



VOTER

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Linnea Hirst, President
Myra Howrey, Editor

First Call to Council 2010

Where: Bellingham Washington

When: May 21-23, 2010

**Theme: Reason Isn't Enough—How to have
Civil Discussions in Uncivil Times**

"The City of Subdued Excitement"

perhaps better known as Bellingham is eagerly awaiting your arrival for the 2010 League of Women Voters Bi-Annual State Council Conference May 21-23. Meetings will be held in the beautifully restored ballroom in our historic YWCA.

The Saturday evening reception and dinner at the Admiral Garden room overlooks Bellingham Bay (we're hoping for a gorgeous sunset!) and you will enjoy the comforts of the newly remodeled Best Western Heritage Inn, honored by "Best Places Northwest".

Come in a little early on Friday and you can join us for a docent tour in our new Lightcatcher Museum at 3:30 pm. The exhibit is Show of Hands, Northwest Women Artists, 1880-2010

The main focus of our conference is learning how to have civil discussions. In January our League held a hugely successful workshop on this subject. The workshop was led by member Mary Dumas, a trained consultant on mediation and the productive use of change and conflict. In May, Mary will share this workshop with you.

The workshop is designed to assist us in engaging in thoughtful, civil conversations and presentations in support of our Civic Engagement Project. State President Linnea Hirst and State board member Penney Van Vleet as well as several members from the Clallam County League attended the meeting in January and enthusiastically endorsed our suggestion to take this to the Council.

Of course one of the benefits of Council is sharing our different League's experiences through the year. We will also be offering a seminar on how to manage a Facebook page and how to frame issues.

It will be a full agenda and we think an informative and fun session.

Do plan to join us.



President's Message *by Linnea Hirst*

Days are getting longer, bulbs are coming up, buds promise...I think it is spring!

And in spring, our thoughts turn to...well, we're League. So our thoughts turn to what's going on in the legislature, plans for Council, budgets—both government and state League—and all that interesting stuff!

First, Council. As you note, it will be in Bellingham in May, which is a wonderful month to visit a gorgeous part of our state. And, please note the program for council: Reason Isn't Enough—How to Have Civil Discussions in Uncivil Times. The program will include a meaningful workshop on civil discourse, something many of us feel the need to know more about in these contentious times. It also will include a workshop on 21st Century technology—every local League needs to know how to set up their own Facebook page.

I hope many of you will consider coming to Council—there's plenty of room for observers as well as for the voting delegates. And the only difference between observers and voting delegates is if we have a business item that we need to vote on. Nothing looms so far.

The Civic Engagement Project (CEP) committee has just released a second video. This one, aimed at the general public, points out what our state taxes fund. You will find it on lwwa.org, on YouTube, on Facebook and on Twitter. Check it out, pass it on!

Major elections are months away, but I noticed an article in the Summer 2008 State VOTER that reminded me that League can be very useful to our communities at any time. The Clallam County LWV conducted a local forum in order to allow questions from a disgruntled electorate and answers from the local council members. So if there's grumbling going on at an increased level in your community, considering stepping up to help. Progress happens when all understand the situation in order to pull together in the same direction, and League can help local communities find that understanding. Any time of year!

In the last VOTER, I asked each of you to be one of those who call, who email, who write our legislators, to provide balance to those often highly paid lobbyists working to shape the important legislation at all levels of government. I'm now going to repeat my plea:

Our representatives need to hear from each and all of us! Promise me you'll take part.

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LEAGUE LOBBY TEAM BY THE NUMBERS

By Kim Abel

- Did you know? League Lobby Team has **20** members, ranging from Environmental to Educational to Good Government topics. ¹

- How many Legislative Priorities is the Lobby Team working on this short session? **5** major priorities, with **18** specific topics ¹ keeps Lobby Team members meeting with Legislators and testifying before Senate and House Committees.

- How many days in a short session? The second year of a biennium allows only **60** days in session, meaning that our Lobby Team can use your efforts to multiply their contacts.

- How often does Lobby Team meet? The Team meets every week during the **9** weeks of the even year Legislative session to sort through everything important to League priorities and to finalize the items for the Legislative Newsletter ².

- What can YOU do? **One** important thing....read the Legislative Newsletter ² that comes out each Sunday and RESPOND! It is your action that makes the League the respected organization it is down in Olympia!

1 - Download a copy of the 2010 Legislative Priorities (including contact info for the Lobby Team) from the LWVWA website or pick one up from your local leagues (copies were mailed early January).

2 - Read the Legislative Newsletter online on the State website on Mondays AND/OR while on the State site, sign up to receive it electronically.

