

Spring 2010-- NH Voter A publication of the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire.

(Your part-time webmaster apologizes for the inept formatting of this electronic version of the newsletter. She will learn to use her new text program before the fall letter.

So ignore the long blank spaces in pages 1 and 2 and enjoy reading about your state League's activities. Lots of new below...)

From the President's Desk

So much is happening this spring I don't know where to begin. The state legislature is grappling with budget deficits and possible increased gambling to fund it. A state commission to study our death penalty statutes is meeting. For a while it looked like there might some federal money for rail transit, but now that seems to have passed NH by. All of these issues are ones that our state League is following through coalitions to which we belong, and the League has testified on some related bills.

Add in the early start that NH candidates for Congress have made and we are just about spinning!

This is an exciting time to be part of the League of Women Voters, a time when our official presence and our individual voices and votes really count.

Our state study of the impact of women incarcerated in NH is possibly most exciting of all, as we find out more with every article we read and person we interview. Representatives from each local League study committee, along with our steering committee, will be visiting the women's prison at Goffstown in April. We recently met with the Director of Field Services for the Department of Corrections to learn about probation and parole and an important piece of legislation underway. One local League has already had its consensus meeting on phase one of our study. In this issue is an opportunity for all of our members, regardless of whether they can belong to a local study committee or not, to express their views on two key study questions. Please read articles on our website (www.LWVNH.org) and in the newspapers, think about the issues, and participate in the mail-in piece of our consensus process. Also check the calendar page of our website for the dates of the other consensus meetings, in Concord and the Upper Valley.

We hope to see many of our members at our Council meeting on Friday, June 4, in Bow NH (just south of Concord and right off the highway). See the article inside on the guest speakers who will add greatly to our understanding of incarceration.

Finally, we have an opportunity to meet Mary Wilson, president of LWVUS, when she attends our Quad State workshops on May 22-23 in Wells, Maine. LWV Maine has arranged a post-Quad State program, luncheon, and reception. It will feature, in addition to our national League president, a program by "Sisters of the Planet." Oxfam's Sisters of the Planet initiative brings together American women leaders to raise awareness about women and climate change, and to influence policy to help vulnerable communities adapt to the crisis. To learn more see the website

<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/campaigns/climate-change/sisters-on-the-planet/>

LWVMaine members have been working with LWVUS on this project with Oxfam.

So please sign up for our two wonderful get-togethers this spring—our state Council and speakers on June 4, and Quad State on May 22-23. Advance registration is necessary for us to plan these events. We look forward to seeing you!

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Come to Council

Complete some business, share a tasty lunch with League friends, but most of all, learn more about our state study topic of women incarcerated in New Hampshire from the experts. All the speakers are ready and willing to answer our many questions.

When: Friday, June 4, 9 am to 2 pm

Where: Bow Mills United Methodist Church, 505 South St, Bow NH 03304

(Bow is just south of Concord, near the route 93/route 89 intersection. From route 89-take exit 1. Go left (north) at end of exit ramp. Go about ¼ mile. Church is on the right)

Who: All League members, potential members, friends and spouses are welcome.

What: An opportunity to hear from the experts: at press time we have invited the NH Dept. of Corrections commissioner (or the assistant commissioner), the warden of the NH Prison for Women at Goffstown, the NH supervisor of parole and probation, and a judge who deals with incarceration decisions every day.

How: send the form below with your check for \$15 by May 20.

Why: because this promises to be a fascinating day, learning about an issue that affects our state tremendously. And because getting together with other League members is always a good time.

Make your check payable to "LWVNH Council." Mail to LWVNH, 4 Park St Suite 200, Concord NH 03301. If possible send registration by May 20.

Yes, I want to attend LWVNH Council on June 4! My check for \$ 15 per person is enclosed.

Name _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please include your phone number or email in case of any last minute changes.

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In memoriam

The League is saddened by the recent passing of New Hampshire's beloved Granny D, Doris Haddock, who showed us the power of one person following her convictions. She was made an honorary member of the League in 2006, after her cross-country walk for campaign finance reform (a long-held League position). At her 100th birthday party in February, Granny D spoke with one of our League members, Karen Davies, and said she was very proud of her League membership.

