

League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area

April 2011

www.lwvka.org

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Co-Presidents: Connie Ferguson and Kay Perry

League Phone: 269-544-0303

Alternative Voting Systems— Issues and Questions

By Paula Manley

Last month we presented an overview of the LWVMI's Alternative Voting Systems study. On April 14 we will have our LWVKA consensus meeting at Paula Manley's home (5652 Brenda Lane East, Parchment) at 7pm to consider the proposals. If you cannot attend the meeting, please complete the consensus questions found on page four of this *Bulletin* and send the form to Paula Manley by April 10.

As you prepare for consensus, read the study on the LWVMI website and consider the following issues:

1. **Majority Rule:** Is the fact that someone may be elected with less than 50 percent of the vote important enough to change to a different election system? If it happens too frequently, will it reduce the legitimacy of Michigan's elected officials? How important are voting paradoxes that are found in all of the systems being discussed?
2. **"Sincere Voting" vs. Strategic Voting:** How important is it for an election system to encourage citizens to vote for their true favorite rather than for someone who has a better chance of winning? Is an "insincere" strategic vote "gaming the system" or making a compromise? Might an "insincere" or strategic vote for a candidate reduce the ability of the winner to interpret the will of the people?
3. **"Wasted" votes:** Does it matter that votes for a third party candidate under the plurality system might be considered "wasted" because it cannot lead to the election of the voter's preferred candidate?
4. **Intensity vs. Breadth of Support:** Should a voting system balance intensity of support with breadth of support? What kind of impact does the type of support have on the winner's ability to govern?
5. **Preferences:** Are there benefits to allowing voters to express their preferences by approving or ranking multiple candidates?

Continued on page 2

Calendar

Apr. 14 LWVMI Voting Systems Consensus Meeting

Thurs. 5652 Brenda Lane East
7 pm Parchment
(See article for details)

Apr. 16 Creating New Experiences Through Dialogue

Sat. Navigation Center
8:30 am- Shaffer at Gull Road
12 noon Kalamazoo
(See articles for details)

Apr. 26 Annual Meeting

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

(No April Board meeting. The Annual Meeting is on our regular meeting night.)

May 25 Redistricting Matters

Wed. Kalamazoo Public Library
7:00- Rose & South Streets
9:00 pm Kalamazoo
Join us to view the documentary film "Gerrymandering."
(More information in the May *Bulletin*)

Note: Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings.



Alternative Voting Systems continued

6. **Legality of Alternative Systems:** Are the benefits of alternative methods sufficient to warrant a change in Michigan statutes?
 7. **Political Parties:** Would alternative voting systems that encourage third parties upset the traditional two-party system? In the plurality system, how important is it that third party candidates can take votes from one major party candidate, perhaps enabling the candidate from the other major party to win?
 8. **Voter Education:** Is the fact that some voting systems require complex tabulation sufficient reason to reject them? How important is it that the voters understand how votes are tabulated? Would the additional cost of a new system be too much of a burden on Michigan election districts in terms of educating voters and election officials?
 9. **Change:** Who benefits from changing to an alternative system? Who is disadvantaged? Is it possible to reduce the impact of the unintended consequences that almost always follow any institutional change?
- *Issues taken from the LWVMI study which may be found at www.LWVMI.org. See page four for consensus questions.

Creating New Experiences Through Dialogue

Take this opportunity to practice a useful life skill.

“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)

By Kay Perry

LWV members are often curious learners, interested in many issues and ideas. When they gather together, the occasion is likely to include lively conversation on a variety of topics. That was certainly the case when a group of more than thirty Leaguers came together last spring to share ideas about civic engagement. We called that event a “gathering” and 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 event 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 disagree, 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 soon to be a national League study: privatization—the policy agenda to transfer government functions, services and assets to the private sector.

When: Saturday, April 16, 2011; 8:45 a.m. to 12:00 noon; coffee available at 8:30 a.m.

Where: Borgess Navigation Center, behind the Medical Specialties Building on the Gull Road campus; turn on Shaffer Road and follow the signs; parking is next to the building. 226-5170.

RSVP: president@lwvka.org or 544-0303

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

News From National and State

League Urges House and Senate to Investigate FEC Failure

In a letter with coalition partners (Americans for Campaign Reform, Campaign Legal Center, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Common Cause, Democracy 21, Public Campaign, Public Citizen and USPIRG), the League urged House and Senate committee leaders to investigate and hold hearings on the systemic problems with the Federal Election Commission. The letter stated that “the FEC is, without question, one of the most dysfunctional agencies in the federal government.” It went on to say that “time and again, the FEC has either dismissed complaints because the Republican and Democratic Commissioners have rejected efforts by the professional staff to enforce the law, deadlocked in a three-to-three vote, or promulgated rules contrary to the law, resulting in orders from the court to rewrite those rules.” In conclusion, the letter said that “it is unacceptable that the only agency charged with enforcing campaign financing rules on our nation’s highest elected officials is largely AWOL.”

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Education Fund Responds to League of American Voters

In late February, the League of American Voters jumped back into the spotlight, inserting them-

selves into the events taking place in Wisconsin. They began email and telephone campaigns backing Governor Walker’s efforts and trying to raise money for their organization. This group first formed in 2009 during the fight for healthcare reform. It chose a name that is deceptively similar to the League of Women Voters to intentionally confuse the public, disseminate misleading information and raise money. The Wisconsin League immediately issued a press release and talked with the media so that Wisconsin citizens wouldn’t be confused by a legitimate-sounding name so much like ours.

