



Voter

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May Calendar

- May 3 7:00 pm LWV SLP Board Meeting
Host: Ellen Hacker

- May 14 10:00 am General Meeting
Virtual St. Louis Park City Tour
Topic: What’s Been Going On
Location: Community Center
West End

Upcoming Events

- August Planning Meeting

CMAL Annual Meeting

The Annual meeting of the Council of Metropolitan Leagues will be held at Crystal City Hall, 4141 Douglas Drive, Crystal, on Saturday, May 14, from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00. There will be a business meeting and a discussion of the LWV St. Paul foreclosure study. Contact Dorothy Karlson about sharing a ride.

Medication Disposal Day

Unwanted, unused and expired medicines:

Thursday, June 2 from 3 to 7 p.m.
Richfield Ice Arena, 636 66th Street E., Richfield

Household hazardous waste collections:

June 9 – 11, parking lot in southwest quadrant of Hwy. 7 and Louisiana Ave

President's Message

Thanks to everyone who helped make our 57th Annual Meeting a success. Although we started out with a snowy look to the landscape, the Minneapolis Golf Club was a perfect setting with tremendous service and delicious lunch along with a nice quiet room.

We tried out the Ranked Choice Voting process to pick the top two program issues for next year. We learned it's a bit trickier to count by hand so will need to make sure we all know the process. Both times we used the Ranked Choice Voting process we needed to go to the 2nd and then the 3rd choice as our members have many varied interests and the voting spread across the range of topics. We had a choice of 9 topics to select our first, second and third choices. The first choice to reach over 50% using the RCV process was the 2010 Census and how St. Louis Park has changed in the last 10 years. The second choice was to develop a proposal for using Ranked Choice Voting for St. Louis Park elections, including updating the City Charter. The Board will use the input from the voting to help shape next year's activities and program sessions.

We also learned from our member Carlota Medus about her work at the Minnesota Department of Health in foodborne illness detection and her recent trip to Bangladesh to consult with public health leaders in that country to develop a surveillance system. Carlota brought some amazing pictures from her travels as well as very interesting stories about the challenges and rewards from her trip.

The Millie Johnson Award – given by the President to the member who showed the most dedication and service to the LWV of St. Louis Park – was given to our current *Voter* editor – Deb Brinkman. Deb has been tireless and creative in her work to support many activities of the League, including volunteering at the Empty Bowls program, assisting in many ways at Voter Service events, serving as both Secretary and Third Unit Chair, and during the past year has taken over the management of the *Voter* with considerable skill. Congratulations Deb! (NOTE: Millie Johnson was a long time member and leader of the LWV of St. Louis Park. Former President Elaine White began the tradition of the year's winner having their name engraved on a silver bowl for their use during the year.)

The May meeting "Virtual Tour" of the many development projects and changes in St. Louis Park is a great way to cap off our program year. I hope you can join us on Saturday morning May 14 for an armchair tour of our community. For those who are interested, we will head out to lunch at a nearby West End restaurant.

Congratulations and thank you to new Board members Allyson Sheldrew (Secretary) and Eilseen Knisely (Voter Service) and to returning members, Dorothy Karlson (CMAL) and to Barbara Aslakson, Elaine White and Dorothy Karlson (nominating committee). Your service to the League is much appreciated. Thanks as well to Nancy Klaber who stepped in to help with secretarial duties this year. I'm honored to be your President for the next two years and look forward to hearing from you about your ideas to make our League even stronger.

We'll be taking a summer break starting in June. Our annual planning meeting will be in August with programs and activities starting up again in September. Have a wonderful summer.

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

April Board Meeting Highlights

- Aggie announced that her new position of Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Health means she will not be able to be in a visible role at Voter Service forums or other politically themed events to avoid conflict of interest issues for her work and for the League
- Reviewed membership numbers (32 as of the Board meeting) and financial status which remains strong. Agreed that increasing membership needs to be a priority for the coming year.
- Finalized plans for the annual meeting for April 16
- Decided to make the May meeting a "virtual tour" because of the cost and challenges of renting a bus. Meeting at the West End on May 14 with lunch afterwards for those interested.
- Discussed idea for "Dollars for Scholars" scholarship fund for high school seniors. Will review additional ideas for developing and managing this at next meeting.
- Barb and Judy will attend the LWV Minnesota convention in Rochester. Aggie will attend if legislative schedule permits.
- Heard a report from Dorothy and Aggie who attended the CMAL meeting in Woodbury to learn about services for the homeless and visited a temporary shelter at a Woodbury church.



Aggie Explains Ranked Choice Voting



Worth Noting

Three Main Reasons Why LWV Opposes Photo ID Requirements

1. Photo ID requirements will suppress the vote.
2. Photo ID requirements are not necessary for election integrity because no one in Minnesota has ever been convicted of voter impersonation.
3. Photo ID requirements create another layer of costly bureaucracy in our elections.

