



No Easy Solution to State Budget Crisis

“Government exists to tax and spend.”

These may be “fighting words” for many of our newly elected state legislators, but it’s how Bob Lang, director of the Legislative Fiscal Bureau, opened his presentation about the state budget at the League’s annual Issues Briefing. To illustrate, he pointed out that we as citizens cannot run a top-notch research university, so our state government taxes us and spends the revenue to hire and employ people who can. It is our elected officials’ job to decide what level of government services the people of Wisconsin deserve and then to raise and distribute the money needed to make those services possible.

Governor Walker has promised to eliminate the structural deficit while also reducing taxes. That cannot be done without deep cuts to government services, which would threaten the well-being of our state’s most vulnerable residents and diminish our high quality of life overall.

The 2011-2013 state budget has been in the works for several months. State agencies made their requests for the biennial budget last fall. The Department of Administration then compiled the requests and also estimated tax revenues for the budget period. This is expected to show a huge deficit. Within the next few weeks the governor will announce his version of the budget.



Then agency officials will brief legislators on what is needed to provide the services with which their agencies are charged. The legislature’s joint finance committee will hold public hearings around the state, deliberate the details in executive session and recommend a budget to the two houses of the legislature.

Each house will pass a version, and a conference committee will iron out any differences. Both houses have to agree on the final bill, which will then go to the governor for his signature. Walker will have the last word, because in Wisconsin the governor has broad powers to veto portions of the budget when signing it into law.

Over the years legislatures have tried to hold the line on expenditures, but revenues have also decreased. The resulting budget gaps have been filled

with federal stimulus money and dollars taken from special purpose funds, with the hope that the economy will improve. Lang predicted a slight increase in income tax collection this year, but he expected it will still be lower than revenues in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

While the situation is grim, the League of Women Voters does not believe legislators should rely solely on drastic spending cuts to get us out of this mess. With so many people out of work and families strapped financially, a publicly funded safety net is more

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President's Message

Melanie G. Ramey

Leagues in Wisconsin sponsored more than twenty candidate forums and debates for state and federal races between the September primary and the November election, in addition to producing our online voter guide at Vote411.org. We made a big difference on a modest budget this year, thanks to vigorous volunteer action in our local leagues and a pragmatic, professional staff in the state office.



Of course, the election was not our only area of focus this fall. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin celebrated its 90th anniversary in October with a visit from LWVUS President Elisabeth MacNamara. During her two-day stop in Madison she visited with top election officials at the Government Accountability Board, was interviewed by the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel and Wisconsin Eye, attended our state-based Member Recruitment Initiative training and gave an inspiring speech at our Issues Briefing. It's mind-boggling that Wisconsin is only one of about a dozen states she visited in the weeks before the election!

In mid-October I testified to the Joint Legislative Council Special Committee on Judicial Discipline and Recusal about why the League petitioned the Supreme Court last year to adopt rules to require judges and justices to recuse themselves from cases involving major campaign contributors. I urged the committee, on which the League's executive director served, to recommend amending the statutes to include:

1. An objective standard for determining when a judge's impartiality can reasonably be questioned. Perception is critical in matters of justice. In the Caperton decision there had been a contribution of three million dollars. Yet most members of the public think in terms of their own finances, and even several thousand dollars can seem unreasonable.
2. A procedure for reviewing a judge's decision to deny a disqualification motion. If a judge denies a request for recusal the decision should be reviewed in a timely manner by another judge or perhaps a panel of retired judges.
3. A requirement that when a judge is asked to recuse himself or herself and refuses, that judge must put in writing the reasons for the denial. Certainly this is very important in a state where we elect judges as it would give voters valuable information on how judges reach a decision when their impartiality is challenged.

Of these, the Committee voted to recommend only the third. Down the road, the Committee's recommendation could lead to new legislation.

Democracy is often a messy process, and change does not occur overnight. The League of Women Voters gets this. After all, it took 75 years for women to win the right to vote. With your support and participation, we will continue to work to protect the reality and perception of a fair and impartial judiciary in Wisconsin.

P.S. Wisconsin Eye recorded my testimony, which you can view online on Wisconsin Eye at: <http://tinyclip.tv/3a2673ed> ❖

SAVE THE DATE: Annual Meeting June 11, 2011

University of Wisconsin-
Whitewater Campus

Make plans now to attend the 2011 Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Fund on Saturday, June 11 on the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater campus, with a teleconferenced site in the Stevens Point area.

