



FORWARD

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WISCONSIN EDUCATION NETWORK, INC.

Statewide Educational Campaign on Judicial Independence

Recent reports in Wisconsin and other states illustrate the threat to judicial independence posed by increased spending in state Supreme Court elections. Concern about the power of money has prompted proposals to change the way we select justices and generated calls for better recusal rules.

Last year the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Network established a Supreme Court observer program to follow selected open Court meetings and better understand the challenges facing justices in the post-Citizens United environment. Observers formed a Judicial Independence Committee to explore ways to educate League members and the public about the influence of money on judicial actions. On February 4, the state League board approved the committee's proposal for a statewide educational program which will provide resources for local Leagues to use in planning public forums in their communities.

LWVWI's position, affirmed in 1971, supports "a system which provides that judges be appointed on the basis of qualifications established by citizen review, and that they subsequently stand for election on their records." The League in the past has unsuccessfully supported a constitutional amendment to provide for such a system; however, it has not advocated on this issue in many years. The Judicial Independence Committee

believes it is important to explore recent issues in Wisconsin and other states that illustrate the advantages and disadvantages in any judicial selection method.

In 2009 the Wisconsin Supreme Court rejected the recusal rules proposed by the League, which would have required judges and justices to recuse themselves from cases involving a major campaign contributor or independent supporter. Instead, on a 4-3 vote, the Court adopted rules written by the Wisconsin Realtors Association and Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, which both have spent large amounts of money to support or oppose a particular judicial candidate.

If the majority of justices who voted for the business-written rules thought that decision was the final word on recusal, they were sorely mistaken. The issue has continued to dog and divide the Court, as some justices have admitted in open administrative conferences. Most recently, Justice Michael Gableman has refused to withdraw his vote from three controversial cases involving the Michael Best & Friedrich law firm, which provided tens of thousands of dollars of free legal representation to Justice Gableman when he was fighting ethics charges.

Cont. on p. 2

The Judicial Independence Committee is recommending a statewide educational campaign instead of a state study because there is already a proposal before the Legislature for a constitutional amendment to change our system of selection for Supreme Court justices. If the Legislature moves quickly, there is an outside possibility that Wisconsin could have a statewide referendum on judicial selection as early as April 2013. Under the League's bylaws a state study could not lead to an updated position before the 2013 Annual Meeting, which will take place in June of that year.

The statewide program will educate League members and the public at an important time before a possible referendum. League members will still have the option of updating our position in the following League year (2013-14).

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President's Message



Melanie G. Ramey

The League's voter ID lawsuit had a hearing on procedural issues by Dane County Judge Richard Niess on January 19. Department of Justice lawyers challenged the standing of the League of Women Voters and also of me, as an individual taxpayer, to bring the lawsuit.

Judge Niess pointed out that many who do not have photo ID are elderly or low-income individuals, groups for whom it is difficult to bring a lawsuit. He posed this question: What organization *better* than the League of Women Voters to mount the challenge?

Incredibly, the DOJ lawyer argued that because the League is a nonpartisan organization, it does not have a stake in getting people out to vote. He apparently was unaware that the League was founded by suffragists who fought for decades to win the right to vote for women. The League's position that voting is a fundamental citizen right

that must be guaranteed goes back 92 years!

The DOJ lawyer also argued that Governor Scott Walker should not be named as a defendant, stating that the only defendants should be members of the Government Accountability Board, who are responsible for implementation of the voter ID law. LWVWI's attorney, Susan Crawford, pointed out that a law enacted last year holds that any administrative rules the GAB writes now must be approved by the Governor. Thus, Governor Walker holds significant authority in the law's implementation.

Judge Niess did not rule in January on these procedural issues, but he said the case should proceed because it addresses people's right to vote and it would soon be election season.

He set a date of March 9 for a second hearing, at which the issue of standing would be addressed along with the constitutional issue that is the basis of our lawsuit.

Our lawyers at Cullen Weston Pines and Bach have since submitted a brief addressing the procedural issues and also a motion for summary judgment, asking Judge Niess to declare that the voter ID law violates the Wisconsin Constitution.

