancy occurs after the 79th day before the general election, the ballot is not changed and the race is not counted. Instead, the office must be filled by special election in February.

Action: Please contact your senator and your representative and urge support for early voting, SF 535 and HF 334. It is particularly important that these bills have bi-partisan support, something that Gov. Mark Dayton (DFL) has indicated he will require for all election legislation.

Capitol Letter, continued....

STATE GOVERNMENT FINANCE

LWV Minnesota Position: Support a balanced and diversified revenue system that is equitable, progressive, and reliable. Support of long-term financial management projections and a budget reserve. (1995)

LWV Minnesota Position on Government Spending: The highest priority areas for state spending are the following: (1) K-12 (regular) education; (2) Health Care: (3) Environmental protection....

Criteria for Limiting Spending... (1) State subsidies for sports teams, convention centers and similar projects should be among the first items to be curtailed....

Jeanne LeFevre, volunteer lobbyist

Although as of this writing, few of the bills necessary to implement Gov. Mark Dayton's (DFL) budget vision have been introduced, there has been no shortage of commentary (both pro and con) on his proposals. In this issue, I will focus on his proposed overhaul of the sales tax code. The Governor proposes to expand the range of goods and services that are subject to the state sales tax and reduce the sales tax rate from the current 6.875% to 5.5%.

The sales tax poses an interesting dilemma when viewed through the lens of LWV Minnesota positions. We favor "progressive" taxes, meaning that the percentage of a wealthy person's income used to pay the tax is higher than the percentage of a poor person's income. The sales tax is NOT progressive. However, we also favor "reliable" taxes, and this is where the sales tax shines. While economic upswings and downswings drag income tax revenues with them, revenues from the sales tax remain fairly constant – good news for a government that needs to fund its programs through good times and bad.

The Governor proposes to apply the sales tax for the first time to a wide range of personal services, over-the-counter drugs, clothing over \$100 per item, auto repairs, household goods repair, consumer legal and accounting services, and warehousing and storage services. Although consumers will pay taxes for the first time on previously exempt goods and services, they will also see a reduction in the rate of taxation on items currently subject to the tax. For the individual consumer, the overall result could be a net increase or decrease depending upon what they purchase. For example, if I spend most of my money on high-end clothing and beauty treatments, I lose. If I spend most of my money on jewelry and pet grooming, I win.

So far, the changes proposed on consumer goods and services have drawn less criticism than the business-to-business changes. Under the plan, businesses would, for the first time, pay sales taxes on legal services, accounting services, architectural services, computer services, management consulting services, advertising services, employment services and others. According to spreadsheets on the Minnesota Department of Revenue website, these new business-to-business taxes would account for a large majority of the revenue from the sales tax overhaul.

It is likely that final decisions about the sales tax overhaul will not be made until the February forecast is released, providing a clearer picture of how much money is needed to fill the holes in the budget.

Capitol Letter, continued

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

LWV US Position: Early intervention and prevention measures are effective in helping children reach their full potential. LWV supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well being, encourage the full development and ensure the safety of all children. These include: early childhood education.

LWV Minnesota Position: Support increased state responsibility in creating equal public educational opportunities for all Minnesota children through measures to correct racial imbalance. Support equal access to education, employment and housing.

All Minnesota children should have equal access to a good public education. State funding for education should be at a level that makes programs of comparable substance and quality available to all. A student's access to a good education should not depend on the wealth of his or her school district.

Kathie Cerra, Volunteer Lobbyist

NEW SF 481 Early Learning Scholarship program establishment; access to quality early learning and care expansion. Sen. Charles W. Wiger (DFL-Maplewood) (Support) SF 481 allots \$183 million for 2014 and 2015 for early learning scholarships, to be overseen by the Office of Early Learning. Gov. Mark Dayton (DFL) has proposed \$44 million, over two years, for such programs in his budget. SF 481 would allot over four times that amount.

The legislation is supported by MinneMinds, a recently formed statewide coalition of 40+ organizations that advocates for investment in high quality early childhood care and education. MinneMinds' policy goal is "To address Minnesota's critical care need for increased access to high quality early care and education." MinneMinds seeks a \$185.2 million investment in this biennium for quality early childhood education for low-income three- and four-year-olds. This investment in the development of young children would take the form of scholarships to be used in high-quality child care/education settings, to be selected by parents using the Parent Aware Rating System (PARS), which has been established as a pilot program. This rating system uses standardized, evidence-based measures to rate child care centers. See MinnPost, Jan. 14, 2013.

The model for SF 481 derives from research in the pilot program, mentioned above, established by the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF). See MinnPost, Jan. 25, 2013. A house version of the bill is expected to be introduced soon.

Minnesota's proposed legislation, and President Barack Obama's recent proposal for universal pre-K education for four year olds, are good news for children and parents if these efforts come to fruition.

Capitol Letter, continued....

EDUCATION

LWV US Position: League of Women Voters believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12. A quality public education is essential for a strong, viable and sustainable democratic society and is a civil right.

LWV Minnesota Position: All Minnesota children should have equal access to a good public education. State funding for education should be at a level that makes programs of comparable substance and quality available to all. A student's access to a good education should not depend on the wealth of his or her school district.

Lonni Skrentner, Volunteer Lobbyist

Most activity around education at the Capitol has been related to Gov. Mark Dayton's (DFL) budget proposals.

NEW Companion bills HF 630 and SF 453 The Governor's Education Budget Bill. Rep. Paul Marquart (DFL-Dilworth) and Sen. Charles Wiger (DFL-Maplewood) This bill increases the formula by 1%, \$52 for FY 2014. For FY 2015 it rolls in gifted and talented allotment and most of pension adjustment, leading to a figure equivalent to 2014. Much of the bill aligns with the recommendations of the Education Finance Working Group. The budget invests \$344 million new dollars in schools over the biennium, including increases in special education reimbursement. The Governor's budget bill will have its first hearing on February 19 in the House Education Finance Committee.

