



Denver VOTER

League of Women Voters of Denver

January 2012

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What We Learned at the Program Planning Potluck and What's Next

On a cold winter night in December, in the cozy confines of the League meeting room, 37 people joined in at the Program Planning Potluck. We rotated through



six tables with each person having an opportunity to stop at three tables to learn the LWVUS positions that affect the areas the Denver League holds

dearest: Voting Rights, Women's Issues (social issues), Government, Health Care, Education, and Natural Resources. Members learned about the LWVUS positions from our most knowledgeable folk and then talked about what the positions don't cover, where they are insufficient, and even where some might be wrong. The results of those table discussions are presented below with an eye to the Program Planning Briefing this January 9 at 9:30 a.m.

Health Care: The most striking finding of all the tables was that the LWVUS Health Care position should be updated. The position, which was written in April 1993, was felt to be generally relevant but needs some updating. An example: in describing basic levels of health care that residents should have access to, "dental, vision and hearing care" are described as important but of lower priority. Medical research increasingly indicates that these are equally important needs. It was also felt some language needs updating based on these questions:

- Does the term U.S. resident include undocumented persons?

January Briefings

National Program Planning
Monday, January 9, 9:30 a.m.
League Office

Privatization
Tuesday, January 17, 9:30 a.m.
League Office

- What is meant by community rating vs. experience rating?
- Does there need to be more explicit language regarding evaluation including quality standards, evidence-based medicine, etc.?

Voting Rights: Our positions are remarkably strong. Still, our campaign finance position is under duress due to the recent Supreme Court decision ruling that corporations are regarded as individuals and therefore are entitled to the same free speech rights as the rest of us and cannot be limited in the size of their contributions. Required postage for mail in ballots was also discussed. Is the cost of mailing a ballot a hindrance to voting, and should ballots be mailed "postage paid?"

Women's Issues: Again, our positions are very strong. Sadly, the ambitions expressed in the LWVUS positions are far from achieved. The table would like to see the LWVUS dedicate additional effort, lobbying resources, and dialogue to achieving those goals.

Government: The focus here was on "earmarks." The League opposes "earmarks," and, as a result the Colorado League was not able to support the recent 2011 ballot pro-

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posal to increase the sales tax to cushion the impact of economic downturn on public education. The table realized that a federal earmark is quite different from earmarks at the state, but concluded that, pending further study, the LWV policy on "earmarks" should remain the same. In researching the LWVUS positions, Chairwoman Cindy Sestrich found the topic of "government" and particularly "fiscal policy" are not separately and clearly identified in LWVUS policy. The table recommended that fiscal policy be moved to a more visible and identifiable location such as a "Government Section."

Natural Resources: The table was satisfied with our national positions. The Natural Resources positions have a rich history and have been fine-tuned since the 1920s and 1930s. The positions remain relevant and helpful for today's education and advocacy activities. The topic of fracking is not addressed, and members wondered if the upcoming Colorado League position on the topic could be put forth for adoption by the National organization. As that study and consensus will not occur until Fall 2012, Colorado's fracking position might rightfully be presented to the National Convention in 2014 for adoption by concurrence.

Education: Our most recent study still generated lively table discussion. The position will be adopted at the LWVUS Convention in Washington, D.C. in June, 2012.

The January 9 Briefing will be designed to further our members' understanding of the Program Planning process. Programmatic discussion will be limited for example purposes. Members are strongly urged to visit the LWVUS website and read about the topics of greatest interest to them. Units will then discuss positions and recommend a new study, updates to existing positions, concurrence with other Leagues' positions, or elimination of positions. The input from the units will be compiled and presented to the Board at its February meeting for approval. LWVUS is only allowed to recommend one study and one position in each of the categories of concurrence, elimination and update. Between now and the time of the unit meetings, members and resource committees are encouraged to advocate for their favored improvements to the LWVUS Program.

