

The Kansas Voter



September 2008

League of Women Voters of Kansas

Working together...for Kansas

National Convention 2008

■ The League: Be Great in 2008

by Diane Kuhn

Thank you for funding my trip to the LWVUS Convention in Portland, Oregon. The speakers were outstanding (addressing universal health care, women as political leaders, and judicial independence); the meetings productive; the people interesting, informed, and passionate; the weather perfect; and the city itself a delight with its beautiful gardens, good restaurants with no sales tax, public transportation, and friendly atmosphere.

The main highlight of Convention, of course, was seeing Janis McMillen elected to the LWVUS Board of Directors. Kansas delegates had fun passing out sunflowers with a note attached celebrating Janis's nomination (thanks to Betsy Rohleder who had shipped a box with all shapes and sizes of sunflowers, stickers, and other sunflower mementos). Of local note also was Ellen Estes's (Wichita) motion to adopt the non-recommended study item entitled "The advisability of using the National Popular Vote compact among the states as a method of electing the President." Motion was approved. Carrie Lindsey, Lawrence, gave a direction to the Board to offer a Young Leader's Award at the 2010 Convention.

Also approved for the National Program for the 2008-2010 Biennium

were the following motions:

- "The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial." (amending the Principles).

- Motion to adopt the LWVUS Board recommended program to adopt a Health Care program to educate members and communities in order to be better prepared to do health care advocacy as needed.

- Motion to adopt "a Multi-Level Education and Advocacy Campaign to promote solutions in global climate change" as an amendment to the proposed program.

- Motion to adopt the following resolution: A resolution procedure shall be proposed by LWVUS for discussion at Council in 2009 as a possible rule for the Convention in 2010.

Of further interest to the Board was

the resolution to redesign national mailings for membership dues and fundraising solicitation. It narrowly passed on a hand-counted ballot vote.

Kansas delegates to Convention were Janis McMillen, Dolores Furtado, and Barbara Stillman (Johnson County); Kay Hale and Carrie Lindsey (Lawrence); Georgia Sandlin and Maryanna Quilty (Topeka); Diana Solis (Emporia); and Ellen Estes (Wichita). We all returned to Kansas with a deep sense of pride in League and a personal commitment to strengthen our Local Leagues and increase our membership. 3



Back Row: Diana Solis, Kay Hale, Ellen Estes. Front Row: Janis McMillen, Dolores Furtado, Donna Lauffer, Carrie Lindsey, and Diane Kuhn. Delegates not pictured: Georgia Sandlin, Barbara Stillman, and Maryanna Quilty.

Convention Notes

• From Dolores Furtado Health Care Reform

The caucus on Health Care Reform focused on (1) the current status and future of the Massachusetts plan and (2) a strategy to get convention delegates to approve the LWVUS recommended program to educate League members and communities to advocate for health care reform. The Massachusetts plan introduced several years ago has not been the miracle solution to the health care problem. Access, affordability and quality remain barriers. The LWV members were not discouraged but rather spoke with enhanced determination to continue to pursue the goal of providing universal health care to all residents in the state. Motivating them are two important parameters: (1) high infant mortality rate and (2) lowering of life expectancy despite higher per capita expenditures. Claims denial management, a new industry, adds 20 billion dollars a year to the cost of health care. These dollars are siphoned to cover administrators not providers. Their new proposal calls for the creation of a Health Trust Fund to be financed by employer contribution (\$ 295/employee, far less than current cost of insurance); an employee payroll tax based on income; continued federal and state funding of Medicare, Medicaid and Veterans to be administered by a Commission accountable to the people. All health care needs, including mental health, would be covered. The product is universal, single payer health care coverage utilizing private providers (not socialized medicine which is entirely government run). League members in other states are also leading the effort to provide answers to this complex issue.

Homeless Youth

In 2005, LWV-Oregon adopted a two year study on the status of homeless youth in the state (Homeless Teens:

Tomorrow's Burden or Tomorrow's Citizen). The Umpqua Valley League on the basis of having successfully completed a local study provided the template for doing the study. One of the most important outcomes was the League's lead role in making collaboration with other agencies happen. The findings revealed the numbers of homeless youth within the community called for services and support from the community. The state needs to provide funds to cover service gaps and also to co-ordinate the care for these children. This effort by the League is very visionary and will pay off in so many ways. 3

• from Kay Hale

My first impression of the League Convention was formed at a pre-convention training session titled: "The League—How to Stand Out and be Great in 2008." At this session, I learned that League membership declined from 160,000 members in 1972 to 60,000 members in 2008. This is an alarming trend—a 62.5% reduction in membership over 36 years!

Here's a key message from the session: The

We must reach out ...and we must ASK people to join the League.

League must recruit new members in order to continue to be the premier organization for voter education and issue advocacy. I heard this message over and over again during the Convention. We received tips for successful member recruitment and we were encouraged to sign the 2008 League pledge:

For the good of the League and our Democracy...I pledge to:

- Ask people to join!
- Follow through on the activities I've agreed to perform!
- Pursue all opportunities to build the League.

