



The Voter

A Publication of the League of Women Voters of Johnson County, Iowa

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and Influences public policy through education and advocacy.



From the President

The calendar year 2011 has begun. LWVJC has already sponsored our annual Legislative Briefing where we shared the priority issues of LWVIA with our state congressional delegation. We will follow up this session with Legislative Forums the last Saturday of January, February, and March plus our carpooling visit to State Capitol for Lobby Day on February 15, 2011.

Please join us!

Now is the time to begin Program Planning. "Program" is the basis for the League's education and action efforts. The largest amount of League program relates to educating our members and community about topics of study.

- See Mary Ann Bradford's article on Public Policy Positions in this [VOTER](#).
- Plan to attend a pre-Program Planning training session at the ICPL Thursday, February 3
- Join us at the Program Planning Meeting later in February (to be announced)

As we embark on the 91st year, the League needs to be strategic in choosing those issues that generate visibility and promote membership as well as fulfill our mission. Join us and ask a friend to attend!

Polly Horton

President

League of Women Voters of Johnson County

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Welcome to our newest member Steve Valenta !!



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The Ever-Changing League of Women Voters

Submitted by Pat Jensen

As was reported in the last VOTER, League members who attended the December brunch worked on an exercise to visualize the LWV of Johnson County in 2020, the League's 100th anniversary. As an introduction to today's changing times and how the organization might adapt to them, Pat Jensen presented the following review of the League's ongoing challenges and changes.

The Editor thought members might find it interesting.

The League is always changing, always facing challenges - in membership, leadership, methods of operating, and priorities. Boards ask: How do we involve more members? How do we prioritize our activities? Are we still having an impact on the community?

These challenges are nothing new. Societal and political changes have challenged the organization over its 90-year history. What follows is a decade-by-decade review of the League.

1920s

In the beginning the League inherited a structure and program (69 positions on issues) from the suffrage movement. Among those issues: protecting women factory workers against sweatshop conditions; promoting pay based on occupation, not gender; maternal health and child welfare; independent citizenship and equal property rights for married women; jury service for women; and election law reform.

The new League also began as a federation, or collection, of state and local suffrage organizations, patterned after the federal system (national, state, local). State delegates elected the national board and adopted program at conventions. Local Leagues had no vote and communication with the national League had to go through

state boards. The states looked for leadership to national, which continued the extensive field work that had been successful in the suffrage effort. Early on, the League developed the dual advantages of grass roots and central thinking, planning and leadership.

By the mid-20s the League had 100,000 members, whereas NAWSA (National American Woman Suffrage Association) had been two million strong. Citizenship schools to teach women about government and voting began, candidates meetings were held. Also, local Leagues began "know your town" studies of their communities and governments.

1930s

Strong central leadership from national continued. Nonpartisanship was institutionalized in the mid-30s (due to the League's federated structure, not all affiliates had stayed out of partisan politics in the early years).

For the League the 1930s were a time of political and educational experimentation and continuous self-questioning. The organization barely survived the depression, the national budget dropped by more than half from 1931 to 1933. By 1934, membership had fallen to 44,000. That year the League began a six-year nationwide campaign to mobilize and unify the LWV with a campaign against "the spoils system" and for merit appointment of civil servants.

1940s

World War II became a catalyst for change. At the 1944 convention the national board proposed fundamental changes - a switch from the federation of state Leagues to a national membership organization, with local League representation at conventions and the elimination of the powerful national departments.



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The Ever-Changing League of Women Voters, Cont'd

Leadership was nominated from the floor and elected and the League's purpose and policy were clarified via new bylaws:

1. The purpose of the League of Women Voters shall be to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government.
2. The League may take action on government measures and policies in the public interest. It shall not support or oppose any political party or candidate."
3. World War II also produced "units" and "unit meetings" at the local level. They evolved during the war when gas was rationed and members met in smaller neighborhood groups to study and discuss issues. Units lasted for 30 to 40 years, but as membership declined, so did they.

After the war Voters Service, which had diminished in the late 30s and during the war, was again emphasized. And membership boomed. In 1941, it was 50,000, but by 1946 the LWV had grown to 62,000. Ten years later membership had more than doubled to 125,000. As membership grew, so did the number of local Leagues. National began organizing Leagues in states where there were none: Montana, South and North Dakota, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming.