Barbara Allen Ford

Program Vice President



Continuing our Privatization Conversation

As we move toward the May deadline for review and consensus on Privatization of Government Services, more background material is being posted on the LWVUS website. You may be interested in some or all of these documents (see list below). No materials will be mailed from LWVUS. Our first Privatization Briefing will be at 9:30 a.m. on January 17, 2012, at the Denver League office.

An electronic meeting, called a “webinar,” was held earlier this year, which can also be reviewed by going to the LWVUS website and selecting “Webinars & Training” under the “Members” heading at the bottom of the home page, and selecting [LWV Studies: Education & Privatization](#). Then sit back for an hour or so while the consensus process is described.

I found this webinar interesting on several levels: first, roles and goals were described for the study committee:

- ◆ Understand the scope by using LWVUS materials, papers, “Facts & Issues”
- ◆ Prepare pro and con analysis
- ◆ Publish background information
- ◆ Create opportunities to inform and bring the community into the discussion
- ◆ Keep the Board informed

Second, the role of the Board was defined:

- ◆ Appoint the study committee
- ◆ Determine the calendar and schedule
- ◆ Protect the process

Protect the process...this is what sets LWV apart from many other civic groups, the public discussion that leads to informed judgment. So, even though winter is upon us and days are short and roads can be treacherous, we will set about to create opportunities to inform and bring the community into the discussion. Please invite friends and colleagues to share in the process. You might bring them to a briefing or just ask them about their opinions and attitudes with respect to the privatization of government services, assets and functions, and the impact on local communities.

This leads me to the third point that came out in the webinar. In a consensus process, how does divergent opinion get counted? Well, first we must welcome divergent opinion, make an honest attempt to understand the rationale and make a very “League-like” effort to focus on facts. A study can be a great recruitment tool for LWV. Let us know how you would like to help broaden our base and bring more of the community into our process.

Casey Davenhill

Program Vice-President

Subcontracting Public Education: <http://www.lwv.org/content/subcontracting-public-education>

Privatization of Prisons: <http://www.lwv.org/content/privatization-prisons>

Privatization of a Publicly-owned Waste Water Treatment Plant

<http://www.lwv.org/content/privatization-publicly-owned-waste-water-treatment-plant>

Deregulation of Railroads: <http://www.lwv.org/content/deregulation-railroads>

The Legal Framework of Transparency and Accountability Within the Context of Privatization

<http://www.lwv.org/content/legal-framework-transparency-and-accountability-within-context-privatization>

20th Anniversary

Twenty years ago this year the first Women to Watch Awards Program was created. This awards program was initiated to honor women who are making great efforts to overcome obstacles to self-sufficiency. Since 1992, ten award programs have been presented and 223 very inspiring women have been honored as well as the organizations and institutions that have helped them.

The program traditionally occurs in March, Women’s History Month, as these honorees are indeed making

history. Our 20th Anniversary Women to Watch Awards Program will be held on March 25, 2012. To acknowledge this anniversary, we would like to give these women a little extra beyond our regular small token. Many of you have been very generous in donating to the League of Women Voters Education Fund in the past, and we ask that you give a little more to recognize this year’s honorees.

The Women to Watch Committee

Reporting in, LWVD City Government Committee

Structural Financial Task Force

The task force met on November 30, for one of its last sessions to hash out the final recommendations. Brendan Hanlon, newly appointed Budget Director, led the meeting with Ed Scholz, the previous budget director, returning to advise. Cary Kennedy and the budget staff also added their expertise to the meeting. It was explained more clearly that Human Services and Denver Health came to the SFTF because they would not normally be discussed within the general fund. They derive their funds, which are decreasing, from mill levy, federal and state funding, etc. Therefore the SFTF hadn't addressed either group as they were focusing on the \$30M deficit in the general fund. Bottom line, these two agencies are still the responsibility of Denver. Both are experiencing a drastic increase in needed and demanded services that has created an urgent and severe budget deficit. If addressed, an increase in funding to these agencies could create a \$60 – 100M deficit beyond the \$30M general fund deficit. According to Elbra Wedgeworth, newly appointed President of Denver Health, Denver Health's funding has been flat for 17 years, yet the demands have increased drastically. Denver Health, under Patty Gabow's leadership, has been renowned for its efficient organization even with underfunding. In Denver Human Services, 186,000 of Denver's population need the services, while Federal Funding is declining rapidly, especially as programs expire.

