

The New Hampshire Voter

January 2008

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to 2008. It will be a busy political year, and we in New Hampshire have already had a taste of that. I hope you were able to participate in the primary and support your candidate.

One project that we are involved with right now is the Granite State Fair Tax Coalition. Our last Voter included a brochure and remittance envelope. Many of you gave generously and the coalition is very grateful for your support.

Now we are in the midst of a campaign to get our resolution on the warrant in as many New Hampshire towns as possible. We are asking you, League members all over the state, to help us by letting your friends and neighbors know you support this warrant article and by attending any meeting held in your town.

To see a copy of the resolution, check out www.nhfairtax.org. To get more involved email Peg Fargo at pfargo@hotmail.com or Jane Armstrong at league@lwnh.org or call Peg at 226-4574 or Jane at 526-2066.

And finally plan to join us March 4th at Legislative Day in Concord. Details inside the Voter. It's a great way to introduce a friend to the League and to state government – two for one.

**Jane Armstrong,
President**

LWVNH DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE

**Concord Library
Tuesday, March 4, 2008**

Once again the State Board offers a Day at the Legislature, an opportunity for members to gather in Concord to gain a better understanding of current legislative activities.

This increasingly popular event will begin with orientation and coffee at the Shakespeare room in the Concord Library. Attendees will receive a list of the day's legislative committee hearings, and then everyone choose will be off to the hearing(s) of most interest. There should be many discussions about pending legislation of interest to the League.

At noon all will return to the library for a light lunch (catered by our famous chef Liz Tentarelli) and share stories about the morning's adventures.

After lunch we will have a choice of activities: a visit to the NH Historical Society Library (on Park Street just across from the Concord Library) to tour a fascinating exhibit, "History of the Importance of the NH Primary" or a custom tour of the State House...or maybe both for those who have the time.

Cost for the day.....\$5.00 In order for Chef Liz to know how much food to prepare, please call the State Office (225-5344) by Thursday, February 28 (to put your name on the list. However if you do not decide to attend until the last minute, please come anyway and take your chances on lunch!

Schedule for the Day

- 9:00 – Gather for Coffee and Preview of Day's Activities
- 9:45 – Leave for Committee Hearings of your choice
- Noon – Return to Library to share experiences
- 12:30 – Visit to State Historical Library or Guided Tour of State House

LEGISLATIVE HAPPENINGS

Funding Education

The League of Women Voters of New Hampshire believes that state support for elementary and secondary education should be a high priority in the state budget. (LWVNH Financing Government position.) We support increased state funding for elementary and secondary education to provide equal access to basic educational opportunities for every student.

Public education has been provided in New Hampshire since the opening of the first school in 1647, and the state has yet to determine its' role in providing a quality education, funding it and ensuring that it is delivered. Court cases (Claremont I and II and most recently, Londonderry) continue to require the state to play a major role in the education of the children of the state.

Responding to Court Mandates

With the passage of HB 927 in June 2008, the state defined the components of an adequate education, the first step of the mandate issued by the court in the Londonderry decision. The second step is to determine the cost of that definition. Then, a funding system must be developed as well as a system of accountability to meet the four standards of the court decision.

HB 927 not only defined an adequate education for grades 1-12, it also mandates kindergarten as a part of the public education system. Currently 11 school districts do not provide public kindergarten affecting over 2,000 children per year.

Research continually supports the value of early childhood education yet New Hampshire chose not to mandate kindergarten and leave it to the local district to determine whether it would be offered in their district. Certainly, there are private kindergartens offered in most of the affected towns but not all families can afford the fees. The children most in need may not be served.

Determining Cost

Another component of HB 927 outlined the composition of a joint legislative oversight committee on costing of an adequate education. This committee was charged with the "review and study of analytical models and formulae for determining the cost of an adequate education and the educational needs and resources needed to deliver an adequate education throughout the state" (HB 927 Amendment, line 33-35.) and shall issue a report no later than February 1, 2008.

Members of the joint legislative committee are: Co-chair: Iris Estabrook,, Senate District 21, Robert Odell, Senate District 8, Peter Bragdon, Senate District 11, Joseph

Education (cont'd)

Foster, Senate District 13, Lou D'Allesandro, Senate District 20 and House Members: Co-Chair: Emma Rous, Strafford 7, Judith Reeve, Belknap 4, Kenneth Weyler, Rockingham 8, David Hess, Merrimack 9 and Randy Foose, Merrimack 1. The members were appointed and all serve on either the education or finance committees in either the Senate or the House.