1950s

In 1951, *The National Voter* was created (*it was temporarily discontinued this the past year*). With the coming of "McCarthyism", the League developed a campaign -- the Freedom Agenda -- to educate the

public about civil liberties and constitutional protection. Opposition to a federal Equal Rights Amendment was dropped in 1954; the LWV had opposed it since the 20s over concern that the ERA would destroy hard-won legislation for women in the workplace. By 1957, the LWV Education Fund was established to allow for tax-deductible contributions. And, the organization became more interested in international studies in the 50s and 60s.

1960s

The '60s were a decade of activism and political change for the League and its members. League members, particularly in the South, had been working on ending segregation, Others had been studying the environment, equality issues, public housing, city politics. The civil rights movement and the War on Poverty were made for the grassroots League. Equal opportunity in education, employment and housing were also central to LWV activity. And, a reawakening of women's rights issues began with the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the prohibition of sex discrimination in employment.

In Iowa, the League was actively involved in 1962 in adding the amendment for merit-based judicial selection to the Iowa Constitution.

1970s

The women's movement grew. The 1972 LWVUS convention adopted support of the federal ERA; Congress passed it that year. State and local Leagues across the country worked to see that their states ratified the constitutional amendment. In 1979, Congress extended the seven-year timeline allowed for ratification. But by 1982, the ERA had come up three states short of the 38 needed for ratification. Meanwhile, many state Leagues pushed action on



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The Ever-Changing League of Women Voters, Cont'd

employment opportunities for women, and the beginning of many single-issue groups competing with older multi-issue groups for members, money and news coverage. Times and the League were changing.

In 1976, the LWV Ed Fund began sponsoring presidential debates with three Carter/Ford debates, carrying on the organization's long "voter service" efforts.

1980s

Presidential debates for both primary and general elections continued in 1980 and 1984. As the political parties became involved in the debates with an agenda to control them, the LWVEF withdrew sponsorship and the League debates ended in 1988. During the decade, study of national security and military policy came in response to the arms buildup. The LWVUS began direct mail fund raising and recruitment of "national" members. And, long-range planning was carried out by the LWVUS and Iowa League. State and local Leagues were changing how they functioned: fewer studies were carried out locally, makeup of boards was changing.

1990s

An effort to put an Equal Rights Amendment into the Iowa Constitution failed in 1992, but "women" was added in 1998. The LWV of Iowa lost its Executive Director and closed the State League office. The LWVJC study of Johnson County government, morphed into the ongoing regional governance study and advocacy. Membership and the number of local

Leagues declined and filling leadership posts became more difficult for state and local Leagues.

2000s

Both the LWVUS and state Leagues focused on election laws and practices, with efforts to keep the processes open equally to all. LWVIA studied sentencing and mental health; continued to use a paid lobbyist. Membership continued to decline (under 100,000 nationwide) and more local Leagues disappeared. Leadership was harder to find, member involvement down.

Regardless of changing times and issues, size of membership and boards, the League's fundamental purposes remain -- to educate, study, and advocate. Nonpartisanship, consensus on issues, study before action and concerted advocacy are central to League's philosophy.

Boards focus on what lies ahead. Today most local Leagues sponsor candidate and legislative forums and provide educational programs to the general public. Some advocate. Boards wonder how to get more members involved and how to mesh the "experienced" member and the "new" member. Interestingly, among the many internal studies of the organization, one done by the University of Michigan in the late 1950s when the League had 128,000 members in 1,000 local Leagues in all 50 states showed "...leaders were puzzled as to what to do about the inactive member...". The more things change, the more they stay the same!

As the LWV of Johnson County concludes a year of celebrating its 90th anniversary, we look at our past to evaluate our future.



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The Essentials of Developing and the Importance of Utilizing Public Policy Positions by the League of Women Voters

Submitted by Mary Ann Bradford

Two reasons for the political effectiveness of the League is its reputation for identifying and thoroughly studying a critical issue within the local, state, and national levels of government and the ability of the League's spoke persons and members to express their views on the causes of and methods of ameliorating the various aspects of the problem to their council members, supervisors, and state and national legislators and executives. The members' participation in each phase of the process is essential and undergirds the actions that bring our public policy positions to governmental officials and the general public.

At the League's first convention in 1920, even before the ratification of the 19th amendment, League members adopted a program consisting of 60 items covering everything from social policy legislation to electoral reform and consumer protection. As the years pass, some positions are dropped, some revised or updated to keep them current, and others go on and on without any major changes through legislation.

The process for changing the program starts at the local level. During the League mid-year, usually January or February, every local League reviews its public policy positions to determine any changes that are needed in the scope or wording of a position. Also, at this time, any member may present to the Board of Directors at a special program planning meeting a new issue for the members' consideration

as a new study item or to broaden the scope of an existing position. Members can also suggest dropping a position. Yes, it happens!

