



THE BULLETIN



League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area

March 2011

www.lwvka.org

Vol. 56 No. 6

Co-Presidents: Connie Ferguson and Kay Perry

League Phone: 269-544-0303

Legislative Breakfast

Sponsored by

Kalamazoo Environmental Council

A Coalition of Kalamazoo Area Environmental Organizations

Please join us as we talk with our State and Federal lawmakers about how to protect and enhance our environmental resources in a challenging economy.

We have invited State Senator **Tonya Schuitmaker**, State Representatives **Sean McCann**, **Margaret O'Brien** and **Jase Bolger** (represented by a staff member) and staff members for U.S. Representative **Fred Upton** and U.S. Senators **Carl Levin** and **Debbie Stabenow**.

WHEN: March 7, Breakfast at 7:30 a.m.
Discussion 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.

WHERE: Kalamazoo Nature Center, 7000 N. Westnedge

COST: \$10 for hot breakfast (\$8 for students)

RSVP: Register online by Thursday, March 3, 2011 at
www.NatureCenter.org

If you have questions or do not have internet access, please call 269-375-0954 and provide your name and phone number.

Kalamazoo Environmental Council members include: Asylum Lake Preservation Association, Audubon Society of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Nature Center, Kalamazoo River Protection Association, Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, **League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area**, Sierra Club—Kalamazoo Valley Group, Students for a Sustainable Earth, Wild Ones Natural Landscapers.



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

Calendar

Mar. 7 KEC Legislative Breakfast

Mon.

7:30 am Kalamazoo Nature Center
7000 N. Westnedge Avenue
Kalamazoo
(See article for registration info)

Mar. 22 Board Meeting

Tues.

The Park Club
219 W. South St., Kalamazoo
5:30 pm Food available for purchase.
6:00 pm Meeting
Questions? Call 269-544-0303
or email president@lwvka.org

Plan ahead—Save the Date

Apr. 14 LWVMI Voting

Thurs.

Systems Consensus Meeting
7 pm
5652 Brenda Lane East
Parchment
(See article for details)

Apr. 16 Dialogue Workshop

Sat.

Navigation Center
8:30 am- Shaffer at Gull Road
12 noon Kalamazoo

Apr. 26 Annual Meeting

Tues.

The Park Club
5:30 pm 219 W. South St, Kalamazoo
(details TBA)

Note: Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings.

Electronic Observer Corps

LWVKA notes created examples of local cooperation.

By Kay Perry

As has been reported in previous *Bulletins*, several of our members are currently monitoring the activities of elective bodies electronically. Those members are regularly visiting the websites of the Kalamazoo and Portage Public Schools, City of Kalamazoo, and Kalamazoo Township. This is the first of our reports on the results.

The LWVKA has a position on "Providing Government Services in Kalamazoo County" that calls for full cooperation among governmental units. Monitoring of the Kalamazoo City Commission revealed some fairly creative examples of this principle in action. For example, the City and Kalamazoo County have agreed to share a Traffic Engineer. Both entities lost their engineers through resignation. They will now jointly hire a new one who will be on the payroll of the city, but will be available to the county no less than 20% of his or her time. The County will reimburse the City for the time spent on County activities.

The city also recently used the services of three WMU seniors to design an extension of the trail way that runs through the WMU and K-College campuses to the downtown Kal-Haven Trail connector. The work was done as a senior project by the students.

The LWVKA's position on "Housing" that was just updated last year calls for "oversight of the quality and quantity of the county's housing stock." The City of Kalamazoo has demolished fifty homes over the past year with over 300 currently abandoned. They expect to demolish 50-100 more in the next year. The city will be transferring 78 properties to the new Kalamazoo County Land Bank Authority for \$1. The properties are targeted for eventual disposition as side lot properties (sold to neighboring residents for a nominal cost).

The LWVKA's position on "Education" contains the following statement: "The (School) Board should examine all available and appropriate sources of funding for operations of the school system, and receive an accurate assessment of the level of funding which might be obtained from each source to meet budgeted revenue needs." In that spirit, a recent Board Packet for the Portage Public Schools notes that because of the reductions in property values, it's likely for many homeowners that a millage rate increase will not result in a tax increase when compared to 2009 taxes paid. An understanding of that phenomenon may be critical for cash-strapped school districts.