Links To The Latest News from LWV Minnesota

[April 20, 2011 Sherri Knuth in Star Tribune-Voter ID measure "unnecessary, costly and harmful"](#)

[April 7, 2011 Sherri Knuth quoted in MPR's story on the impact of photo id legislation](#)

[April 7, 2011 Video of Sherri Knuth's, LWV Minnesota's Public Policy Coordinator, testimony](#)

[April 7, 2011 LWV Minnesota's Testimony Cited in Session Weekly](#)

[April 7, 2011 LWV Minnesota's Public Policy Coordinator, Sherri Knuth, quoted in Star Tribune regarding the photo ID bill.](#)



Convention
May 20 – 22, 2011
Rochester

Turn to Page 10 to see the Proposed Agenda

Top 3 Priorities of the 2011 legislative session

1. Solving the \$5 Billion Budget Deficit
2. Creating jobs
3. Spurring the states economy

Because LWV does take positions on issues that many describe as "partisan", some are concerned that LWV may become a target down the line by those who may want to **undermine our credibility**.

LWV Minnesota convention on May 20-22 prioritizes Civil Discourse, in part, because of this issue. We encourage members from local LWVs, to attend and learn how to challenge this form of "gotcha" journalism.

More information on page 13 "Gotcha Journalism".

West Metro meeting on Voter ID

More than 100 people attended. A number of media representatives were on hand. Watch for the meeting to be broadcast on cable channel Park TV17 and also read the Patch.com article.

There will still be a lot of activity around the voter ID bill. We suggest you contact your state senator representatives to let them know you appreciate their support for opposing the photo id requirement to vote.

LWV St. Louis Park 2011 Members and Unit Information

- Units meet monthly from September to May. Some months a General Meeting is held instead of Unit meetings. General Meetings are open to the public. The LWV SLP Board plans the program schedule in August for the coming LWV SLP year.
- Unit 1 – unassigned members and/or inactive members.
- Unit 2 – meets the second Wednesday at 12:30 pm at Park Shores Apartments, 3663 Park Center Boulevard, St. Louis Park.
- Unit 3 – meets the third Thursday at 7:00 pm, at member's homes.
- If you are unable to attend your unit meeting, you are welcome to attend another in that month. Please notify the hostess that you are planning to attend. See your *Voter* for the hostess schedule.
- Local LWV membership entitles the individual to information and participation in the West Metro Alliance, Council of Metro Area Leagues (CMAL), LWV Minnesota and LWV United States.

The Following Individuals Are Paid 2011 Members Supporting League of Women Voters St. Louis Park

Dorothy Aarness – Unit 1
 Barbara Aslakson – Unit 2
 Sharon Bannie – Unit 2
 Shirley Bierma – Unit 3
 Debbie Blake – Unit 3
 Deb Brinkman – Unit 3
 Judith Cook - Unit 3
 Reg Dunlap – Unit 1
 Max Edelstein – Unit 2
 Phil Finkelstein – Unit 1
 Ellen Hacker – Unit 3
 Ruth Halverson – Unit 2
 Betty Hardacker – Unit 2
 Dorothy Karlson – Unit 3
 Nancy Klaber – Unit 3
 Eilseen Knisely – Unit 3
 Logene Kobe – Unit 2
 Ruth Kronick – Unit 2

Aggie Leitheiser – Unit 3
 Anne Mavity – Unit 1
 Carlota Medus – Unit 3
 Barb Person – Unit 3
 Julia Ross – Unit 3
 Louise Ross – Unit 3
 Thelma Russeth – Unit 2
 Eleanor Sachs – Unit 1
 Sue Sanger – Unit 1
 Carol Schaldenbrand – Unit 2
 Allyson Sheldrew – Unit 3
 Steve Simon – Unit 1
 Bonnie Skelton – Unit 3
 Beryl Stoller – Unit 2
 Elaine White – Unit 3
 Valerie Wild – Unit 1

**We welcomed five new members over the last year:
 Allyson Sheldrew, Ruth Kronick, Thelma Russeth, Max Edelstein and Sharon Bannie.**

57th Annual Meeting Saturday, April 16, 2011

Tell Us About A Memorable Voting Experience

- I was disenfranchised to vote. Idaho had a 6 month waiting period and I couldn't vote.
- I brought 35 people to vote. They needed help and I had to help them vote for Nixon 17 times.
- My mom was a member of the LWV.
- Voting is such a pleasure. I always anticipate a full parking lot.
- Many people were energized by Governor Ventura.
- I vouched for a neighbor so he could vote.
- Meeting Aggie at a primary.
- I volunteered to be a Poll Server – they sent me to Duluth.
- When people would call in to find out where to vote, we had to look in a big book. The phones rang constantly.
- Handling the registrations.
- The last election I wasn't registered, I had to make a mad dash to my parent's house to register and vote.
- I was an election judge. President Obama brought so many new voters and many brought their children.
- My job was to monitor the polling places. There were concerns about mischief in NE Minneapolis but it was uneventful.
- After Kennedy won in 1960 I went to school with Kennedy buttons all over me.
- During voter registration there were a lot of Russian Jews. They were so excited to display their citizenship papers.

Highlights 2010 – 2011

September: Unit 2 reviewed health reform issues and changes. Unit 3 prepared for the general election candidate forums.

October: Unit 2 discussed population growth and the impact on the planet. Unit 3 hosted two candidate forums.

November: Unit 2 and Unit 3 held discussions on upcoming legislative issues and the many changes for Minnesota.