Spotlight on Local Leagues

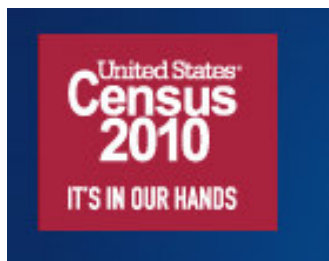
LWV San Juans: It's always good to have a special guest at your meetings....A statue-like Lady Liberty appeared at the League of Women Voters of San Juan meeting in December. Members and guests tested themselves by taking the U.S. citizenship naturalization test and learned about the history of immigration.



LWV Yakima has been involved with planning events celebrating 100 years of women's suffrage in Washington State. Yakima League will also have a voter registration table at the opening of the "Women's Votes, Women's Voices" exhibit on February 19.

LWV Benton-Franklin had an op-ed piece by Susan Kayser in the local newspaper, complete with her picture. She gave the summary of league's work on health care. They also held 3 public meetings around the Tri-Cities, showing the health care DVD sent to them by Susan Eidenschink with a follow-up question period afterwards.

LWV Pullman, hosted Dr. Don Dillman, WSU Professor and recognized national authority on questionnaire design, to discuss the Census. The 23rd U.S. Census will be collected in 2010 and this meeting was an excellent opportunity to identify the importance and impact of compiling the Census.



LWV-Jefferson County book grant

This year the Port Townsend School District switched their Washington State history course from high school to 7th grade.

The old books had been used for years and barely touched on the Native American part of Washington history. Sadly, no funds were allocated to replace them. We were shocked to learn the State of Washington pays districts only enough to replace curricula every 18 years! We wanted to help.

LWV-Jefferson County applied to the LWVWA Education Fund for an extraordinary outreach project special grant of \$750. With our unit's contribution of \$360, all sixty 7th grade students have a copy of The State We're In: Washington "Your guide to state, tribal and local government". The teacher is thrilled with the quality of the text and the excellent illustrations.

Our book grant made the front page of our local daily newspaper, The Peninsula Daily News, and will soon be reported in our weekly newspaper, The Port Townsend Leader. We will be getting more exposure from the press releases we will submit on February 14, the 90th anniversary of the founding of LWV-WA, wherein we will announce an essay contest with a \$50 prize, open to all Washington State history students in Jefferson County. The winner will be selected by our unit members at the end of April. The winner pronouncement will make a third media splash for us.


We are proud to be a part of an organization that values and nurtures education, specifically civics. Thanks, Education Fund!

Local League Responses to the Civic Engagement Project

The League of Women Voters of Bellingham/Whatcom County is sponsoring three consecutive meetings spotlighting the Civic Engagement Project on tax reform. The first meeting is a workshop for our members and their guests called, "Civil Discussions in Uncivil Times" – the topic of discussion is taxes, local and state structures, and services. The purpose of the workshop is to teach our members techniques to help us have meaningful and useful dialogue on difficult subjects like taxes—subjects that generally provoke emotional knee jerk reactions. The second meeting in the series, entitled, "Dollars and Cents in our Local Economy," will begin with where our current budget is at, followed by local speakers discussing how it impacts us locally. We will share the synopsis of taxation in WA as provided by the LWVWA's Civic Engagement Project and then using the tools learned at the previous workshop, attendees will discuss ways to increase revenues to pay for government services. "A Taxing Subject" is the title of our last meeting in the series and the focus will be Tax Reform. Our goal is to have a speaker who was a member of the 2002 Washington State Tax Structure Committee, as well as speakers with other points of view. Stimulating our citizenry to have productive conversations on tax reform embraces the mission of the Civic Engagement Project and the LWV of Bellingham/Whatcom County fully supports this effort.

Tanya Baumgart, 1st VP, Communications Director

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Diane Knutson, **LWV Spokane Area**, has developed an extensive outline on tax issues for use in presentations to school and community groups. All of the referenced handouts as well as the Power Point presentation can be found on the LWVWA website.

The focus, after some education, is ultimately a discussion about how to avoid this type of crisis in the future. All ideas are welcomed. Main points on the outline are:

"History of revenue and meeting the expenses for public services";

"Why is revenue important to state and local communities?";

"How the State spends its money is laid out in three different budgets";

"How does the budget process work?"; "How has the economic crisis in the economy affected the 2009-2011 budget and you?"; and...

"Now what????".

For more information, or to request the entire outline, contact Diane at: elkwomancatlover@yahoo.com or 509-590-8881.

In planning its public meetings for this year, **LWV Kitsap** decided to take a thematic approach, with most of its gatherings focusing on finance in various levels of government.

