

THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY VOTER
Newsletter of the League of the Women Voters of the Champlain Valley
December 2007

CVLWV Board, 2007 – 2008

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Director - Bonnie Scott (Website), webmaster@cvlwv.org
Director - Keri Toksu (Programs), 658-0962

Calendar of Events

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

CVLWV Board of Directors Monthly Meeting

Friday, December 7 at 11 am

Brownell Library
Essex Junction

As always, all are welcome to attend.

Dinner with Vermont Legislators

Dec. 12 from 5:45 - 8:30 pm

Eagle's Club
194 St. Paul Street
Burlington

Join us for a delicious dinner and a chance to speak with key legislators about the upcoming session. Please save the date! The Eagles Club has plenty of parking and is handicap accessible. **Please RSVP** to Keri Toksu via ktoksu@hotmail.com or 658-0962 or **by Dec. 5.**

Immigration Consensus

Jan. 9 from Noon - 1 pm

Pickering Room at
Fletcher Free Library
235 College Street
Burlington

Join your fellow League members to discuss and vote on consensus questions from National LWV on the topic of immigration. The process of study and coming to consensus is a time-honored League process by which we arrive at a position -- soundly based on members' views -- on issues of importance to our

democracy. This is your chance to participate in one of the liveliest, most well-informed discussions there is! For more info, see the [Immigration Study Consensus Kit](#) at www.lwv.org.

Legislative Day

Feb. 6 from 9 am - 1 pm

Vermont State House

Montpelier

An opportunity to greet other LWV members, chat with your legislators, attend committee meetings, and more!

Education Financing

Feb. 13 from 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Speeder and Earl's

412 Pine Street

Burlington

LAST CALL FOR ANNUAL DUES!

If you haven't already, would you please remit annual membership dues (now \$50) to:

Champlain Valley League of Women Voters, PO Box 8266, Essex, VT 05451

Thank you for helping to keep us on a sound financial footing!

DEC. 12th DINNER WITH VERMONT LEGISLATORS - Keri Toksu

Reserve today for a delicious chicken dinner and a chance to speak with key legislators about the upcoming legislative session! There will be appetizers and cocktails (cash bar) from 5:45 to 6:30pm. Dinner begins at 6:30pm, followed by a short presentation by our legislators of their priorities in the coming legislative session, then Q&A.

Date: Wednesday, December 12, 5:45pm - 8:30pm

Place: Eagle's Club,* 194 St. Paul Street, Burlington, VT

Legislators: Chris Pearson (P), Diane Snelling (R), and Gaye Symington (D; pending)

Cost: \$15 per person

Please RSVP by Wednesday, December 5, to Keri Toksu at ktoksu@hotmail.com or 658-0962.

Pay at the door OR mail your check to: Keri Toksu, 30 Scarff Avenue, Burlington, 05401. Your RSVP is a reservation; payment will be expected whether or not you attend.

Bring a friend! The more who attend, the more interesting. Need a ride? Let us know and we'll try to arrange a carpool. Hope to see you there.

* *The Eagle's Club has plenty of parking and is handicapped accessible.*

STOCKING STUFFER IDEA: The League's Vermont Citizens Guide

The Vermont Citizens' Guide to Government in Vermont (revised 7th edition) has been used as an educational tool in many Vermont schools for government / civics classes since it was first printed in 1965. This 100-page book provides a comprehensive examination of all aspects of local, county, and state government and describes in detail the officers, departments and functions of each. The Guide delves into the roles of the state executive, legislative, and judicial branches and explains the process by which individual bills become laws.

The "Vermont Citizens' Guide" also outlines the major events in which Vermont led the nation such as the first state to abolish slavery and the first to enact absentee balloting plus delves into the role of political parties and citizen responsibilities in government. The Vermont Constitution is included in its entirety. Also included are sections on voting and the responsibilities of citizenship. Copies are \$10, including shipping and handling. They may be ordered from LWV of Vermont via the following form:

Published by The League of Women Voters of Vermont

**THE 2004 REVISED - 7th Edition
VERMONT CITIZENS' GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT IN VERMONT**

This compact guide explains how state and local government works in Vermont. To place on order, send this form to:

League of Women Voters of Vermont
P.O. Box 8266
Essex, VT 05451-8266

Single copy: \$10.00 each (incl. S&H) 10 or more copies: 10% discount

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Make checks payable to: [LWV of Vermont](#)

FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS - Amy Bond

Each year, school budgets increase much more than the rate of inflation. Let's examine some universal causes of such costs, and consider what we might do locally to reduce them.