League Urges Support of Appropriations for International Climate Investments

The League sent a letter to leaders of the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee in the Senate urging them to support appropriations for international investments to address the causes and consequences of a changing climate. The League said that funding for climate programs should be part of strong overall development assistance and should not lead to cuts in complementary humanitarian, development, and conservation programs in any way.

Annual Meeting

The LWVKA will hold its Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 26 at the Park Club in downtown Kalamazoo. Our guest speaker will be **Don Gilmer**, former county administrator and former state representative, who will talk about state and local budgets. This is a timely topic given the financial challenges facing our local communities and state.

The Annual Meeting is a time to celebrate our accomplishments this past year and look forward to the coming year. An invitation will be coming to your mailbox soon. Invite a friend and join us at 5:30 p.m. on April 26.

Consensus Questions for Alternative Voting Systems

Directions:

Please indicate your opinion for each of the voting systems studied for single-seat elections when more than two candidates are running. **This consensus process allows for supporting more than one voting method.**

QUESTION: *Is the current method of plurality voting adequate under all circumstances, or should alternate options be recommended?* The methods under considerations are the following:

1. **Plurality Voting**-Current voting system in Michigan; the candidate with the most votes wins, regardless of whether or not he or she received a majority of the votes cast.

Support____ Oppose_____

No consensus_____

Why or why not?

2. **Approval Voting:** Voters cast votes for all the candidates they approve. The candidate with the most votes wins.

Support_____ Oppose_____

No consensus_____

Why or why not?

3. **Instant Runoff Voting:** Voters rank the candidates. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated, and the votes cast for the eliminated candidate are transferred (or moved) to the next choice listed on each ballot. This process of elimination continues until a majority winner is declared.

Support____ Oppose_____

No Consensus_____

Why or why not?

If you are unable to attend the consensus meeting on April 14, please complete and return this form to **Paula Manley**, 5652 Brenda Lane, Parchment, MI 49004 by April 10, 2011.

Flegal & Tibbitts

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Portage, Michigan 49024
Phone (269) 383-1900

202 Trowbridge Street
Allegan, Michigan 49010
Phone (269) 673-2222

Never doubt the importance of INFLUENCERS and EDUCATORS

Every Tuesday, since the beginning of 2011 nine league members have made a difference by registering voters at the Department of Human Services, 322 Stockbridge, in Kalamazoo. Can you help out with this important service?

Volunteers are needed from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. on: April 19, May 10, 17, 31

All Tuesdays in June, July and August are open. Contact **Karen Eddy** at 269-599-6399 or kseddy2@yahoo.com

A Home, the LHAF and the HOMES Coalition

The Local Housing Trust Fund has assisted many Kalamazoo County residents.

By Kay Perry

How important is it to you to have a place to call home? Can you imagine building a new and prosperous life from a sleeping bag under a bridge? Can you imagine being a child who cannot concentrate on her schoolwork because her mind is filled with thoughts of not having a place to sleep that night? Can you imagine losing your job and being unable to pay for your family's housing? Do you have friends, acquaintances, relatives or neighbors who have experienced being without a place to call home?

We can be proud of Kalamazoo County for creating, in 2006, the Local Housing Trust Fund (LHAF), a very successful program that has provided vouchers to many without a home, assistance to many who were in danger of losing what they called home and (with leveraged money) some affordable housing for low-wage earners and some on fixed incomes.

The LHAF, a pilot program, has assisted many Kalamazoo County residents who were homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. The LHAF began with approximately \$1 million in donations from the County, the cities of Kalamazoo and Portage and a few generous private

donors. About \$1.5 million in additional funds were leveraged. The money helped 146 households (185 adults and 223 children) avoid homelessness with an 89% success rate. In the voucher program, 117 vouchers were issued. A 20% success rate was expected but a 40% success rate was achieved. One of the properties purchased through the leveraged monies is home to 10 previously chronically-homeless individuals and of those 10, 7 have stabilized in that housing. The money has now run out.

Because of the great successes of the LHAF, a number of organizations in the County (including the LWVKA) feel that the LHAF should survive and grow. In the fall of 2010, they formed the HOMES Coalition for the sole purpose of securing a permanent funding source for the LHAF. HOMES is an acronym for Housing Opportunity Makes Economic Sense. Housing people costs half of what it costs to shelter them and saves in health care costs, public safety costs and the long-term costs of under-educated children. Anyone willing to take an active role in the HOMES Coalition should contact Ann Perry at 381-4277.

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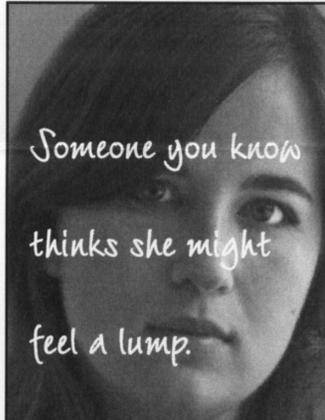


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**REMEMBER—EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T THE TIME FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION,
YOUR MEMBERSHIP ALONE WILL STRENGTHEN OUR VOICE.**

- 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 _____

PHONE OFFICE _____



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