In November we met with our local state legislators in advance of the current legislative session in Olympia. In response to questions from the audience, legislators discussed the financing of the state's Basic Health plan, the Department of Natural Resources and the school system.

This month we will meet with our county commissioners and again plan to keep the focus on budgeting during a recession. What services were cut this year? What is the outlook for next year?

In April we plan a meeting on school district finances and will be asking similar questions of school finance personnel.

We feel the focused, thematic approach is a way to give our questions a little more edge and to keep public officials from veering off into discussions of their own pet projects and favorite topics. More than ever, it's our duty to hold them accountable for the way they spend our hard-earned dollars.

LOBBY DAY 2010 "League of Women Voters Day"

Lobby Day, held January 19, 2010 in Olympia, was publicized as "League of Women Voters' Day" and was a huge success. The atmosphere was festive due to the fact that not only was it a day to lobby members of the legislature, but also a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Washington women's suffrage with some league members costumed like the suffragettes of 1910. The walls were festooned with a display that recorded Washington State's historical involvement in the women's suffrage movement. We owe that effort to Sue Lean who arranged for the display.

The day was sponsored by Secretary of State Sam Reed who came and graciously welcomed the group of over 60 league members. Linnea Hirst, LWVWA president greeted the attendees and thanked all who worked to make the day possible. Special kudos go to the Thurston County League and to Karen Verrill and her team who made all the preparations at the Capitol for this event.

The program continued with LWVWA lobbyist Lonnie Johns-Brown speaking on the perspectives for the 2010 legislative session. Kim Abel, Lobby Team Chair introduced the lobby team and others who got up and outlined their issues and briefly explained the bills they are following: Jane Freitag-Koontz spoke on housing; Catherine Ahl on Education; Pat Dickason on Early Learning; Susan Eidenschink with Lounette Templeton on Health Care; Katy Sheehan on Campaign Finance Reform; Nora Leech on Taxation; Betty Sullivan on Housing; Elizabeth Davis on Natural Resources; Donna Ewing and Toni Potter on Climate Change; Denise Smith on Water Issues; and Wayne Martin on Reproductive Rights. Betty Tabbutt announced that there were no state bills on Nuclear Energy.

Representative Marko Lias, 21st District, spoke on good government. Before leaguers left to visit their representatives, all gathered in groups according to their particular issue of interest in order to review talking points.

Lobby Day was held in the midst of the 60 day legislative session when the entire capitol campus was active with legislators, lobbyists and guests from across Washington State, a stimulating day indeed.

State's failure to fully fund public schools declared unconstitutional

Plaintiffs called a landmark school funding lawsuit "a huge victory for Washington school children" when Superior Court Judge John Erlick on Feb. 4 ruled that the State is in violation of its constitutionally mandated "paramount duty" to amply provide for the education of all children.

The lawsuit was brought by the McCleary and Venema families and the Network for Excellence in Washington Schools (NEWS), a coalition of which LWVWA is a member.

Judge Erlick ruled that the word paramount in Article IX, Section 1 of the Constitution, means "preeminent, supreme and more important than all others" and that funding K-12 education is "the State's first and highest priority before any other State programs or operations."

The Judge also wrote, "First, the constitutional mandate provides for ample, i.e., more than adequate provision for education. Secondly, even this "adequate" standard is not being maintained by State funding, but rather with supplementation through local levy funding and other funds "cobbled together" by school districts."

The Judge ordered the State to determine the actual costs of providing all children with the knowledge and skills set forth in the State's high academic standards and to fully fund that actual cost with stable and dependable State sources. Erlick also wrote that the State "cannot avoid the question of whether it is currently complying with its legal duty under Article IX, Section 1 by stating its intent (through HB 2261) to correct a legal violation sometime in the future."

by Catherine Ahl

Fundraising: Is it really a four-letter word???

By Penney Van Vleet, with contributions by Myra Howrey and Linnea Hirst

Fundraising, development...no matter what you call it, I tend to cringe. And I'm sure most of you have similar reactions. Even with experience in this field, I still approach all of it—the letters, foundations, businesses and events—with a certain amount of trepidation. After all, it is not a science!

Yet, as Leaguers, we need to make sure that all three levels of our League are adequately funded to accomplish our goals at the local, state and national levels. If we're not producing or selling a product, or packaging derivatives, how do we get our money? Well, first, there're the dues.

What do I get for my dues to the League of Women Voters? Isn't it enough? That's a question often asked by members, especially in these times of steadily increasing costs, increasing dues, increasing per member payments (PMPs) to state and national leagues. So the question keeps coming up: what do I get for my dues. Should I expect to receive printed and mailed VOTERS? Am I owed printed and mailed study materials? It's an ongoing discussion, whether at local, state or national level.