Of interest is the discussion to repeal the teacher licensure tests. In 2007 a group appointed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R) began to investigate the feasibility of creating a Minnesota specific test instead of continuing the use of the nationwide Praxis exams. The decision of the group, along with former Commissioner Seagren, was to hire Pearson Testing to create a Minnesota test. In testimony last week the working group's executive director was asked repeatedly to provide data that demonstrates Praxis is not working, or that shows the need for a new test. No such data seems to exist. The new Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exam (MTLE) will cost upwards of \$350 per candidate with no recommendations for remediation if a candidate fails. After a set number of retakes, one would lose their teaching license. Testimony from researchers at Augsburg College cited some evidence of racial bias in the test. At a time when Minnesota has set a goal to diversify their teaching force, this is troubling. Testimony from the Minnesota Department of Education cited other troubling issues with the new test. (See Parents United for Schools for additional information.)

NEW HF247 Establishing the "Achievement and Integration for Minnesota" program. Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul) The provisions in this bill are based on a report from a task force formed last session, to investigate better use of integration funding after the law funding these efforts was repealed by the 2011-12 legislature. According to Session Daily, HF 247 "takes the group's advice and creates a new program called Achievement and Integration for Minnesota or AIM, which would combine the goals of racial integration, increased student achievement, and educational equity. The new model resembles the state's current program in many ways, but task force members say that it would refocus uses of the money in ways that are easily tied to achievement. The new plan also makes changes intended to improve the program's oversight and more closely track its results."

Capitol Letter, continued....

Session Daily also reports that under the bill, "School districts that receive the aid could spend it on college-readiness programs and efforts to recruit teachers of color, among many other uses. They'd have to set goals for closing the achievement gap and promoting integration, and get state approval for their plans. School districts would have to spend at least 80 percent of the aid on students, with up to 20 percent allowed for activities, such as teacher training. Districts that fell short of their achievement goals over time would have their aid cut by an unspecified amount."

HF 247 was sent to the House Education Policy Committee where a hearing was held on Feb 14 and will also be heard there on February 19.

NEW Companion bills HF 53 and SF 88 Super majority requirement. Rep. Kelby Woodard (R-Belle Plaine) and Sen. Eric Pratt (R-Prior Lake) This bill would require a three-fifths vote to have any allocation of school funding below the regular 90/10 split. HF 53 was referred to Education Finance and the companion bill was referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

Repayment of School Shifts: Several bills have been presented related to the repayment of the school shifts but legislators have heard testimony that full repayment of the school shifts is not a priority for school districts because they have already borrowed funding to cover the shift. Representatives from AMSD (Association of Metropolitan School Districts) testified that they are much more concerned about actual new revenue for such things as technology, providing all-day kindergarten, and special education.

For detail on educational issues, two good sources are Schools for Equity in Education (SEE) and Parents United.

Capitol Letter, continued...

ENVIRONMENT

LWVUS Position: Natural resources should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of the ecosystem and to protect public health.

LWV Minnesota Positions: See Program for Action, pp. 7-10

Gwen Myers, Volunteer Lobbyist

NEW HF 615 Reinvest in Minnesota Conservation Reserve. Rep. JoAnn Ward (DFL-Woodbury) (Support) Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve is a wetland program aimed at conservation on private lands. The goal is to protect and improve water quality, increase groundwater recharge, reduce flooding and enhance habitat for native species. This program is managed by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR),¹ which pays landowners when they enroll their land. The payment is funded through the state via a bonding bill with matching funds coming from various federal conservation programs, usually at a ratio of about 1.5 federal to 1 from the state. It is estimated that about 20,000 acres will be protected if this bill passes as submitted.

LWV Minnesota's ally Audubon Minnesota is the lead advocate for this measure. There is no senate companion at this time, but we expect to have one soon.

->Action: Contact your House member and urge support for HF 615, the RIM Reserve bill.

On another front, on Feb. 19, the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment will hold a joint informational hearing with the House Committee on Energy Policy on silica sand mining, aka frac sand mining. Silica sand mining bills will be heard by the Senate committee on Feb. 26.

Industrial scale silica or frac sand mining is comparatively new to Minnesota. Frac sand is fine, round sand found throughout western Wisconsin and southeast Minnesota. According to the Land Stewardship Project, it is used in the process of "extracting gas and oil by injecting highly pressurized 'fracking' fluid [deep in the earth] that creates new channels in the rock" for gas and oil. The hazards related to frac sand mining range from devastation of huge areas to hundreds of sand trucks lumbering through scenic river towns, health problems including silicosis, and extravagant use of ground water. According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, "Silica sand mining and processing plants ... expected average water use ranges from 420,500 gallons per day to 2 million gallons per day (292-380 gallons per minute)."

The industry has shown little regard for neighbors or for the environment. This issue was highlighted in a Star Tribune article, "Sand mine rules melt under pressure," on Feb. 4, 2013. Under new ownership, a frac sand mine in southern Minnesota was annexed by another city where officials adopted new regulations more favorable to the mine and allowed it to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

LWV Minnesota's ally Land Stewardship Project is the lead advocate on this issue. The goal is to secure a moratorium on frac sand mining permits until a Generic Environmental Impact Statement has been completed and the state has used the information gleaned from the GEIS to enact regulations for the industry and to get funding from the industry necessary to monitor frac sand mining operations for compliance. We hope to see bills introduced on this issue the week of Feb. 18. (An LWV action alert on this issue was sent out on Feb. 13, 2013.)

¹See Feb. 7, 2013 Capitol Letter for further info on BWSR.

Capitol Letter, continued....

FIREARMS

LWV US Position: Protect the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulating ownership of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons and support the allocation of resources to better regulate and monitor gun dealers.

LWV Minnesota Position: Action to support restrictions on the sale, possession, and use of firearms by private parties in the state of Minnesota.

Mary Lewis Grow, Volunteer Lobbyist

Firearms Discussed in Minnesota House Committee

The February 7th Capitol Letter reported on HF 237, HF 244, HF241, and HF 242. All of these bills were heard the week of Feb. 4 in the Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and were held over. The hearings drew overflow crowds, mostly made up of opponents of the bills who were wearing yellow lapel buttons that read, "Self-Protection is a Human Right."

