



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



From the President

By the time you read this message, the League of Women Voters Johnson County (Iowa) will have sponsored 2 Legislative Forums and participated in Lobby Day at the Capitol in Des Moines. The League reminds public servants and community members that the issue is not bigger government or smaller government, but more effective government that can address the issues that are too large for any single body to handle.

The League can be powerful in impacting our personal lives, and vital in making a genuine difference in our community on issues we care about. It is with this spirit and pride, that we encourage the Nominating Committee to offer the opportunities for leadership service within the League to candidates for board positions. The Nominating Committee members for LWVJC 2010-11 are Pat Hayek, Audrey Moeller, and Naomi Novick.

In addition to board positions, the 90th Anniversary Committee has proposed we set one priority for our coming year's agenda: a campaign on Iowa's Judicial System. This campaign could educate voters about the three equal branches of state government while focusing on the judicial branch plus advocate for the current merit appointment system of selecting/retaining Iowa's judges. Does this campaign committee interest you?

Get involved with LWVJC to inform, educate, and encourage voters to participate in local, state, or national government!

Polly Horton

March 2011

2010-2011 Officers

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621.1685

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Gaylen Wobeter 338.5218



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Updates to the LWVJC Position on the Johnson County Proposed Property Maintenance Ordinance. The LWVJC supported the ordinance as introduced and the changes outlined below.

February 13, 2011

Johnson County Board of Supervisors

913 S. Dubuque St.

Iowa City, IA 52240

Dear Members of the Board,

The League of Women Voters of Johnson County (LWVJC) is writing to follow up on our December 9, 2010, statement of support for your adoption of a Property Maintenance Ordinance.

We note that the Board has discussed revisions to your original version of the ordinance and charged the Planning and Zoning staff and the County Attorney's Office to incorporate your suggested changes into the next version. Published reports of your directions to staff raise a concern.

Exclusion of owner-occupied homes from provisions of the ordinance means that owner-occupied mobile homes will also be exempted. Concerns about conditions in mobile home parks were a factor stimulating the County to work on this ordinance.

We urge you to reconsider this exclusion to ensure the ordinance as adopted will truly address public safety and health concerns.

Sincerely yours,

Carol Spaziani, Member, Board of Directors and member of the Regional Governance Committee

and

Polly Horton, President

League of Women Voters of Johnson County

Request for Board Nominations

Polly Spencer Horton, President, LWVJC

Dear League Member:

Interesting and interested people

Doing interesting work and

Having interesting dialog...

Does this sound like a group that might interest you?

An experience to remember: demanding, rewarding, challenging, satisfying ...join the LWVJC Board of Directors to be part of a dynamic, fun group of people.

If this sounds like an opportunity you or someone you know might want to pursue please contact Nominating Committee members Audrey Moeller moellerad@gmail.com or Pat Hayek Pmhiowa@aol.com.



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Legislative Forums

Submitted by: Barbara Beaumont

The League of Women Voters of Johnson County will be sponsoring a legislative forum on Saturday, March 26th from 9:30 until 11:30 at the North Liberty Community Center, 520 West Cherry Street, North Liberty. Senators Joe Bolkcom, Robert Dvorsky, James Hahn, and Sandra Greiner, and Representatives Jarad Klein, Nate Willems, David Jacoby, Jeff Kaufmann, Vicki Lensing, and Mary Mascher have been invited.

The forums provide an opportunity for dialogue between the legislators and their constituents in Johnson County. The legislators present five-minute summaries of critical issues before their respective houses, particularly those of interest to them. The remainder of the forum is devoted to public comment and questions, beginning with the questions from the co-sponsors. The microphone will then be open to members of the audience.

Lobby Day in Des Moines 2011

submitted by Gaylen Wobeter

Four members of our Johnson County League, Polly Horton, Rebecca Reiter, Dawn Suter, and Gaylen Wobeter attended the Iowa League of Women Voters Lobby Day in Des Moines on February 15th. The State coordinator for this event, Karen Person, did an excellent job of organizing us so we could be effective in our lobbying efforts. The League's lobbyists, Amy Campbell and Craig Patterson gave us an update about the status of some of the League issues in the Legislature.