In the meantime, Leagues across the state have been working to help people obtain the necessary ID. For example, the Dane County League has created

a fund with a grant from the Evjue Foundation to assist people with the cost of requesting a birth certificate. The Ashland-Bayfield Counties League helped a 96-year-old woman by explaining that she would qualify for the voter ID exemption for people who are indefinitely confined. The state League answers questions from individuals around the state and refers them to the appropriate agency.

Indeed, who better than the League of Women Voters to advocate for people who don't have a voting ID? The League's lawsuit is based on clear language in the state Constitution, and we confidently look forward to the March 9 hearing.

But the DOJ's argument sounds an alarm that there is a lack of awareness about the League and what we do, particularly when coupled with a recent email I received on another subject that asked: Whatever happened to the League of Women Voters? Apparently some people live outside the reach of all media—which makes me wonder if we should purchase billboards explaining that the League is alive, well and challenging undemocratic practices wherever they exist as we have for 92 years. It is especially troubling that those in positions of societal responsibility, such as the DOJ attorney, do not have a clue as to what the League of Women Voters is all about. If you have ideas on how we can puncture the bubble in which some seem to live, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you. ❖

Cont. from p. 1

It doesn't have to be this way. Other states have adopted recusal rules to address the increased potential influence of money on the courts. The Tennessee Supreme Court in January adopted rules similar to those proposed two years ago by LWVWI.

Under the new educational program, the Judicial Independence Committee will develop forum materials and guidance for local Leagues to present pros and cons of judicial elections and merit selection, as well as information on recusal and influence of money. LWVWI expects to collaborate with other organizations doing educational work on judicial independence.

Throughout the educational programming, the League will emphasize that the reason Wisconsin needs to focus on judicial selection and recusal is because of the increased influence of moneyed interests which are threatening the independence—or at least the appearance of it—of the courts. ❖



Annual Report

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WISCONSIN, INC. • LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WISCONSIN EDUCATION NETWORK, INC.

Successes, Accomplishments and Upcoming Actions

Last year

- Trained and placed 130 volunteer election observers in polling places in eight state senate recall districts. The resulting report was welcomed by state election officials and covered widely in the media.
- Distributed \$4,400 in pass-through funds from a grant from The Joyce Foundation to local Leagues for educational programs.
- Sent 28 press releases and opinion columns to the press on League issues. Most were quoted or published in multiple outlets.
- In October, challenged the voter ID law based on the state constitution.
- Won a group exemption from the IRS, extending 501(c)(3) status to 16 local Leagues.

Coming year

- Continue legal challenge to overturn the voter ID law.
- Launch educational program on judicial independence.
- Place volunteer election observers in polling places around the state to monitor implementation of new election law.
- Educate voters about candidates and voting procedures for recall elections.
- Assist and train local Leagues in 501(c)(3) compliance.
- Continue to be a visible, effective advocate for good government in Wisconsin.

For the year July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011

Community Shares of Wisconsin	\$9,437
Contributions	\$26,212
Membership Dues	\$27,600
Grants & Special Projects	\$1,500
Program Revenues	\$7,314
Net Assets Released	\$98,760
(grant carryover from 2009-10)	
Miscellaneous Income	\$3,296
Investment Income (Loss)	\$16,969
Total Income	\$191,087
Program Services	\$135,773
Management & General	\$32,026
Fundraising	\$3,548
Total Expenses	\$171,347
Net Assets at End of Year	\$122,331

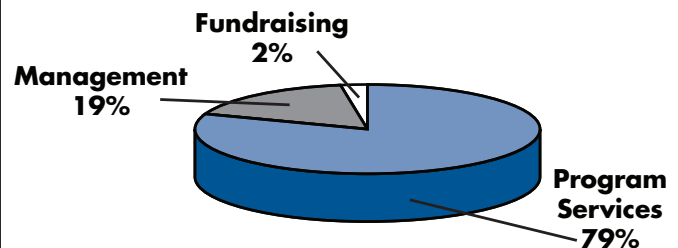


Ariel Ford and Earnestine Moss, LWV Dane County



Senior Fair, LWV Beloit

LWVWI Education Network Expenses \$171,347



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∞Sustaining Partners make monthly contributions to ensure stability for the league

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Wisconsin Rapids Area

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

MEG MCLANE AWARD FOR ADVOCACY

Once a year the state League board recognizes and honors outstanding advocates for good government with the Meg McLane Advocacy Award.