Scheduled Senate Hearings on Firearms Legislation

The companion Senate bills, except the assault weapons ban, will be heard by the Senate Judiciary Committee on Feb. 21 and 22.

NEW SF 458 (Companion to HF 237) Mandatory background checks. Sen. Bobby Joe Champion (DFL-Minneapolis) (Support)

NEW SF 503 (Companion to HF 244) Increasing penalties for straw purchases, Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park) (Support)

NEW Companion bills SF 557 and HF 240 Mental Health Screening. Sen. Dick Cohen (DFL-St. Paul) and Rep. Dan Schoen (DFL-St. Paul) (Support) Law enforcement officials will be given greater discretion in granting firearms permits by modifying mental health screening requirements. This bill will be heard in a hearing by the Senate Judiciary Committee on Feb. 22 at noon.

On Monday, Feb. 18 at 3:00 a rally in support of Freedom from Gun Violence was held at the Capitol Rotunda.

Action: Contact your legislator: Please call/write your legislators as a concerned citizen and urge them to support universal background checks for all gun purchases, increasing penalties for straw purchases and a ban on high capacity ammunition clips. They need to know that there are Minnesotans who want reasonable restrictions on firearms.

Public testimony on the bills heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee will be from 6-9 p.m. on Feb. 21. Please see the requirements for testimony on the Judiciary Committee's schedule. You must sign up in advance with the committee administrator to testify. Any LWV member can testify as a concerned citizen but if you want to testify as a member of LWV, your testimony must be approved by the LWV Minnesota President or Executive Director.

Capitol Letter, continued....

HEALTH CARE REFORM

LWV US Position: A basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all U.S. residents. Other policy goals should include the equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total national expenditure level for health care.

Glenda Larson, Volunteer Lobbyist

Expansion of Medical Assistance Passes

NEW Companion bills SF 5 and HF 9 Expansion of Medical Assistance. Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato) and Rep. Thomas Huntley (DFL-Duluth) (Support) MinnesotaCare, the public program that provides health insurance to low-income adults and families, does not meet federal guidelines for the Affordable Care Act (ACA). SF 5/HF 9 has been written so some MinnesotaCare enrollees will be eligible to use the insurance marketplace created under the ACA. The bills expand Medicaid (known as Medical Assistance in Minnesota) to include adults who have incomes up to 138% of the federal poverty guideline (\$15,415 for an individual and \$20,879 for a couple). This expansion will include some people now enrolled in MinnesotaCare. Other bills will include solutions for covering the remaining population of low-income people who are currently using MinnesotaCare.

On Feb. 11, Session Daily reported that SF 5/HF 9 will cover 35,000 more people. Newly eligible enrollees will be covered under the federal ACA at 100% for the first three years and at 90% after that. The benefits of expanding Medicaid/Medical Assistance to more people include improving health outcomes, fewer unpaid health care bills and providing affordable health insurance for more individuals. Rep. Huntley said the bill could save the state \$129 million in the first biennium and an estimated \$237 million in the following biennium.

HF 9 passed in the House 71-56 on Feb. 11 and on Feb. 14, HF 9 (SF 5) passed in the Senate. The bill was sent to the governor and he signed it on Feb. 19. The legislation had to be passed by March 25 to meet a federal guideline under the Affordable Care Act.

NEW Companion bills SF 184 and HF 214, Establishment of Basic Health Plan. Sen. Tony Lourey (DFL-Kerrick) and Rep. Erin Murphy (DFL-St. Paul) Bills have been introduced to provide coverage for the remaining people on Minnesota Care who are not covered by the Medicaid expansion. This bill was introduced at the end of January.

The Basic Health Plan will cover working families making more than \$15,000 per year who still can't afford the insurance offered in the marketplace/exchange where the choices for them will have higher premiums, high deductibles and less beneficial coverage than they receive with MinnesotaCare.

Last week the federal Department of Health and Human Services announced a timeline and framework for states to use to establish the Basic Health Plan as described in the Affordable Care Act. Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jessson stated that this will "ensure continuation and improvement of MinnesotaCare, and will enable thousands of low-income working Minnesotans to experience the benefits of significant health reform."

No action has been taken yet on SF 184/HF 214.

Update on Minnesota Insurance Marketplace Act

SF 1/HF 5, the companion bills establishing the health insurance exchange required by the Affordable Care Act, have continued to move at a fast pace through committees in both chambers. The goal is to have this passed by the third week in March. With a complex bill like this it is not unusual to see many amendments presented at committee hearings, many of which are not adopted by the committee. One amendment, however, involving how the exchange would be funded, was adopted in the Senate Taxes Committee. The committee voted to amend SF 1 so the exchange would be funded by the Health Impact Fee which is part of the General Fund. This "fee," really a tax on tobacco products, was initiated under Gov. Tim Pawlenty in 2005.

The House version of this bill still has the original funding mechanism, a "withhold" of up to 3.5 percent from the health insurance premiums for policies sold in the new marketplace. Under the "withhold" provision, health insurance providers pay the operating costs of the exchange, costs which they would probably pass on to the customer. These two methods of funding represent major philosophical differences in who should pay for the operation and administration of the exchange.

SF 1 will be heard in the Senate Finance Committee on February 19, its sixth and last Senate committee hearing. HF 5 will be heard in the Health and Human Services Finance Committee on February 18, with at least 32 amendments on the agenda.

Capitol Letter, continued....

IMMIGRATION

LWV Minnesota Position: The Department of Public Safety should recognize the Matricula Consular as an acceptable document to prove identity for obtaining a driver's license (2003)

Judy Stuthman, Volunteer Lobbyist

NEW Companion bills HF 348 and SF 271 Drivers License Requirements. Rep. Karen Clark (DFL-Minneapolis) and Sen. Bobby Joe Champion (DFL-Minneapolis) (Support) Introduced on Feb. 4, these bills modify drivers license application requirements opening up the possibility for some in the undocumented community to obtain a drivers license. Immigration status will not be asked but acceptable proof of identity must be provided. This means an official form of governmental identification issued by a country other than the United States needs to contain: (1) full name and date of birth of the cardholder, (2) a photograph identifying the cardholder, (3) a unique identification number; and (4) security features that make the card as impervious to alteration as is reasonably practicable in its design and quality of material and technology, using materials that are not readily available to the general public. For Mexican citizens, this form of identity is the Matricula Consular.

