

La Crosse Wisconsin Voter

No. 72

League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area Newsletter

Feb. 2004

The President's Podium

By Kay Adams
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MEETINGS—MEETINGS—MEETINGS

The explosive power of meetings has great history in League as well as in the birth of our country. The coming together of people, united in a common cause yet open to diverse opinions, is the core of League. The last League noon meeting featured our fellow Leaguer, Carolyn Castore. Her presentation was excellent and the audience was sitting on the edges of their chairs as we were talking about HAVA and the nuances of voting. It takes a very special person to be riveted by voting but we, in the La Crosse Area League, are those special people.

Jean Marck, as Program Chair, and the Board have talked about the timing of our educational meetings. The noon meetings are well attended but we are concerned that we are not reaching everyone, as some members do not have the flexibility to make a noon meeting. We traditionally have the Legislative Breakfast on a Saturday and the League Annual Meeting is on a Monday night. *PLEASE SEND US YOUR OPINION* on whether you would prefer to continue with the noon meetings exclusively aside from the above listed deviations or would you like to see Saturday morning meetings every other month or do you have another suggestion? The older I get the less I like to venture out after a full day at work but there have been evening meetings during the week in the past. We used to have unit meetings where people met in smaller groups to discuss consensus issues or local study ideas.

Send your thoughts and ideas to me prior to our next Board meeting, which will be February 18th. We will put it on the agenda for discussion.

Don't forget to remind everyone you know or don't know, the importance of voting! Every clerk that I interact with is encouraged to vote. The price of doing business with a League Member is to hear our cry, "Be Patriotic—Vote!"

☐ Reserve Thursday, February 19 for a meeting on Presidential Selection at Doc Powell's.

The buffet (5.95 + gratuity) begins at 11:30 a.m. and the meeting at noon.

Reservations by Sunday evening, Feb. 15 to Jean Marck, 788-4162 or jeanm2332@aol.com

More inside

HAVA Update

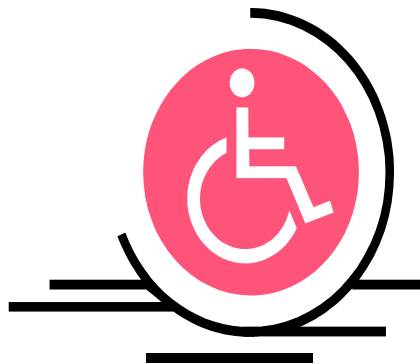
Carolyn Castore is a League member from Milwaukee and represents the League on the State Election Board's committee to implement the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). She is also the Program Director for Wisconsin Citizen Action. She and Alicia Sidman of the Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy were our guest speakers at our monthly luncheon meeting on January 15th, and they gave us an update on the HAVA implementation plan.

The Help America Vote Act was designed in response to the 2000 presidential elections, which we

all remember were mired in controversy over hanging chads, uncounted ballots, and voters being denied access to the polls. HAVA's purpose is to help streamline the voting process nationwide and improve accessibility for all voters, regardless of income, location, or ability. Its implementation deadline is January 2006, after which

every Wisconsin municipality must be in compliance.

Unfortunately, the funds available for implementing HAVA are less than what are needed to bring every municipality into compliance by 2006. Federal funds totaling \$42.47 million are available for Wisconsin until 2006, but none are allotted beyond that date.



The state legislature is currently working on providing a match for the federal funds, but so far, it is not sufficient to meet HAVA requirements. The good news is that Wisconsin is considered to be one of the best in terms of voter accessibility, and our system is being used as a national model to upgrade other states. Of course, Wisconsin is not perfect, and there are still improvements to be made.

Unlike many states, Wisconsin does not have a centralized system for keeping voter registration records—each municipality keeps its own records. In municipalities of fewer than 5000 residents, in fact, there is no registration required at all. By 2006, HAVA requires that there be a centralized process for registering voters in Wisconsin that will likely be tied to the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Corrections.

One stumbling block some Wisconsin voters encounter is the inability to vote independently, especially among voters who are vision-impaired or unable to fill out their ballots on their own. Under HAVA, all eligible voters must be able to access the polls, and specialized voting equipment will be used to allow each voter to vote independently. The cost of this equipment, and the poll worker training that will be needed, is part of the challenge of implementing HAVA.

Wisconsin's Coalition for Advocacy has taken on the task of helping individuals with disabilities obtain better access to the voting process. Partially funded by HAVA, the Coalition fights for the rights of people with disabilities, using their HAVA funding to provide education and advocacy for disabled voters. They are currently working with the state's HAVA implementation committee to ensure that disabled voters' needs are met.

