LWVIL State of the State Highlights

The League of Women Voters of Illinois members braved frigid temperatures for its annual State of the State Luncheon at The Union League Club on January 24, 2008. The venue was filled with elected officials, business leaders, and many Illinois League members.

LWVIL gave its 2008 Citizen of Action Award to Robert Graham, a partner at Jenner & Block in charge of the firm’s Environmental Law practice. Mr. Graham is active in pro bono cases and public service. He has co-authored environmental law books and taught environmental law. His remarks focused on the essential role of individuals and citizens groups like LWVIL in shaping environmental law and policy. He cited as an example how citizen outrage influenced government officials and BP to back off plans to allow BP to dump more waste into Lake Michigan.

The 2008 Corporate Citizen Award, presented to Baxter International Inc., was accepted by Art Gibson, Vice President for Environmental Health and Safety. Baxter began publicly reporting energy use, cost, and greenhouse gas emission for all of its global facilities in the mid-1990s. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized Baxter in 2006 with a Climate Leaders Award and a Climate Protection Award.

The League’s inaugural Laura Pollak Fisher Award for Excellence in Public Service was bestowed on Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan. In addition to her efforts to protect the environment and consumers, the IL Attorney General has worked to make government more open and accessible. In her comments to the League, Ms. Madigan focused on her office’s work for clean air and water. She also explained how Illinois participated in improving federal environmental legislation and reiterated that individuals and groups like LWVIL can wield considerable influence. The event concluded with a question and answer session.

LAURA POLLAK FISHER

Laura Pollak Fisher, representing the highest ideals of involved citizenship, was President of the League of Women Voters of Illinois from 1949-1953 and helped found the Citizens Information Service, which worked to get poor and minority residents more involved in community activities. While LWVIL president, Ms. Fisher led Illinois’ efforts on the Freedom Agenda, a LWVUS program to counter scare tactics resulting from the McCarthy hearings and viewed by some as subversive. Ms. Fisher tirelessly promoted the Bill of Rights, particularly the protection of free speech. The Laura Pollak Fisher Public Service Award was created to honor this dedicated community activist and those who show a similar commitment and dedication to public service.

ILLINOIS STUDENT VOTE

With generous funding from the McCormick Tribune Foundation, LWVIL is again sponsoring Illinois Student Vote. Working with the National Student/Parent Mock Election curriculum, participating classes undertake activities to study the candidates and issues of the 2008 election. Participating teachers will receive age-appropriate curriculum plans to help their students debate current events, integrate government studies with reading and math and develop critical thinking skills.

Students then will be able to make informed decisions as they vote for candidates in a simulated election in October. On October 30th, student votes from throughout the state and nation will be tallied and reported online. LWVIL will post Illinois tallies and provide a link to national results.

To make Illinois Student Vote a success, LWVIL needs local League members to serve as coordinators in their areas. A coordinator connects with local schools to market Illinois Student Vote and assists with Mock Election activities. If your League is interested in helping with Illinois Student Vote 2008, please contact Emily Lieber, Project Manager (elieber@lwvil.org) by May 1, 2008.

For more information on Illinois Student Vote, visit our website at www.lwvil.org.
From Your President

This election year is the first since 1928 where neither an incumbent president nor vice-president is seeking the presidential nomination. The field of candidates is diverse, which has contributed to high voter turnout and a record amount of funds being raised from millions of contributors. This is a perfect opportunity for League to capitalize on what it does best, Registering and Educating Voters.

Mary Wilson, LWVUS President, has stated, “Many have worked for years to counter embarrassingly-low rates of civic participation in America. This year, it seems we are on track to make significant improvements in that arena. Participation is on the upswing – and that is evident in the high turnout rates this primary season and the many Americans who have signed up to help as poll workers.”

LWVIL is offering moderator training in our Chicago office on Saturday, May 10 (see article at right) and will, upon request, travel to local Leagues to run training sessions, like the one in Evanston on May 4 (contact LWVE at www.lwve.org for more info).

We have received a grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation to conduct Illinois Student Vote (ISV) (see article on p. 1). Secretary of State, Jesse White, is also a sponsor. Local Leagues are encouraged to work with their schools and PTAs on this project created to get the youth of our nation involved and excited about the election process.

The LWVUS websites www.lwv.org and www.vote411.org and the LWVIL website www.lwvil.org have great resources for voters.