You hear a lot about false ID's but Mexico has made sure that the Matricula Consular is not one of these! Approximately 60 to 70% of Mexicans in Minnesota already have this form of ID (also known as a Consular ID). The following information was provided by the Consulate of Mexico in St. Paul:

The Counsula ID is issued by the SRE (Secretaria do Relaciones Exteriores) in Mexico and through the Mexican Consulate in Minnesota or any of the other 49 consulates in the U.S. It is an important means of ID for Mexicans living abroad. It is extremely difficult to forge, due to highly sophisticated security measures. It is not an easy process to obtain this ID and the process takes time to insure its accuracy.

To apply, the applicant must present their Mexican birth certificate, an official Mexican ID, proof of address within the Consular District and pay a fee. The ID does not grant the bearer any immigration status in the U.S. nor is it a passport for travel. It can be a useful document to locate Mexican nationals in case of emergencies.

The ID is not issued if the applicant has a criminal record or is subject to prosecution or faces a judicial or administrative process. The ID is an effective means to locate someone wanted by the law. The Consular ID data base is linked to the Mexican National Security data bases.

There are many security measures taken that include visual and hidden security, bi-dimensional Bar Code, optical character recognition, fingerprints and signature. Digital files are created containing proof of citizenship and identity documents. The hidden features on the ID can be seen with special "decoders" and if someone's ID is of being counterfeit, Consulate personnel can be called on to check with a decoder.

HF 348 has been referred to the Transportation Policy Committee and SF 271 has been referred to the Transportation and Public Safety Committee. If the bills pass, the applicant for a driver's license must take and pass the MN drivers test and purchase insurance improving safety on our roads and highways. Seven other states have passed similar legislation for the undocumented to obtain a drivers license or a drivers permit.

Capitol Letter, continued....

MENTAL HEALTH

LWV Minnesota Position: Support a comprehensive and coordinated system of programs and services for mentally ill adults and emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. Priority should be given to persons with serious and persistent mental illness and/or acute mental illness.

Barb Person, Volunteer Lobbyist

Several legislators have proposed legislation to address violence by investing in the public mental health system for children. Here are the first bills that were introduced to address serious gaps in mental health services to support children. We expect more to appear this session.

NEW Companion bills SF 264 and HF 358 Medical Assistance. Sen. Tony Lourey (DFL-Kerrick) and Rep. Diane Loeffler (DFL- Minneapolis) (Support) Several new children's mental health services will be covered by Medical Assistance. Annual reviews of pediatric and children's mental health providers will be required.

NEW Companion bills SF 265 and HF 359 Child and Adolescent Care. Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL – Mankato) and Rep. Carolyn Laine (DFL-Columbia Heights) (Support) These bills, as introduced, modified case management services including allowing services to be provided up to age 26. This provision was removed in the Senate Health, Human Services and Housing Committee but remains in SF 270 (see below). Funding is provided in both SF 265 and HF 359 for other mental health services such as respite care, crisis services and school-linked mental health services.

NEW Companion bills SF 266 and HF 360 Certification Program. Sen. Chris Eaton (DFL- Brooklyn Center) and Rep. Will Morgan (DFL- Burnsville) (Support) These bills require the development of a program to certify certain behavioral health aides. Right now, providers must train people for this level of health aide.

NEW Companion bills SF 270 and HF 296. Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL-Mankato) and Rep. Tina Liebling (DFL- Rochester) (Support) These provide an exception to the drug formulary, modifying case management services and appropriate funding. The proposed legislation would fund school-linked mental health services, training for mental health professionals on early psychosis and intensive treatments, and support for families with adolescents and young adults experiencing their first psychotic episode.

In testimony on these bills, Minnesota's National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI) Executive Director Sue Abderholden, a parent of a 12-year-old with mental illness, and a number of Hennepin County psychiatrists discussed the barriers families face when dealing with mental illness in children.

NAMI believes the legislation will make a difference by investing in treatment efforts as early as possible. Minnesota Public Radio quoted Abderholden as saying, "21 percent of children age 9 to 17 have a diagnosable mental illness or substance abuse disorder, but only 1 in 5 receives treatment. The problem, she said, is a mental health system that is fragile and underfunded."

All four bills were passed by the Senate Health, Human Services and Housing Committee and referred to the Senate Finance Committee.

In the House Health and Human Services Committee, HF 358, HF 359 and HF 296 were passed as amended and referred to Early Childhood and Youth Development Committee.

Capitol Letter, continued....

METROPOLITAN ISSUES

CMAL (Council of Metropolitan Area Leagues) Position on the Met Council: Support the Metropolitan Council as the decision-making body for metropolitan needs.... Support provisions for coordinated metropolitan services focused through the Metropolitan Council. Support retention of an appointed Metropolitan Council with greater use of its existing powers. (1969, 1976, 1993)

CMAL Position on Transportation: Support the Metropolitan Council as the single metropolitan agency planning and coordinating a diverse transportation system, meeting varied needs, and having approval authority over this system's major capital expenditures. New funding sources should be service related. (1983) Support various modes of transportation both public and private, including ...buses.... A light rail transit mode can be supported if assured high ridership, economic feasibility and integration into the total transportation system.

CMAL Position on Land Use and Environmental Quality: CMAL recognizes... the need for a strong public voice in land-use decisions. CMAL supports metropolitan-level planning, programs and policies [in order to]: (1) preserve and enhance the natural environment; (2) use public investment to the best advantage; and (3) provide area residents with diversity in choice of facilities and amenities.