There wasn't a general consensus from last month's meeting as to any clear recommendations for these two agencies. It was again suggested that there be a greater incentive for city employees to use Denver Health for their health insurance. Only 5% of the employees designate DHS as their provider. The comment was made that most employees have doctors outside of DHS, so it would be a hard sell. Keeping good employees is a major goal and health insurance choice is a big factor in retention and hiring. The SFTF couldn't come to any final solution, except to say that there needs to be a more in-depth study through another mayoral task force. It was mentioned that the public sentiment is against more task forces. Their volunteer year of commitment, however, is winding down and this grave situation may demand it.

Several new issues were addressed for the remainder of the meeting. Tom Downey, Excise and License Director, came to propose a cigarette tax increase. Every \$.03 in increased sales tax would raise \$1M annually, but there would be a series of steps necessary to make this happen.

First, surrounding metro Denver municipalities would need to also agree to an increase in tax. This would eliminate the issue of crossing boundaries to save money, which could actually decrease funds. Then the Colorado State Legislature would need to change their tax law. The cigarette tax is controlled at the state level, with distribution of the city's portion out of state funds. When the tax was created, a "municipal poison pill" was included. It states that if any municipality raises their own tax on cigarettes, they lose out on their portion of the state's collection of the tax. The tobacco industry, with its large financial resources, lobbied for this so they would not have to fight any future increases in cigarette taxes in every municipality in the state. This was standard at that time across the country. The first step, then, would be to lobby the legislature, with the help of metro Denver municipalities, to remove this "poison pill." Then each municipality surrounding Denver would have to get the initiative on the ballot for November 2012 for the voters to pass the increase in tax. According to polling, there is more potential to pass a sales tax increase in a presidential election year and 2/3 of the voters would pass this increase. A ruling would have to be made by the City Attorney's office on the distribution of the tax revenues to healthcare or the general fund. Cigarette usage has gone down and may continue to do so, so the long term benefit of the tax is questionable.

Another issue discussed was an increase in the medical marijuana tax. Other counties have increased this tax beyond the regular rate. SFTF requested additional information on surrounding counties' rates. A discussion took place regarding the conflict of medicinal use and the penalty of a greater tax burden.

More suggestions for revenue included obtaining appropriate corporate sponsorships for small areas in the city such as dog park accessories and soft drink machines at recreation centers, etc. If a sponsor's reputation became tainted, then it could easily be removed. They did not want to give the idea that Denver government was selling out to private industry.

The last subject discussed was grants. There is an independent contractor that does grant writing for Denver agencies. No grants are applied for that have a decrease in funding over time as this would be a burden on the future budget. More creativity was advised in searching for grants.

It was noted at the end of the meeting that the Hancock administration plans to be aggressive with economic development. There are 32 Transportation Oriented Development (TOD) stations in Denver that would be potential areas of mixed residential and commercial development expansion. They could create jobs and increase private expenditure, which would bring in more income. The last meeting, date to be announced later in December, will be an overview of recommendations.

Cindy Sestrich

Reprecincting – Getting Ready for the Early Caucus

At the Special Issues City Council Committee meeting November 28, Debra Johnson, Clerk and Recorder, and Amber McReynolds, Elections Director, presented the two preliminary plans for redrawing precincts in anticipation of the state's new boundaries. The courts had not yet finalized the state districts, but it was close enough that they thought they needed to start some plans, due to time constraints. Paul Sharp, with the Technology Services, Geographical Information Services (GIS) department, worked with Johnson to present the plans. The current 426 precincts were drastically reduced to potentially 304 – 334 precincts in the new plans. (Refer to October article for the reasons for reducing the amount and the requirements.) Maps are displayed on the Clerk and Recorder's website. Revisions will occur during the process, so constant monitoring of the site is advised: www.denvergov.org/clerkandrecorder/ or DenverVotes.org.