Right now, there are no universal standards for accessibility at polling places. Many of Wisconsin's polling places have barriers to the disabled, both physical (like stairs or narrow doorways), or a lack of understanding on the part of poll workers. Many do not know how to deal with voters who have cognitive disabilities or mental illness or are under the guardianship of another individual. Some voters have been turned away from polling places because their voting rights are not understood. Other disabled voters simply do not attempt to vote at the polls for fear of stigma or lack of access, or because they do not understand their own rights.

Nationally, 14 million disabled people are not registered to vote, and disabled voter turnout is 11% lower than the general population. Lack of transportation keeps many voters from going to the polls. And then there is apathy—the feeling that an individual's vote simply doesn't matter.

HAVA provides some tools to overcome many of these obstacles, and there is a special emphasis on voter education. How that education is distributed, however, is a source of controversy in itself. Amendments to AB 600 that passed the state assembly would prevent the Coalition from advocating for individuals with any disability except for those with developmental disabilities (including individuals with mental illness) or from assisting individuals with disabilities either 30 days before a spring primary or 60 days before any other regular election. At this writing, the bill is on the Senate floor, and a vote is expected shortly.

Another bill would require voters to possess and present a government-issued ID card in order to vote, which would make voting even more difficult for many voters. This bill, AB 111, was vetoed by Governor Doyle, but the ID card requirement may be included in a future amendment, which would not be subject to a line-item veto.

Both Carolyn and Alicia encouraged the League to stay in touch with local officials and elected representatives on these issues. With HAVA in place, the workload for local officials will be enormous, and League's assistance will be much needed. In the meantime, the League has a strong presence on the State Election Board's committee to implement HAVA.

Coming Next Month...

LWV Legislative Breakfast: Mark your calendars for this year's Legislative Breakfast. We will be meeting at the Days Inn Hotel, 101 Sky Harbor Drive, on March 20th. A buffet breakfast will be served at 9:00 a.m.

Please notify Roxanne Reynolds at 526-5871 or roxyrey@aol.com if you will be attending. We need to have reservations in by March 16th. Cost, to be collected at the door, will be \$9.60 inclusive of tax and tip.

Please plan on joining us for this important meeting. This is our chance to discuss issues and ask questions of our local legislators. This year we have not included those legislators that send an office representative rather than attend themselves. This will give us more quality time to spend with our representatives that attend in person.

Hope to see all of you there!

Reproductive Rights: News as of January 14, 2004

by Janet Kusch

The floor period for the Legislature is January 20th - February 5th. These are bills that the anti reproductive rights folks are attempting to fast track. They are out of committee and ready to be scheduled

- **Oppose AB 634/SB 308** This is the anti waiver bill. You may remember different bill numbers. The numbers changed because the authors changed the implementation date to July 1, 2004 so as not to further jeopardize even more monies. This bill removes 15-17 year olds from the waiver.
 - Fiscally, as estimated by Wisconsin Department of Family Services, the removal of teens will result in a loss of savings of 12.7 million dollars.
 - The entire program could be disrupted or terminated, as the state will have to apply for an amended waiver. Losing the waiver would result in the loss of \$7.6 million federal dollars each year.
 - **Only AB 634 is out of committee and ready to be scheduled in the Assembly.**
- **Oppose AB 63/SB21**, the Pharmacist Denial of Birth control bill. These bills allow a pharmacist to refuse to fill birth control prescriptions if they mistakenly believe that birth control pills cause abortions.
 - The pharmacist's belief takes priority over the health care needs of a patient and interferes with the physician/patient relationship.

- Health care is disrupted.
- **AB 63 and SB 21 are ready to be scheduled in both houses.**

- **Oppose SB 27**-Right to withhold. Provides legal immunity to individuals who withhold certain information from women if doing so contributed to the mother's decision to forgo an abortion.
 - Allows health care providers to withhold information about important prenatal tests and/or their results
 - **Ready to be scheduled in the Senate.**
- **Oppose SB 28**- Baby Abandonment Counseling. Expands state-mandated lecture on abortion to include information about immunity from for baby abandonment within 72 hours after birth.
 - Mandates that abortion providers dispense legal information. Promotes baby abandonment as a pregnancy option in a state-mandated lecture.
 - **Ready to be scheduled in the Senate.**

Action:

- Call John Gard (R) Assembly Majority Leader 608-266-3387 and Mary Panzer (R) Senate Majority Leader 800-662-1227 and ask them not to schedule these bills.
- Call your Legislators and tell them you oppose these bills.
- The *Save the Waiver Coalition* will be doing a postcard campaign. We need folks to mail the cards in to let our legislators know we oppose any change to the Waiver as it is currently being implemented. Options 775-8380 will be getting the post cards. Please pick some up, share with friends and mail them out as soon as possible.



