

THE BULLETIN

League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area

September 2011

www.lwvka.org

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The HOMES Coalition could use your assistance



The HOMES Coalition, of which we are a member organization, has moved into the second phase of its campaign to fund the Local Housing Assistance Fund (LHAF).

The first stage was to inform the community of the successes of the LHAF and why it should continue and hopefully grow. The LHAF has, over the past four years, provided housing and housing assistance to more than 600 individuals from every corner of Kalamazoo County. Amazingly, 258 of those individuals were children. We know that a stable place to call home gives children more opportunities to succeed in life. The LHAF has stabilized all those children and their families. But now the original funds have run out.

The Public Housing Commission (PHC) has asked the County Commissioners to place a .33 millage on the November ballot to fund the LHAF and that request has moved us into the second phase of the campaign. The Commissioners need to hear from their constituents that the voters deserve the right to vote on this issue. The Commission wanted more information so the millage will probably not go on the November ballot, but perhaps May of 2012 will work if Commissioners are reminded that voters still wish to vote on this issue. **You can help by calling your Commissioner.**

The Coalition is offering Messaging Training so all Coalition members "speak with one voice." If you are interested in attending a training session, please call **Ann Perry** at 381-4277 or e-mail her at annmperry11@gmail.com. If you would like to learn more about the LHAF and/or the HOMES Coalition, visit our website at www.homescoalition.com.

Calendar

Sept 20 Board Meeting

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

Note: Board meets on 3rd Tuesdays.

Sept 21 Energy Forum— Kalamazoo Environmental Council

Wed. Fetzter Center
7:00 pm Western Michigan University

Sept 29 New Experience through Dialogue

Thurs. Ladies' Library Association
6:00 pm 333 S. Park St., Kalamazoo
Refreshments served. RSVP to
president@lwvka.org or
544-0303 by 9/23. See article
for details.

Note: Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings.

**Taxes are a bargain,
There is no doubt.
Unless we all pay them,
Many services we'll be without.
-- Government is us!**

News From National and State

ACTION

League Continues to Fight for Strong Ethics Standards in Congress

In our continued effort to fight for strong ethics standards in the House of Representatives, the League and coalition groups sent two letters to the House. One letter, sent to the leadership of the House Ethics Committee, urged the Committee to appoint outside counsel in the investigation into ethics violations by Representative **Maxine Waters**. Another letter, sent to the entire House, urged them to oppose an amendment that would gut the Office of Congressional Ethics entirely.

League Opposes Balanced Budget Amendment

The League and coalition partners sent a letter to Congress urging them to oppose any balanced budget amendment to the United States Constitution. A balanced budget amendment should not be used as a substitute for real leadership on fiscal policy.

Elections: Congressional Redistricting Status Report

A special event, "Congressional Redistricting: A Status Report" (see video) was held in July at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. The event featured national redistricting experts, including several League partners, who provided a status update on Congressional redistricting nationwide. The speakers touched upon several aspects of redistricting at the heart of many Leagues' efforts, including

the impact of recent reforms in California and Florida, efforts to increase transparency and public participation, and likely Voting Rights Act challenges to redistricting proposals in Texas, North Carolina, and elsewhere. Learn more at www.lwv.org/redistricting.

Global Democracy: League Addresses Women's Rights in Egypt

The League of Women Voters Education Fund is working with women in Egypt at the invitation of the U.S. Embassy. During a five-day trip, the League met in Cairo and Alexandria with leaders of civil society groups working to address women's rights issues throughout Egypt. The meetings, aimed at ensuring women will have a leading role in the forthcoming elections, also included media interviews with Al Tahrir and Maspero TV stations as well as other media outlets. The League's publication, "Empowering Citizens to Influence Public Policy: A Guide for Civil Society Advocates," was translated into Arabic to be used as a road map for these strategic meetings.

The Clean Air Promise Gains Momentum

Last week, the League and its partner organizations launched a citizen's campaign to protect our public health. The Clean Air Promise offers everyone in our community – the public, business leaders and elected officials – a means to come to-

continued on page 3

News From National and State

gether to do something for real people and real communities. The promise has received some great news coverage. Please visit www.peoplenotpolluters.org to share your story, make the promise and send a message asking your elected officials to make the promise as well. You can also make the promise on our Facebook page.

LWVUS Privatization of Government Services Study

The purpose of this study is to identify those parameters and policy issues to be considered in connection with proposals to transfer federal, state or local government services, assets and/or functions to the private sector. It will review the stated goals and the community impact of such transfers, and identify strategies to ensure transparency, accountability, and preservation of the common good. Between August and October 2011, an LWVUS committee will provide a history and background of privatization, a glossary of terms, legal issues to be considered when privatizing at different levels of government, current state regulations on privatizing and case studies on successful and unsuccessful privatizing efforts. Finally, the committee will provide suggested policies and parameters to be considered when privatizing. Between November 2011 and May 2012, Leagues are encouraged to participate in the study by scheduling meetings to educate members and communities about the issue and coming to consensus.