December: Unit 2 and Unit 3 held Lively Issues discussions, our annual review of program and positions.

January: Unit 2 hosted the St. Louis Park City Clerk, Nancy Stroth, who donated a poster with many versions of voting booths. Unit 3 held a legislative interview with Representative 44B Steve Simon.

February: Both Units heard a presentation from Jeanne Massey from Fair Vote MN who discussed how Ranked Choice Voting is being used in Minnesota and in other parts of the country for local elections.

March: Both Units reviewed the current activities and plans for light and heavy rail in St. Louis Park presented by Lynne Carper from the St. Louis Park Planning and Charter Commission.

May: A Tour of St. Louis Park is planned to see the many changes in housing, transportation, neighborhoods and environment.

2011 – 2012 Officers and Directors

Officers

President	Aggie Leitheiser
Vice President	Debbie Blake
Secretary	Allyson Sheldrew
Treasurer / W. Metro	Barb Person

Board of Directors

Membership	Ellen Hacker
Voter Editor/Web	Deb Brinkman
Voter Service	Eilseen Knisely
CMAL	Dorothy Karlson
Observer/Publicity	Judy Cook

Annual Meeting Vote for 2012 Topics

1. 2010 Census and how St. Louis Park has changed in the last 10 years
2. Develop a proposal for using Ranked Choice Voting for St. Louis Park elections, including updating the City Charter

Annual Meeting Speaker: Carlota Medus Minnesota Department of Health

Forborne Disease Epidemiology in Minnesota
Carlota Medus, PhD, MPH
Epidemiologist, Principal
Forborne Diseases Unit
Minnesota Department of Health



Carlota Explains The Process Of An Investigation

Foodborne Diseases in the Minnesota

Epidemiology means the study diseases in populations. The study of foodborne diseases influence policies, prevention efforts, inspections and enforcements in order to prevent more illnesses.

Epidemiologists at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) have earned a national reputation for identifying outbreaks and the source of those outbreaks quickly. Here are two ways that outbreaks are identified. One way is by comparing complaints from people who call the MDH to report their own illness that they believe they contracted from a food or a restaurant (the hotline's number is 1-877-Foodill).

Outbreaks are also detected by reportable disease surveillance: health care providers and laboratories are required to report diseases caused by certain pathogens (e.g., Salmonella, E.coli O157:H7) to the MDH. As part of the surveillance activities, laboratories send the actual bacteria that made a person sick to MDH. Additional testing done at MDH includes bacterial DNA fingerprinting, called pulsed-field gel electrophoresis. The genetic fingerprinting allows the epidemiologists to figure out which persons may have acquired their infection from the same source. To figure out what the source may have been, all persons of illness caused by a foodborne pathogen is interviewed about exposures (foods consumed, animal contact, travel, other exposures) in the 7 days prior to their illness.

One of the things that contributes to MDH's success is a group of eight or nine graduate students called "Team Diarrhea". Team Diarrhea conducts interviews of ill persons on evenings and weekends, allowing the epidemiologists to more quickly identify the source of the outbreak.

Foodborne Safety in Bangladesh

Carlota went to Bangladesh last fall to evaluate if there is any surveillance in place for foodborne diseases, and to make recommendations on conducting foodborne disease surveillance.

Bangladesh is a small country about the size of Iowa, that is packed with people. With a population of 164.4 million in 55,598 sq. miles, it has one of the highest population densities in the world. It is essentially a river delta, and it experiences extreme frequent flooding. More than half of the population lives on less than \$1 a day. In Dhaka, the capital, approximately half of the population lives in the vast, hand-built shantytowns.

Carlota Medus, continued

Challenges include:

- Overpopulation
- Poverty
- Physical and chemical hazards
- Arsenic in the water
- Gender inequality
- Malnutrition
- Child labor
- Hospitals suffer from power outages

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, in collaboration with the government of Bangladesh, started a project called Food Safety in Bangladesh. The European Union funds the program. It is intended to implement food safety policies, establish a program of food inspections, and develop food safety education strategies. International food safety experts work in teams with professionals from Bangladesh on this project. The goal is that the Bangladeshi's will be able to continue the program after implementation.

Although certain diseases are reportable in Bangladesh, the way the data are collected and the type of data collected by the government is not very meaningful. The government laboratory is not equipped to be able to conduct any testing as part of surveillance efforts. Additionally, outbreaks are detected by monitoring newspapers and media reports. There is a private institute called the International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) that conducts meaningful laboratory-based surveillance for foodborne diseases. Recommendations included long-term recommendations for government-based surveillance efforts, and minor additions to the surveillance already conducted by the private institution ICDDR,B.

Carlota's travel experience reminds us of how fortunate we are to have the Epidemiologists at the Minnesota Department of Health working to identify sources of foodborne diseases.