Country-wide

Health care: The costs increase greatly each year. Each month I pay for Medicare insurance. Most of us receive health insurance from our employers. Because federal, state, and local governments and public school systems employ enormous numbers of people for whom we are expected to offer health insurance, our taxes must pay for their insurance. We need to move away from an employer-based system. A single-payer system awarded to the lowest bidder could help cut administrative costs.

Energy: The rising cost of oil affects electricity, heat and transportation. We can do little, locally, to remedy this problem. Our state and our country must work to find energy alternatives.

Special Education: This is an un-funded federal mandate. The law requires schools to place children in the least restrictive environment under which they can learn. To start, Vermont schools simply placed students in the regular classroom with little or no provision for their learning. This problem is gradually improving, but requires adding teachers to help meet the goals. Much of the extra burden of costs is falling on local school districts. Vermont needs to continue to press for more federal funds to ease this burden.

No Child Left Behind: Another case of underfunding. Increased costs and penalties are among the outcomes that appear to be counter-productive. Vermont needs to address these problems at the national level.

State-wide

Legislation on school administrative structure is cumbersome. The Vermont constitution calls for a competent number of schools in each town for the convenient education of youth, unless the legislature provides otherwise. Clearly the legislature needs to un-complicate the present system of so many administrative units. When the constitution was written each town may have had several one room schools within walking distance of population centers. Now school buses have changed the picture. However, districts like Chittenden East - one town wide and five towns long - and, similarly, the Champlain Islands need to be rethought. We don't need boxes so much as we need convenience. Making bigger boxes isn't necessarily the best solution. We need to tailor the solutions to the needs of the districts involved.

People who may be eligible to vote on local school budgets must be assessed at the residential tax rate. This is the most effective way to control costs. This means that rental housing must be assessed at the residential property tax rate. It also means that income sensitivity must be proportional to the property tax rate. Income sensitivity must not be simply a tax on income. Non-residential property should pay only the state property tax with the rate being dependent on the amounts needed to support the education fund's budget.

Cost-per-student does not have a reasonable definition. Cost-per-student will cycle according to how full each classroom happens to be. When every seat is filled, the cost-per-student will be at its lowest. Fewer or more students will cause the Cost-per-student to increase. Cost-per-student should not be used for comparative purposes but should be used for determining state aid. Before Act 60 the definition was reasonable but indeterminate because we had no standard method of accounting for costs. Act 60 did not address this problem. We believe, for purposes of state aid, that cost-per-student should represent costs which are controllable by local school districts. It should not include such costs as capital construction and debt service, vocational and technical education, transportation, and special education. The major share of these items should come from the state education funds supplemented by federal

funds. State education funds should also be used for income sensitivity and tax equalization payments.

Should we have a block grant? Without a good definition of cost-per-student, the block grant failed in its purpose and was much higher than necessary. We believe, with a definition similar to that suggested above, that a block grant should be no more than 90% to 95% of the average state-wide cost per student.

Should the state cap local school budgets and spending? Local school boards need the support of the voters to adopt a school budget. The large majority of boards work very hard to keep costs as low as possible, and often have to rework the budget to get voter approval. Costs-per-student depend on enrollments. There may be a point above which expenditures should not be reimbursed, but the state should not deny a budget which has been approved by the voters.

The state can and should legislate that normal municipal costs be kept out of school budgets. The inclusion of town-wide recreation, libraries, and sidewalks should be seriously questioned.

Should we have a state-wide teachers' salary schedule? Economics vary across the state. We might pay more than necessary. We must have qualified teachers and will have to pay more in some areas to get them.

Local responsibilities

- * Elect responsible school boards.
- * Understand and approve a reasonable school budget.
- * Encourage school boards to employ an adequate number of qualified teachers, administrators and support staff.
- * Volunteer when asked.
- * Join a parent/teacher organization.
- * Encourage and help your children and grandchildren to do their best in school.

"MAKE NEW FRIENDS, BUT KEEP THE OLD, ONE IS SILVER AND THE OTHER'S GOLD"

... KEEP OUR CHAPTER GOING - AND GROWING!

Remember to tell your friends about what you've learned, thanks to the League, and invite them along to our next meeting. Word-of-mouth is most effective, so please spread the word!

... ARE YOU A LEAGUE VETERAN OF 25 YEARS OR MORE?

If so, we want to commend you and commemorate you for your long-time support of the League! Please help us compile a list of "25 and counting" members by contacting Irene Wrenner at 879-0011 or imwren@aol.com if you fit the bill.

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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.