LWVIL 2017 Issues Briefing: Air Quality and Energy
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The IL Clean Jobs Plan, Illinois’ framework for meeting the new emissions standards set out in the federal EPA’s Clean Power Plan, was the main legislative focus for 2016. President Mary Kubasak announced LWVIL’s support for the plan at the annual Earth Day rally in Chicago on April 22nd. Unfortunately, the Illinois budget crisis kept it off the table until the November Veto Session when a compromise bill, merging provisions from both environmentalists and the two major electric utilities, was filed. League members were asked to call their legislators in support of some of the provisions but not all. After numerous revisions, the bill was passed and signed by Governor Rauner on December 7th; it goes into effect on June 1, 2017 (Public Act 99-0906).

Additional League activity last year included:
February: A TFA to members asking them to contact Catherine McKenna, Canada’s Minister of Environment and Climate Change to voice opposition to a deep underground nuclear storage facility near Lake Huron. 2017 Update: The issue remains open. This February a bipartisan group of congressmen from Michigan and four other Great Lakes states formally encouraged President Trump to oppose the plan.

LWV of Lake County contacted the Illinois Pollution Control Board to implement rules protecting northeastern Illinois from the harmful effects of coal ash dumping by Midwest Generation at its Waukegan generating station.

In April LWVIL contacted the Illinois Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (J-CAR) asking them to deny Com Ed and Ameren’s request to alter the aggregated net metering rules already established by the Illinois Commerce Commission. The changes would have blocked condo owners, apartment dwellers and low income households from joining together to set up their own solar power sources.

Outlook for 2017
In Illinois the Clean Power Plan legislation signed into law in December last year is now being challenged in the courts. As promised, Dynegy Corp and a group of others filed two law suits in early February challenging the constitutionality of the measure claiming that it unfairly rigs wholesale electricity generation and supply markets in Exelon’s favor and will give them hefty financial windfall at the expense of Illinois ratepayers. LWVIL and Clean Jobs Coalition partners will be monitoring the progress of the lawsuits carefully.

As of this writing, we and like-minded organizations around the state are waiting to see the outcomes of the various law suits and their impact on public policy. At the federal level - with a new Administration in Washington and Congressional leadership that has openly denied modern science and blatantly puts profits and business interests ahead of the health and welfare of the populace - we expect to see a rollbacks of environmental regulations met with continued law suits and counter lawsuits. LWVIL sees more areas of concern than areas of opportunity for progress as it is unclear whether the states will be able to maintain or expand their own environmental protections or whether the federal government will attempt to preempt state law and regulations.

Meanwhile, the renewable energy industries continue to grow with wind and solar showing tremendous increases in market share in the country and around the world. Energy storage and efficiency technology is also making rapid strides and are poised to provide ever more cost effective support for renewable generation in the very near future. LWVIL will continue to advocate for public policy measures that support that growth.