Here are some of the things you do get. At the state level, you currently get twenty volunteer lobbyists who spend countless hours at the state legislature working to forward the LWVWA agenda and mission. At both state and local levels you get all the amazingly talented and dedicated members who serve in positions of leadership and who help keep League active and energized. And you get a state league office staffed by a dedicated administrative director who is there to answer any question and concern and help out local league members in countless ways as well as to answer many, many questions from the public. On a less tangible level, you get the name of the League of Women Voters as well as the League history and prestige. The same is true at the national level.

Also, you now get two printed VOTERS a year, and if we have your email address, you get two "virtual" VOTERS as well. Whether or not, all VOTERS are posted on the LWVWA website. What you don't get is a copy of each state study.

Those cost up to \$10 each—and with PMPs at \$19, that's understandable, though very regrettable. Yet, we don't want to fund everything we need to do with just dues, because we don't want to discourage people from joining the League because of their financial situation.

We do have one particular product that promises to be helpful in funding the League at state level. The 6th edition of the League's civics textbook is now in the hands of the textbook decision-makers at schools throughout the state, and is being received with enthusiasm. We don't yet know whether it's also going to be received with a textbook budget in any of those schools and therefore how much money will come into the League coffers. We hope, but we don't count on the proverbial unhatched chickens.

So those of us who have a few more nickels to rub together need to continue to step up to the plate. Many of you have already stepped up, for which we all are grateful. Our first state fundraising letter this fall brought in over \$12,000. Our action letter, requesting your help for this legislative session, is in your hands as I write this—and again you are responding. Each of us has different interests to which we prefer to contribute.

After all is said and done, it is not just about voter service, education and action. It is also about funding our efforts at every level, because although the local Leagues are where it starts, we need the state and national Leagues to coordinate the action in the State Legislature and Congress, plus all of the national and state studies and consensus that we depend on for action at the local level.

We are all in this together and will help each other as we strive to strengthen our democracy and provide for the common good. If you haven't already, please join us in this effort!

**LWVWA WEBSITE
LOOK FOR IT
www.lwvwa.org**

TAXES

by Nora Leech

The League position is to support progressive forms of taxation based upon an individual's ability to pay.

What does progressive mean?

An economist's definition of income is the increase of an individual's ability to consume during a given period of time.

How does the government get money to pay for the services they provide?

Some ways include:

- Collect Taxes: Includes excise and sales taxes on products and services, property taxes, income: personal (but not in Washington State) and business
- Charge Fees and Fines for services such as licensing or lawlessness like speeding
- Apply for Grants from private and public sources such as the Federal government
- Sell Assets like forest lands, mineral rights.

What is Fair regarding taxes? Here is a raging debate. A few definitions.

Taxes on wealth or income

The debate here is what constitutes income.

Progressive taxes

% of taxes paid increases with increases in wealth. Our Federal income tax is a prime example of a progressive tax. The folks with small incomes pay a smaller percent (10%) than do wealthy income earners (39%).

Proportional Taxes

The same percent is charged for everyone. An example is the property tax. If your house is more valuable you pay more money but you pay the same percent as everyone else.

Regressive Taxes

High income people pay a smaller percent of their income than low income.

Social Security is a good example. The government stops charging on incomes over a certain amount so higher income people pay a lower percent of their income than do lower income people.

Everyone pays the same dollar amount.

The most infamous example is a poll tax where the same dollar amount is charged to each person regardless of wealth. Dollar for dollar, everyone pays the same dollar amount.

Taxes on consumption

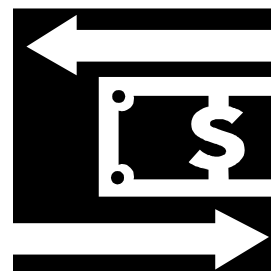
Regressive

Every person pays the same dollar amount for the goods and services provided. These taxes, primarily sales and excise, are regressive in that people pay the same dollar for dollar amount for the services or products purchased as the wealthy.

If you buy diamonds you pay more dollars in taxes than the person buying crystals but the same amount as anyone buying diamonds.

We in Washington State pay the most regressive taxes in our region. Our taxes fall most heavily on low- and moderate-income residents and smaller business due to the reliance on sales and excise taxes.

This leaves the League conflicted as we advocate for critical services for the poor using regressive taxation. A dilemma.



The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

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Send address changes to League of Women Voters of Washington, 4730 University Way NE, #720, Seattle, WA 98105.

We have produced our second video and released it to the public! This video is titled 'A Balancing Act'. You can find it on Youtube at the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LWVWA#p/a/u/0/g1Yu3wtlTe4>



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