Woman And Child At The Dhamrai Market



Public Transportation - Rickshaws In Dhaka



Women On A Homemade Raft In Gulshan, A Neighborhood Of Dhaka

**57th Annual Meeting
Saturday, April 16, 2011
Minneapolis Golf Club**



Betty Hardacker, Elaine White, Logen Kobe



Debbie Blake and Eilseen Knisley



Carlota Medus and Thelma Russeth



Barb Person and Judy Cook



Dorothy Karlson,
Aggie Leitheiser,
Deb Brinkman



Ellen Hacker and Barbara Aslakson



President Aggie presents the
"Millie Johnson" award to
Deb Brinkman

Keeping In Touch

Senator Ron Latz

The Week In Review

With the first policy deadline this Friday, April 29, we have spent a lot of time in committees going through bills. For a bill to continue on after first deadline, it must move through all the required committees in either the House or the Senate. Next Friday, May 6, is the final policy deadline when a bill must move through all the required committees in both the House and the Senate. You will see long committee hearings next week as well.

Tuesday was a frustrating and disappointing day. The Omnibus Liquor bill was introduced in the Commerce Committee and my bill to help Four Firkins in St. Louis Park (S.F. 323) was not included. I do not sit on the committee that was hearing the bill but, I had another Senator offer an amendment to include the language that would let Four Firkins sell t-shirts with their logo on it in their store. Currently, under State law, that is not allowed. The amendment to have the language included was voted down on party lines. Fortunately, it was included in the House bill so it may still have hope

Tuesday also saw the introduction of a Constitutional Amendment to define marriage as between one man and one woman. Currently Minnesota has two provisions in state law that specifically ban marriage between persons of the same sex. Although I don't agree with them, they do exist. This amendment would write discrimination into our State constitution and I firmly believe that to do that would be wrong.

There were also other constitutional amendments introduced by the Republicans this week including Voter ID, a requirement for a super majority to raise taxes, and one that allows the State to ignore Federal laws. I am embarrassed that we are wasting our time on such issues when we have a large deficit to overcome and a budget to constitutionally balance by May 23rd.

So far, the conference committees (with all Republican members save one) have been only meeting to go over the bills and have not started any negotiations. The Governor has requested that the conference committees pass their final bills from the Senate and House by May 6th so that there will be time to negotiate the differences between the Governor's budget (introduced Feb. 15th) and their budget that has not been passed yet.

Please continue to e-mail, write or phone me regarding your issues and concerns. As session becomes hectic, please be patient with me on response time.

sen.ron.latz@senate.mn

Phone: [651-297-8065](tel:651-297-8065)

Elisabeth MacNamara, President, LWVUS

Springtime...Take A Deep Breath of Clean Air!

The assaults continued in April: on the Clean Air Act via attempts to gut the Environmental Protection Agency and on voters' rights via discriminatory voter ID legislation in many states. Late this month, we launched a seven-figure television ad campaign calling public attention to the votes by Senator Scott Brown (R-MA) and Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) earlier in April to block new air pollution standards. The accountability ads call on both Senators to "protect the people, not the polluters."

More than 2/3 of states have passed or are considering laws that would make it harder for people to vote. Because of ONE case of voter fraud in 6 years, a new law disenfranchises 620,000 Kansas residents who lack government ID. An "emergency" Texas bill does not consider student IDs valid IDs to vote, but will allow anyone with a handgun license to vote.

But we are not deterred. Instead, we were especially heartened by this [April 26 editorial in the New York Times](#), citing these challenges, while calling for action and highlighting the League's work on voter protection and voter registration.

There's more below on these topics as well as the other vital work we have been doing this month. Read on...

And, we always look forward to your thoughts via our [Facebook](#) page and [blog](#). We also recently joined Twitter! Find us as @LWV or www.twitter.com/LWV and follow us.



Proposed Agenda

63rd Annual LWV Minnesota Convention Rochester, MN May 20-22, 2011

The Power of Civil Discourse

Friday May 20

3:00 – 7:00 Registration

5:00 – ? Reception/Entertainment

Saturday May 21

8:00 – 5:00 **Registration** with coffee, tea, juice, water, muffins, etc. in morning

8:30 – 5:30 **Communications demonstration in Theater**

Vote411

LWVMN website

Facebook

9:00 – 10:15 Minnesota Action Priorities Presentation Voting rights, redistricting and the Minnesota state budget are our action priorities at the state level. Voter ID requirements would do nothing to improve election integrity but would prevent many registered voters from casting a ballot. The redistricting process should be more accountable and transparent. Minnesota must address its long-standing imbalance between lower revenues and higher spending, while protecting education, needy citizens and the environment. Join us for a lively discussion of LWV Minnesota's successes and challenges on these issues.

10:15 – 10:30 **Break**

10:30 – 11:30 Workshops:

The 21st Century League Presenters Carol Frisch, former LWVMN President, speaks on the LWV basics for your local president, secretary, and treasurer. What if my league doesn't have board members? Bettie Reuther, LWVMN State of Democracy, speaks on how to streamline your league. How can it work for my league? A panel of local league presidents offer what works and doesn't work for them.

Growing your LWV - What could your League do if you had more members? Just answering that question gets the juices flowing for the Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI), a program offered through LWV Membership/Field Support staff and available to LWV Minnesota in early 2012. Participating LWVs will receive intentional coaching and support to implement best practices for membership recruitment and retention. Learn more about the MRI, sample some of the Best Practices, and bring your enthusiasm about the program back to your LWV. Judy Duffy, National Board member and Florence Hedeem, National Coach, will lead the session and share the success of the approach in participating states.