The members attending divided themselves into four groups according to areas of concern: Mental Health Reorganization, Gun/No Retreat Law, Voter ID, and Pay Day Lending. These issues are some of the top priorities for the Iowa League. We had background papers on the issues and names and photos of legislators who were on committees working on that issue. We role played how we might interact with legislators who we are trying to educate.

Then we went over to the State Capitol where confusion reigned. The building was packed with all kinds of people lobbying on an assortment of issues. Trying to find the legislators who we needed to talk to proved a challenge, but progress was made. We also attended a very confusing House committee meeting. Representative Mary Mascher graciously agreed to explain the background of what had just happened as she saw the questioning looks on our faces. The adage that "democracy is messy" certainly seemed true to us that day.

Later in the afternoon the League members regrouped and a feedback session about the day and what to do to improve it in the future was conducted by Karen Person. The group agreed that having the background on several important issues and then mixing us up to lobby legislators on that issue, rather than all of us going to our local legislators, was a positive change.

Lobby Day is an important learning opportunity for any League member and also one way we can make our voices heard on the state level.



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LWVIA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES UPDATE

Submitted by Dawn Suter

Sentencing Reform: There is nothing happening legislatively on sentencing reform this year as that work was done in 2010 and the commission charged with developing and implementing the legislation has completed most of its work. The outstanding issue under this priority was its connection to the criminalization of people with untreated mental health issues. Budget shortfalls at the county level for mental health services, without state legislation revamping the entire system, including an infusion of cash, will result in more people with mental health issues in jail, not fewer.

Mental Health: Omnibus house bill 45, the Taxpayer First Act, represented the incoming House Republican majority's priorities for the 2011 session. It focused largely on budget and tax issues. However, the bill did contain a proposal for spending \$25 million on restructuring the Mental Health Delivery system in Iowa. (Please refer to last month's [VOTER](#) for more detail of the proposed bill.)

The legislative process has split the Mental Health Care proposal from House Bill 45 and separate bills have been created to address the legislation in both the House and the Senate. The bills are HSB 83 and SSB 1077. Creating these bills allows both bodies to develop legislation reflecting their key priorities for restructuring the system. At the LWVJC Legislative Forum, held on February 26th, Senator Dvorsky said this bill would be moved to appropriations which removes it from the legislative funnels and allows legislators time to craft thoughtful, if imperfect, legislation.

Senator Bolkcom reported that they would begin by looking at how to structure the delivery system. Specifically, will the state take the central role in allocation of services while relying on local providers to provide them? Will legal settlement, a provision where the county responsible for delineating needed services and paying for them is the county where the individual is first diagnosed, regardless of where they later live, be replaced by county of residence approach? Substance abuse treatment falls under the Department of Health and Human Services, not Mental Health, how would those services be integrated? Overhauling this system is not an easy task and frankly, the complexity has meant that reform has been a long time coming. It sounds like in the 2011 legislative session both bodies are taking it on.

This bill will have a direct impact on Johnson County whose mental health budget faces a \$2.5 million dollar shortfall for 2012. The shortfall is a result of a couple factors, state imposed caps on county levies for mental health services and the end of federal stimulus dollars that augmented the budget for the 2010 and 2011 fiscal years. Under state law the County is limited in the amount of they can levy for mental health services to the amount they spent in 1995. The law, passed in 1997, also transferred half of the cost of Mental Health services to the state, subject to the same cap. The cap applies regardless of demographic changes. As a result of increased demand, increasing costs of medications etc., the cost of providing services has increased while at the same time, the county is stopped from allocating funding to that portion their budget.

The Johnson County MH/DS Department has gone over their budget with a fine tooth comb trying to find the least detrimental places to cut; but they are hard to find. Provided the proposed cuts to address the budget shortfall go into effect, the result is that approximately 100 people needing services will not be able to receive them beginning in 2012. Unfortunately, statistics show that some portion of those 100 people will end up in the criminal justice system. Jail as a fallback to underfunding mental health services cannot continue to be an unspoken option for individuals suffering from mental health illnesses. Something needs to change. It is unlikely that the law limiting tax levies for this budget item will change. It was originally sponsored by the Farm Bureau and it is unlikely their position has changed. Efforts by county officials to change the law have failed for years and the current political climate is more unfavorable to tax increases than ever before. Restructuring seems like the best hope for systemic change, but it too is fraught with challenges.