Lois Quam, volunteer lobbyist

The Star Tribune reports that Scott and Carver Counties appear ready to consider inclusion in the transit taxing district proposed by Gov. Mark Dayton (DFL) in his budget. Five years ago both Scott and Carver Counties refused to join the other five metro counties in the fraction-of-a-penny sales tax that has poured money into light rail and other rapid transit options. At this point they appear ready to at least consider the advantages of being included in the district.

According to the Star Tribune, Minneapolis is considering a streetcar system along Nicollet Avenue between 46th Street in the south and 41st Street in the north. It's far from decided, however. Minneapolis needs to complete its alternatives analysis (due in summer 2013) which could conclude that some form of enhanced bus system, possibly bus rapid transit, would be more viable.

The Metropolitan Council will hold two meetings in March to take public comments on amending the region's long-range transportation plan to include light rail transit (LRT) for the Bottineau Transitway in Hennepin County and Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridors throughout the metro area. Check for meeting times and locations if you would like to provide input. Now is the time to speak up if transit plans don't coincide with your needs!

Capitol Letter, continued....

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LWV United States

The [Voting Rights Act](#) (VRA) is the jewel in the crown of Federal elections law. Authorized by the 15th Amendment, passage of the VRA required tireless effort. Determined opposition in the Senate thwarted Congressional action for many years. But in 1965, proponents overcame a filibuster to finally pass a law that has stood the test of time and which has been reauthorized with overwhelming bipartisan support in 1970, 1975, 1982 and 2006.

Next Wednesday, the Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in the case of [Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder](#) in which the constitutionality of Section 5 of the VRA is being challenged. It was under [Section 5](#), that the League challenged restrictive voter photo ID laws in [South Carolina](#) and [Texas](#) just last year, and the VRA served as the basis for challenges to a cut back in early voting hours in Florida and to the Texas redistricting plan. The continued relevance of the VRA in protecting the voting rights of all Americans is clear. To drive that message home, the League will be participating in a rally on the steps of the Supreme Court as the arguments proceed.

The LWVUS and the [LWV South Carolina](#) have joined in [amicus briefs](#) in support of the VRA, which has such important ramifications for our work to protect and empower voters nationwide. We are calling on League members in the Washington D.C. area to [join us as volunteers at the rally](#). But whether you are nearby or far away, please customize this [press release or letter to the editor template](#) to draw attention to the importance of this case. Finally, be sure to follow and weigh in on our up-to-the minute updates on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) throughout the day.

In League,

Elisabeth

LWV United States, continued ...

COMMUNICATIONS - MAKING CONNECTIONS**Protecting the Voting Rights Act (VRA) - What You Can Do (NEW)**

As President MacNamara mentioned in her message above, we are working hard to protect the Voting Rights Act in conjunction with our partner organizations. Many LWVUS staff members will be rallying in front of the Supreme Court on Wednesday, Feb. 27th. League members in the area who are interested in **attending or volunteering at the rally should contact Virginia Clairmont** - vclairmont@lww.org. The rally will start with a press briefing at 8:30 AM and the rally will run from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. We've also put together [a template press release and letter to the editor](#) for you to customize and submit to your local media to draw attention to the importance of this case. Finally, be sure to follow and share our up-to-the minute updates on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

ADVOCACY**League Urges Office of Congressional Ethics to Steer Clear of Procedural Minefield (NEW)**

On February 13th, the League and other reform groups sent [a letter](#) to the Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) urging them to stand fast on the OCE's current rules of procedure. The OCE received suggestions from private attorneys who represent clients before the OCE. The letter calls the proposed changes "inappropriate for OCE as currently structured and would impede the agency's ability to make the ethics process more accountable and transparent."

LWVUS and LWVFL File Amicus Brief in Florida Purge Case (NEW)

LWVUS and LWVFL filed an [amicus brief](#) in the U.S. Court of Appeals arguing that a last-minute purge of suspected non-citizens by the state of Florida is barred by the National Voter Registration Act, which says that no systematic purges are allowed within 90 days of an election. The League was joined by the Brennan Center for Justice in the brief to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

League Sends Letter to U.S. Senate on Gun Safety Issues (NEW)

The League sent [a letter](#) to the U.S. Senate in favor of common sense solutions to the gun violence plaguing our nation.

Forward on Climate Rally a SUCCESS (NEW)

Thanks to everyone who came out to the Forward on Climate Rally! The rally had over 40,000 people attend to voice their support for action on climate change. If you were unable to attend, you can still participate by sending [a letter to President Obama](#) asking him to lead the climate fight!

The Campaign Finance Task Force Requests Your Help (NEW)

The Campaign Finance Task Force is developing a ["Money in Politics Discussion Guide"](#) for Leagues across the country to be used in communicating with members and the public on this important issue. We are interested in any outlines and materials you have used within your League for this purpose so that we can share what you have done with others. Please send outlines and materials to Advocacy Committee Chair, Toni Larson toni.larson@gmail.com.

LWV United States, continued ...

EDUCATION FUND

The Agriculture Update is Up and Running! (NEW)

The [names of committee members, scope and timeline for the Agriculture Update](#) are now available. Local and state Leagues will want to check out the timeline to see when to schedule your local update meetings. Be sure to subscribe to the [Agriculture Update group in the member Forums](#) to discuss the update with other League members.

FAIR JUDICIARY AND GLOBAL DEMOCRACY

Women and the Rule of Law: A View from the Americas (NEW)

On February 27th, the League of Women Voters, the Inter-American Dialogue, and the International Association of Women Judges are hosting ten leading women judges from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States for the conference, [Women and the Rule of Law: A View from the Americas](#). The conference showcases the progress women have made in gaining access to judicial leadership positions across the Americas and will develop recommendations to further advance the positive role of women in the judiciary. Discussions will focus on the following themes: strengthening judicial institutions and the rule of law, promoting diversity in the judicial system, and the use of international law to promote women's rights and to press national governments to comply with their international obligations. The judges are scheduled to meet privately with U.S. Supreme Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the afternoon of the 26th.