Presidential Selection Concurrence

By Jean Marck

Please read material in the bulletin and *National Voter* and be prepared to have a lively discuss on the Presidential Selection Process at the luncheon on

February 19. There will also be some time discussion of local program items for next year.

Concurrence and Consensus

League reaches membership agreement by two processes, either consensus or concurrence. This month we will do doing a national concurrence. The difference between the two is that concurrence is agreement on a position already stated while consensus is agreement on positions established through asking questions.

Concurrence was originally encouraged by some League members who felt LWV was spending too much time studying items which had already been thoroughly researched, many times by other Leagues. Concurrence does not automatically mean "no discussion." Concurrence still requires study and discussion. The proposed new position will be discussed and a vote will be taken at the February meeting. We agree or we don't agree, we can't amend it.

Local Program Making

We will spend some time at the Feb. meeting discussing what local topics we want to study next year. Criteria to consider are: Can the problem you want to study be solved by governmental action? Will study lead to effective action? Is the political timing right? Will it attract new members? Do we have sufficient member power and funds to carry out the program? What are your ideas? School boundaries and socioeconomic balance in the public schools? Continuation of county wide planning? Intergovernmental cooperation? Neighborhood revitalization? Mental health issues? Public health issues? Juvenile justice? You name it!!

Presidential Selection Committee Update

The following message is being posted on behalf of the Update Task Force:

Xandra Kayden, Task Force Chair for LWVUS Board
Edith Dallinger, LWV of Indiana
Judie Hoffman, LWV of Ames, Iowa
Carolee Mullen, LWV of Texas
Lu Pierson, LWV of Baltimore City, Maryland
Carol Smith, LWV of Broward County, Florida

It is clear that most of us have felt considerable frustration with the last presidential election, particularly, and that the whole process has been viewed with scant enthusiasm for some time. We would argue that the sense of frustration goes back at least 30 - years, but it probably is endemic, given the nature of democracy. When the Task Force assembled, we hoped for an opportunity to put the League in the forefront of a better way. Some in the League advocate instant run-off voting as a very specific solution. Since its inception, however, the League has always drafted positions based on the premise that it should identify what policies its supports in a broad philosophical sense, and has not limited its positions by being too specific as to how those goals should be achieved. This is a conscious decision so that its positions will be valid and useful for a long period of time and not become irrelevant or outdated by unforeseen events or developments. This approach has been validated numerous times over the history of the League. It is also doubtful that the League as a whole would feel comfortable adopting a specific solution such as instant run-off voting through an Update that did not go through the thorough consensus process that is part of a full-blown study.

Through most of the study, we thought we would be strong advocates of later and fewer primaries. Nine or a dozen primaries can be a test of a candidate's viability; forty-something is an endurance contest that will always be lost by those who are not front-runners because they haven't the resources to get through them. As we looked at the issue, a national primary - even the regional primaries currently under consideration - have serious drawbacks. In the end, however, it appeared that the politics would take care of the issue as candidates decided to pick and choose which primaries and caucuses they would attend. The problem isn't solved, but neither is it standing there as a clear target for a specific solution.

So, what we did was educate ourselves and, we hope - through our work - League members, many of whom were not members when the original position was adopted, about what has happened since we adopted our current position on electing a president. The interest in one-man one/vote remains high. The probability of changing the Electoral College remains low. The interest in implementing uniform voting qualifications and procedures not only remains high, but consumes a considerable amount of League energy at all levels. What has changed is not the governmental structure of presidential selection, but the politics and institutional framework by which it is

carried out. True, the League supports some of these issues already. We are supporters of campaign finance reform, free air time, and educating Americans on how the process works. Does that make it less important to focus those views in this topic? We don't think so. In fact, we suspect there is overlap on many League positions reflecting our values and our continuing commitment to them.