National positions are reviewed every other year. In 2010, LWVJC reviewed the LWVUS' positions. Local League's completed a check off form via e-mail that LWVUS put together from local Leagues, State Member-at-Large Units in a state and State LWV Boards of Directors to determine which issues should be presented at convention. The issue that won the National Convention delegates' vote was an "LWVUS Education Study that will emphasize: 1) History of the Federal Government's Role in Education; 2) Equity in Funding—Title IX, ESEA, IDEA. etc. and 3) Standards and Assessments." The National Board voted to expand the study to include pre-K through 12th grade.

This year, state public policy positions will be reviewed by Iowa local Leagues and their responses will be sent to the State Board. *We hope that you will get involved in the process.* On February 3rd, President Polly Spencer Horton will conduct a training session explaining how you can propose an issue for study or to expand a study, including how that proposal moves forward within the League. In 2012, National positions will once again be reviewed and if your issue is adopted it could be forwarded to National for consideration for adoption.



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90th Anniversary Committee

Submitted by Gaylen Wobeter

The committee met on the afternoon of Jan. 20th at Pat Jensen's home. Notes taken from the four groups at the December brunch were shared and discussed. The committee tried to find common themes running through the four groups to synchronize ideas for the future of our Johnson County League. These ideas will be shared at the February

7th Board meeting and to the entire League membership after the Board meeting.

The committee felt like the League's 90th Anniversary had been celebrated well in 2010, and a notebook will be assembled with the activities and information from our anniversary year to be kept for posterity.

Calendar of Upcoming Event

For more detail visit the websites listed in the page header. Simply click to be connected.

JANUARY

Saturday, 29th

Legislative Forum

9:30 until 11:30 AM

Emma Harvat Hall, City Hall

410 E. Washington,

Iowa City

FEBRUARY

Thursday, 3rd

Program Planning Training

5:00-6:00 PM

ICPL, Room E

Tuesday, 15th

2011 Lobby Day

10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Calvary Baptist Church

606 E. 9th Street, Des Moines, IA

Saturday, 26th

Legislative forum

9:30 until 11:30 AM

Coralville City Hall, Council Chamber

1512 7th St.

Coralville, Iowa 52241

TBD

Program Planning review and new program proposals.

MARCH

Saturday, 26th

Legislative Forum

9:30 to 11:30 AM

City Council Chambers

5 East Cherry Street

North Liberty, Iowa



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Legislative Priorities and the 2011 Session

Submitted by Dawn Suter

Representatives Mary Masher and Nate Willems and Senators Joe Bolckom and Bob Dvorsky meet with about 15 LWVJC at the Brown Bottle on January 3rd to discuss the LWVIA's legislative priorities for 2011. The top three League priorities are Payday Lending, Improving the Mental Health System and Sentencing Reform.

Payday lending has been a League priority for several years and Senator Joe Bolckom has been a key advocate for finding legislative remedies for the usury inherent in these lending vehicles. There was general agreement among the legislators that having introduced a bill in 2010 to cap interest rates on all loans in the state at 36% that failed to move out of sub-committee, that it was unlikely that new legislation would be introduced this year. When asked what the League's next step should be to further advocate for limiting these loans, it was suggested that the League speak to the Iowa Bankers Association. Partnering with the IAB would not only strengthen our advocacy position they may be convinced to offer an alternative product to the current payday loans. That idea subsequently surfaced in the current legislative session. The proposal currently being debated would involve establishing a fund that credit unions could use to lend to payday loan consumers using a new loan structure with lower interest rates.¹ The question remains if any new program can pass with the emphasis on reducing spending. The good news is that payday loans are recognized as problematic and solutions are being sought. This is an issue the League will continue to work on.

The 2010 legislative session resulted in the adoption of many sentencing reforms the League had been supporting for more than a decade. A new public safety advisory board was created to carry out the reforms. The board's work is progressing addressing many of the issues the League was concerned about and to a large extent; the League can claim victory on this issue. However, a key outstanding issue under this priority is linked with mental health reform. Currently, more than 70% of Iowa's prison population has a diagnosed substance abuse disorder, and more than 45% were diagnosed with a mental illness that requires ongoing psychiatric care. One in every three inmates met the criteria for being seriously mentally ill.² The outstanding issue for the League in sentencing is to reduce the number of **mentally ill caught in the judicial system**.