It was noted that there are two areas of "broken neighborhoods" where the precincts have holes in the middle of them due to the terrain. These are Glendale, with the car dealership on Colorado Blvd., and the College View/Ruby Hill/Overland area. Also, the areas previously mentioned that had mistakes made by the national Census department have been addressed. The only irregular outcome was that a part of Indian Creek (50 voters) will be combined with the Arapahoe County state district representative.

A discussion took place after the presentation on purging voter files when they have not had a response to mailings or where the mailings are returned undeliverable. The cost associated with outdated voter files was raised as a concern. Johnson said she would get back with them after an analysis of the numbers and the effort needed to keep their

database current as to inactive voters. They currently carry the voters indefinitely if there hasn't been a notification of moving, or death, etc. The voter goes inactive if they haven't voted in the last two general elections. These preliminary reprecincting plans use both active and inactive voters.

A public meeting occurred on December 1 that outlined the timeline and the public comment process. (Note: There is a video of the meeting available at the website listed above.) If you would like to comment on the map, you may email election-comm@denvergov.org, fax 720-913-8600, go in person, or mail your comments to Elections Division (200 W. 14th Ave., Denver, CO 80204, Attn: Communications Dept.). January 6 is the deadline for the map to be completed with distribution by January 12. Then City Council will work on Council districts. School districts will be revised by the Clerk and Recorder's office according to the new boundaries.

Cindy Sestrich

Of Note

Denver Budgeting Method – I thought it was important to dispel a persistent rumor about the "use it or lose it" budget method in Denver. Brendan Hanlon, newly appointed Budget Director, said that Denver does not employ this system that incentivizes year-end spending in order to maintain the subsequent year's budget allocations. In the past few years, the budgeting process has actually built in a certain amount of unspent appropriations. In a downturn economy, there will be attrition (vacant positions not filled) and efficiencies put into place during the year. That is why in the last quarter of the year the projected budget can show a better position. The savings are then used to help with the budget gap.

When the economy outlook starts getting better, then a process of reinvesting a portion of the continuing efficiency savings could be used towards other department efficiency programs. In other words, a method of initiating program efficiencies is built into the process, creating an ongoing savings program.

Cindy Sestrich

New Member - The City Government Committee welcomes new member Angie Knepell. She joins us as a new member of the LWV Denver also. She has been a policy intern and Chief of Staff for State Senator Linda Newell. Currently, she works at the Governor's Energy Office.

Unit Meetings

Buffalo
Mon., Jan. 23, 5:30 p.m.
 Location TBD
 Call Joan Friend for info.

Cheesman
Tue., Jan. 10, 9:30 a.m.
 Roberta Long-Twyman
Tue., Jan. 24, 9:30 a.m.
 Virginia Olsen

Cherrington
Thu., Jan. 12, 1:00 p.m.
 Marty Sloven
Thu., Jan. 26, 1:00 p.m.
 Glenda Prosser

Heritage
Thu., Jan. 27, 10:30 a.m.
 Regular meeting place:
 Heritage Club

2020 S. Monroe St.
 For info call Betsy Kester

Highland/Woodbury
Wed., Jan. 4, 5:45 p.m.
 Regular meeting place:
 Red Tango
 5807 W. 38th Ave.
 Call Sally Augden for info.

Matchless
TBD
 Call Ida Schmuck for info.

Observatory
Tue., Jan. 10, 7 p.m.
 Carol Jones
Tue., Jan. 24, 7 p.m.
 Tracey Bedford

St. Vrain
Wed., Jan. 11, 9:15 a.m.