11:30 – 12:45 **Lunch/Keynote Speaker: Judy Duffy, 1st Vice President of LWVUS**

1:00 – 5:00 First Plenary Session:

Welcome/Organization of convention/Roll Call of Local Leagues

Presidents' Report

Executive Director's State of the League Report

Introduction of the Current Board

Proposed Agenda, continued

BREAK

Presentation of the Proposed Program
 Consideration of Non-Recommended Items
 Announcements

5:15 – 6:00 Social Hour

6:00 – 7:00 **Banquet / Peggy Thompson and Hope Washburn Awards**

7:00 – 8:00 **Speaker - Dr. Angela High-Pippert, Associate Professor, Political Science, University of St. Thomas**

8:00 – 10:00 Caucuses/Socializing in Suite

Sunday, May 22

7:30 – 8:00 Coffee/tea/granola bars/yogurt

8:00 – 9:30 Workshops:

Program & Action Have you been impacted by the Citizens United Decision? Are you concerned about water quality? Has your access to the judicial system been affected by budget cuts? Program Chair, Deborah Price, will discuss the program topics and how to be involved with the process of the briefing paper and/or study that is chosen by the convention. How do we draw more members into the process? Can we afford a study? Is a briefing paper enough? What topics will be timely?

Action Co-Chair, Gwen Myers, will describe LWV Minnesota's action procedures and the joys of working in our new political environment in St. Paul. The budget will be center stage - will we be on the verge of a special session or celebrating a balanced solution to a \$5 billion deficit? (The Legislature must adjourn on 5/23.) Look for answers to questions like, "OMG, what do we do now?" and "How do I lobby my legislator who disagrees with me on important issues?"

Local Leagues Becoming Community Leaders Minnesota without the LWV would not be the same place. Our environment has changed from 90 years ago. How do we look to the future to make changes but keep our mission? How do you position your Local League to be a leader in your community? Local LWV's have some great ideas for you.

9:40 – 10:40 **Brunch/Spirit of Democracy Awards Presentation, & Introduction of the In-coming President**

10:50 – 12:15 **The Power of Civil Discourse: Creating Positive Programs and Forums in an Increasingly Uncivil World**

Speaker, Donna Rae Scheffert, Emeritus Extension Professor of the University of Minnesota and adjunct instructor at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs believes in the power of civil discourse. She will discuss ways to diffuse, deflect and even prevent disturbances at our public forums and programs.

12:15 – 12:25 **Break**

12:25 – 3:00 Second Plenary Session

Debate and Action on Program
 Adoption of Program

BREAK

Adoption of Budget
 Direction to the Board
 Adjourn

3:15 – 3:45 New-Board Meeting

"Gotcha" Journalism

Originally published in the "Nonprofit Quarterly", dated March 29, 2011,
by Rick Cohen to the LWV Minnesota Board

It is an excellent description of how non-profits, beginning with ACORN, then Planned Parenthood, and NPR, have been targeted by those who want to eliminate any or their federal funding, as well as **undermine their credibility**.

Some in LWVMN have been concerned that LWV may become a target down the line. Although we do not receive government funding, we do take positions on issues that many describe as "partisan." Planned Parenthood was targeted at their lowest employee level, as was ACORN. This means that someone could attend a local LWV meeting, audio-taping or video-taping it, and publicize what is said. We **all** need to keep in mind our non-partisan position.

LWV is considered a non-partisan, political organization, because it does not support parties or candidates. However, there are those who publicly have tried to dispute this across the country. The best example, but by no means the only, is the disruption of the Illinois candidate forum, which Glenn Beck commented about on Fox News.

In Minnesota we have seen several incidents of other behaviors which tries to achieve the same outcome. LWV Park Rapids recently ran into a problem during Sunshine Week (talk to Florence Hedeem for more details.)

Our LWVMN convention May 20-22 prioritizes Civil Discourse, in part, because of this issue. We encourage you to send delegates from your local LWVs, so they can learn how to accomplish what this article recommends nonprofits do to challenge this form of "gotcha" journalism.

Thank you,
Karen Langsjoen, Chair
Member Resources Committee

Editor's Note: In this intensely polarized political environment, it is no surprise that nonprofits – particularly those operating in politically charged fields – would feel at risk. Traditionally that risk includes a lot of overheated rhetoric leading to vulnerability in both public policy decisions and public funding.

Unfortunately these risks are not new. But now those traditional lines of attack are being supplemented by the growing popularity of the video "sting." Sometimes masquerading as journalism, these well-publicized stings are a penny ante theater in search of a venue. The plots are thinly constructed, and the precepts ridiculous, but somehow they are playing to full houses.

The scenario entails showing up at the organization in question (sometimes repeatedly, if they can't at first find a patsy) and posing a

situation that is unusual enough to throw the subject off base and then luring them into misbehavior. Granted, sometimes it does not take much. The misbehavior of the individual stung then becomes a proxy for the behavior of the whole organization – the small story becomes the bigger meaning and the die is cast.

The problem is that these kinds of stings have been infecting public policy conversations. The images and edited statements remain in people's minds eyes, obscuring the real substance of the policy debates.

