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Illinois Voter

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Founded in 1920, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization which encourages citizens to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. For membership information, call (312) 939-5935. Articles from the *Illinois Voter* may be reprinted in full with complete acknowledgment.

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LWVIL Diversity Policy: The League of Women Voters of Illinois, in both its values and practices, affirms its belief in and commitment to diversity and pluralism. The LWVIL recognizes that diverse perspectives are necessary for responsible and effective decision making in democratic organizations. LWVIL affirms its commitment to remove barriers to participation in any League activity on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or national origin; and to actively seek to be inclusive.



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Travel Concepts International was formed in 1984 to organize international tours for members of the League of Women Voters. Our tours feature home and school visits, Embassy visits and other one-on-one cultural exchanges. For each traveler on a TCI League tour, a donation is made to your State and Local Leagues.

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Leave a Legacy for the Future

It's not too late to donate to the Campaign for the Future, the LWVIL Education Fund Endowment Campaign. The Endowment Fund was established to support the work of local and state League volunteers and to ensure that the League continues to meet the changing needs of Illinois citizens in the years ahead.

To make a gift, please send your check (made out to the LWVILEF Endowment Fund) to the state League office, 332 South Michigan Avenue, #1050, Chicago, IL 60604 or to donate by credit card, e-mail Judy Elsass at jelsass@lwvil.org or call her at 312-939-5935 x34.

A list of all donors will be in the next Voter. Be sure YOUR name will be there by making a gift or a pledge before November 7. Thank you! Thank you! to all who have contributed!

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TAKING DEATH PENALTY ABOLITION TO NATIONAL CONVENTION IN 2006

Continuing LWVIL's effort to have LWVUS adopt a position calling for the abolition of the death penalty, Paula Lawson, LWVIL President, has contacted the other State Leagues that have abolition positions to ask for their assistance. LWVIL will ask that delegates to the 2006 LWVUS convention concur with its position that the death penalty be abolished.

This campaign will request local Leagues to indicate support of concurrence with the abolition position during national program planning so that it can be a recommended item at convention. Although a concurrence requires a 2/3 vote in any case,

being a recommended item should carry weight with undecided delegates. The committee will continue to contact local Leagues seeking their support and encouraging them to study and/or adopt by concurrence an abolition position. Our website is available to any League for use in this process. LWVUS plans to establish a listserv for Leagues to exchange information on the program planning process and issues for consideration. We will be using this listserv as another way to get the word out.

LWVIL members and local Leagues can help the effort in several ways:

✓ Financial donations are always appreciated. Donations may be sent to the

LWVIL Office earmarked for Death Penalty Abolition Concurrence.

✓ If you plan to attend national convention in Minneapolis in June 2006 and are willing to help, please let me know.

✓ Support concurrence with the death penalty abolition position as a recommended item on materials sent to local leagues on national planning for LWVUS convention 2006.

Please feel free to contact me with questions, suggestions or to help.

Janet Kittlaus
Death Penalty Specialist, LWVIL
dpconcurrency@lwwil.org

Mental Health Rally

Date & Time:

Monday, October 17, 2005
- Noon

Place:

The Thompson Center,
100 West Randolph Street
Chicago.

Purpose:

To rally in support of Illinois mental health advocacy.

Advocacy this year will include keeping new federal matching dollars in the community system, access to medications, and creating housing options for people leaving state hospitals and nursing homes.

Please join us in supporting Illinois mental health advocacy. It is important to have a show of strength. This rally is organized by the Mental Health Summit, an LWVIL coalition partner. For more information, check out the website at mentalhealthsummit.uchicago.edu. (Note there is no www in front of it.)

Darlene Bakk (zinniazen@juno.com); 630-377-8301
Mental Health Issue Specialist

LWVIL Opportunities for Involvement & Key Contacts

The LWVIL Board has many new officers and members. Committees are beginning to meet and develop plans for the biennium. Please contact the following to ask questions or volunteer to help in your area of interest.

Issues and Action: Edith Auchter - 847/381-5760, auchfam@comcast.net

- ✓ **Democracy Project** – Identify areas in the state legislative process that could be reformed in order to strengthen citizen participation. Contact Chris Slowik 708/598-5459, ChrisScope@aol.com.
- ✓ **Public Education and Social Services Funding** – Advocate for changes in the state revenue system. Contact Kathy Nesburg 708/848-9129, knesburg@msn.com.
- ✓ **Constitutional Convention** – Investigate the need for an Illinois Constitutional Convention in preparation for a 2008 ballot question. Contact Edith Auchter.
- ✓ **Immigration Study** – How should Illinois respond to the challenges and opportunities of Immigration in the areas of economic policy, social policy, which includes education, and the governmental process? Contact Kim Reed at 630/545-0662, lkaareed@earthlink.net. (Note: Study is contingent on securing funding. See article on page 3 for more information.)
- ✓ **Issues Specialist Openings** – Campaign Finance, Civil Liberties: Parlay your passion for an issue into action. Join the Issues Committee. Contact Edith Auchter.