Meetings of the committee started in late September and have continued on a weekly basis all during the fall and early winter. Attendance at the committee meetings has been nearly 100% at each meeting and discussion has been lively. The co-chairs prefer to try to come to consensus rather than take number votes on items which is leading to a body of work that reflects the majority position of the committee without using numbers of votes for each item. A minority opinion on each component has often led to further discussion on various aspects of the issue. The meeting room is also full of interested observers including the Department of Education, the School Administrator's Association, the School Board Association, representatives of interest groups and legislative staff.

A subcommittee on the implementation of kindergarten issued a recommendation that a delay of one year was important as affected districts needed more time to initiate this effort. A survey of the districts was completed by a Department of Education official and he stated district by district the very real issues of no space within existing buildings and no funds or no space to build. Education Commissioner Lionel Tracey spoke in favor of granting an extra year but only if the districts submit a plan for full implementation of kindergarten no later than September 2009. The committee adopted this recommendation.

One of the major tasks of the committee has been to determine the methodology of determining the cost of an adequate education. Two suggest measures are input (teachers per specified number of pupils, other staff per number of pupils, starting teacher salary, average salary, etc.) or output (attendance, performance on applicable tests, etc.) The committee is using input data for their determination. Then, a determination must be made for pupils with special needs and a consideration of at-risk students. Within each of these measures are variations of applications, which will need attention and consideration from the committee and may later lead to debate and discussion within the legislature. After the data for input was selected and cost figures were selected, the committee moved to a discussion of education for those with special needs.

Initial totals suggest that an adequate education will cost an average of \$3,500 per pupil. This is only a suggested total and there is still room for discussion before the final tallies are placed in the report. An additional segment of the planned report will also list a figure for planned inflation prior to the actual enactment of a funding formula.

Actual expenditures as reported by the US Census Bureau report an average expenditure for New Hampshire students in 2004-05 of \$9,448 per pupil per year.

This

can be compared with the highest per pupil expenditure in New York State of \$14,119 to the lowest of \$5,527 for the state of Utah.

In 2006 the level of NH state funding was \$835 million, a reduction from the \$859 million the districts were entitled, and scheduled, to receive.

Another Amendment?

And then, adding to the mix that will face the second year of the legislative term, is the January news that the Governor will again propose a constitutional amendment. Remember the 20 versions of the previous amendment? Public education of the 200,000 children of New Hampshire is one of the state's most important responsibilities. The League must continue to monitor the legislative efforts and be prepared to add our voice to ensure the constitutional right of all students to a high quality education sufficiently funded by the state.

Peg Fargo

HB 794 – Public Funding of Elections

Public funding of elections in NH now rests in the hands of HB794. The League and many of us personally have long supported the concept that public funding of our elections is the best answer to a renewed commitment to democracy; opening the door to public office to a much wider spectrum of our citizens and allowing those in public office to concentrate on governing rather than fundraising.

HB794 was retained from last session and worked on all summer by a subcommittee of the House Election Law Committee. In the end, the bill created a commission to recommend legislation by December 1, 2008. The members of the commission will be non-legislators and recognized leaders in public funding in NH. The bill was scheduled for a vote in the House January 16th and we expect to be able ask for your support as it moves on to the Senate.

Jane Armstrong

Note from Jan Pendlebury: As of January 1, 2008 the National Environmental Trust became the Pew Environmental Group, the conservation arm of the Pew charitable Trusts, My role will stay the same. You can still reach me at the same phone number. NET and Pew have partnered together on winning environmental campaigns for more than a dozen years. Now we're joining forces to reduce the scope and severity of three major global environmental problems. Dramatic changes to the earth's climate caused by the increasing concentration of greenhouses in the atmosphere; the erosion of large wilderness ecosystems that contain a great part of the world's remaining biodiversity; and the destruction of the world's oceans, with a particular emphasis on global marine fisheries.

Implementation of HAVA

Under HAVA, the Help Americans Vote Act, states are required to have in place several tools to make polling places and the voting process more accessible. At least one voting booth must be large enough to accommodate two persons, a wheelchair and a fax machine. So that visually impaired voters may cast their votes with minimal assistance from election officials, an election official accompanies the voter into the booth and dials the secretary of state's office. When the connection is made, the voter uses a keypad to indicate choices. A paper ballot is created which is faxed back to the booth. The voter then delivers the ballot to the election officials.