What's a politically contentious nonprofit to do in the face of such stuff? Rick Cohen suggests that we scrutinize our own organizational cultures and practices to ensure as much integrity as possible. I agree with that, but it also behooves us to speak out against the absurdity of the tool being used to batter important organizations

among us into a weakened state. We tend not to speak out on such stuff as a sector. When a "scandal" surfaces at a colleague nonprofit, many of us just keep our heads down, hoping we can stay out of the fray but what would happen if this sector took to loudly mocking the practice of the video sting – creating our own counter narrative about the practice?

Nonprofits need to take more control over the "story" we want heard by our public. Part of that is in loudly and often declaring these kinds of vacuous stings illegitimate and unworthy of the intelligence of the residents of this country. – Ruth McCambridge, Editor in Chief

On a recent late winter day, National Public Radio fundraising specialist Ron Schiller was having a great meal at the hip and expensive Milano's in the posh Georgetown neighborhood in Washington D.C. He was meeting with representatives of the "Muslim Education Action Center," interested in donating \$5 million to NPR – or so he thought. Members of the group allegedly told Schiller that they were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Over the course of the meal, the conversation covered the Jewish control of the media and Zionist bias in news reporting and other topics of interest.

Schiller told the two men he was meeting with, "The Tea Party is fanatically involved in people's personal lives and very fundamental Christian – I wouldn't even call it Christian. It's this weird evangelical kind of move." And later added, "Tea Party people" aren't "just Islamophobic, but really xenophobic, I mean basically they are, they believe in sort of white, middle-America gun-toting. I mean, it's scary. They're seriously racist, racist people."

It was only later that Schiller – and the rest of the world – learned that he'd been stung. Political activist James O'Keefe and his self-styled muckraking group, [Project Veritas](#), had managed to get the whole thing on tape. Schiller, along with NPR CEO, Vivian Schiller (no relation), was fired.

And NPR is not alone. Other groups, many nonprofit, and many – but not all – considered liberal, have all been stung – and caught on tape. ACORN, Planned Parenthood, and

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, and Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, have all had embarrassing, incriminating, or inappropriate remarks made public.

Each has been stung by people masquerading as potential donors, clients – even as telephone repairmen – aiming at generating some embarrassing news revelations. Is this investigative journalism? Is the public being served? Or is this noise that distracts from important issues? We think it's the latter. These stings sidetrack the public into focusing on the miscues of individual nonprofit and government officials and staff, and rarely the quality of public discourse.

In the case of ACORN, the sting generated enough public outrage on conservative cable TV shows to lead to an external management review. ACORN never recovered, in part because it didn't make the corrective actions the external reviewers recommended. In the end, ACORN's problems were hardly the acts seen in the videos of its under-trained and inadequately managed staff. The group's undoing was its inability to come to grips with its managerial problems tracing back to the embezzlement of a seven-figure sum by the brother of ACORN's founder and chief organizer.

The videos didn't elucidate issues about how ACORN or any community-based organizing and advocacy effort might be better structured and managed. The video sting didn't elevate the debate, but rather cheapened it. It muddied the issues, and left the public confused about the legitimacy of ACORN's core functions versus its politicized image.

For Planned Parenthood, the sting involved people masquerading as pimps looking for abortions for underage prostitutes. It took visits to several Planned Parenthood centers until they found one where they could trap a less-than-attentive clerk. Even though Planned Parenthood fired the staff person in question and the staff person in the videos actually called the police, the sting has been used by opponents to [call for defunding the organization](#). But what did the events say about Planned Parenthood, as an organization?

The caught-on-tape phone call of Governor Scott Walker may well have weakened the Wisconsin

conservative's ability to carry out his agenda to make deep cuts in the state budget and simultaneously eviscerate the rights of public sector unions, but it isn't clear that the sting helped public understanding. The argument is that the sting, a blogger masquerading as right wing mega-donor David Koch, was able to get through to the Walker to talk political turkey when the governor was purportedly unwilling to make himself similarly accessible to Democratic state senators who had decamped for Illinois.

While the Governor let his guard down with Pseudo-Koch and embarrassed himself, the issue isn't whether he was willing to chat up a storm with a conservative donor. Like any pol, Walker probably answered the call because of money and said things about what he'd like to do to his former colleagues across the border that he perhaps regrets having become public. But Walker's willingness to attack his opponents isn't really new. Much of what he and his Republican colleagues did to fast-track the anti-union legislation was reprehensible on its own accord – and the governor's negotiating intransigence is turning off voters in his state.

But Wisconsin is emblematic of how communities, nonprofits, and labor are going to organize to stand up for government playing the role it has to play going forward regarding public funding for critical public services. That's the issue, that's what needs to be discussed, that's what should propel organizing around Wisconsin as the bellwether state for the kinds of cuts in programs and services that, if Walker succeeds, will devastate communities there and, by virtue of emulation, around the nation. The sting did not elevate that discussion.

And now with the latest sting aimed at NPR, the underlying issues are obscured by a "gotcha" mentality that only seeks to destroy an organization, rather than understand, change, or challenge it.

To his credit, the fatuous NPR executive never accepted the phony money offer, but he decided to talk big about the Tea Party movement, calling them anti-Islamist, racist, and xenophobic, and suggested some less than complimentary things about the Republican Party overall. He also said that he thought that NPR would be better off not accepting any government money.