LWVNH Testimony

SB489 – The Senate passed SB489, which would saturate NH with six casinos and 17,000 slot machines. The Senate has also passed **SB490**, which would legalize 3 "historic racing" slot casinos. The League position is that this is not a way to support funding of government services of any kind. Arguments used by supporters of

expanded gambling this year are set asides that would pay for social services and provide jobs.

Action steps needed now: Call your House representative TODAY. Ask them to oppose both SB489 and SB490. A brief phone message is fine. The Committee considering SB489 and SB490 is Local and Regulated Revenues.

LWV has testified in this session against expanded gambling and against expansion of the death penalty

HB1177 - On January 14, members of the incarceration study steering committee testified on HB 1177 before the Children and Family Law committee. Although we cannot advocate on incarceration issues until we formally reach consensus and adopt a position, this bill addresses education of youth and young adults in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. We do have a position on education, so we were able to speak in favor of establishing a committee to study education and career development programs for these incarcerated young people. We are happy to report that the bill passed the House.

LWVUS 2010 Legislative Priorities

After a review of congressional action in 2009 and a discussion of expected activity in 2010, the LWVUS Board of Directors has adopted the following Legislative Priorities for 2010: Global Climate Change; Health Care Reform; Money in Elections (campaign finance reform). On the Legislative Watch List are: Arms Control, DC Voting Rights, Election Reform, Ethics and Lobbying Reform, and UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This Watch List includes issues that need to be monitored for action opportunities in the 111th Congress. It is understood that the Board will have opportunities to review the priorities throughout the year to make changes if the situation requires it. It should also be noted that DC Voting Rights and CEDAW are perennial legislative priorities that the LWV has worked hard for in the past and is committed to working for successful passage.

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Women Incarcerated in New Hampshire Consensus (First Phase)

Our state study will not be completed until late winter 2011. However, because there are so many aspects to the study, the steering committee has created a phased consensus process. Members at large, nationally recruited members, and all other League members in New Hampshire are now invited to participate in phase one of the consensus process. If you are not able to attend a local League consensus meeting, you may participate by clipping, filling out and mailing in the form below.

**This form must be received in the League office by June 1, 2010, at the latest.
Mail to LWVNH, 4 Park St Suite 200, Concord NH 03301 attn "study"**

Your ZIP code _____

Question #1

LWVNH should understand the impact of incarcerating women, upon the women themselves, their children, and upon society, and then take action to improve the system of justice for

women in New Hampshire because the problem is a growing one, because incarceration has a large financial impact on taxpayers, because the recidivism rate shows that incarceration is not working for many, because the unique needs of female offenders and their families need to be addressed, and because several of the League's existing positions, both at the state level and the national level, allude to basic questions of equality of opportunity but do not directly address those issues for women incarcerated.

Circle one: Agree Disagree Other comments

Question #2

Desired outcomes for women incarcerated in the county houses of correction should include

- Punishment
- Reduction of recidivism
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse treatment
- Mental health counseling
- Educational opportunities
- Job skills development
- Improvement of parenting skills and strengthening of parent/child relationships
- Build life skills capacity
- Preparation of post-incarceration plans including access to substance abuse treatment, mental health services, assistance in finding a job, and assistance in finding housing

(Please prioritize the top 5 goals. 1 = highest priority)

Please check the item(s) below that apply to you.

To prepare for answering the consensus questions I did the following:

- attended a League meeting on the topic of incarceration
- read articles on the topic in recent issues of the NHVoter or on the League's website (LWVNH.org)
- read other articles or books on the topics of women offenders/incarceration
- visited a county house of corrections and/or the women's prison
- other (please describe)

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Former Inmates Speak to the League

On Nov. 18 two women who had served sentences at the Goffstown Prison for Women spoke to League members in Concord, giving us an insider's look at women incarcerated in New Hampshire.

Gretchen is over 65 and has been out of prison for four years. She served a total of six years for two different convictions for alcohol-related offenses.

Carol is married and in her 40s. She served three years for embezzlement and has been out for four or five years. She also self-identified herself as having had mental health issues, and she credited former chaplain Alice Roberts with having helped her greatly in group therapy. She has a part-time job right now with a very supportive supervisor, who often employs former inmates (motel industry), and she is finishing her college degree program.