LWVKA Helps Makes Democracy Work

LWVKA has been registering voters at the Department of Human Services, 322 Stockbridge, each Tuesday 9:00 - 11:00 am. since November 2010. Volunteers from "Ready to Read," a Kalamazoo Public Library program are at a table on the other side of the room - reading to and with children who are waiting with an adult to receive "survival" services. This is an exciting example of cooperative community hands-on work leading to civic improvement.

If you are interested in joining this effort to "make democracy work" please contact **Karen Eddy** at 599-6399 or kseddy2@yahoo.com. Volunteers are needed in April, May, June, and July.

Many thanks to volunteers **Ruth Caputo, Diane Worden, Janet Jones, Janet Nykaza, Fran Eckenrode, Janet Scarrow, and Sara Wick** for their on-going voter registration efforts.

News From National and State

League Urges Senate to Reform Rules

In early January, League President Elisabeth MacNamara sent a letter to the Senate, urging Senators to reform their rules in ways that maintain the best traditions of the Senate, while ensuring openness, accountability, decision-making capability and effective performance. In addition, the League and coalition partners sent a letter to the Senate, urging its members to make transparency and accountability a priority and end needless obstruction by filibuster that threatens the vibrancy of our democracy. *(Note that this action on the filibuster happened because Kalamazoo's Kay Perry brought this issue to National Convention.)*

League Fights to Protect Public Financing System

The League fought against the efforts last month to eliminate the public financing system for presidential elections. Although the House voted in favor of repeal, prospects in the Senate are a bit better. The League issued a letter to the House and joined a coalition letter, blogged on our views, and urged League members and citizens to take action in opposing the elimination of this system. More recently, the League and coalition partners sent a letter to Senators urging them to oppose repeal and support modernization legislation instead.

Privatization of Government Services Study Committee

Committee members selected for the LWVUS Privatization of Government Service study are: Susan Baer, San Diego (CA), Diane Di Ianni, Nashville (TN), Carole Garrison, Hampton (VA), Ann Henkener, Columbus (OH), Cathy Lazarus, Los Altos (CA), Nora Leech, Seattle (WA) and Ted Volskay, Simpsonville (SC). Janis McMillen, LWVUS Board, is the chair. Over the next few months, the Committee will be doing

research and defining the scope of the study. Finalization of the study scope is anticipated by June 2011.

LWVUS Legislative Priorities for 2011

The Board adopted the following LWVUS Legislative Priorities for 2011 at its January meeting: Clean Air Defense; Health Care Defense; Money in Elections (campaign finance reform); and Voter Registration and Election Administration. The Legislative Watch List* is as follows: CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women); Climate Change; Ethics; Immigration; and Safe Drilling and Mining ("Fracking"). *The Watch List means that if an opportunity arises on these issues and does not interfere with action on an advocacy priority, the LWVUS may take action if it appears we can make an impact.