There will be optional training on Friday, June 10 for local Leagues, including a Membership Recruitment Initiative training session. Only the Saturday sessions will be teleconferenced, so we hope every League will plan to send at least one representative to Whitewater.

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

important than ever. The state League gave this advice to legislators in 2009:

Maintaining good government in these times is challenging. While it may be difficult to think beyond the bottom line of the current budget process, it is critical to use this opportunity to lay the groundwork for long-term sustainability. This requires attention to both the revenue and spending sides of the budget.

As citizens, we expect appropriately financed government services, and we must expect to pay for them. Likewise, business and industry should not be overtaxed but should pay their fair shares. We all—individuals, families, corporations and communities—prosper in a state where government services are of high quality. So, as always, we must consider how to balance the importance of needed services against a fair and efficient system of taxation.

At the same time, we urge our government to spend wisely, supporting those programs and services that meet current needs and make Wisconsin a desirable place to live, learn, work and raise a family.

With these principles in mind, the League's state legislative committee is monitoring the 2011-2013 budget process. We will let you know when your statement at a public hearing or call to your representative will make a difference.

To sign up for regular updates and action alerts from the state League on the budget and other issues, go to:

www.lwwi.org

or send an email to

lwwisconsin@lwwi.org



~IN MEMORIAM~



Lawrence N. Hansen

December 23, 1940–
November 15, 2010

Lawrence Hansen, vice president of The Joyce Foundation and an avid supporter of democracy in the Midwest and nationally, passed away in November. Larry was devoted to helping reform groups work together, knowing that their combined efforts added up to far more than the sum of their parts.

His legacy continues through the Midwest Democracy Network (MDN), which he helped to create. MDN offers needed camaraderie, information and technical support for state-based groups, including LWVWI, in five midwestern states. Inspirational and encouraging to those whose lives he touched, Larry will be sorely missed by those fortunate enough to have worked with him. ❖



Report from the Lake Michigan League of Women Voters Annual Meeting

by Art and Marge Palleon, LMLWV
Wisconsin Representatives

The Lake Michigan League of Women Voters held its Annual Meeting in Manitowoc in October. LMLWV members and advocates from the watershed states of Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin heard from several experts on issues affecting Lake Michigan and toured nearby natural areas and other relevant sites.

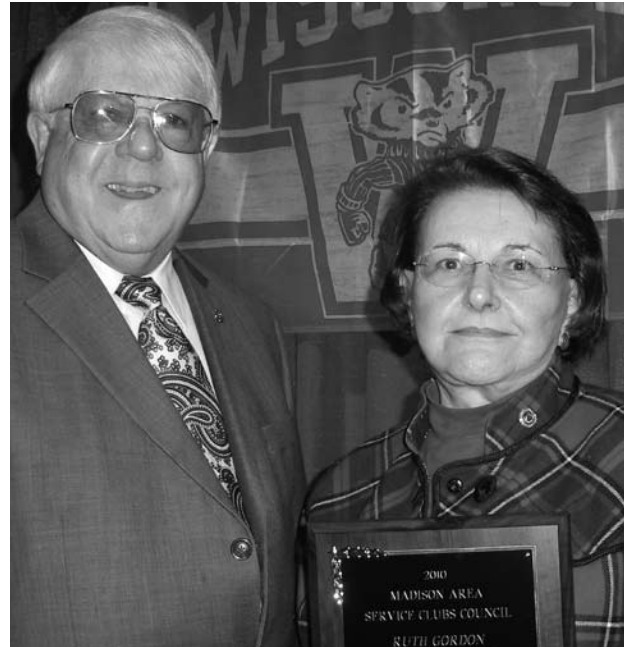
Keynote speaker Dr. Phillip Moy, Invasive Species Specialist with the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute, discussed the history and invasive movement of the Asian carp and steps for remediating the problem. Manitowoc Mayor Justin Nickels, a member of the Great Lakes Mayor Council, addressed challenges Manitowoc is facing with pollution and the need for advancing the use of wind power and energy-saving lighting devices. Jim Knickelbine, Executive Director of Woodland Dunes Nature Center in Two Rivers, ended the meeting with a presentation on wetlands, which he noted form a natural “sponge” that help remove metal, nitrogen and phosphorus from the water. He also pointed out that the dunes' close proximity to Lake Michigan provides a vital migration stopover for birds—on a recent autumn night his organization banded two hundred owls. ❖

League President Melanie Ramey Honored for Community Service

In November, LWVWI President Melanie Ramey received the 2010 Ruth Gordon Service Award from the Madison Area Service Clubs. This prestigious annual award honors a current or past service club member who exemplifies volunteer service for the betterment of the community, either individually or through the recipient's service club.