Both women were very open about their experiences and shared their feelings as well as their perceptions. For Carol this was the first time she has spoken publicly about her conviction, and League members much appreciated her candor.

Both women reported on the overcrowding at Goffstown, which has made it difficult for the prison to offer all the programs the inmates need in order to deal with their issues. At the time they were inmates, volunteers ran all programs. Programs include AA, Bible study, anger management, and GED classes.

When we asked them to suggest changes they think should be instituted, Gretchen would have GED courses be mandatory for those without high school diplomas. Carol sees a need for college-level courses for some inmates. She is just 3 courses away from earning her BA in counseling and hopes that after graduation she will be allowed to go back to help others incarcerated.

Gretchen is leery of mandating that inmates and parolees participate in other programs, however, such as substance abuse counseling. She believes that one doesn't change until one is ready, and that having inmates in the programs who are there just to socialize is disruptive to others. She speaks from experience after her first alcohol conviction when she would drink in the parking lot after a mandated AA meeting. Now, happily, she is sober because she made the decision to change her life.

Upon release, finding housing is a challenge for some. Carol went home to her family, but Gretchen reported that policies in public housing bar felons from living there. Because often the jobs parolees get are part-time or low wage jobs, finding an affordable apartment is difficult. Gretchen worked for a temp agency upon her release and now works part-time.

Another restricted area is federal aid for college-level education for felons. Carol reported that federal financial aid is not available for those who have drug or alcohol related felony convictions.

Getting medications for chronic conditions is another issue for inmates about to be paroled. We have already learned that some of the county houses of correction give released inmates several days worth of meds upon release, but our speakers report that it can take a week to get medications through clinics or doctors. This might be too long to wait to get birth control pills, for instance, or high blood pressure or psychotropic medications.

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Our speakers opened our eyes to another issue for inmates and parolees, the cost of services. While both women had high praise for the nursing staff at the prison, they also mentioned that a routine visit to the medical office costs the prisoners \$3, though medications are given at no cost to the inmate. While Gretchen and Carol were at the prison, they were allowed to earn money for the work they did: \$1.25 per day.

The room and board fee at Shea Farm, the halfway house to which some inmates move while they work at jobs in the community, costs inmates \$65 per week. In the next step, parole, most parole officers charge their former inmates a supervisory fee. If an inmate is allowed to serve all or part of a sentence outside the prison under electronic monitoring, the inmate must pay that cost of about \$45 per week.

One area of interest to the League is the impact of incarceration on the children of inmates. Certainly the rights of the parents must be balanced by the long-term well being of the children, so this is a complicated issue. The law states that parental rights can be terminated after a parent has been in prison for one year. If children of inmates are in foster care, the foster parents are not required to maintain contact with

incarcerated parents. Thus a parent may have no contact with her children for over a year, which threatens her position at a custody hearing. Keeping inmates informed of custody hearing dates has been hit-or-miss in the past, we were told.

We thank Gretchen and Carol for their time and candor in discussing their experiences and preparing us for further study of the Goffstown Prison for Women.

Budget for 2010-2011

Our members will vote on the budget enclosed with this newsletter on June 4, as part of our council meeting. Note that our per member payment to LWVUS will go up by \$.60 per person, and we will no longer get a rebate for our nationally registered members, of which there are approximately 51 throughout the state. In the past we have received \$5 off our per member payment for each of those national members, in recognition of the costs we incur in mailing them our state and local newsletters. That, apparently, will end this year, thus increasing our line item for per member payment.

Honorary members, 50+ years members of the League, pay no dues. We value their continuing membership, but we also need to cover the cost of their newsletters. We are asking the two local Leagues with honorary members to contribute \$2.50 per member as part of their annual pledge to support the state League.

We want to acknowledge the "in kind" contribution LWVNH makes to two coalitions to which we belong, by allowing them to share our office in Concord. They use it for board meetings and occasionally for work in progress. Since we can't afford financial contributions, our office is a valuable way for us to support these coalitions. This doesn't appear on our budget but is important.