All of the comments he made were his own, not NPR's, certainly not endorsed by NPR. NPR for its part made it clear that it wanted to get documents attesting to the legitimacy of the proposed donor organization, 990s or their equivalent, but none were forthcoming and no money or checks ever changed hands.

After the fact, as in the ACORN situation, there is evidence that the sting videos were significantly edited to present Schiller in the worst possible light. For example, the unedited video shows that Schiller's "xenophobic" [statement was actually a quote](#) of a Republican ambassador.

Congressional leaders have called for defunding NPR and denying support to Planned Parenthood, as though the stings were sudden revelations to them. Of course the Republicans have been aiming at zeroing out NPR forever.

The stings and subsequent resignations and firings didn't mollify Republicans' positions on public radio or Planned Parenthood for that matter. The sudden [faux outrage](#) of the likes of Republican Congressman Eric Cantor and others taking to the House floor (or cable TV microphones) was hardly news.

So what does a nonprofit do when the caller on the phone or the prospective client is of unverifiable provenance? What's the regimen for functioning in an environment where we've dumbed down accountability to gotcha traps and stings?

First, a general principle: Don't fall prey to the fear of stings and go all secret and silent. The nonprofit sector needs more openness, more transparency, more public discussion, not less. If you want to be a perfect candidate for a sting, you will be doing the stingers a great service by trying to keep issues under wraps. You might as well raise semaphores over your organization announcing that you have something to hide. As Justice Louis Brandeis famously said, "sunshine is the best disinfectant."

Second, stand up for what you believe. NPR's rapid collapse in the wake of the sting has been truly disheartening. While the sting caught an NPR fundraiser or two making eyes at the possibility of a multi-million dollar donation, it didn't raise a scintilla of information about the

journalism and community function of National Public Radio or its thousands of local affiliates.

Are there issues to debate about NPR? Sure. How about the core issue of whether NPR actually needs federal funding? What is the significance of federal funding for NPR versus federal funding for NPR affiliates? Given that all of the NPR affiliates are hardly as resource-rich as WETA or WGBH, how does federal funding affect the operations of public radio stations that aren't quite as well-heeled?

There are also questions that could be raised about the need for NPR to expand its audience [demographics](#) beyond the 32 percent that hold graduate degrees (compared to 8 percent in the U.S. population), the 69 percent with Bachelor's degrees (compared to 26 percent in the population), the median household income of NPR listeners of \$90,100 (compared to \$53,593 overall), and the 86 percent white (and 5 percent black) proportion of listeners ([PDF](#)).

But a sting of a fundraiser bloviating to impress potential donors doesn't get to the root questions of explaining, justifying, or altering NPR's federal subsidy – and no, killing federal funding for NPR has virtually zero impact on the federal deficit, it doesn't even add up to a microblip. But should a National Public Radio be considered a *national* organization for public subsidy purposes when its audience is so distinctly white and upper class? This is an issue that could be debated productively – but won't be, as stings become the way public policy is debated.

A third way to function in the sting era is to keep egos in check. Like the Pew program officer who [famously pronounced](#) that Pew was funding campaign finance groups to appear like a mass movement, the NPR fundraiser sounded like his ego was working much faster than his brain. Some people have suggested that his behavior was, unfortunately, typical of some fundraisers who throw caution, ethics, and intelligence to the curb in their pursuit of the big donation. If there is a solid lesson in the NPR sting for every single nonprofit employee, it is to remember the importance of humility and service.

A fourth way is to correct misguided staff, improve management oversight, and bolster training. In the cases of ACORN and Planned Parenthood, the sting was aimed at line staff, in many cases, line staff way down the food chain. In some cases, the staff mishandled the traps and fell through manholes. As awful as the sting scenarios might have been, these line staff were likely responding the way most nonprofit service staff respond, with the default "how can I help" thought process. Planned Parenthood appears to have taken corrective steps, ACORN resisted them until an outside audit was conducted, and by then, ACORN had unraveled.

Targeting a sitting governor rather than a low-level staff person, pseudo-Koch didn't elevate the debate about the Wisconsin state budget and the collective bargaining rights of public sector unions, but he revealed the highest officer of the state playing fast and [loose with ethics](#), the campaign finance law, and the public trust.

But nonprofits – and legitimate journalism – should be concerned with elevating the quality of the public dialogue.

Catching the governor in a compromising position doesn't make us know more or less about public sector unions – why they have been growing while private sector unions have been declining, how public sector officials negotiate with public unions when there is only one public sector compared to multiple private corporations competing to provide the unionized product, and whether the union issue is or isn't at the heart of Wisconsin's budget crisis.

Similarly, the verbal faux pas of NPR fundraiser Schiller and [NPR CEO Schiller](#) mean just about nothing for the content and quality of the 900 or so stations that carry NPR programming or the 764 radio stations operated by NPR's official 268 members. It is grossly unfair to trap a Washington-based NPR executive waxing thoughtlessly over drinks and assume that that tells anything about NPR stations serving Brownsville, Texas, Lafayette, La., or Fargo and Bismarck, N.D.