Voter Service: Robin LaBedz – 847/392-6195, plabedz@sbcglobal.net. Provide voter service support for local Leagues in areas such as voter education, moderator training and Illinois Student Vote.

✓ **Election Administration Reform** – Help educate voters about changes in the voting process under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002. Contact Marcia McConnell 708/957-9189, marcia_mcconnell@sbcglobal.net.

Member Services: Sylvia Tillman – 708/799-9721, still313@comcast.net. Provide service, information and guidance to the local Leagues to help them function effectively.

Communications: Laurie Huget – 708/383-7053, laurie@huget.com. Help make LWVIL marketing and communications more effective.

Development: Paula Lawson – 312/939-5935 ext. 35, plawson@lwwil.org. Brainstorm ideas and plan fundraising events for the biennium to help LWVIL improve its fiscal health.

Voter Editor: Hollis Burgess – 847/835-3670, HBBLWVILVoter@aol.com

“By The People” to be held in Arlington Heights

Topic: Healthcare Reform

The League of Women Voters of the Arlington Heights/Mount Prospect/Buffalo Grove Area is pleased to call for “A Community Conversation on Healthcare Reform” to be held on

Thursday, October 27, at 7:30 pm at the Arlington Heights Historical Society, 110 W. Fremont Street.

This event is part of a larger national initiative sponsored and funded by the League of Women Voters of the United States Education Fund and By The People, a project of MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, to encourage citizens to engage in informed dialogue and, in particular, to facilitate such local dialogues across the country during Deliberation Week 2005 (October 22-29).

After the panelists speak on current

problems in the healthcare industry as well as analyze proposed reforms, the audience will break into smaller “community conversations,” prompted by generalized discussion questions. Panelists for this event include State Representative Carolyn Krause; Ron Buch, Director of the Low-Income Patient Program of Northwest Community Healthcare; and Victoria Bigelow, President of Access to Care. For more information, contact Cathy Duoba (847-437-6956) or Robin LaBedz (rplabedz@sbcglobal.net); 847-392-6195).

President, Paula Lawson
Vice President for Issues/Action, Edith Auchter
Vice President Communications, Laurie Huget
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Home Page <http://www.lwwil.org>

Post Your League Event Online!

Publicize your event at the LWVIL website. It's easy!

Just go to the League Events page at the LWVIL website.

And click at the bottom where it says:

- League Officials Post Your Events.
- Fill out the form and we will do the rest!
- Add this to your PR to do list.

ABBY FOUNDATION HONORS TWO OF OUR OWN

LWVIL's own Marcia McConnell, of Homewood, and Chris Slowik, of Hickory Hills, were added to the Abby Foundation's Woman of the Year list at its 25th annual Women Together luncheon. The Abby Foundation is a philanthropic organization celebrating women and groups that support women. Both women were honored “because of their continuum of service and because of the myriad organizations each of these two women support,” according to Mary Kulak, chairman of the Abby Foundation award committee.

From the President

Questions of how government functions and works for citizens are foremost in people's minds in the wake of recent natural disasters and government response to them. Is the government adequately equipped to deliver needed services and perform essential functions? Is there a need for change? If so, how can citizens effect change?

The League of Women Voters with its commitment to educate and encourage citizens to participate in government has the tools to help citizens effect change. However, to be most effective in educating citizens we must keep growing and changing at both the state and local League level. We must commit to promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation, expanding the League's public presence, increasing public activity, boosting membership recruitment, and renewing our involvement with League.

Promoting Political Responsibility: The LWVIL Election Administration Reform Committee is preparing an informational publication on the extensive changes to voter registration and election procedures to help local Leagues educate voters. LWVIL will also continue its relationship with ABC7 by partnering in spring primary debates for statewide office. Local Leagues have already begun or are planning to educate voters in this election cycle by having a demonstration of new voting equipment.

Expanding Public Presence: The LWVIL Communications Committee is meeting to determine how to communicate more effectively with both League members and the public. As requested by members at the June 2005 LWVIL Convention, listservs for presidents, public relations chairs, voter services chairs and bulletin editors have been set up.