The Johnson County legislators expressed doubt that much would be done in the 2011 legislative session on revamping the mental health system. It was pointed out that this was somewhat nonsensical when studies clearly show that the cost to taxpayers multiplies when many mentally ill people end up in the legal system where taxpayers pay not only for the judicial proceedings and incarceration but ultimately, for the mental health services, the lack of which, lead to the costly incarceration in the first place. The legislators agreed but thought this intractable issue would not find a voice in the 2011 legislature. Surprisingly then, the Taxpayer First Act introduced by the Iowa House Republicans included a proposal to spend \$25 million over the next 18 months to help



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Legislative Priorities and the 2011 Session cont'd.

counties clear waiting lists of 844 people needing medical care for mental health issues.³ It also sets a deadline for 2012 for ending Iowa's current system of having counties be responsible for most mental health services. The \$90 million in funding currently allotted to counties would be used to overhaul the system making the state the central coordinating body for service delivery while preserving local providers. The current proposal **includes funding for substance abuse treatment**⁴. This new mental health care delivery system would be in place by 2014 positioning the state to take advantage of the expansion of Medicaid under the Federal Affordable Care Act.

The passage of a mental health reform bill in 2011 that includes funding for substance abuse treatment and overhauls the delivery system would bring to successful resolution two key priorities of the League of Women Voters Iowa. We hope you will continue to follow this legislation as it moves through the legislative process and if the final product warrants it, urge your legislators to support it.

Having addressed the three key priorities of the League, the Legislators were asked what they thought the upcoming session would hold. They discussed the key role that the Director the Department of Public Health would play in implementing the Affordable Care Act and the need for the appointee to therefore be favorable to the Act. Governor Branstad appointed Mariannette Miller Meeks to the position. She has stated that she opposes the Health Care Reform Act. There was agreement that many social issues would be at the forefront of legislative initiatives including impeachment of judges, gay marriage and abortion rights.

In closing, *The Capitol Report*, the newsletter from the League's lobbyist, stated the following: "A disturbing development - this week several constitutional amendments were filed. Apparently anything that hasn't been able to be addressed through legislation is getting a shot at being added to the Iowa Constitution. While most are filed by Republicans, Democrats have filed a resolution (HJR 9) that calls for a constitutional convention to prohibit corporate campaign expenditures. Some of the constitutional amendment resolutions filed to date include caps on state spending, restrictions on abortion, definitions of marriage, reductions to the number of counties, two year budgeting requirements, statements on the freedom to purchase health insurance and term limits for elected officials. While it is highly doubtful that any of these constitutional amendments will pass, it looks like there will be some pressure to have the debate."⁵

If you haven't already, sign up for LWVIA alerts from the League's lobbyist, Campbell Patterson to get alerts like the one quote above. They do a great job of outlining the issues and the legislative wrangling taking place around them. Sign up at: <http://www.ialobby.com>.

Another good resource on the Legislative Session is the [Iowa Independent](#). Look under the Special topics tab on the website for the 2011 Legislative Session.

Footnotes

1. "Despite broad support, payday lending legislation faces uncertain future", Mike Malloy, [Iowa Independent](#), 1/6/2011.
2. Sentencing & Corrections Reform, 2011 Policy Priorities, Issues 2011, League of Women Voters Iowa.
3. "Follow through on mental health reform", Kathie Obradovich, [Des Moines Register](#), 1/11/2011.
4. Ibid.
5. *The Capitol Report*, League of Women Voters of Iowa Legislative News, 1/13/2011.



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Lobby Day February 15th

We will car pool to Lobby Day on February 15th. We will meet near the Barnes and Noble entrance at the Coral Ridge Mall at 8:00 AM on the 15th. We will leave by 8:15 AM.

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING THE LEAGUE TO HELP US CONTINUE TO PROVIDE CANDIDATE AND LEGISLATIVE FORUMS AND ADVOCACY ON LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL ISSUES.
JOIN TODAY!!!!

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF JOHNSON COUNTY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Individual membership \$55 Family membership \$82.50 Student membership \$25

Name(s) _____

Address _____

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City

Zip

Phone(h) _____ Phone(w) _____ email _____

Please make your check to LWVJC and mail to:

Allison Panther, Treasurer

Johnson County League of Women Voters

308 ½ N. Dubuque St., Iowa City, IA 52245

Dues paid annually July 1-June 30*

*New members who join after January 1 shall have their dues prorated by one-half the amount of full membership and those who join after April 1 shall pay one-fourth the amount of full membership.