As a simplifying measure, we have changed all offset items to \$50, recognizing however that the actual amount we spend on voter service or a workshop or next year's convention is unknown now but will be offset by Education Fund grants or attendees' payments.

Questions on the budget can be asked at Council (June 4), or they may be addressed to the board via "membership" on the www.LWVNH.org website.

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2010 Quad State Gathering

"The League in a Changing World" is the theme of this year's Quad State weekend of workshops and sharing. Mark your calendars for the weekend of May 22 and 23. Join other League members from NH, Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island for this informative and enjoyable weekend on the Maine coast. On Sunday, meet Mary Wilson, president of LWVUS!

How can the League disseminate voter and candidate information to 21st century voters? How can Facebook and Twitter add to the League's outreach? What alternatives exist to traditional candidate forums? What is alternative voting and how could it increase voter involvement? How can a state study build the strength of the League? What is coming up at LWVUS convention next week and where do we stand on some of the issues? Members from Rhode Island will explain their proposed bylaw amendment for LWVUS convention: to give state and local Leagues the freedom to lobby their Members of Congress on national positions as each League board decides is appropriate, after giving national 10 days notice, a contentious topic in the past.

The keynote speaker will address the question of why civil discourse has lost some of its civility lately. Here in NH we have heard of some long-term state representatives who are not planning to run again and who no longer take phone calls or open emails because of the anger and aggression constituents exhibit toward them. Public forums have been interrupted by shouting and chanting, preventing an exchange of ideas. Nationally, members of Congress have received death threats after their votes on health care. Dr. James Melcher from the University of Maine at Farmington will put this into an historical perspective. Prof. Melcher is very well versed in political science and history, and also very amusing. His students at UMaine describe him: "Imagine a college professor combining the energy and humor of Robin Williams with the keen insights of a gifted and respected academic - that's Jim Melcher"

All details of the workshops were not set by our publication deadline. However, we expect to have workshops on the following topics: Alternative Voting Systems: Terry Bouricius (LWV Champlain Valley and "Fair Vote"); Get Out the Vote and Voter Service: Judy Davis (LWVUS board member) and another speaker; Social Networking: Nancy Lynch (LWV Central Vermont and Executive Director of Peace and Justice Center, VT). For more details on speakers check the "calendar" page of the LWV New Hampshire website closer to the event date: www.LWVNH.org

On Sunday, following the morning workshop, a program will be presented by "Sisters on the Planet", an Oxfam organization with which LWVUS and LWVMaine have partnered this past year. Following the program will be a luncheon and reception with "Sisters" guests and LWVUS president Mary Wilson. Cost is \$25.

Quad State will be held at the Hampton Inn in Wells, Maine. Book your rooms before the **deadline of April 23** in order to ensure the League price of \$89 plus tax.. Share a room and it's less than \$50 per person per night! Room price includes breakfast. Please call the hotel directly to make your reservation and tell them you're with the League...207-646-0555.

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League of Women Voters of New Hampshire
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Return Service Requested

QUAD STATE

We will have free use of the larger meeting rooms IF enough people book rooms! So please, if you are staying overnight, book a room at the Hampton Inn! Registration for the weekend is \$20 per person, which includes lunch on Saturday, and coffee and pastries during the workshops both days. ***Please fill out form and send with your check by April 25, payable to LWV Quad State. Mail to LWV c/o Liz Tentarelli, 27 Bowles Rd., Newbury NH 03255***

Yes, I want to attend Quad State! My check for \$ 20 event registration per person is enclosed.

Name _____ State _____

Phone _____ Email _____

We will send you confirmation with details of time and road directions via email.

- _____ I plan to attend just the Saturday workshops.
 - _____ I plan to stay at the hotel Saturday night and attend workshops on Saturday and Sunday.
 - _____ I plan to stay at the hotel Friday and Saturday nights and attend workshops Sat. and Sunday.
 - _____ If staying overnight, I have already booked my room at the Hampton Inn.
 - _____ I also plan to stay for lunch on Sunday (11:30 – 1:30), to hear the “Sisters On the Planet” program and meet Mary Wilson, LWVUS president. Added to my Quad State registration is \$25 for the reception and lunch.
- Total amount of check enclosed: \$ _____