Leagues and League members may nominate an exceptional individual for this \$250 award. The nominee does not have to be a League member. Past recipients are June Kjøme, La Crosse Area; Nancy Stabb, Janesville; Connie Threinen, Dane County; Barbara Hussin, Milwaukee County; and Darlene Wellner, Manitowoc.

Nomination paperwork is due to the state League office by April 1. Instructions and forms are available at lwvwi.org. You can also request a nomination form from your local League president or the state office.

The 2012 award will be presented at the LWVWI Annual Meeting on June 1-2, 2012 in Wausau. Contact the state office with questions. ❖

Executive Director's Message



Andrea Kaminski

Twelve years ago, LWVWI president Melanie Ramey established an annual Downtown Madison Rotary ethics forum for high school students. This year more than 200 eleventh graders considered ethical dilemmas in such areas as politics, friendships/dating, business and sports.

During breakout sessions, students worked in small groups to apply a six-step decision-making framework to scenarios with difficult choices and potential ramifications for the decision maker and others. I had the opportunity to work with LWV Dane County member Gerald Thain to facilitate this year's session on ethics in politics, for which we drafted a relevant vignette. There were plenty of

real-life examples!

Our scenario required the students to balance the values of open government and personal privacy in the recall of an elected official. (Sound familiar?) They had to think about what "open government" means in the Information Age.

The annual Rotary ethics symposium is a laudable effort—and would only be better if all Wisconsin high school juniors could participate! Given that many students graduate from high school without taking Civics, they need opportunities to learn about concepts such as government transparency and protection of privacy, as well as other pillars of our democratic society.

The past 14 months have been a living civics lab for many Wisconsin residents. People have a stronger understanding of the balance of powers among three co-equal branches of government and why this is important. We have seen that even the appearance of a conflict of interest can erode public trust in our government officials. We have witnessed a statewide election recount and seen firsthand how important it is to track and document the custody of voted ballots.

As a nonpartisan organization, the League of Women Voters has stood up for good government for 92 years. In Wisconsin at this time, the League is needed more than ever! ❖

SAVE THE DATE: Annual Meeting June 1-2, 2012

University of Wisconsin- Marathon County Wausau

Make plans now to attend the 2012 Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Network on June 1 and 2. LWV Stevens Point Area will host the meeting at the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service on the UW-Marathon County campus in Wausau.

The meeting will kick off with a public event on Friday night featuring a keynote address. Saturday morning's speaker will be followed by training sessions and the business meeting. Teleconferencing of the Saturday sessions is being arranged so League members can participate from a to-be-announced site downstate.

The Annual Meeting is your opportunity to hear distinguished speakers discuss key League issues and to participate in setting the direction and leadership for the state League in the coming year. Watch for more details soon and then join us at the Annual Meeting! ❖

Around The State

Beloit: Celebrating Black History Month and Women's History Month with several events in February and March, including presentation of the PBS Video Series on *Women, War, & Peace*.

La Crosse Area: Co-hosted with AARP and others a series of voter ID "clinics" in four municipalities to help people with the new ID requirements and arrange for transportation to the DMV; assisted the local Hmong Association with election of its officers.

LWV Wisconsin: Supervised two student interns from UW-Madison who helped with the League's Facebook page and produced a 60-second announcement about voter ID for a student radio station.

Manitowoc County: Launched the first of eight planned programs in a Great Decisions series with an informative presentation on Middle East realignment.

Ripon Area: Presented two public education sessions about local groundwater regulation that featured speakers from UW-Stevens Point, the City of Ripon and the Fond du Lac County Land and Water Conservation Department. ❖

Save Trees and the League Money!

Money doesn't grow on trees, but we can save both by using email for League communications! Send an email to lwwwisconsin@lwwwi.org to sign up for any of the following (be sure to tell us which items you wish to receive by email):

- *Forward Newsletter*
- *League Updates and Action Alerts*

League of Women Voters of WI Education Network/Advocacy Network 2012 Calendar

LWWEN Board Meeting
March 31, Madison

Spring Nonpartisan Election
April 3

LWWEN Board Meeting
June 1, Wausau

LWWEN Annual Meeting
June 1-2, Wausau

LWVUS Convention
June 8-12, Washington, DC

LWWEN Board Meeting
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July 27-28, Madison



2010-2011
Annual Report
INSIDE!

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