Our board asked Leaguers to attempt to use this process as they voted in the recent primary and to report their experiences, which we will share with the Secretary of State. Here are some of the comments we received.

..."When I asked to use the system, the person at the sign-in table did not know what to do but she called someone over who did. He led me to the booth and called the number. He had to try twice before making the connection. After he handed me the phone, I listened to the process and went through the steps. The process worked very well."

..."Assistance was offered willingly although I think it was a bit of a surprise to the election officials. Directions were easy to follow once I got started. The election official I asked was not trained and had to get the town clerk away from counting absentee ballots, but she brought a trainee so another would know how it worked. When my completed ballot was faxed back to me the fax machine thought it was out of paper. A clerk had to help jiggle the paper. Obviously a blind person could not read the 'out of paper' notice!"

..."At my polling place votes are counted by hand and usually elderly or disabled voters are accompanied into the voting booth by a friend or relative who assists them. Although there is a special voting booth for handicapped residents, it has never been used. When I approached the officials none of them had ever tested the system or knew how it operated."

..."After I had indicated my choices, the fax machine would not print and signaled 'out of paper.' Finally the Chief of Police volunteered his services and discovered the wiring had not been set up properly."

..."No secret ballot. This process continues to produce a ballot that can be identified since the faxed ballot is on a different colored paper and can be identified in the counting process. The ballot also looks different since it comes out with a filled in oval rather than the 'X' that paper ballots have."

...”I entered the booth at 9:20 a.m. and left it at 9:42 a.m. It was hard to hear and hard to understand the phone. Noises in the room made it difficult to understand instructions.”

Reaching Consensus on Immigration

After a year of study, with guidance from LWVUS, our four local leagues held consensus meetings as the final local step in the national immigration study. I moderated the meetings for three of the leagues, Manchester, Kearsarge/Sunapee, and Upper Valley, and what a fascinating experience to see on which aspects our members in New Hampshire agree and on which they disagree.

The results of each local league consensus meeting have been submitted separately to LWVUS. The deadline for all local leagues to submit their results is February 1, 2008, after which the LWVUS Board will decide upon a national position statement. Look for results in the *National Voter* some time in 2008.

On the question of which criteria should be taken into consideration in drafting federal immigration policy, members of all three leagues agreed that economic and business needs of the US should be considered high priorities. They also agreed on the importance of reunification of authorized immigrants and naturalized citizens with their spouses and minor children and that refugees from countries with humanitarian crises and political persecution should be given high priority.

There was unanimous agreement that deportation of all unauthorized immigrants currently living in the US was out of the question. Various suggestions were offered for ways to allow unauthorized immigrants to earn legal status.

It was agreed that physical barriers at borders to stop illegal entry just won't work. More effective tracking of persons with non-immigrant visas is needed as is improved technology to facilitate employer verification of visa status. Employers who fail to verify status should be fined proportionate to revenue. We need a program to allow immigrant workers to go in and out of the US to meet seasonal and sporadic labor needs.

The final point of agreement among the three leagues is that federal immigration law should address and balance the long-term financial benefit from immigrants with the financial costs borne by states and local governments with large immigrant populations.

Major points of difference that I noticed in the three meetings may reflect the communities' experiences as well as the preparation for this study. For example Manchester participants live and work in an area with many immigrants and appreciated the difficulties of employers finding enough workers.

Leaguers in other parts of the country with far more legal and unauthorized immigrants may have very different views from those in New Hampshire. We eagerly await the final position statements.

Liz Tentarelli

Brennan Center Conference - The LWVNH was approached by the Brennan Law Center and asked to co-sponsor a panel discussion on Liberty and National Security at the Franklin Pierce Law School. The Concord League did much of the organizing work and Jane welcomed and introduced the League and the speakers. Much of the emphasis was on the role of the Presidency today. This is a topic that the League has worked to bring to public understanding. In 2005 the LWVUS held a series of "public conversations" on Local Voices: Citizen Conversations on Civil Liberties and Secure Communities. The League continues to lobby on the issue of civil liberties.

Dates to Remember

April 26 – LWVNH Council, Hopkinton Library

May 17, 18 – Quad State Training, Hampton Inn, Wells/Ogunquit, Maine

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The New Hampshire Voter

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