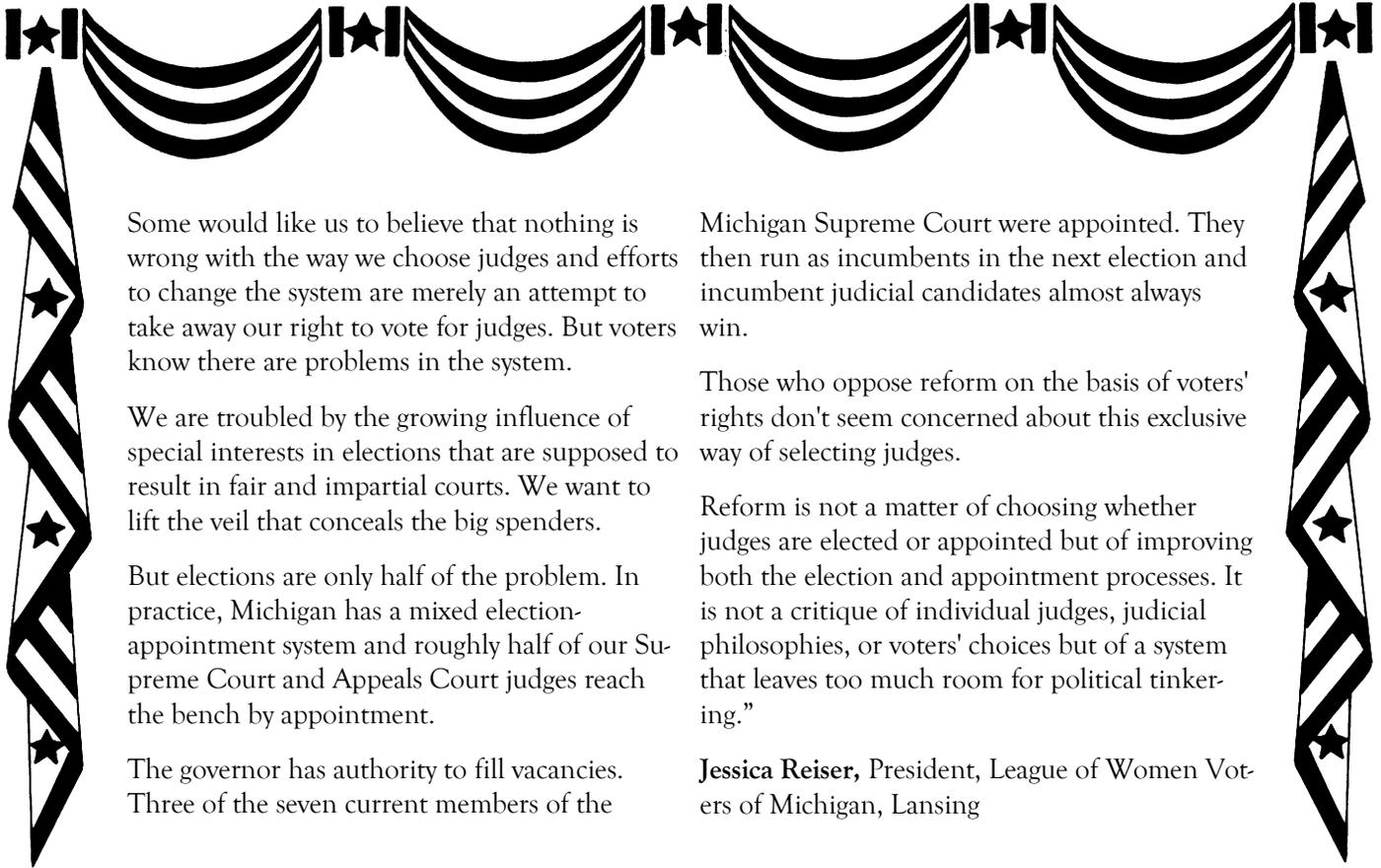
The Board discussed many issues and the responses from members suggesting Legislative Priorities. The decisions were made based on what issues are likely to come before the 112th Congress, the opportunities to make an impact, program decisions made at the 2010 Convention, member interest and resources available to manage these priorities effectively. The Board reviews these priorities throughout the year, making changes if warranted.

The following letter from LWVMI to the Editor on Judicial Selection appeared in the *Detroit News*, January 26, 2011

"The League of Women Voters of Michigan welcomes the creation of the Michigan Judicial Selection Task Force and applauds Justice Marilyn Kelly and Judge James Ryan for their leadership ("Judicial reform panel bad for Michigan," Jan. 6).

Continued on next page

News From National and State continued



Some would like us to believe that nothing is wrong with the way we choose judges and efforts to change the system are merely an attempt to take away our right to vote for judges. But voters know there are problems in the system.

We are troubled by the growing influence of special interests in elections that are supposed to result in fair and impartial courts. We want to lift the veil that conceals the big spenders.

But elections are only half of the problem. In practice, Michigan has a mixed election-appointment system and roughly half of our Supreme Court and Appeals Court judges reach the bench by appointment.

The governor has authority to fill vacancies. Three of the seven current members of the

Michigan Supreme Court were appointed. They then run as incumbents in the next election and incumbent judicial candidates almost always win.

Those who oppose reform on the basis of voters' rights don't seem concerned about this exclusive way of selecting judges.