LWV to Host Forum during UN Commission on the Status of Women (NEW)

During the 57th meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the LWV Global Democracy Program and the LWV UN Observers will conduct a parallel forum, [Implementing Laws Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls-Successfully](#) on March 5th at the Salvation Army (221 E and 52nd Streets, New York, New York). The forum is open to the public, no special badge or ID is required.

ELECTIONS

Power the Vote 2012: How a New Initiative Launched Results for Millions of Voters

LWVEF is pleased to release [Power the Vote 2012: How a New Initiative Launched Results for Millions of Voters](#). This comprehensive report showcases the best accomplishments the League volunteers and activists achieved through unified and focused efforts during the 2012 election cycle. It also lays out a plan to continue to advocate for voters as well as strengthen and expand our electorate in 2013 and beyond. We encourage you to utilize the report and evaluate your League's successes and challenges as you plan future elections programs for 2013 and 2014. Thank you for your incredible work to engage and empower voters!

LWV United States, continued ...

MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

Congratulations to Growing Leagues and Contest Winners! (NEW)

LWVUS is pleased to announce that the Leagues with the greatest percentage of membership growth from Jan 31, 2012-Jan 31, 2013 are:

Leagues with fewer than 50 members: LWV of Hamilton County, IN (82 percent increase).

Leagues with 51-150 members: LWV of Hillsborough County, FL (45 percent increase).

Leagues with more than 151 members: LWV of Orange County, FL (33 percent increase).

Drawing Winners: LWV of Washington County, AR and LWV of New Castle, NY also grew and won the drawing.

All five Leagues won [one free registration](#) for the LWVUS convention in Dallas, TX in 2014.

Congratulations to these Leagues and all Leagues who are building League capacity and welcoming new members. Cheers!

PMP Rate Information (NEW)

Thank you again for updating your membership rosters in the LWVUS database. The number of members included in your roster will determine the amount of Per Member Payment (PMP) due to LWVUS for FY2013-2014 (July 2013-June 2014). The PMP rate for FY2013-14 is \$31.00. This PMP rate was set by League members at the National Convention in 2012.

It's Budget Planning Time! (NEW)

As Leagues begin preparations for their annual meetings (including creating a new budget for FY2013-14), please remember that a sample budget can be found in Appendix Q of the [ABCs of Streamlining](#). Leagues are encouraged to budget for at least one representative to attend National Convention 2014 in Dallas, TX. The registration fee is \$335.

OTHER

Suffrage Centennial Celebration (NEW)

On March 1-3, 2013 several organizations are working together to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the historic 1913 Woman's [Suffrage Procession in Washington, DC](#). Exhibits, special programs, performances and events are planned to mark this occasion. For additional information about the weekend events visit [Suffrage Centennial Celebration](#). A particularly important part of these events is a re-creation of the 1913 Suffrage March, and the League of Women Voters will be participating. This parade, organized by the Delta Sigma Theta sorority, will take place on Sunday, March 3, 2013 at 9:30 AM and will symbolically follow the exact route of the 1913 march. If you would like to meet up with other League members, please contact Arlington League member Susan Trice at csusantrice@gmail.com. The parade will be preceded by a 9:00 AM pre-march rally on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol.

Support the Membership and Leadership Development Program

"I wouldn't trade my League experience for anything!" It's always the right time to reflect on the personal gifts the League has given to you and consider making a gift to the [Fund for Local League Growth](#) (FLLG). As this quote reminds us, League is an experience like no other! The [FLLG](#) is a special fund solely designated to build the League's infrastructure and support the Membership and Leadership Development program. The Membership and Leadership Development program is helping to ensure that the League's future is vibrant, healthy and strong. Thank you in advance for your support!

Health Reform in Minnesota

Submitted by Deb Brinkman

Health Reform in Minnesota: What, When, Where, Why?

Ellen Banavides, Assistant Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Health spoke at the February Unit 3 meeting.

Why Health Reform?

Everyone hates our healthcare system. While Minnesota has a very low rate of uninsured, there are not a lot of people who have had a good health care experience. Health literacy needs to improve: people don't understand the system. We can do better.

Why does everyone need health insurance?

To manage the risk. If only the sick had health insurance, the program would go broke.

The vision for Minnesota:

- Better health care
- Healthier communities
- Lower costs

History of health reform in Minnesota:

- Minnesota is ahead of the curve most of the time.
- In the 70's and 80's HMOs were started in Minnesota.
- In the 90's we focused on the 'working poor'
- Minnesota Care 1992
- MN Eliminating Health Disparities Initiative 2001
- MN Statewide Health Improvement Program 2008
- Federal Affordable Care Act becomes law 2010
- Early Medicaid expansion for 84,000 Minnesotans 2011 (formerly GAMC)
- US Supreme Court decision making Medicaid expansion to 133% FPL optional for states
- One new trend: 'SHIP'
- State-wide Health Improvements Program. These programs are community based - often to tackle a condition.

What can we expect from in the future?

Focus on health, not just health care.

What is an Exchange?

Its an Online Marketplace where Minnesotans can find, compare, choose, and purchase health care coverage that best fits their personal and family needs. The Health Care Exchange starts January 2014.

Individual practitioners, insurance companies, and facilities will submit a program to be included in the Health Care Exchange. This will give consumers more choices and better choices.

Modeled after Massachusetts program and must be self-sustaining by 2016. Anyone who is self-insured or is employed by a small business of less than 50 people will be able to participate in the Health Care Exchange.

Open enrollment begins in October.

For more information:

Minnesota Health Reform: <http://mn.gov/health-reform/>

Citizen Solutions Conversations: <http://citizensolve.org>

HealthCare.gov: <http://www.healthcare.gov/>

Governor's Health Care Reform Task Force: <http://mn.gov/health-reform/health-reform-in-innesota/indes.jsp>

Exchange Advisory Task Force: <http://mn.gov/commerce/insurance/topics/medical/exchange/Exchange-Advisory-TaskForce/indes.jsp>

Legislative Interviews Submitted by Carlota Medus

League of Women Voters St. Louis Park Legislative Interviews, January 26, 2013

Guests:

Ron Latz, State Senator District 46
Ryan Winkler, 46A State Representative
Steve Simon, 46B State Representative

Introductions:

Sen. Latz,

Committees: He is chair of judiciary committee, which covers budget, finance and policy for courts, corrections and department of human rights; and includes family law, civil, liability and criminal law, sex offenders, gun control, consumer protection and debt collection. He is also a member of the finance committee, which #1 obligation is the budget for this biennium.