Recommended Reading:

1. **Government Privatization: History, Examples, and Issues** (http://www.ilga.gov/commission/cgfa2006/Up-load/2006Gov_Privatization_Rprt.pdf)
2. Paul Starr, "The Meaning of Privatization," *Yale Law and Policy Review* 6 (1988): 6-41. (<http://www.princeton.edu/~starr/meaning.html>)
3. **Privatization: A Seattle League Study** (<http://www.seattlelwv.org/sites/default/files/privatization2009.pdf>)

2010-2012 LWVUS Nominating Committee: "YOU Are a League Leader!"

The Nominating Committee's theme for this biennium is "YOU Are a League Leader!" The LWVUS Board is you: made up of members like you, from local and state Leagues all across the country, who are willing to dedicate two years of their time and effort to the management of our national organization. Learn more at [lwv.org/For Members/Leaders' Section](http://lwv.org/ForMembers/Leaders/Section) about the LWVUS Nominating Committee, how it plans to work, and how you can be a part of the process by nominating yourself or a leader you admire.

LWVUS Education Study

Education reform involves complex issues.

The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Equity and Funding

From LWV.org website

Public school funding comes from many sources – federal, state and local taxes as well as grants provided by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The federal government adds less than 10 percent to local education budgets, yet it contributes significantly to the rules for how the funding is used. Additionally, the United States invests 5 percent of the GDP in public education. Nearly half of the K-12 education funding in the United States is intended to come from the states, drawn from a combination of income taxes, fees and other taxes. However, some states resemble Illinois, where the state’s share is only 27 percent. The remainder usually comes from local property taxes.

Equity

States that rely heavily on property taxes to fund education tend to have large inequities in school funding, which mirror the inequity of wealth in society-at-large. Hurst (2007) noted that inequities in wealth stem from the fact that wealthy people earn much of their income from investments and/or inherited funds, while the poor earn all of their income from jobs and they spend it on food, shelter, transportation, etc. In the United States, the wealthiest 20 percent own 84 percent of the total wealth.

Inequities in school funding reflect housing patterns. During the past 50 years since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, schools have become re-segregated (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Currently, three-fourths of

the Black and Latino/a students attend schools that are predominately non-white.

Adequacy

Since 1990, rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy—whether a state is providing local districts with just enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education. Odden and Picus (2008) developed a model calculating the cost of an adequate education. They defined an adequate education as one that includes factors such as a full-day kindergarten, core class sizes of 15 for grades K-3, 25 for grades 4-6 and specialist teachers. The cost of an adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

Funding Priorities

When schools are not funded adequately, this has a long-lasting impact. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2010) noted that dropouts cost the country at least \$200 billion a year in lost wages and taxes, costs for social services and crime. Since the 1980s, national investments have spent three times more on the prison system than on education. Data show that the national average for educating a child is \$9500, while it costs \$43,000 per year to keep a person incarcerated. With 5 percent of the world’s population in the United States, we house 25 percent of the world criminals (Kang & Hong, 2008).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, “No Child Left Behind,” which was intended to close

continued on page 5

LWVUS Education Study continued

achievement gaps, particularly for minority children. However, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students before NCLB. One provision of NCLB permitted parents to remove a student from a low-performing school and transfer to another, better performing school. They would receive a voucher which would pay some of the cost of attending another school – public or private. Additionally, courts and education agencies stepped in to “remediate.” The sanctions imposed by NCLB had the effect of punishing or threatening punishment to low-performing schools and teachers, sending them the message that they were incompetent and that they should not have the right to make decisions about how to educate students. Studies (Reeve, 2009) showed that threatening public schools and teachers with punishment had harmful effects on students who remained in the public schools.

Supporters of NCLB appreciate the increase in accountability for schools and teachers as well as the focus on low scoring sub-groups. Critics of NCLB decry the lack of federal funding for many of the Act’s mandates, the emphasis on penalties, the reliance on standardized tests, and the lack of attention to gifted students as well as to subjects such as science, social studies and the arts. One goal of NCLB has been to offer choice to parents whose children attend poorly performing schools.

However, large-scale studies of voucher school students have revealed little difference in their performance compared to public school students with similar backgrounds, and having vouchers has not raised the performance of the most needy students (Rouse & Barrows, 2009). Fur-

thermore, many (Holland, 2011) argue that the NCLB goal of 95 percent of students meeting state standards in reading and math by 2014 is unrealistic.

Race to the Top (RttT)

Race to the Top was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. This program shifted the basis of awarding funds to emphasize competition. Competitive grants reward reform planned in the winning states. Funding is flexible as long as states demonstrate grant dollars are aligned with the agenda outlined in their winning applications. Only twelve states received funding through RttT.

