

THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY VOTER

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of the Champlain Valley

December 2006

CVLWV Board, 2006 - 2007

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Calendar of Events

We sponsor meetings and events for the public and League members.

Champlain Valley LWV Monthly Meetings

We alternate between noon and evening meetings on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May.

Wednesday, December 13, 2006 at 7 pm

Economic Impact of the Aging Vermont Population

As the population ages, how does that ripple through society and the economy? What changes can we expect in Vermont? How will the aging Vermont population impact the cost of health care, education and property taxes? Our speaker, Jeffrey Carr, is an economist who provides forecasting in such areas as housing studies and forensic economics. He is also a member of the Town of Essex select board.

Speeder & Earl's Coffee, 412 Pine St., Burlington

Wednesday, January 10, 2007 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm

Legislative Preview Dinner

Meet with elected officials. Please save the date! The Eagles Club has plenty of parking and is handicapped accessible.

The Eagles Club, 194 St. Paul St., Burlington

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - Marge Gaskins

Hello everyone:

I hope you all have looked at the new website (<http://champlainvalley.vt.lwvnet.org/>) and are thinking of the ways we can use it to expand the membership and activities of the Champlain Valley LWV. I recently looked at some of our historic reports of the League goals in the past, and using and expanding our accomplishments promises to be exciting with this new medium.

Alternating noon and evening meetings seems to be working pretty well, but we hope more of our membership will be able to attend them all. Winter and the earlier sunset is difficult for many of our members who do not like driving late, but hopefully with carpools and shorter meetings at night, most of them will be able to attend. As for those who have problems with the noon meetings because of jobs or other conflicts, we hope some of our night meetings are accessible.

Our January meeting will focus on the new legislative session. We are inviting members of the three major parties and both Houses to share their perspectives on some of the upcoming issues with which we are concerned. These include many issues that just don't seem to have resolutions without major overhaul, such as funding education, health care for all and instant runoff voting. And with this new session, the Constitution is once more open for amendment, such as the 4-year term for Governor and Lt. Governor, a position we have held since the 70's.

So there is plenty to work on for all of us. If you have ideas or expertise to help us plan the year, give us a call, and be sure and attend the meeting.

FOUR-YEAR TERM FOR GOVERNOR - Vee Gordon

Did you miss it? Tuesday evening, November 28th, was the show of shows as Madeline Kunin and Frank Bryan dueled on the issue of length-of-term for governor.

The Snelling Center provided this forum for the former Governor and the UVM Professor to discuss term-lengths. Moderated by the editor of the St. Albans Messenger, Emerson Lynn, who did a superb job by the way, the two sides of the issue were given a good airing.

Kunin cited such disadvantages of two-year terms as: arriving under the previously-passed budget and only having one year to formulate and work with one's own budget; the panic to get staff up and running in a very short time and finding people willing to commit to the two years; only being able to start a plan that could take over a year to implement and then having to start running for office again one year after the election.

Professor Bryan believes the two-year term gives the people a chance to see how a Governor is doing in a brief time and to get rid of him/her in a timely fashion, if necessary. He thinks the four-year term would need a recall provision - the ability to remove a poor performer from office before an election.

Money, money, money was also a very large topic. Today, millions are being spent in pursuit of the Governor's office regardless whether the term is two or four years.

Statistics were cited as to gubernatorial term-lengths in other states. (Vermont and New Hampshire are the only states with two-year terms). Also cited were terms for House and Senate members, which vary across the country.

There are rumblings in the State House to have four-year terms for the constitutional officers and four-year terms for Senate and House members. The league can only speak to the four-year term for Governor, and that is what we will work for in the next session.

FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS - Amy Bond

What costs do local school districts have that they cannot control? In October we briefly mentioned the very complex issue of health insurance costs. We pay for health care for our local school district employees through our local property taxes. Our local, state and national taxes also pay for health care for all governmental employees. We pay for health care for college and university employees through increases in tuition payments. We pay for the cost of Medicare through payroll deductions and/or deductions from our social security income. Increased costs of goods and services help to pay for health care for any number of productive employees in other cities, other states, and other countries.

It is mind-boggling for the average person to appreciate the full cost of health care. These costs should be isolated, clear, and easy to work with so that we can find efficiencies, eliminate duplications, improve fairness and simplify administrative processes.

Local schools need to pay for heat, electricity, and transportation, all of which are dependent on the uncontrollable cost of oil. We need to start now to find a way to harness nuclear fusion so that we can end the cost of eternal storage of radioactive wastes generated by atomic energy from nuclear fission. Since this goal will take many years of research, we also need to start now to increase our use of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and biomass. These are issues that our state must address now.

Will it work to cap local school budgets? It is naïve to think that a cap on local school budgets will solve these problems. The costs of textbooks, teaching materials and teachers are all affected by the above uncontrollable costs. Well qualified teachers are not a plentiful commodity. If we can't find the funds to pay them, they won't be there. We are in competition for people who have many other options for earning a living. Shortchanging the education of the future citizens of our country is not the answer.

What are our responsibilities? As a state we have it in our power to improve how and what we pay for health care; to find other sources of energy; to question what we pay for "no child left behind"; to find better answers for special education. Finding ways to be more efficient and cost effective involves using state services when and where they can provide assistances not available

to local districts. This may occur in areas such as transportation, special education, capital construction and debt service, and regional vocational and technical education.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Thank you to everyone conducting voter registration drives in recent months, including Edith Sanderson, who should have been mentioned in our last issue.

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Membership in the League is open to men and women citizens of all ages. With more than 86 years of experience and 850 local and state affiliates, the League is one of America's most trusted grassroots organizations.