Senator Dvorsky said that if Mental Health legislation is passed at the state level this year it would be implemented in time to address at least some of the challenges the county faces in continuing to treat with Mental Health Issues.

The legislators all asked for input on how to best design the system and welcome your comments of support for moving this legislation forward.



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LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES {CONTINUED}

by Dawn Suter

The League supports an integrated mental health system. Please see Legislative priorities at www.lwvic.org for the caveats for that support.

Payday Lending: A bill addressing this issue has surfaced in this legislative session and as of last week was still alive. Senate file 113 would lower fees to 36% annual percentage rate, passed out of sub-committee on 2/24 and is now eligible for vote by the full Human Resources Committee.

The LWVIA supports the 36% cap.

Women's Reproductive Rights: This issue was not one of the LWVIA's original priorities for 2011. However, HF 153 was introduced which defines life at conception. Unfortunately, the bill can be read to outlaw contraception, morning after pills for rape victims, in vitro fertilization of all kinds and it would not allow a doctor to save a pregnant women if the cell or fetus would die (even in the case of early ectopic pregnancy that will rupture).¹

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Kim Pearson, when questioned by committee member Rep. Beth Wessel-Kroeschell said that she hopes it will result in a legal challenge to Roe v Wade and that both women receiving and doctors who perform legal abortions would be considered murderers and subject to state criminal penalty, which is life in prison, for their crime.²

The LWVUS's position is unequivocal in supporting a women's right to privacy including in health care decisions. The bill outlined above is delegated for a public hearing, although no date has been set for it. The LWVIA will present a statement at that meeting in opposition to this bill as stated in our national position.

The League's Position:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that public policy in a pluralistic society must affirm the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

Footnotes:

¹ The Capital Report # 3, League of Women Voters Legislative News, 2/19/11.

² Ibid

Federal statistical study on Women in America just released.

The Council on Women and Girls, created by President Obama in 2009, just released a study **Women in America: Indicators of Social and Economic Well-Being**. The report provides "a statistical portrait of how women are faring in the United States today and how these trends have changed over time."¹ The study is the most comprehensive since the Commission on Status of Women, commissioned in 1963 and chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, reported on the condition of women.

While statistics cannot tell the human story they reflect, they can and do provide a snapshot of how our society has changed and how that change impacts women. The report looks at five areas:

- People, Families and Income
- Education
- Employment
- Health
- Crime, violence and criminal justice

Click here for an overview and copy of the report: [Women in America](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/Women_in_America)

Footnotes: ¹ http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/Women_in_America.

March is Women's History Month

[The National Women's History Project](http://www.nwhp.org) has selected "Our History is Our Strength" as the 2011 theme for Women's history month. Visit their website for more information about History month, suffrage history and much more.

On March 8th, the International Day of Women, reach out and say thanks to women in your life, just for being there.



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MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By Rebecca Reiter

Each year on February 1st we report to national our membership count. This year our count was **99** members broken down into these categories:

Individual members: 58

Household members: 27

National members: 7

Honorary (50 year) members: 2

Student members: 5

From this number national determines our per member payment (PMP) to them for dues. No dues are assessed us for national and honorary members. This year national has asked that local leagues recruit all national members locally. I have sent out letters to our national members asking them to renew their membership through our League. Membership at the local level entitles you to be a state and national member and to receive information at all levels.

This past year we have been fairly successful in recruiting new members, gaining 8 new local members and 3 national. But, of course, we must continue our efforts on membership if we are to survive. As I have said before, the single most effective way to recruit new members is for **YOU** as a member of the League to talk to others about the League and urge them to join. We have a long and proud history of accomplishments. Use the information in the Voters as your talking points. There is also a wealth of information about the League on the websites listed above. Simply pass on to me the name of anyone you think might be interested and I will contact them with background information and how to join. The League of Women Voters has had 90 glorious years as an organization. Help us keep this legacy alive!

Many thanks to all of you who have been working recruiting new members!

Rebecca-reiter@uiowa.edu phone: 354-7163