

THE CHAMPLAIN VALLEY VOTER

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of the Champlain Valley

September 2007

CVLWV Board, 2007 - 2008

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Director	Keri Toksu (Programs)	658-0962

Calendar of Events

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

Champlain Valley LWV Monthly Meetings

Meetings alternate between noon and evenings, usually on the second Wednesday of each month, September – May.

Date	Time	Place	Description
Wednesday Sept. 5	Noon – 1 pm	Pickering Room at Fletcher Free Library 235 College Street Burlington	Why Affordable Housing Is Important to Us All. David Mullin (Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity) will talk about the challenges of creating affordable housing options for Vermonters and how his organization can offer a hand up, rather than a handout to those in need of safe, adequate housing.
Saturday Sept. 8	9:30 am – 12:30 pm	See Description	Habitat for Humanity service project. Our League Habitat day has been postponed, but please consider joining to help with this one: The Service Politics organization is teaming up with the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging to help a senior citizen in Colchester make much needed repairs to her trailer. For more details and directions, please email sarah@servicepolitics.org
Wednesday Sept. 19	7:00 pm – 8:30 pm	Quaker Meeting House 173 N. Prospect St. Burlington	Why Affordable Housing Is Important to Us All. Panel Discussion: with John Fairbanks, Public Affairs Manager, Vermont Housing Finance Agency ; Rep. Helen Head , S. Burlington, Chair, House General, Housing and Military Affairs Committee ; Brenda Torpy , Executive Director, Champlain Housing Trust ., moderated by Keri Toksu , Program Chair of CVLWV. For more info on affordable housing, see the Times Argus article, " State vows help with housing affordability ".
Thursday, October 18	8:00 pm – 9:00 pm	VPT Studio Fort Ethan Allen 204 Ethan Allen Ave. Colchester	League Members invited to Public Square on VPT. All Vermont League Members have been invited to participate as the audience for Public Square , Vermont Public Television's live issue-focused show.

November	TBA	TBA	Immigration Policy. Evening program open to the public, then a day program the following week for League Members to discuss the consensus questions available from National LWV .
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - Marge Gaskins

It has been a beautiful summer, and we all wanted to make the most of it. The Board has been busy preparing for September and another season of monthly meetings for the League in the Champlain Valley.

We are starting right off with two meetings on affordable housing. Though the first meeting, at noon tomorrow at Fletcher Library will be past when you get this, the second meeting, an evening one at the Friends Meeting House on Prospect Street in Burlington will be worth putting on your calendar. We have a busy year ahead, and hope you all will find something to share your energy and enthusiasm that you just won't want to miss. We will be sure to get you future topics and meeting times and places well ahead of time.

We started off the year with two planned projects that went awry, while neither loss was catastrophic, it was disappointing none the less.

First we had hoped to participate in a new membership growth plan, funded and led by the national League. This was a request from the Quad State (VT, NH, ME, and RI) organization that was not granted.

Secondly, we planned to contribute some League power to a Habitat for Humanity day of work in Burlington. The original day that we had picked was too difficult for enough people to participate, and an alternate day was not available. Hopefully this opportunity will come again.

So we are underway with a new year of useful and interesting League information and action. Just be sure and join us!

Marge Gaskins
President

PS: If you haven't paid your dues, you're in the company of about 30 others. Please do so today!

Annual Dues are Due!
<p>Would you please remit annual membership dues (now \$50 per individual / \$75 per household) to:</p> <p>Champlain Valley League of Women Voters PO Box 8266 Essex, VT 05451</p> <p>Thank you for helping to keep us on a sound financial footing!</p>

2007 MEMBERSHIP LIST! If you have joined the League of Women Voters by paying dues this year, please contact PuzzleWiz@aol.com to request a membership list to be sent to you via e-mail.

IMMIGRATION STUDY - National League of Women Voters

The Immigration Study is to include the underlying values and principles regarding immigration, reasons for immigration, current federal immigration policy, and the impact of immigration. We have now reached the member agreement phase of the LWVUS Immigration Study, the time when Leagues prepare to take consensus. Grassroots agreement on positions is one of the League's greatest strengths. Preparing for and taking consensus is hard work, but worthwhile. The resulting position will allow the organization to affect national policy for years to come, just as we have been doing in other areas for 87 years - it's part of the organization's history. For more information, visit <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Immigration>.

FUNDING OUR SCHOOLS - Amy Bond

How can we compile all of the parts of school funding to improve the fairness to the local residential property tax payer?

In response to the Supreme Court ruling that the quality of education should not be dependent on where a Vermont student happens to live, Act 60 went into effect in 1997. Its framers recognized that additional problems would need to be addressed soon. What are some of the many ways the problems can be addressed? Is a property tax better than an income tax? What is the best way to compare one district to another for purposes of distributing state aid. What is the best way to determine residential property value? How should cost per student be defined? It seems we can ask more questions than we can answer.

Local residential income tax:

- It will not tax out-of-state property owners, requiring more to be raised by Vermonters.
- The tax rate that will be needed is indeterminate.
- Low income voters may not be affected, so they might approve, while higher income voters would be more inclined to reject a proposed budget.
- An income tax doesn't work well on non-residential property.

Local residential property tax:

- The tax rate can be closely estimated before the budget vote.
- With income sensitivity proportional to the property tax rate, low income people will pay a reduced tax rate while higher income people may pay less than they would with an income tax.
- Property tax depends on a fair system of property valuation both within each town as well as compared with other towns. The CLA (common level of appraisal) provides equity among towns but is quite unfair where we have inconsistency within a town. Use of fair market value pleases our sense of propriety but seems to cause more problems than we are able to cope with especially in times of rapidly changing market value. Can we initiate a system that uses physical

attributes such as footprint, quality, of building materials, number of rooms, location, acreage, etc., creating a rating to each property to which a tax rate can be applied?

- Non-residential property owners should pay school taxes only to the state education fund, because service to local schools does not directly affect them.
- If at all possible, the state tax on residential property should be eliminated. Taxing residential property only at the local level is fairer and easier for taxpayers to understand, and because it would include all school district voters it would provide the best form of cost control.

Cost per student:

Vermont gives aid to each school district such that the tax rate is the same for every district which has the same cost per student, with the tax rate increasing as the cost per student increases. With this goal, the way we define cost per student is critical. Ideally, it should include only those costs which are in the control of the local district. We would eliminate, for example, those costs required by the state constitution, by the federal government, and by state administrative regulations. These items would be separately funded to each school district from federal funds and from taxes paid into the Vermont education fund. Some of these items would be capital construction and debt service; transportation; special education; school lunches; "no child left behind"; etc. *(continues)*

It should be noted that weighting of students by grade level is faulty and should be eliminated. All school districts have preK-12 students making weighting unnecessary.

If we can resolve problems with residential property values and cost per student, the local tax rate will follow. Until we do, a block grant from funds other than residential property taxes will absorb some of the burden by reducing the amount to be raised by local taxes. A block grant should be no higher than 90% to 95% of the median state cost per student.

HAVE QUESTIONS?

Send them to our editor Irene Wrenner, 15 Thrush Lane, Essex Junction 05452 or imwren@aol.com.

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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.