When we are visibly involved in local voter education activities is the perfect time to INVITE VOTERS TO JOIN THE LEAGUE. There are Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI) Training sessions scheduled in various communities (see article on p. 5) to help local Leagues recruit new members. LWVUS has some key phrases (both short and long) to help you break the ice. When asked what the League is about, respond

- The League of Women voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. The League is a community-based nonpartisan political organization that has fought since 1920 to improve our systems of government and public policies through education and advocacy.

Then follow up with

- Join us in making democracy work! Join the passionate League members, men and women in your community, in the important work of keeping your community strong, safe and vibrant.

Let's capitalize on the excitement of this election by working to both educate voters and strengthen League.

Paula

Moderator Training Session Planned

With candidates’ forum season upon us, League moderators will be in high demand. LWVIL is holding a moderator training session on Saturday, May 10, 10 a.m. to noon

at LWVIL offices, 332 S. Michigan Av, Chicago, Suite 1150. Please register with Kathy Graffam, Voter Services VP, at votersevice@lwvil.org or the League office (312-939-5935).

2008 LWVIL PHONATHON

In addition to Spring showers, March and April bring the LWVIL annual phonathon, so when your phone rings one evening or weekend, please pick up and talk to the League member making calls on our behalf.

Members can contribute to either the LWVIL Operating Fund, which supports advocacy and lobbying on public policy issues, or the LWVIL Education Fund, which supports citizen education and voter service activities. Leagues whose members make phone calls also receive a percentage of the contributions made during their calls. LWVIL looks forward to talking to you.

IN DEEP APPRECIATION OF SERVICE

Judy Elsass
LWVIL Business Manager 1981—2008

Hats off to Judy Elsass for her dedicated service to the LWVIL since 1981. Judy has worked tirelessly with eight presidents and innumerable members on budgets, expenses, PMP and Education Funds. We will greatly miss her in the LWVIL office. Thank you, Judy!

IN MEMORIAM
PAT OSTEWIG

Our condolences to friends and family of Pat Ostewig, president of the LWV of Carpentersville/Dundee, who died suddenly of an aneurysm. Pat held several leadership positions in the League and was involved in mental health issues.

WELCOME Judith Upton...

to the LWVIL staff. She will have financial and administrative responsibilities. Judith has a strong background in non-profit administration and is a long-time League member - and leader - in Indiana. We are delighted to have her onboard.
The morning session was to feature a discussion moderated by Paul Green, Director of The School of Policy Studies at Roosevelt University, on the pros and cons of having a Constitutional Convention (Con-Con). Lt. Governor Patrick Quinn was unexpectedly unable to present the pro side. In his absence, former State Representative Nancy Kaszak presented her position against a Constitutional Convention as a rebuttal to reasons usually presented in favor.

Ms. Kaszak presented three primary reasons for opposition to Con-Con: (1) the serious problems suggested as a reason for a Con-Con can be addressed by legislation or constitutional amendment, as exemplified by the ten successful amendments since 1970; (2) given the current uncooperative climate in the Illinois government, to give the responsibility for “providing for the election of delegates,” which must be accomplished in only ninety days (refer to pages 4-5 of the LWVIL Con-Con study guide at www.lwvil.org), to the Governor and General Assembly would be questionable; and (3) opening the whole constitution to revision could create turmoil. Following are often suggested which could be addressed in Con-Con and Ms. Kaszak’s comments in parentheses:

- Ethics and Campaign Finance Reform (Currently addressed in excellent legislation [HB1] held in the Rules Committee.)
- School Funding (The current A+ Illinois proposal covers this.)
- Progressive Income Tax (This can be accomplished within the current tax structure as evidenced by the Governor’s recent child tax credit.)
- Climate Change concerns (HB3424 and SB663, currently stalled in the legislature, address some of these concerns.)
- Selection of judges, recall of elected officials, curbing amendatory veto powers, etc. (Could be achieved by constitutional amendment.)
- Provision for mandatory voter initiatives (Mandatory initiatives can be risky and subject to special interests manipulation.)

Illinois currently has a very broad Bill of Rights. Revising the constitution could result in changes that would restrict civil liberties. Administering Con-Con is estimated to cost about $100 million with no defined funding source in a state already in debt. Mr. Green provided background on the 1970 Constitutional Convention, Illinois politics, the current political climate and potential scenarios created by a Con-Con.

