

THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY VOTER

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of the Champlain Valley

February 2007

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.

Legislative Day

An opportunity to greet other LWV members, chat with your legislators, attend committee meetings, and more! Wednesday, Feb. 7, 9 am - 1 pm, Vermont State House, Montpelier

March 14, Noon - 1 pm

Openness in Government: Looking for Sunshine

Pickering Room at Fletcher Free Library, 235 College Street, Burlington

In honor of Sunshine Week, Mike Donoghue, President of the Vermont Coalition for Open Government, will talk about accountability and transparency in government. Mike is a Burlington Free Press staff writer and was one of three journalists inducted in 2003 into "Heroes of the 50 States: The State Open Government Hall of Fame," a joint venture between the Society of Professional Journalists and the National Freedom of Information Coalition. Please come to learn more about this issue and to ask your questions!

Wednesday, April 11, 7 pm

Lake Champlain: Its Past and Its Future

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

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - Marge Gaskins

Hello everyone: Our League year is well underway and going great with our new format--one month at noon and the next an evening meeting. Our last meeting was dinner and conversation with three of our legislators, each representing the major parties, Republican, Democrat and Progressive.

The discussion and questions covered some of our issues, including education funding, instant run-off voting, four-year terms for Governor and Lt. Governor, health care and energy alternatives.

During the first year of the biennium, not much gets done, but we will be watching and following all of these issues, plus others. In addition, there are personal issues among us that many are interested in. The great thing about Leaguers is that we care and we say so.

In February we have Legislative Day on the 7th. We do hope many of you can be there and invite your legislators to join you for lunch at the Thrush Tavern. There will also be an update that day on key issues and committees. We will be carpooling, so let me or someone else you know of about getting together. We can plan to take the shuttle from the station in Montpelier.

Then in March at our regular meeting we will be discussing the Right to Know law (our "sunshine" law), what's working and what isn't. Have you read the recent rulings in the court?

And looking ahead a bit, save the second Wednesday night in May for annual meeting, a pot luck at Mabel Buttolph's. Bring your spouse and/or a friend for the social and dinner, and let's talk about program and directions for next year.

NEW, IMPROVED WEB ACCESS - Here's our new, easy-to-remember web-address.e Visit us on-line now at <http://www.cvlwv.org> for information on meetings, voting and candidates.

NOTARY APPLICATIONS ON-LINE! All notaries must reapply now, if they wish to serve after February 10. Download the form and mail it in, along with your \$20 check to CHITTENDEN SUPERIOR COURT, 175 Main Street Â· P.O. Box 187 Â· Burlington, VT 05402.

TAKE NOTES AT YOUR TOWN MEETING! After your town meets on March 6, we're eager to hear the highlights. Everyone is invited to share a 5-minute summary of their individual Town Meeting experience at our March 14 member meeting on Openness in Government.

THE ECONOMIC AND FISCAL IMPLICATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

If our December 13th meeting got you more interested in the Economic Impact of the Aging Vermont Population, consider attending "Vermont's Ticking Time Bomb," a lecture by Arthur

Woolf, UVM Assoc. Professor of Economics at 7:30 p.m on Thursday, February 8 at Memorial Lounge, Waterman Building, corner of Prospect St. and College Ave. on the UVM Campus.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION 2007 - Vee Gordon

The legislature has taken a couple of weeks to become acquainted with procedures and "seminars" to help them govern more effectively. Now the bill time begins. By the end of January, 212 bills had been introduced in the House and 69 in the Senate. Most of those have been assigned to various committees.

The League does not have much of interest going so far. I do suggest you look at H.109, a bill to introduce an income tax. This will probably become the first bill to be discussed in Ways and Means. There are bills dealing only with the CLA, appraisal and reducing the number of supervisory unions. Reduction on the number of unions will be a hot topic because of all the details associated with such a measure (and a lot of folks think it means closing schools when it doesn't). Testimony was heard from people who are part of Revolt and Repeal and their arguments are good. They also offered solutions!!

Though there are bills covering renewable energy and other Educational Quality areas, discussions are general, not specific. The same can be said for voting bills and any involving good government. William Sorrell has updated the Senate on the Campaign Finance lawsuit and Deb Markowitz has provided the Government Operations committee a list of voting law changes, but work on changes has yet to occur. We will follow and speak to any government issues. We will testify on campaign finance. We will speak to changes in ed. funding. Hope to see you at Legislative Day on the 5th.

FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS - Amy Bond

What should the Vermont legislature do to reduce school spending? Vermont's administrative structure is cumbersome in some regions of the state. We have tended to move toward more superintendents and separate administrative offices. Vermont should look at each school district and supervisory unit to find the most efficient structure. Administrative costs should be allocated to each unit so as to fairly reflect their impact on per student costs. The town of Essex is an example of these problems, with two K-8 administrative offices, one supervisory district, one supervisory union, and one union high school district. At most there should be one K-12 district and one supervisory union.

One of the best ways of controlling school budgets is to make certain that people who may be eligible to vote on the budget proposal are affected by the outcome of that vote.

Residents, including renters, of each school district should pay at the residential property tax rate. Non-residential property should pay only the state property tax.

State education fund income must be carefully budgeted and the non-residential property tax rate should be set each year to raise that share of the budget. The education fund's share of school costs should include, but not be limited to the cost of capital construction and debt service,

transportation, special education, vocational and technical education, school district equalization, and income sensitivity. Income sensitivity must be proportional to the local school budget and not simply a percentage of household income.

Why does our cost per student rise when we have fewer students? Cost per student cycles depending on enrollment. When a grade level has all of the seats filled the cost per student is at the lowest level. If the enrollment increases or decreases, the cost per student increases. Only when we get to the point where we can get by with one less teacher does our cost per student decrease. If we have to add a teacher the cost per student increases sharply. Cost per student should not be used to compare school districts.

It is important to have a fixed and logical definition of cost per student so that state subsidies can be equalized fairly. Act 60 chose to equalize by having the same local equalized tax rate to support the same cost per student. However, Vermont did not have a clear definition of special education costs at that time, so we were unable to factor out that portion of cost per student. I believe it is now possible to redefine cost per student. Act 60 also had a block grant which was hampered by these problems. If a block grant is to be used it should be no more than 90% to 95% of the redefined state median cost per student. Cost per student ought not to include those items which are the responsibility of the state as suggested at the end of the previous question above.

What are your questions? Mail or e-mail them to our bulletin editor Irene Wrenner, 15 Thrush Lane, Essex Junction 05452 or imwren@aol.com.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY TO THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTER'S STORYBANK!

Do you have a League story to tell? There's no better way to explain the benefits of membership to potential members than to share stories from current LWV members -- and we want to hear yours. Submit a story now! (<http://www.lwv.org/Storybank/>)

For more information about the Storybank and how your story may be used, click here: http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=League_Storybank&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=36&ContentID=7296, or contact storybank@lwv.org with any questions.

To read some examples of stories already submitted, click here: http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=League_Storybank&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=4&ContentID=7297.

SAVE A TREE! Due to the cost of postage and labor, we encourage members to obtain this newsletter electronically. Please let the editor know if you can make the switch from paper to (colorful) pixels. Reach her at imwren@aol.com. Thank you!

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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.