Melanie was nominated by the Rotary Club of Madison, where she has been an active member since 1991. In addition to the many hours she devotes to Rotary and League, Melanie serves on the boards of Wisconsin Arthritis Foundation, Madison Community Foundation, Trinity United Methodist Church, Dane County Mental Health and the Dane County Family Planning Council. Something many people don't know is that each year on Christmas she distributes books and reads to children who have to spend the holiday in the hospital.

Melanie's dedication to community service is also reflected in her professional career, where she is the Executive Director of The HOPE of Wisconsin, the state organization of all hospice and palliative care programs. LWVWI is grateful for Melanie's leadership. ❖



Glenn Rindfleisch, Madison Area Service Clubs Council, presents Melanie Ramey with the Ruth Gordon Service Award.

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin State Legislative Committee

Patricia Finder-Stone

Committee Chair
LWV Greater Green Bay
Health Care, Adult Aging

Carolyn Castore

LWV Milwaukee County
Election Law/Voting Rights,
Redistricting

Dorothy Dean

LWV Milwaukee County
Predatory Lending

Joann Elder

LWV Dane County
Antidiscrimination

Linda Gratz

LWV Manitowoc
Children & Families

Barbara Hussin

LWV Milwaukee County
Corrections

Margi Kindig

LWV Dane County
Climate Change, Redistricting

Sue Lloyd

LWV Dane County
Campaign Finance Reform

Clare McArdle

LWV Dane County
Mental Health Parity, Redistricting

Katie Mulligan

LWV Dane County
Mental Health Parity, Health Care
Reform

Trish O'Neil

Member at Large
Redistricting, Education

Marge & Art Palleon

LWV Ozaukee County
Lake Michigan

Pamela Rewey

LWV Dane County
Education, Predatory Lending

Caryl Terrell

LWV Dane County
Natural Resources

Connie Threinen

LWV Dane County
Tax Policy, Women's Issues

Darlene Wellner

LWV Manitowoc
Juvenile Justice

Elizabeth Wheeler

Member at Large
Reproductive Rights

Meagan Yost

Member at Large
Gun Control, Redistricting

Drawing the Line on Redistricting

Under the Wisconsin Constitution, the state legislature is required to redraw legislative and congressional districts every ten years based upon the results of the decennial federal Census. Unfortunately, this gives incumbent office holders in our state the power to “choose their voters.” Gerrymandered election districts, in turn, deprive voters of meaningful choices and heighten partisanship.

With support from The Joyce Foundation, the League of Women Voters is working with other organizations in Wisconsin and regionally to increase the transparency of this year’s redistricting and bring about positive reforms to improve the process in the future.

A fair process improves cooperation

At the League’s Issues Briefing in October, Carolyn Castore, a member of LWV Milwaukee County and the League’s state legislative committee, and Mike McCabe, Director of Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, led a session on redistricting. McCabe asserted that in addition to promoting electoral competitiveness, a fair redistricting process leads to increased civility and cooperation in the State Capitol. When legislators draw boundaries to produce “safe districts” for their own political party, candidates have less incentive to reach out to independent voters. The result is more gridlock than good governance.

McCabe said the cost of the last Wisconsin redistricting has been estimated at \$2.6 million to \$2.9 million, including the costs of sophisticated map-drawing technology, technical experts, political consultants and lawyers.

Yes, lawyers.

Although redistricting is a legislative responsibility, every plan for the past five decades has ended up in the courts because the legislature and governor failed to agree.



A League priority for over 50 years

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has been active on redistricting since 1952. During the 1986 legislative session, the League supported amending the state constitution to establish an independent redistricting commission. A model now exists in Iowa, where mapping is carried out by a nonpartisan agency similar to our Legislative Reference Bureau. This plan takes redistricting away from partisan incumbents who have the greatest vested interest in how lines are drawn. The mapping process is held to strict guidelines and the addresses of current officeholders or potential candidates may not be considered. The agency submits its redistricting plan to the legislature, which may accept or reject the proposal. If the legislature rejects three versions of the agency’s plan, the agency has the final say.

Although redistricting was computerized in Wisconsin in 1991, this year there is

likely to be open-source software available that will allow schools or community groups to map a redistricting plan for their county or the entire state. This will boost the ability of citizen groups such as the League to critique the legislature’s procedure and increase their expertise to intervene in court.