Increasing Public Activity: LWVIL will be partnering with the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability to present a forum on Illinois State Fiscal Policy and its Effect on Social Services. Local Leagues have been sponsoring and co-sponsoring a variety of public forums and joining local coalitions. (See articles on Let the Public Speak and Women Engaging Globally.)

Boosting Membership Recruitment: LWVIL will be developing materials and giving support to help increase the activity and number of student units at universities. Rockford and Chicago Leagues have special committees, to involve younger members. Oak Park/River Forest and Batavia Leagues are expanding programs into neighboring communities.

Renewing Commitment: Commitment to League can range from attending League meetings and other functions, to chairing and working on committees to supporting League financially or accepting positions on a Board. I hope you will make a commitment to your local and/or the State League. You can make a commitment to the State League by responding to the LWVIL Opportunities for Involvement listed in this Voter.

The new Office Administrator, Debbie Kirman, began working on August 9th. Her first day in the office, she helped complete a grant proposal. Since then she has spearheaded an office cleanup, written job descriptions, and met with ABC7 about co-sponsoring debates.

There will be a President's Rap on Saturday, October 22, from 10 am – 1 pm in the LWVIL office. This will be a time for local League Presidents to get together informally to ask questions about and make suggestions to State League and share ideas with other local Leagues presidents.

Please feel free to contact me at plawson@lwvil.org or (312) 939-5935 x. 35.

Paula



Paula Lawson
LWVIL President

WOMEN ENGAGING GLOBALLY

The Geneva-St. Charles League of Women Voters joined with the Center for Women's Policy Studies and the Women's Environment and Development Organization to host a panel discussion on September 17 on the economic status of women around the world. Speakers included Heather Hamilton, Vice President of Programs for Citizens for Global Solutions, and Illinois State Senator Debbie Halvorson, a graduate of the Foreign Policy Institute for State Legislators. David Goldberg, Assistant Professor of Political Science, College of DuPage, moderated the discussion on the need for developed countries to provide multilateral aid and support for women in the developing world. A lively question-and-answer session followed.

According to the UN Development Program's Human Development Report in 1998, more than half of the poor people in the world are women. Globally, 66% of all working hours are worked by women. While women may work the majority of hours, they still earn only ten percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property. In addition, HIV disproportionately affects women around the world. Of the adults living with AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, more than half are women.

Multilateral organizations such as the United Nations have been working for many years to improve the economic and social conditions of poor women in underdeveloped countries. At present, the U.S. focuses on bilateral aid agreements. The panelists warned that this focus runs the risk of inadequate response to epidemics and pandemics, such as HIV, and limits the ability to affect the plight of women. The U.S. withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol On Climate Change and its failure to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are serious setbacks in the movement for multilateral solutions to social problems, especially those affecting women. The WOMEN ENGAGING GLOBALLY meetings around the country focus attention on the shortcomings of bilateral solutions to multilateral problems.

Let the People Speak: U.S./UN Relationship

On September 15, the League of Women Voters of McLean County sponsored a "Let the People Speak" program at the Illinois State University Bone Student Center to promote discussion and debate about the United States' relationship with the United Nations. Dr. Charles Lipson spoke to the question, "Has the U.S. Abandoned the UN?" Dr. Lipson is a professor of political science at the University of Chicago and founding director of the Program on International Politics, Economics and Security (PIPES).

Dr. Lipson believes that the U.S. has, in fact, abandoned the UN in some ways and that the UN has serious structural deficiencies, such as the veto power of the five permanent Security Council members. It is his contention that these deficiencies, together with the United States' lack of leadership, have created a stalemate on issues of combating terrorism and promoting peace-making efforts. He does believe, however, that the UN is effective in such areas as world health and finances and peacekeeping. A lively discussion, with many questions from the audience, followed his presentation.

This program was made possible by the generous co-sponsorship of Illinois State University's Global Review program, the Bloomington/Normal Citizens for Peace and Justice, their Peace is Cool Club student group, and Local Laborers' 362. In addition, the Pantagraph provided publicity.

LWVIL LISTSERVS READY TO GO

We've set up several listservs whereby local League members can share ideas and information and to encourage discussion of issues important to particular groups. Participants can also post news, announcements, invitations and ask for help or advice on League business. They are easy to use. Just go to the home page of your choice and hit the "Join" button. Your e-mail will go to the list manager, who will add you to that list. You can also e-mail Emily Lieber at the LWVIL office, elieber@lwvil.org. Current listservs are:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LWVIL-Pres> (for League presidents)
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LWVIL-PR> (for PR chairs of local Leagues);
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LWVIL-VoterServ> (for Voter Services chairs); and <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LWVIL-Bulletin> (for Bulletin editors).

