WORLD- The United Nation’s World Meterological Organization announced that the world carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are accelerating and reached a record high in 2012 of 393.1 ppm, well above the 350 ppm considered the upper limit of safe by most scientists and environmental groups. We could reach 400 ppm by 2016. Since CO2 remains in the air for a century, a lot of future warming is already locked in. The goal must be for 100% energy from renewable sources, and it can be achieved, one locality at a time.

NATIONAL- In March 2013, President Obama nominated Gina McCarthy to head the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In April, LWVUS sent a TFA to President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry opposing the Keystone XL Pipeline. On April 29th, I testified in Chicago in support of increased emission standards on vehicle tailpipes and fuel by the EPA. On June 25th, President Obama gave a major policy address laying out “his vision for a comprehensive plan to reduce carbon pollution, prepare our country for the impacts of climate change and lead global efforts to fight it.” On July 18th, the U.S. Senate confirmed the appointment of Gina McCarthy to lead the EPA after ‘only’ 136 days. On September 20th, the EPA released strong standards for carbon dioxide pollution by new power plants, which should virtually eliminate new coal plants in the 21st century. Encouraged by the LWVUS, I commented at a ‘listening session’ at the EPA regional offices in Chicago on November 8th in support of issuing carbon pollution standards on existing power plants.

STATE- After watching bills in General Assembly for both regulation of horizontal hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and banning fracking in the spring session, on May 31st, a regulatory bill was passed and signed into law. The 2013 LWVIL convention delegates decided that fracking needed more attention, and the issue now has an Issues Specialist, Fran Cella. Another issue related to fracking is the mining of silica sand in LaSalle County. Led by a college student activist, environment groups are fighting expansion of mining, including one at the entrance of Starved Rock State Park. Expanded silica sand mining will cause health, environmental and economic problems for the region. In the Peoria area, Ameren sold five power plants to Texas-based Dynegy. Ameren had received a 5 year variance on pollution controls from the Illinois Pollution Control Board (IPCB), pleading inability to pay for improvements. Dynegy requested the variance be transferred as a condition for sale. The IPCB denied the transfer of the variance, and told Dynegy to apply for variance of their own. Dynegy used the same excuse as Ameren had, and IPCB granted the variance on November 13th. Another year has gone by without fixing the Illinois Renewable Portfolio Standard. When passed in 2007, Illinois’ RPS was considered nation leading requiring 25% of our energy come from renewable sources by 2025. It was passed before electric competition took hold, and it needs to be amended to capture the intent of the law. The RPS Fix will be a major focus for 2014.