There are also new issues: the role of the media is more than just free air time, it is how the media covers politics in general and candidates in particular. There is a lot of attention paid to that from time-to-time, but we have never looked at it directly beyond questions of access. The Internet is an entirely new subject for us and the rest of the world, and the Task Force is not comfortable making recommendations for government action at this time. What we can do is observe its development and consider it in the context of elections and, perhaps, in time make recommendations. We can also develop a position, which we believe we have, that embodies our philosophical beliefs and positions the League to take action in a number of different ways to improve the presidential selection process as time and experience go on.

An update—not unlike a study—requires us to look at all sides of the issue. It does not require us to change our positions, but rather to consider whether or not our current position still works, and whether or not it needs something else. If we had done nothing other than provide education on the process and keep the original two positions on the subject, we would have done our job, although we would be disappointed.

And here is the nub: we wish there were a silver bullet that would guarantee free, fair, open presidential elections - and most important - a process of which we could be proud. We don't think there is one. The 2000 election highlighted many things that could go wrong with an election. Most of us would admit that the candidates who competed for the presidency in the general election were the most centrist at that time and the parties' best hope for success. The voting process was dreadfully inadequate. Should we have made recommendations about the Supreme Court? Or any court? Maybe, it never crossed our minds. Today's race in the Democratic Party has a pack of strong candidates in it. The intensity of the coming general election will be strong because we are evenly divided as a nation and very far apart in our partisanship. The problem is our politics. No

matter what happens in 2004, a good third of the nation will be upset at the result.

We have asked League members to consider what has changed in the presidential selection process and what options are being considered. We have asked them to be vigilant in educating themselves and their communities on how our election system works and on the impact of other institutions on it, principally the media and the Internet. The parties play a major part in selecting the president and we cannot ignore their role. We have explicitly expanded the notion of League activity to include advocacy to the parties.

CHILI SUPPER, BAKE & CRAFT SALE

When: Thursday, February 12
Time: 5 to 7 p.m.
Where: St. Paul's Lutheran Church, corner of Division and West Avenue
Cost: \$5.00
Why? A FUNDRAISER for Coulee Region Transitional Housing Program. We work with New Horizons to help provide housing for women & children when they leave the shelter. If you want to donate items for the craft or bake sale, you can bring them to the church the day of the sale. We will have regular, low carb and vegetarian chili.

Please price items you bring. Thank you.

~Submitted by June Kjome.

Election of the President

(from the LWV Listserv)

The League of Women Voters has long been among the staunchest supporters for the direct election of the President. The League has testified and lobbied for legislation to amend the Constitution to replace the Electoral College with direct election. The measure, which passed the House and nearly passed the Senate in 1971, has been revived in each Congress. In 1997, the LWVUS again called for abolition of the Electoral College and for direct election of the President and Vice-President in testimony before the House Subcommittee on the Constitution. The League has also supported national voting

qualifications and procedures for presidential elections to ensure equity for voters from all states and to facilitate the electoral process.

The proposed updated position continues to support direct election of the President and the abolition of the Electoral College. However, in the past 30 years, much has changed in the presidential selection process and we need to define and measure our values against other factors that appear to have dramatically altered the process. Today, the process of selecting the president is dominated by questions of campaign strategy and campaign finance, the role of the parties in the primaries and caucuses leading up to the convention, the role of the media and the effect of developing technologies. If the League's concerns include encouraging the best candidates and promoting the highest participation by informed voters, we need to understand the impact of the process on those values.

As Leaguers, we want:

- * The best possible candidates
- * Voters to be as informed as possible
- * Optimum participation by voters

Politics -- unlike government -- is capable of enormous and rapid shifts in its values and processes. Largely for that reason, making changes in the rules under which elections are run has been characterized more by unintended consequences than a widespread sense of improvement. Even as the Task Force on the Update of the League's Position on Selection of the President did its work, concern for the increasing numbers of primaries scheduled in the first few weeks of the primary season was changing. Some states dropped their plans to hold primaries, mostly claiming economic problems, but others argue it was because there was a contest in only one party and the other side did not want to give them the publicity. Some candidates chose not to enter the earliest contests, recognizing that regional preferences could be muted by their entrance in later races. Under the circumstances, it seemed unwise to draft a position that could be out of date in one election cycle. In the end, we based our recommendations on the consensus expressed in the Voter survey members returned about their values and interests; our understanding of where changes are happening or likely to occur; and how the League could be enabled to act. We identified areas that had heretofore not been part of our presidential electoral position: the parties, the media and the Internet, and all levels of government.