In conclusion, Kaszak suggested there is a need for new courageous leaders, not a new Constitution. Kaszak opined, “Con-Con risks making things more difficult for our most vulnerable citizens.” During questions, League members asked if the Constitution could be amended to restore a balance of power as seemed to exist under Illinois’ previous system of cumulative voting. Several members suggested that mandatory voter initiatives are very empowering to voters and represent a serious commitment to good government.

For more information on Con-Con, an expanded review of the Issues Briefing Con-Con session, and a presentation of the pro arguments, please link to http://www.lwvil.org/ConCon.asp

IMMIGRATION WORKSHOP: Panelists Mehrdad Azemum, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR); Patrick O’Connor, 2nd Vice President of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police; and Kris Howard, Palatine Opportunity Center (POC), discussed the impact of and alternatives to training local and state police officers as Immigration Officers as covered in the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) application 287(g). Mr. Azemum mentioned that in communities that have applied for this training, like Waukegan and Carpentersville, the anti-immigration atmosphere has already had a negative impact on businesses and school enrollment. Chief O’Connor noted that local police do not have funding and/or personnel to handle immigration issues. Also, they need a cooperative relationship with immigrants to effectively safeguard the community. Ms. Howard discussed the success of the POC as a collaborative effort of local organizations to provide services to immigrants and low-income residents.

EDUCATION FUNDING WORKSHOP: The discussion was on issues, including state aid, to improve education in Illinois. Adam Smith, Rockford Mayor’s Office, advocated for community-generated, low-cost solutions like those created by Rockford’s Community Council, which include community-based truancy intervention officers. Dr. James Ryland, Superintendent of Schools, Aurora, discussed special needs education, cautioning to view it as a part of education as a whole when addressing funding issues vis-à-vis mandated services. Michelle Kane, Illinois Association of Gifted Education, dispelled the myth that gifted students will always succeed on their own, reminding us that there are no federal protections for gifted and talented children. Janet Mathis, Illinois Development Council, stated that the most important factor in business location decisions is available labor force. Ms. Mathis promoted more programs in industrial arts, agriculture and business skills at the secondary level and greater coordination between state, educators and employers in planning educational programs to compete on a global basis. Economist Dr. Nathan Anderson, Assistant Professor at University of Illinois Chicago, spoke on taxes and state financing and reviewed several scenarios for increasing and allocating funds for education and the impact of each.

NATURAL RESOURCES/GLOBAL WARMING: The Illinois Climate Advisory Group, which includes LWVIL, recommended twenty-four cost-effective policies to meet the emission reduction targets which will help Illinois do its part to prevent global warming. Following is pending legislation that would help reduce the effects of Global Warming: The IL Clean Cars Act (HB3424) requires the IL Environmental Protection Agency to establish new motor vehicle emission standards and prohibits the Secretary of State from issuing titles for cars not meeting the standards or that have not been tested. The Residential Energy Efficiency Code (SB0526) provides for energy efficient building standards for residential new construction.

continued on page 4
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE 2008

School Funding/Fiscal Policy: HB750, to be amended to update language, and SB2288, in Second Reading and expected to be amended, would restructure the revenue system for Illinois. HB4642 would require compilation of information on providing services for gifted children. HB4266 requires reimbursement to districts for interest not earned on general State Aid allocations due to delay in implementing FY2008 budget.

Campaign Finance Reform: HB1, Pay to Play, passed the House and is in the Rules Committee of the Senate. SB222, Judicial Campaign Reform, which provides for voluntary public funding of Appellate and Supreme Court elections, passed the Senate in 2007 and is in House Rules Committee.

Election Laws: HB1872 changes procedures and requirements for nominating petitions for candidates running for county office and for petitions on public policies. HB4403 requires a government-issued photo ID to be presented to the election judges and requires the election authority to issue such an ID card to registered voters who cannot afford one.

Gun Violence Prevention: SB1007 bans sales of large-capacity ammunition magazines. HB758 requires background checks on private handgun transfers.

Housing: HBB5189 regulates the percentage of condominiums in a facility that could be leased rather than occupied by the actual owner. LWVIL is watching this bill because of possible impact on providing low cost housing.