Observer Reports

Observer Coordinator: Judith Cook 952-928-9846

Observer Report - St. Louis Park City Council - April 4, 2011- Deb Brinkman, observer

In attendance:

Anne Mavity, Sue Sanger, Jeff Jacobs, Susan Santa, Julia Ross, and Phil Finkelstein

Presentations

- Recognition of Board and commission members – several awards were presented.
- Caring Youth Day Proclamation – Mayor Jeff Jacobs commented that there are several organizations in St. Louis Park who nominate and support the Caring Youth program – and on how hard the youth work in this program.

City Council minutes were all approved as submitted.

The Special Study Session minutes from March 21 were approved with a minor addition.

The agenda was approved as submitted.

Discussion Item:

Phase 3 activities of Highway 7/Louisiana Interchange Project are nearing completion.

Phase 4 will take approximately one year.

Next spring and summer funds expire. The total cost is \$22 million.

It is being funded by HR Levies.

- Everyone had done a great job but concerned that we could not afford another billion-dollar project that we can't fund ourselves.
- If we are going to take a chance, now is the time to do it.
- This is a risk worth taking. We have been working on it for 7 years.
- There is a huge need for traffic and safety concerns in the area.
- It is unfortunate that we have to foot the bill for planning, but we do not want to throw the money away.
- Source for the funds is a grant through Met Council

The work was approved and seconded noting that we can stop work at any time if we do not receive funds.

Communications Sessions:

- Two listening sessions have been scheduled, April 27 and 28 at the Jr. High.
- There will be more information coming.
- There will be a public meeting on Highway 100 on Tuesday, April 12.

Observer reports, continued

Observer Report — City Council, Monday, April 25, 2011 Ellen Hacker, observer

After holding a study session and brief Economic Development Authority meeting, the mayor called the City Council meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. The first item on the agenda was the Beautify the Park Proclamation presented by Mayor Jeff Jacobs. The mayor talked about the Pick Up The Park program, encouraging citizens to pick up any trash they see and that if anyone is interested in helping further, volunteers are needed. To become a volunteer call 928-6025.

The consent calendar was approved unanimously. There were no Boards or Commissions items on the agenda. A public hearing and final bond resolution for the issuance of private activity revenue bonds for Benilde-St. Margaret School was held after bond counsel, John Utley from Kennedy Graven, presented an overview of the project and summary of the bond process. No one appeared at the hearing so it was closed.

Prior to the vote, a question was asked by Councilmember Sue Sanger directed to the Benilde principal who was present at the meeting. The question was related to many complaints received by Councilmember Sanger, and she said others had also received complaints, regarding the athletic field's bright lights being on late at night and bothering neighbors. She said the problem had been ongoing and that she wanted to know if anything was being done to rectify the situation and what the timeline would be. The principal said she was not directly involved with the project and didn't know the answer. The school will follow-up and let the City Council know what will be done to correct the problem. After this discussion, the council voted unanimously to approve the bond request.

There was a motion to adopt resolution accepting the project report for the Park Center Blvd. rehab project. Staff provided information and maps showing the slight reconfiguration of Park Center Blvd. turning lanes, east of Target Store. Staff stressed that businesses would remain open during the construction. The resolution passed unanimously. Another motion was adopted unanimously approving a labor agreement between the city and the firefighter union, with no pay increases but other increases, such as for uniforms, licenses and an increase for health care costs. This is the fourth of five one-year union agreements being negotiated by the city this year.

Communication items included:

- Spaghetti dinner fundraiser for Lenox Senior Program on Friday, April 29, 2011, 4:30-6:30 p.m. at Lenox, catered by St. Louis Park Olive Garden. Tickets are \$7.50 in advance, or \$8.00 at the door and \$4.50 for children under 10. Link to website: http://www.slpcommunityed.com/senior/special_events.html
- St. Louis Park home remodeling tour being held Sunday, May 1, from noon to 4:00 p.m. Here is a link to the city's website about the event: <http://www.stlouispark.org/events/the-st-louis-park-home-remodeling-tour.html> .
- City Council "listening sessions" on Wednesday and Thursday, April 27 & 28 at City Hall regarding the freight rail issue. Here is a link to the city's website about the issue: <http://www.stlouispark.org/light-freight-rail.html>

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Observer reports, continued

Observer Report - School Board Meeting - April 25, 2011 Judy Cook, observer

The Board meeting spotlighted the student History Day Finalists, the Math Team State Finalists and the award of the Twin West \$5,000 scholarship.

There was a lengthy Open Forum as many parents decried the perceived inequities at the Junior High School between the Spanish Immersion program and the standard track program. There was no comment from anyone on behalf of the Spanish Immersion program.

A presentation regarding a two track educational options for students in grades 9 through 12. The 9th grade program would focus on Building Assets and Reducing Risk (BARR). In grades 10 – through 12 could choose electives in either the business/arts academy or the science/technology academy. They also proposed a non-traditional approach for challenged learners and another approach for high achieving students.

A team of teachers presented a plan for teacher development that includes early release and late start times for students.

The agenda also included presentation of the 2011-12 budget update, discipline committee update, and policy development

Editor's Note: Thank you to everyone who has contributed content to the *Voter* and to Barb Person and Nancy Klaber who have helped preview it before publishing. Have a great summer.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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