Reform is not a matter of choosing whether judges are elected or appointed but of improving both the election and appointment processes. It is not a critique of individual judges, judicial philosophies, or voters' choices but of a system that leaves too much room for political tinkering."

Jessica Reiser, President, League of Women Voters of Michigan, Lansing

Program Planning Meeting

Members reviewed state and local positions.

By Paula Manley

Fourteen League members met on Saturday January 29 for the Annual Program Planning Meeting. Each year Leagues meet to review local positions and state or national positions, as well as to consider new study items.

This year our task was to review the LWVMI positions as well as our own LWVKA positions. Several members read sections of the positions in advance and reported if they found the current positions to be relevant, in need of word change, or even a restudy. We agreed to retain all the state and local positions with a few suggestions for word changes in some of the state positions.

Kay Perry suggested that we review the Michigan State Government's use of electronic media, the likely impact on those citizens who have no access, and what could be done to ameliorate the impact.

The LWVMI has proposed a new study on redistricting in Michigan. While we felt it is an important issue, the impact of the study would not be until the 2021 redistricting process. The current redistricting will be completed by November 1, 2011. We decided not to support this study proposal. However, we do believe it is important to educate the public about the process and we do not need a study to do this.

We will submit our report with our new study proposal, and the State Board will compile all the information and issue recommendations for consideration at the May State Convention in Traverse City.

In addition to our discussion of positions, Kay Perry volunteered to convene a group to consider opportunities to use current positions for advocacy. Look for more information on this opportunity in future months.

Meet the New Members

**Busy,
engaged
people
support the
League.**

By Norma Clack

A member of LWVKA since August 2009, **Jennifer Lang** is the director of Colleagues International in Kalamazoo and has served in that position a little more than ten years. Colleagues International is a hosting organization for visitors from foreign countries. This organization offers professional development and education for adult visitors. These participants, who are adult professionals, take home a better understanding of the U.S. people and political systems which can be applied in their everyday lives. It was through this organization that Jennifer became more knowledgeable about the League of Women Voters when our members made presentations to Colleagues International participants about the U.S. governmental structure.

Jennifer graduated from Western Michigan University as a music major (voice), but it was her minor in journalism that helped lead to her current career. While a student at WMU, she was a news reporter for the *Western Herald* and after graduation worked at Healthy Futures which gave her a solid background for the director position with Colleagues International. She is a member of the Kalamazoo Rotary Club.

As a full-time professional and the mother of two young sons (ages 7 and 4-1/2) she keeps very busy. And being an involved mother led her to become a certified hockey coach - in her spare time!

Jennifer says she may not be able to be very involved with the LWV at this time, but feels that what the League does is invaluable. She wants to extend an invitation to League members to consider being a "home host" or even simply a dinner host for Colleagues International adult guests that visit the Kalamazoo area.

The League of Women Voters was just three years old when **Robert Nagler** (now age 88) was born. Bob and the League have developed concurrently and, after decades of observation, he officially joined our ranks last year. Bob said he has always supported the League "tangentially" and had several friends who were members.

His family became Quakers when Bob was 14 and that is where he acquired his long-standing beliefs about human rights and the environment. During World War II, Bob was involved with the Civilian Public Service Committee, became a human guinea pig for the study of hepatitis, and also worked on activities that initiated his interest in chemistry. He subsequently earned degrees in chemistry, taught at the college level, and retired from Western Michigan University after a 30-year career there that included being chairman of the Chemistry Department. He stays involved with his former colleagues through a "Chemistry Emeriti Group" that meets monthly to keep abreast of scientific issues and current events.

For decades Bob has been writing monthly letters about environmental issues to Michigan's U.S. representatives and senators. He is concerned about what he perceives as the deterioration of the political process while observing the "least democratic" government he has experienced in his life. Bob said that he might not have a lot of time to devote to League meetings, but he certainly supports the League's ideals and work.

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Voting Systems Study

LWVMI considers the election rules and procedures.

By Paula Manley

At the LWVMI State Convention in 2009, members approved a new study regarding issues related to alternative voting systems for the state of Michigan. The purpose of the study was to provide background material about alternative voting systems. A voting system for this study was defined as a “collection of rules and procedures that establishes how an election will be conducted, including how the ballots are marked, how the votes are tabulated, how many votes are necessary to win, and other election administering procedures. The scope is limited to single-seat Michigan elections. Voting systems being studied include plurality, approval voting and instant runoff voting.”