Dot Sobol
Wed., Jan. 25, 9:15 a.m.
 Vivian Dodds

Thomas Jefferson
Fri., Jan. 27, 9:15 a.m.
 Alida Stein-Lustig

Whiteman
Tue., Jan. 10, 9:15 a.m.
 Jan Burns
Tue., Jan. 24, 9:15 a.m.
 Elaine Kaufman

January Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- 2 Office closed
- 9 National Program Planning Briefing, 9:30 a.m., League Office
- 10 Ed Fund Board Meeting, 2:45 p.m.; Board Meeting, 3:30 p.m.
- 16 MLK Holiday, office closed
- 17 Privatization Briefing, 9:30 a.m., League Office
- 23 LWVCO Day at the Legislature, Old Supreme Court Chambers

Welcome New Member!

Salye Stein

We welcome articles and submissions to the VOTER from all members. Here are the upcoming deadlines:

VOTER Month	Submission Deadline
February	1/10/2012
March	2/14/2012
April	3/13/2012
May	4/10/2012

Send your submissions to info@lwwdenver.org.

Need a New Year's Resolution?

Resolve to buy more grocery cards! Thanks to all of you who use the Sunflower Market and King Soopers reloadable cards for your contributions to the Denver League. We continue to hope that Safeway will soon have reloadable cards available.

Bev Bridges

Grocery Card Fundraiser Coordinator

www.lww.org

Check out the newly designed League of Women Voters US website! According to their announcement, they are modernizing the way LWVUS informs and interacts with the public. "We want to grow our community and expand our resources, so as we enter an election year, we hope this new site will better showcase the work done by Leagues – local, state and national."

Look for an insert with a follow-up on the *Patriocracy* film event in November.

Health Care Committee

SAVE THE DATE! Fortunately we were able to reschedule the Health Care Briefing that had to be cancelled November 2 because of the snow. Put 5:30 p.m. on February 21 on your calendar and watch for more information on this in the February VOTER.

News from the Colorado Health Benefit Exchange Board is that Patty Fontneau has been approved as executive director. A good resource for information about the exchange is the Colorado Health Benefit Exchange website getcoveredco.org.

Join the Fund Development Committee!

As we head into the 2012 election year, the LWVD Education Fund will see increased expenses related to election activities in addition to regular expenses. In order to remain sustainable, we must seek outside funding sources to support our operations and programs. The LWVD board is forming a fund development committee that will be tasked with coordinating fundraising efforts for the League, concentrating on the Ed Fund first. If you are passionate about (or even just interested in) fundraising, please consider joining this committee. We are looking for members across our membership to join board members in this endeavor.

The committee will be responsible for setting our fund development strategy, brainstorming funding streams and methods, and actually implementing fundraising activities in some cases. This is not an event-planning committee alone. We will address all forms of funding streams including individual and corporate gifts, events, grants, and others. The first meeting will be in January and will likely occur monthly throughout the year. If you would like to join or would like more information, please contact Marci Hladik

Marci Hladik
Finance Chair

Announcement from the Women's Issues Committee

Colorado's first Child Protection Ombudsman has been selected by the Colorado Department of Human Services. She is Becky Miller Updike, formerly director of Colorado Judicial Institute, state director for Every Child Matters, and most recently has been providing government affairs and strategy consultation for clients including Tennyson Center for Children, Colorado Council of Churches, Qualistar Colorado, and Every Child Matters. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Denver Morgridge College of Education.

In speaking to All Families Deserve a Chance Coalition on November 11, the new ombudsman told the group that there are 30 child deaths annually attributable to child abuse in Colorado. Ms. Miller is charged with identifying emerging trends that indicate the need for enhanced protection of this young and particularly vulnerable part of our population.

Ms. Miller noted that her job is complicated by the variations that exist in policy and procedure in the state's over 60 different counties. An increase in child abuse can be reasonably projected from the stress that will inevitably be put upon families as federal and state funds are slashed in the current economic climate. The group noted that the impact of many cuts in benefits are already being felt.



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