Natural Resources: SB1242, passed in 2007, provides technical assistance to local governments that endorsed the Mayors’ Climate Protection Agreement (IL Cool Cities Act). (see Natural Resources section of Issues Briefing Report for more info, p.4)

Criminal Justice: HB4612, State Employment Application Act, affecting applicants with nonviolent offense history, is scheduled for committee hearing. HB5516/SB2528 sets criteria for the Prisoner Review Board to consider issuing certificates of good conduct and restores some rights.

Children’s Services: HB4384 allows people sentenced to natural life in prison for crimes committee before age 18 to request their sentences be reviewed by the Prisoner Review Board for parole eligibility after serving ten years.

Health Care: SB1900, in committee hearings March 13, amends various insurance programs relative to coverage for autism spectrum disorders. SB2323/HB5865 requires health insurance companies to report their spending practices to the Division of Insurance in order to determine how much is spent on actual care versus administrative costs.

Additional information on these and other bills can be obtained through the LWVIL website and issues specialists in that area (www.lwvil.org) or the General Assembly website (www.ilga.gov).

OMNIBUS ELECTIONS BILL SB 662

became law in November 2007 and covers issues of candidate certification, criteria for election of judges, the petition process and requirements, polling place signage, poll watching, powers of the State Board of Elections, requirements for voting equipment, voter registration procedures, and voting tabulation rules. For the complete text, visit www.ilga.gov.legislation.

SHOW US AMENDMENT 2008

The Show Us Amendment Campaign 2008 petition drive was suspended because it would not reach the minimum 350,000 signatures by the end of April. The campaign can be revived in November 2008 for ratification in 2010.

Issues Briefing Workshops (continued from page 3)

The Lake Michigan ILO is concerned with protecting the Great Lakes system. Federal legislation that we will act on includes:

The Coast Guard Reauthorization Act, (HR2830) would ban ocean-going ships from releasing untreated ballast (which contains alien invasive species) into U.S. waters.

The Great Lakes Legacy Act, which provides funding to remediate contaminated sediments in Great Lakes harbors and tributaries in thirty U.S. Areas of Concern (AOCs), has been highly successful so far but must be reauthorized as it is set to expire by September 30, 2008. The Clean Water Restoration Act (H2421/S1870) needs to be amended to include (among other things) updating and requirements for enforcement. BP and US Steel permits are just two examples of why changes are needed.

Illinois and Minnesota legislatures have adopted the Great Lakes Compact, which outlines binding regional water use standards and seeks to prevent diversions from the Lakes. Once endorsed by the legislatures of all the Great Lakes states, the Compact moves to the U.S. Congress for final ratification.
The League of Women Voters of Illinois extends thanks to the following corporations and individuals for their support of the 2008 State of the State, benefitting the League’s Education Fund.

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In-Kind Donors
Huget Advertising, Inc.
for coordinating the State of the State logo, invitations, and program book.

Jenner and Block
for providing the event photographer.

LWVIL PLANS MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT INITIATIVE WORKSHOPS

Membership recruitment and retention are the backbone of any organization. LWVUS has tested new strategies and techniques that Leagues can use to welcome new members and keep the interest of existing members. Following are Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI) training sessions being held in the Chicago metropolitan area. We are planning additional MRI training at locations around the state but do not have confirmed dates and places yet. Stay tuned.

Sessions are open to all members and we encourage all to attend. If you cannot get to one in your area, please attend one in another. Here is your opportunity to learn how to make the connection to help increase your membership and retain the members you have.

ELGIN
Friday, March 28
1—3 p.m.
Gail Borden Library
270 North Grove Av, Elgin
Host: Darlene Bakk/Cluster 7

GLENVIEW
Wednesday, April 30
12—2 p.m.
Glenview Police Department
2500 East Lake Av, Glenview
Host: Barb Marsh/Cluster 10

UNIVERSITY PARK
Saturday, April 26
2—4:30 p.m.
University Park Library
1100 Blackhawk Dr, University Park
Host: Judy Lohr and Mary Truss/Cluster 5

WESTERN SPRINGS
Saturday, May 3
10 a.m.—noon
Western Springs Public Library
(aka Thomas Ford Memorial Library)
800 Chestnut Av, Western Springs
Host: Mary Klonowski/Cluster 11

Questions? Valerie Krejcie, Chair, Member Services at membership@lwvil.org
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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 Voter may be reprinted in full with complete acknowledgement.

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, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin; and to actively be inclusive.

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