Two of the requirements met by states that received RttT funding were (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and (2) lifting the cap on the number of charter schools that could be created.

While both these funding requirements can be effective, neither is foolproof, and each addresses only one part of the problems schools face. For instance, research studies show that promising increased pay based on teacher effectiveness is not an effective incentive. Furthermore, research showed there is a problem when teacher performance evaluation is based only on student scores in standardized tests (Springer et. al. 2010).

Although there is no question that some charter schools are effective, they have not been the panacea many expected. They were originally proposed as an opportunity for educators to test research-supported methods for reaching hard-to-educate children, and some have done quite well. However, a large-scale research study

Creating New Experiences through Dialogue

Here's an opportunity to practice a useful life skill.

By Terry Hluchyj

"To argue with someone else's experience is a waste of time. To add someone's experience to your experience—to create a new experience—is possibly valuable." (MG Taylor)

The time is right to try again. Last spring we planned this event, but found that few were able to join us. We've revamped the design and will make another run at it during the election season when Leaguers are most likely to act on their inclinations as curious learners, interested in many issues and ideas.

This event follows our "gathering" last year when more than thirty Leaguers came together to share ideas about civic engagement. For that event we used an approach known as conversation café to promote the exchange of ideas with many people in short rounds of small group discussion. Comments about that experience were very positive, as participants made new (and renewed old) acquaintanceships and considered how they could improve their own civic engagement.

That event also highlighted the merit of engaging with those with whom we dis-

agree, rather than avoiding those conversations, as we often do. The experience of learning from each other whetted the appetite for what's possible if we widen the circle of engagement.

In an effort to offer a skill-building opportunity for League members, all are invited to join together to learn about and use dialogue—a way of communicating that promotes shared exploration and understanding. We'll practice with a topic that's a national League study this year: privatization—the policy agenda to transfer government functions, services and assets to the private sector.

When: Thursday, September 29, 6:00–7:30 pm

Where: Ladies Library, 333 South Park Street, Kalamazoo. Refreshments will be served.

RSVP: president@lwvka.org or 544-0303 by September 23. It is important to send your reservation so we have an accurate count.

Take this opportunity to practice a useful life skill—one that enables the kind of civil discourse the League strives to model.

LWVUS Education Study continued

funded by pro-charter advocates revealed that only 17 percent of the 2,403 charter schools had significantly more growth in test scores compared to traditional public schools, and, in fact, 37 percent showed significantly less growth (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009). Furthermore, many charter schools do not admit and/or retain students who need in-

creased support, e.g., students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

The progress of the U.S. Department of Education's Equity and Excellence commissions can be tracked through <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/index.html>.

Voter Registration is continuing!

One-on-one education is an important part of voter registration efforts.

By Karen Eddy

In August, Sara Wick, Martha Cohen, Charlotte Russell, Carol Urban, Stu Eddy and Cheryl Lyon-Jenness represented the LWV all day at the Mothers of Hope 4th Annual Ultimate Family Reunion at Spring Valley Park.

Each Tuesday morning from 9:00 to 11:00 AM, voter registration continues at the Department of Human Services.

From September through November 8 which is **Election Day**, we hope to add one-on-one education to our service at DHS. Elections are important and we believe people are hungry for voting education in a friendly, conversational manner. Stay tuned or come join us and help pave the way. No previous experience needed. Contact **Karen Eddy** at 269-599-6399 or email her at kseddy2@yahoo.com if you are interested in helping with voter registration.

LWVMI Redistricting Study

Have you been following the redistricting process in our state this year? Do you have questions about how the lines are drawn? The League of Women Voters of Michigan is embarking on a study of the redistricting process. They are looking for volunteers to participate on the state study committee. This would involve background reading, finding out what other states do, and what other state leagues have done studies on this topic.

If you have an interest, please contact **Fran Hamburg**, VP for Program LWVMI at 989-631-4769 or email at fphamburg@chartermi.net

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**REMEMBER—EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T THE TIME FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION,
YOUR MEMBERSHIP ALONE WILL STRENGTHEN OUR VOICE.**

- Yes! I want to Take Back the System. Please sign me up!
- I'm enclosing a check for \$60 for individual membership.
- I'm enclosing a check for \$30 for student membership.
- I'm enclosing a check for \$90 for household membership.

NAME OF SECOND HOUSEHOLD MEMBER _____

- In addition to my membership, I'd like to make a contribution of \$_____
- Please send me more information on the League of Women Voters.
- I can't join right now, but I'm enclosing \$_____ to support League activities.

Because we lobby at the local, state and national levels, membership dues and other contributions to the League of Women Voters are not tax-deductible.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

PHONE HOME _____

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Make check payable and mail to:
The League of Women Voters
Paula Aldridge, Treasurer
8035 Glenwynd Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49009