After a state study committee looked at the various voting system, they came up with a summary of the voting systems, listing pro and con statements for each system:

Plurality Voting System

(Voters select one candidate; candidate with most votes wins)

- Is easy for voters to understand
- Preserves tradition
- Requires no legislative change.
- Does not ensure majority rule when more than two candidates are running.
- Votes for third party candidates may be “wasted.”
- Is vulnerable to “spoiler” candidates.
- Is vulnerable to manipulation.

Approval Voting System

(Voters select as many candidates as they wish; candidate with most votes wins)

- Is easy for voters to understand.
- Expands voters’ choices because they can vote for more than one candidate.
- Might eliminate “wasted” votes, and “spoiler” candidates in some cases.

- Measures only whether or not a candidate is acceptable; does not distinguish between intense and weak approval.
- Could lead to defeat of a candidate whom a majority support as their first choice.
- Is vulnerable to manipulation.

Instant Runoff Voting System

(Voters rank candidates; votes for candidates with fewest first-choice votes are redistributed according to their second choices until one candidate achieves a majority)

- Ensures majority rule.
- Allows voters to express preferences among candidates.
- Eliminates problems of spoiler candidates knocking off major candidates.
- Eliminates need for run-off elections.

Each local League is to review the study materials and answer consensus questions. The deadline is May 1, 2011. Please read about the study in more detail on the LWVMI website www.lwvmi.org. We will hold a consensus meeting on Thursday April 14, 2011 at **Paula Manley’s** home 5652 Brenda Lane East at 7 pm. Look for consensus questions in next month’s *Bulletin*. PLEASE NOTE: Quotations in this article and explanations of the three voting systems are taken from “Alternative Voting Systems for the State of Michigan” on the LWVMI website.

New Members

Margaret McAllister

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Kalamazoo, MI 49006
269-343-1176
marmcallister@hotmail.com

Stuart Eddy

336 South Burdick St #506
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269-599-6399
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League of Women Voters General Fund Statement of Revenues and Expenditures Budget Year July 2011—June 2012

REVENUES

Membership Dues	\$8,500
Members Contributions	3,500
Non-Member Contributions	500
<i>Bulletin</i> Sponsors	150
Fund Raising Sales	200
Annual Meeting Income	1,000
Transfer from Education Fund	1,000
Women's Equality Day	250
Interest Income	<u>250</u>
Total Revenues	\$15,350

EXPENDITURES

Office Expense	\$100
Postage, Bulk Mail, PO Box	885
Telephone	525
Website	145
<i>Bulletin</i> Expense	2,100
Finance Drive Expense	10
External Organizational Dues	275
National PMP	4,410
State PMP	3,000
Sponsorship	500
Meeting Costs	50
Annual Meeting Expense	1,000
Advocacy	1,050
Nat'l/State Convention	1,000
Membership Recruitment	<u>300</u>
Total Expenditures	\$15,350

"The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Join us in making democracy work!"



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of the Kalamazoo Area
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Nominating Committee Slate

Can you serve?

The Nominating Committee for the LWVKA Board met in December at Waterstreet Coffee Joint to identify potential nominees for Board positions. We continued to do business through e-mail.

The following slate of Board members to be voted on at the 2011 Annual Meeting.

Co-Presidents: **Paula Manley & Connie Ferguson**

Vice President for Organization: **Kay Perry**

Vice President for Program

Issue study/Advocacy: *[open]*

Secretary: **K C Miller**

Board Members:
1. **Michele McGowan**
2. **Ruth Caputo**
3. *[open]*

Nominating Committee: Chair: **Yolanda Mitts**

Nominating Committee: **Rebekah Fennell**
Kay Anderson

The 2011 Nominating Committee includes **Kay Anderson, Dolores Hayden, Janet Jones, Michele McGowan,** and **Yolanda Mitts** with input from current Board officers. We are still trying to fill several Board positions. If you are willing to serve please contact Nominating Committee Chair **Janet Jones** at 383-4436.