Local Leagues lay important groundwork

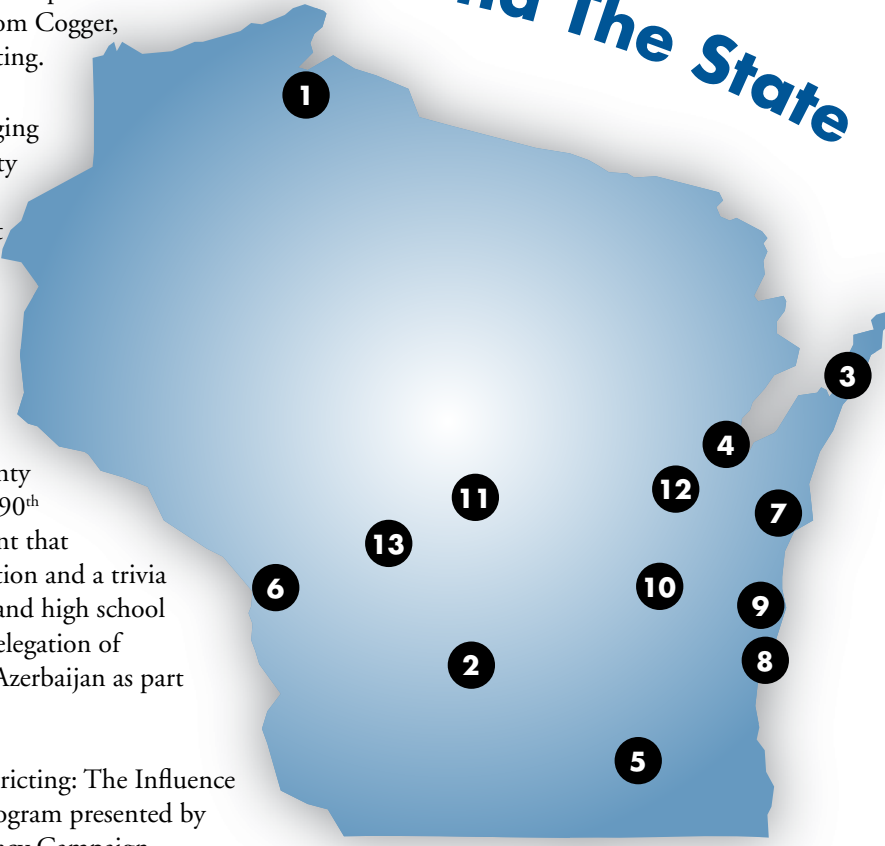
Castore noted that in Wisconsin redistricting begins at the county level, where supervisory district lines are drawn. The state League and several local Leagues joined court cases in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to force county boards to apportion based on the principle of one person-one vote. Local Leagues already are getting involved in local redistricting commissions, monitoring their progress and working to educate the public about the importance of fair redistricting.

At the state level, the League is joining other reform groups in the Midwest Campaign for Accountable Redistricting, coordinated by the Midwest Democracy Network. One likely activity will be formation of a politically diverse statewide citizen panel of legal and academic experts, political leaders and voters that can:

1. Serve as the public face of the redistricting reform movement;
2. Monitor and critique the redistricting process following the 2010 census; and
3. Be a primary voice in support of long-term reform.

Data for redistricting will be available April 1, 2011 from the U.S. Census Bureau. Ward lines must be provided to the legislature by August 2011 so that they can be used to create new districts before June 1, 2012. ❖