Rep. Winkler,

Committees: He is currently a member of the elections, government operations, early childhood education policy, higher education finance, and civil law committees. He is chair of a select subcommittee on living wage. He is also a member of two subcommittees: data practices and employee relations. Some of the highlights so far this legislative session are scholarships for early childhood education and job skills development such as technical college or 2-year degrees.

Rep. Simon,

Committees: He is chair of the elections committee. Other committees include public safety finance and policy, civil law, state government finance, ways and means, and legislative audit committee. Although there is unified party control, Governor Dayton has clearly stated that he will only sign election legislation that has bipartisan support. Some of the focus so far has been on options for early voting- either allowing early voting, or no excuses absentee voting. Other areas of focus have included involvement in the South West corridor rail, consumer protection, child protection, false claims/fraud, health care and education.

Questions and Answers

1. Post-fiscal cliff, postponed decisions regarding federal cuts

Rep. Winkler: The fiscal cliff is no longer the issue; the issue now is sequestration. There is no way of knowing what will happen, but the effect will not be immediate.

Rep. Simon: Fiscal cliff was averted in December. Now the argument over the debt limit has been pushed out until May. It is difficult to predict the impact, It will be difficult to address federal cuts in May; however, the Governor's budget has some flexibility and new revenue, which would help with unforeseen federal cuts.

Sen. Latz: Didn't have anything to add

Legislative Interview, continued...

2. State Budget

Sen. Latz: The Governor's proposed budget is a platform to work off. His approach is structurally balanced. Past budgets have tapped into the tobacco fund; and that will cost us twice as much to pay it back. Shifting made the budget look balanced, but left us with huge obligations. The Governor's budget includes:

- Meaningful increase to K-12 funding;
- Expansion of sales tax to include clothing, structured to eliminate "regressivity" by exempting items that cost less than \$100. Only 4 states do not tax clothing;
- Increased taxes on higher incomes;
- Taxing business-to-business services; e.g., lawyers, accountants. This will probably not pass the legislature intact;

Internet sales taxes are difficult- Sen. Latz introduced a bill regarding federal taxes on internet sales, but didn't pass. There is only so much that can be done at the state level regarding this issue.

Rep. Winkler: An outline of the Governor's proposed budget:

- 3.6 billion total new taxes: 2 billion from sales tax expansion, 1 billion from tax increases to incomes over \$250,000, plus increased taxes on tobacco sales;
- \$1.6 billion will go to property tax relief in the form of an annual \$500 credit (not based on income);
- Of \$2 billion net new revenue, \$1 billion will be applied towards the deficit, and \$1 billion for education and corporate incentive programs;
- Currently, the corporate tax code included exemptions for international business. The proposed budget eliminates those exemptions, but will lower the corporate tax rate;
- The sale tax expansion will lower the sales tax rate, resulting in no new taxes for most consumers;
- New revenue will come from business services. There is a real question about businesses passing the added cost to consumers;
- The Governor proposes increase LGA;

Rep. Simon: Internet sales put Main Street business at a disadvantage.

Minnesota has one of the highest corporate tax rates at 9%, but there are many deductions and entitlements, resulting on an effective tax rate of approximately 4%. The Governor's proposal will lower the overall tax rate but reduces deductions. About \$2 billion of new revenue is business-to-business tax, which has great opposition. The \$500 proposed property tax refund is not based on income, unlike the homestead and renters credit.

3. Election reform, campaign finance, disclosure issues, felon voting

Rep. Simon:

-Election reform: Thirty states have early or no-excuses absentee voting, including all the states around us. Rep. Simon supports early voting. No-excuses absentee voting is more likely to pass. On-line voter registration is likely to happen-the Secretary of State office already has the authority to implement it. 46,000 people in Minnesota vote by mail only (small townships and towns with populations under 400 people). There are efforts to lift the cap so additional communities can implement mail-only voting.

Legislative Interviews, continued

-Disclosure issues: Should disclosure be expanded to include spouse's economic interests? Current form is very basic, but how far should disclosure go? Should I include client lists? That probably won't work due to client privacy issues. Maybe categories should be included. Maybe a "catch all" question should be added.

-Felon voting: We need to really think about this. Not all felons are created equal (e.g., bad checks vs. killing someone). If not complying with conditions of release should they be allowed to vote? This would be difficult to manage, would require oversight, and we would need to develop criteria for when eligibility kicks in. Should it only be allowed after probation/parole is over? We may not be ready for this yet.

Rep. Winkler:

-Campaign finance: There are a number of issues, including problems with disclosure rules, non-profit donations, and independent donations to PACs. Third party money is limiting the actual candidate compared to the voice of other groups during campaigns. Should expanded contributions to the individual candidates be allowed? The state agency monitoring all of this has suffered from the same cuts as other state government. Additional funds are needed to be able to staff it. Increasing its funding could come from increased fees, or with direct state funds.

-Disclosure issues: The economic interest form that legislators complete needs to be revised to better uncover potential conflict of interest. Should it be expanded to include spouses' client lists? He is preparing a bill to add a catch-all question that asks if there is anything that can affect the legislator's judgment/that the public should know?

-Felon voting: when released, full civil rights are not restored. We could wait until the person is done completing their sentence.

Sen. Latz:

-Disclosure issues: Those are tough issues that could open a Pandora's box for anyone seeking to run for office; e.g., spouses may not want their information disclosed- this could be one more barrier against running for office.

-Felon voting: this issue will come before the judiciary committee. We want to rehab/reintroduce felons to society; we want them to be productive members of society. Having a stake in your community is to be able to vote. North Dakota allows felons to vote. Should we allow it once they are released from custody? If voting is not a right, we create a "class" of criminals. If they are in the community, they are using services.