If you would like to suggest setting up any other listservs for interest groups within LWVIL, please contact me, Laurie Huget, LWVIL VP, Communications at laurie@huget.com

LOCAL LEAGUES REACH OUT AND TOUCH SCREENS

The Leagues of Riverdale/Harvey/Dolton, Home-wood-Flossmoor Area, Palos/Orland Area, and Park Forest Area co-sponsored a presentation on touch-screen voting machines at the 25th annual Abby Foundation Women Together luncheon. About 600 people viewed the machines and, in some cases, got hands-on experience.

Representatives of the Cook County Clerk's Office showed how to make and correct selections with a touch of a finger and use the "back" key to view previous pages. Observers learned how to file the ballot after completing it. Each selection could then be printed and verified for accuracy. Jan Czarnik of the Clerk's Office advised "that people were more comfortable using computers if they could see on paper what the computer recorded." According to Ms. Czarnik, there will be at least one unit in each polling place for the March election.

LWVUS LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Visit the new, updated LWVUS website – www.lwv.org - to see how user-friendly the site has become. When you visit the first time, you will need to set up your account information so future accessing will be just a click. Just follow the instructions at the site. If you have not advised your local League of your e-mail address, we urge you to do so as soon as possible so that your access to members' only sites will not be affected. Please note, the LWVUS never sells or trades member e-mail addresses.

Issues Update

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

State Budget:

Earlier this year, state legislators approved the fiscal year 2006 State Budget of \$55 billion on a party-line vote with no support from Republican members of the General Assembly. Controversy generally centered on the institution of a "Pension Holiday" to balance the budget. This maneuver delays \$1.2 billion in payments owed to the state's five pension programs for teachers, state workers, and university employees. It also translates into more borrowing in the future to cover pension obligations that are already running a deficit of \$37 billion.

The budget provides a \$314 million increase for elementary and high schools, increasing the foundation level by \$200 per student. There were other increases for schools, however, the foundation level still lags below the levels recommended by the Education Funding Advisory Board (EFAB). In addition, the legislature did not eliminate the structural deficit or continue with its planned catch-up on funding the pension plans. Thus, these underlying budget reform challenges will remain high on the League's fiscal policy agenda.

Health Care:

Health care reform is now more critically needed than ever. During 2003-04, 3.5 million people in Illinois were without health insurance. Premiums paid by workers have increased by 35 percent since 2000.

Working as a member of the Campaign for Better Health Care, the League helped pass the Health Care Justice Act (Public Act 93-0973), sponsored by then State Senator Barack Obama and State Representative William Delgado. The Act implements a process to assess options for achieving affordable and accessible health care in Illinois.

A Health Care Task Force has been appointed, with a total of thirty-four members, twenty-nine voting members appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders and six non-voting representatives from the Departments of Public Health, Aging, Public Aid, Insurance, and Human Services. Public hearings will be held in every Congressional District in Illinois so that people in every part of the state may have input into the process. The first of these hearings will be held in the First Congressional District on Wednesday, October 5, from 4 to 7 p.m. at Trinity United Church of Christ (400 W. 95th Street, Chicago) with others scheduled before June 2006. A final report will be written by July 15, 2006.

When available, LWVIL will post specific hearing dates and locations on the LWVIL website and notify local Leagues. League members are encouraged to attend at least the hearing in their own Congressional District.

Election Laws:

Of the 157 bills relating to elections introduced in the Assembly's spring session, seventeen bills went on to become law, with ten taking effect immediately.

Of particular League interest, two House bills were introduced thanks to the work of the LWVIL Election Administration Reform (EAR) Committee. House Bill 114, (now Public Act 94-637), provides that persons confined or detained in jail pending acquittal or conviction of a crime may not be disqualified from voting. Such confinement is a specified reason for absentee voting. The second bill of League interest is House Bill 2532. This legislation permits civic organizations, such as the League, to appoint poll watchers under guidelines set by rules of the State Board of Elections. HB 2532 remains in the House Rules Committee. The EAR Committee will be discussing the legislation with the sponsor.

Major election law legislation, which began as a shell bill (HB 1968), became and was approved as the Omnibus Elections Bill. This 207-page bill took effect on August 22, 2005 as Public Act 94-0645. It incorporated portions of some of the other 140 election laws bills that remain in House and Senate Committees. This enormous piece of legislation addresses many of the federal requirements found in the Help America Vote Act by amending the Election Code, the State Finance Act, the Illinois Municipal Code, the Revised Cities and Villages Act of 1941, the Illinois Highway and Vehicle Codes, and the State Mandates Act.