Around The State

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- 1 Ashland/Bayfield Counties:** Explored production and distribution of food with guest speaker Tom Cogger, a local sustainable farmer, at chapter meeting.
 - 2 Dane County:** Presented “How Changing Demographics Are Affecting Dane County Schools and Human Services,” with the director of the Dane County Department of Human Services, superintendent of schools for the Madison Metropolitan School District, and the district administrator for the Sun Prairie School District.
 - 3 Door County:** Partnered with five county school districts in a project honoring the 90th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment that included League-sponsored voter registration and a trivia contest for mainland and Washington Island high school students; selected by LWVUS to host a delegation of professionals and emerging leaders from Azerbaijan as part of the Open World Leadership program.
 - 4 Greater Green Bay:** Hosted “Redistricting: The Influence of Money on Politics Post Election,” a program presented by Mike McCabe of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.
 - 5 Janesville:** Presented “Janesville’s Schools Serve All Students,” a Lunch-and-Learn program featuring Janesville School District administrators who reported on how at-risk and multicultural programs are funded; discussed juvenile justice issues and use of the detention center during a community education program with the new head of the Juvenile Justice Division in Rock County.
 - 6 La Crosse Area:** Offered a program called “Community Housing Issues and Solutions” with the executive director of Couleecap, who addressed housing availability in the area.
 - 7 Manitowoc:** Introduced the community to Painting Pathways Clubhouse, a dynamic program for mental health recovery services, with activities that included a facility tour, presentation, video and stories from Clubhouse members.
 - 8 Milwaukee County:** Presented “Where Do We Go from Here?,” a look at League positions and programs; selected by LWVUS to host a delegation of professionals and emerging leaders from Azerbaijan as part of the Open World Leadership program.
 - 9 Ozaukee County:** Offered “Redistricting 101” with Mike McCabe, Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, who discussed historical perspectives and how to improve the process of redrawing legislative and congressional districts.
 - 10 Ripon Area:** Created a Victorian-themed “living window” for Ripon’s Dickens of a Christmas tradition, an ideal setting to celebrate the League’s 90th Anniversary and share information.
 - 11**
 - 12**
 - 13**

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Executive Director's Message



Andrea Kaminski

It's an understatement to say the new legislative session promises to be difficult for the League's issue advocacy efforts. Within days after the midterm election, the incoming Assembly leadership said their first priority will be to pass a voter ID bill, and there has been talk of introducing an immigration bill similar to that passed last year in Arizona. Before he even took office, Governor-

elect Walker succeeded in jettisoning the opportunity for Wisconsin to receive more than \$800 million of federal stimulus money intended to provide high-speed intercity rail.

For 90 years the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has devoted itself to grassroots study and advocacy of multiple and diverse public policy issues. As a result, we have positions in many areas that will be touched by the new political leadership's regressive agenda. I am heartened by the fact that, time and again, the League has shown that our members have the grit to fight for what they know is right regardless of politics.

The League's state board and legislative committee have discussed the reality of the current political climate and wisely chosen to focus our energy and my time as your registered lobbyist on core issues for which the League is recognized as a leader. Top priorities are to preserve and continue to improve Wisconsin's honest and accessible election system and to promote a fair and transparent redistricting process.

That doesn't mean the League will not be active with our positions to protect natural resources, work for a fair school financing policy and defend equitable access to healthcare, including mental, dental and reproductive care. Guidance on these priorities will come from the League's strong volunteer leadership. Our state legislative committee will monitor legislation in several areas and make information available to members on a timely basis. We count on the active citizenship of our members to let elected officials know about our positions.

To follow the state League's activities, you can go to our newly redesigned website at www.lwvwi.org and sign up to receive updates and calls for action.

I hope you'll be an active League participant in the upcoming year. There are many opportunities for involvement and we need your help as we prepare for a challenging year. I look forward to joining you as we make democracy work in Wisconsin. All the best to you in 2011. ❖

Around the State cont. from page 6

- 11 Stevens Point Area:** Focused on voter services activities, including a televised roundtable between two primary candidates and distribution of the State LWV Candidate Guide to local newspapers, our website and members; presented an educational program about voting for high school students with special needs and the program "Understanding Voting in America" for the Hmong.
- 12 Winnebago County:** Evaluated county board size and committee structure in preparation for redistricting; planning a parks inventory to complement the Oshkosh Parks Report; monitoring plans for a possible consolidation of county and city health departments.
- 13 Wisconsin Rapids Area:** Celebrated with good food, conversation and the movie "Food, Inc." ❖

Make the League Part of Your Legacy

Bequests, gifts of stock and memorial gifts sustain the League well into the future. The next time you review your charitable giving plan, consider the League. For more information, contact Andrea Kaminski, (608) 256-0827. ❖

League of Women Voters of WI Education Network/Advocacy Network 2011 Calendar

**LWVWEN
State Board Meeting**
January 22
Madison

**Nonpartisan
Primary Election**
February 15

**LWVWEN
State Board Meeting**
March 26
Madison

**Spring Nonpartisan
Election**
April 5

**LWVWEN State
Board Meeting and LWV
Training**
June 10
Whitewater

**LWVWI
Annual Meeting**
June 11
Whitewater
*See Page 2 for More
Details!*

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 lwvwisconsin@lwvwi.org to sign up for any of the following (be sure to tell us which items you wish to receive by email):

- *Forward Newsletter*
- *Weekly League Update and Action Alerts*