We did not propose alternative voting systems, including the proportional allocation of electors to the Electoral College. While this was considered as a measure of last resort in the original position, the notion of encouraging Leagues to lobby their respective states would lead us into a direct conflict with the value of uniform procedures, and it was removed from the position in 1982. Additionally, there is a real possibility that reforming the Electoral College will increase the chances that a Presidential election will be thrown into the House of Representatives under procedures that are contrary to the League's support for "one person, one vote." We also did not address campaign finance reform because it is covered in our campaign finance position. And in the end, we chose not to address specifically the questions of front-loaded primaries, recommendations about the media or the Internet, etc., because we believe the proposed new position will open the way to advocacy at the national, state and local levels on these issues and many more that are to develop as time goes on. The proposed new position should enable LWV boards to determine whether the primaries in any given year are too many, too skewed, or even too few. There may be legislation introduced about the use of the Internet in time, but most legislatures - including Congress - are wary of acting precipitously in this very fast-changing medium.

How the Position Might be Applied: The following are some examples of how the proposed new position may be applied. However, please keep in mind that the LWVUS Board determines how national positions may be applied and you should check with LWVUS's National Grassroots Lobbying Coordinator before taking action using the proposed new position, if it is approved through the concurrence process.

The Primaries: Parties could be encouraged to limit the number of primaries (an important factor in the increasing costs of elections), or to move them to a later date altogether, thus shortening the time between the selection of a candidate with sufficient delegates to win the nomination and the convention and general election. LWVUS could take the lead by addressing the national parties, and State Leagues could address their parties and legislatures on the subject.

The Media: Polling tells us that one major reason people do not vote is a lack of information on the candidates and ballot measures. All levels of League could encourage the media to provide more public

affairs programming, free air time, and/or require that to be a condition of licensing of local broadcast stations. They could encourage more debates and more programming in general on political and civic affairs. Print media could be lobbied to include more voter information, from candidate positions to how to obtain an absentee ballot. All levels of League could work with their local media, print and non-print, to help them understand their role in building a participatory democracy.

The Internet: The most important issues relating to the use of the Internet and other electronic communications involve access, privacy, and accuracy of information. There is an additional question about the speed with which information (particularly misinformation) can spread. While it may be premature to advocate government regulation, these issues need to be evaluated and League at all levels should be aware and observant of these questions as campaigns develop. Additionally, Leagues at all levels could work with Internet information sources, such as local governments, educational institutions and civically orientated community web sites, to provide more voter information geared to their local community.

Presidential Check-Off: All levels of League could work on raising the public's awareness of the purpose of the Presidential Check-Off on their taxes and encourage them to participate in the public financing system through educational programs and Letters to the Editor, etc.

Education: In the end, the best defense in any electoral system is an educated voter, but in the same 30-year period of change in the presidential election process, school systems throughout the nation have been dropping their civics requirements. State and local Leagues could advocate the development of civic courses in schools on how the electoral process and American government itself works in a system of separated powers.

Most of all, the League could provide education on how dramatically the Presidential selection process changed and how it might be impacted in the future by the Internet and an evolving media.

PROPOSED LWVUS POSITION ON THE SELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT

The League of Women Voters believes that the direct-popular-vote method for electing the President and Vice-President is essential to representative government. The League of Women Voters believes, therefore, that the Electoral College should be abolished. The League also supports uniform voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections. The League supports changes in the presidential election system - from the candidate selection process to the general election - to provide voters with sufficient information about candidates and their positions, public policy issues and the selection process itself. The League supports action to ensure that the media, political parties, candidates, and all levels of government achieve these goals and provide that information.

Watch for the January/February LWVUS VOTER for your concurrence form to complete.

~ Submitted by Jean Marck

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La Crosse County web site (information on Board of Supervisors and Committees):

<http://www.co.la-crosse.wi.us/Default.htm>

State Legislative Hotline:

(800) 362-9472

Wisconsin State Legislature (including *Wisconsin Blue Book*): <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>

Calendar for February ~ March 2004

League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area

Wisconsin Presidential Primary

Tues., Feb. 17

Board Meeting

Doc Powell's, 200 Main St.

Wed., Feb. 18 at noon

Presidential Selection Concurrence

Doc Powell's, 200 Main St.

Thurs., Feb. 19 at noon (lunch: 11:30 a.m.)

Board Meeting

Doc Powell's, 200 Main St.

Wed., March 18 at noon

Legislative Breakfast

Days Inn Hotel, 101 Sky Harbor Drive

Sat., March 20 at 9:00 a.m.

Note: Board meeting times/location are subject to change; refer to agenda or contact LWV President.



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