4. Gun violence

Sen. Latz: The senate judiciary committee is looking at a long list of proposals dealing with gun violence, including a long list that he would support. Proposals include banning assault weapons and high capacity magazines (a politically charged issue), closing the loopholes on mandatory background checks by including private and gun show sales, and adding people receiving mental health services (such as commitment) to the background checks, but there are nuances to this issue (found to be mentally ill by court or committed vs. commitment is stayed). Also discussing the need for additional mental health services in schools, to recognize early signs and provide treatment earlier. For felons, make it a felony to possess a weapon or ammunition. Straw purchase (buy a gun for someone else) will be in the mix. We may need a middle of the road approach that takes smaller steps, but takes us on the right direction.

Legislative Interviews, continued....

Rep Winkler: He will introduce a bill that would require mental health providers to give their clients a firm that would voluntarily get the on a list of people not allowed to purchase guns or to get a conceal-and-carry permit; the person could get off the list at a later date. Another idea is to allow individuals to give their guns to police temporarily and get them back later; however, police may resist this due to liability issues and lack of space.

Rep. Simon: Straw purchase should be punished severely.

5. Defeat of constitutional amendments

Rep. Simon thanked the LWV for their efforts on defeating the voter id constitutional amendment.



Observer Reports

Observer Coordinator: Dorothy Karlson 952-935-4051

Dorothy Karlson is coordinating the 2012 – 2013 Observer Reports. If you can attend a City Council Meeting or School Board meeting and type up a brief review of the meeting, please contact Dorothy at 952-935-4051. Remember to wear your pin at the meetings – our presence at the meetings is noted and appreciated.

St Louis Park School Board Meeting, Monday, January 28, 2013, Dorothy Karlson, Reporter

Technology took the stage at this Board meeting. Several technological devices were discussed. Megan Jones, 3rd grade teacher from Peter Hobart, explained how she uses the smart board in her classroom. Trevor Paulson, art and technology teacher at the High School talked about the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) program which enables students to do work at home thus freeing them up for more hands on experiences in the classroom. Angela Fransen, a tech trainer told about the use of Chrome Books which enable students to practice their writing and how teachers are using online grade books to track the progress of various groups of students. She told how iPads are enabling students to work at their own pace in math.

The school calendar for the next two years was presented. Several people presented their plea for early release – late start days which they said enable staff development in many areas. All proposed calendars include starting school after Labor Day. Shortening winter break and making an earlier end to the school year is one of the proposals.

Sandy Salin, Director of Business Services, explained that an Elementary Facility Task Force has been formed to create two options on how to deal with space issues in the elementary buildings. Enrollment in the district is projected to increase slightly over the next ten years. If all day kindergarten is to be increased, six more rooms will be needed. Also, the Read 180 program will require two additional rooms. The Task Force is charged with developing a comprehensive proposal that recommends the best use of facilities, accommodates projected enrollment, and supports educational programs.

Julie Sweitzer, is the current representative to the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) which runs the FAIR schools in Minneapolis and Plymouth. She explained the recommendation that the amount of time for notification by districts about withdrawal from the program be changed from 17 months to 6 months. The Board approved the proposal.

City Council Meeting, February 19, 2013, Deb Brinkman, Reporter

The City Council meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm. All were present.

There were 2 presentations: One for Retirement Recognition for Police Sergeant Ward Dohman. Sergeant Dohman was instrumental in starting the Meadowbrook collaborative. and one for Fire Chief magazine's Fire Station Style Design Award. The team that designed Fire Station #1 included a representative from every department.

The minutes of the Study Session were approved with one minor change. The minutes of Special City Council Meeting and City Council Workshop were approved with no changes.

Observer Reports, continued ...

Public Hearings

Pei Wei Asian Diner Liquor License approved. Pei Wei Asian Diner is changing from corporation to LLC so a new liquor license is required. The motion was approved.

Allocation of 2013 Community Development Block Grant Funds approved the use of funds. The funds focus on sticks and bricks programs in the community. There were several organizations who expressed gratitude for the funding assistance. The resolution was approved.

Amending Chapter 18 -Offenses and Miscellaneous Provisions to Include Regulations for Drug Paraphernalia. This would prohibit advertisement or sale of drug paraphernalia. Currently we don't have any head shops in St. Louis Park, but we would need to notify the tobacco shops. Sue Sanger spoke against the ordinance sighting legal concerns, desire to wait for appeals of the law suit to be finished and suggested that we make them not visible. Anne Mavity expressed concern that some products may be used for cultural products. The amendment passed with Sue Sanger voting against.

The City Council meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm.

St Louis Park School Board Meeting, February 25, 2013 – Barbara Downey, Reporter

The Spotlight was on Pastor Tim Rauk, Community Volunteer, who demonstrated the kind of service he has provided for the past fifteen years by accompanying three seniors singing their solos from Les Miserables, which will be presented in concert format by the High School Music Department. Board Chairman Bruce Richardson presented certificates to Pastor Tim, the soloists, and their teachers.

There were no speakers present for the Open Forum.

Staff members presented discussion items. Topics included updates from the Facilities Task Force Options, the Integration Revenue Budget, District Bond Projects, and a new Athletic Conference, as well as a Quarterly Financial Update and a School Calendar discussion.

Superintendent Debra Bowers noted that most stakeholders favored the traditional calendar with a two-week winter vacation period. The only objection was that the final school day of the year was a Monday (needed to comply with state regulations of the number of school days). The administration will continue to look for possible ways to avoid that situation.

The meeting concluded with unanimous approvals of the Integration Revenue Budget, the 2013-14 and the 2014-15 Calendars, and the Fiscal 2013 Budget Amendments.

Live cablecasts of the school board meetings are available on City Cable Channel 14. The City is now posting the cablecasts on their video server for viewing on demand. Meetings will be available for viewing with 48 hours of the live broadcast and will be archived for future viewing. The URL is: www.stlouispark.org/video-on-demand.html



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