As summarized on the General Assembly website, PA 94-0645 makes changes with respect to the following: "statewide voter registration; voter registration outreach programs by State agencies, public colleges and universities, and legislative district offices; statewide centralized voter registration database; voter registration change of address; early voting; absentee voting; legislative, judicial, and municipal candidate petition signature requirements; campaign finance disclosure by non-profit entities and non-participating political parties; electioneering communications; poll watchers; certification of successful write-in candidates; reporting of election returns by precinct and ward; internet voters' guides; provisional voting; voting equipment; employee time off for voting; municipal instant runoff elections; and appointment of an acting mayor or village president."

The League will prepare an informational publication about election-related legislation for distribution to local Leagues in December 2005.

Mental Health:

The Mental Health Insurance Parity legislation, House Bill 59, was signed into law as Public Act 94-0402. This bill allows persons diagnosed with mental illnesses to be covered by insurance companies. It repeals the sunset provision in the current parity law, allowing the parity law to continue in effect indefinitely.

The Governor also signed into law House Bill 1345, now Public Act 94-0498. This law requires that funds saved through the closure or downsizing of state mental hospitals be kept in the mental health system.

In addition, House Bill 759 became Public Act 94-0034. This law addresses the improvement of mental health services for Department of Children and Family Services wards. House Bill 2190 also became Public Act 94-0584. This law adds Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to the list of illnesses that are covered by the Illinois Mental Health Insurance Parity Law.

Immigration Study

At the LWVIL convention in June 2005, delegates voted to conduct a study on immigration, provided funding could be obtained. The scope of the study would include how Illinois should respond to the challenges and opportunities of immigration in the areas of economic policy, social policy including education, and the governmental process.

To date, \$2,500 has been committed to this purpose from the Wheaton, Glen Ellyn and Naperville Leagues. We need to raise a total of at least \$5,000 before we can even begin our work. To that end, we plan to contact each League in Illinois to ask them to consider making a donation to help this effort. Any amount given would be gratefully accepted, but we hope that each League would consider giving \$100. Contributions should be made payable the LWVIL Education Fund, earmarked for the immigration study, and mailed to Judy Elsass, LWVIL, 332 S. Michigan Avenue, #1050, Chicago, IL 60604.

If you have any questions or would like to assist in this effort, please contact Kim Reed (kareed@earthlink.net; 630-545-0662).

Constitutional Conventions and The League

The League of Women Voters of Illinois has been intensively involved in state constitutional revision and reform issues since the 1940s. In 1965, a former State League President, State Representative Marjorie Peabworth, chaired the Constitutional Study Commission created by the General Assembly to determine the need for a convention.

A constitutional convention (CON CON) is one of two devices for amending the Illinois Constitution. A statewide constitutional convention is a meeting of elected delegates for the single purpose of reviewing the entire state constitution and making recommendations for changes in any of its parts. These changes are submitted to the people for approval, which requires a majority vote on the proposition.

In order to hold a convention, the General Assembly must vote by at least 2/3 of each House to place on the ballot the question calling a CON CON. The General Assembly did that in May, 1967, unanimously in the Senate and with an overwhelming majority in the House (150-14). The League campaigned vigorously in 1968 for passage of the call for convention and then led the statewide effort to ratify the proposed constitution in 1970. Several publications were prepared and distributed by the LWVIL in the campaign for a new constitution. On December 15, 1970, registered voters in Illinois voted to adopt the new 1970 Constitution, which provided that once every twenty years the people would be given the opportunity to vote on having a Constitutional Convention.

The provision for calling such subsequent Constitution Convention was placed on the ballot for the 1988 November election. The LWVIL opposed passage of the call for CON CON at that time. Reasons cited for that opposition included satisfaction with the present amendment procedure and fear that important gains achieved in 1970 could be lost if the entire constitution were exposed to revision. Members also expressed concern that the estimated cost would be an unnecessary drain on limited state revenues at a time when education and human services were seriously under funded. The proposal was defeated by voters.

Another twenty years have almost passed and the issue is due to be put to the voters in 2008. Delegates to the 2005 LWVIL Convention voted to adopt an Exploration Item: A 2010 State Constitutional Convention. Some concerns expressed by local Leagues during program planning include constitutional issues such as redistricting, death penalty, merit selection of judges, fiscal policy, school funding, home rule, county government, income taxes, and graduated income tax. Does the Illinois Constitution still work effectively or does it need to be revised? If you are interested in investigating the need for a CON CON, contact Edith Auchter at auchfam@comcast.net.