I have personally acted upon the pledge. I asked five people to join the League, over the last two weeks, and one said yes. I was thrilled.

I have learned that we can build a more successful League if we consistently incorporate visibility, fundraising, and membership into plans for League advocacy and education. We must reach out beyond the League with our messages and we must ASK people to become members.

I learned this and so much more at the 48th National Convention of the League of Women Voters. I am deeply grateful to have been a voting delegate. 3

• from Barbara Stillman

The meetings and workshops at the League National Convention were all informative and helpful in our work for the League. I have always been interested in foreign policy so decided to attend one session which was about the United Nation, not realizing that the League had been involved in the UN since it was just an abstract idea. During World War II, the League

did a study on the possibility

of a world organization for peace. They hoped it would eventually include all countries. In 1944, the League supported United States membership in such an organization and campaigned for the formation of the United Nations. They trained more than 5000 speakers and distributed more than a million brochures. President Truman invited the League to be one of 42 Non- governmental Organization consultants in the United States delegation at the UN Charter Conference in San Francisco in 1945. The League has had a presence at the UN ever since that conference in the form of official UN Observers. 3

More Convention Notes

• from Georgia Sandlin

Each time I have attended a LWVUS convention I have been impressed by a young enthusiastic League member. This year she was Lori Dawson, a 30-something, from Saratoga, New York. The first night in Portland the League members were invited to Nordstrom's for free drinks and finger food. Maryanna Quilty and I balanced our glasses of wine and plates of appetizers while standing elbow to elbow with Leaguers from all over the country. We were wedged next to Lori and found she was lighting director and stage manager at Skidmore. She was on a mission to have the League endorse the National Popular Vote Compact. The fact that the National Board did not recommend the study only seemed to energize her and her committee. As the convention progressed I saw her at caucuses and on the floor continuing to push for her program. On Monday the vote of the members was so close it had to be a card vote. There were 643 total votes, 363 yes and 273 no. To me, Lori personifies the passion and perseverance so important to League work and to any grass roots project. 3

• from Ellen Estes

I'm hooked. It only took me 23 years to attend a LWVUS convention and now I've promised myself to not ever let myself miss another.

I became part of a group that wanted the LWVUS to adopt a study of the second most widely suggested topic, which was the National Popular Vote. I attended a caucus one evening with Barbara from the Johnson Co. League. They asked for people to stay after the meeting to help strategize how to achieve our goal. There were two Leagues, one from New York and the other from Arizona, that took the lead. New York had almost finished their own study of the National Popular Vote when LWVUS shut them down, saying that

the NPV was in direct conflict with our stated position on the Electoral College. Our national position says that we will only support the elimination of the Electoral College. We talked about how we wanted to be the first to propose a non-recommended study. We knew there were others that had their own special causes and that there would be a fatigue factor with the delegates as more studies were suggested.

Now, who would speak? We put our chairs in a circle and we all wrote down what we would say in support. We read aloud our notes. I wrote that I starting teaching high school government classes over 30 years ago. I had told my students "one person, one vote except for President." I wanted to see that changed. Without LWVUS letting us study NPV, I am prohibited from speaking to a legislator, legislature, or writing a letter to the editor. We have to OK this study. I was selected to speak.

There were about a thousand people in this convention hall. We made sure that we had people at all three "Pro" microphones. It went as planned. Well, mostly. We all know that everything at convention is proposed and then voted on later, in this case. the next day. Everyone seemed to think that NPV would be selected but I knew how difficult it would be. The voice and standing votes during the convention session were too close to call so we had to go to a paper ballot. It PASSED. Some said that it was because LWVUS was basically on board with the idea. The people (there were some guys too) involved were passionate, informed, and organized. That was the reason we were successful.

LWVUS has fast-tracked the National Popular Vote and also chosen to study health care and climate change. 3

Ellen's Perspective on the National Popular Vote:

The masses are asses. OK OK That was not exactly what the delegate from Pennsylvania said. She said "I don't trust all the people out there." She was referring to her view that the Electoral College didn't need to be changed in any way. Personally, I was flabbergasted.

This conversation took place one morning at breakfast at the LWVUS convention in Portland, Oregon, that I just attended. I was attempting to garner support for a LWVUS study that I was working to get adopted. I wanted the National Popular Vote to be a new study for all of us to learn how we may possibly state by state working with/around the Electoral College elect our President.

When I taught high school government classes I introduced political theory. Plato thought that because the masses were asses they needed a Philosopher King. I actually used that phrase with my students. It is my hope that they were shocked enough by my choice of words then to remember them now.

What is this National Popular Vote, you may ask?

The National Popular Vote creates a compact. All of the states that join agree to give their electoral votes to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The compact only kicks in when enacted by states possessing a majority of the electoral votes—270 of 538, enough to elect a president. The bill has passed in four states, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, and New Jersey. It is a bipartisan effort. Kansas has compacts already with other states for Powerball and with Colorado regarding water. Voter turnout among 18-29 year-olds was 64.4% in the 10 most competitive states (battleground states) and 47.6% in the remaining states—a gap of 17%.

(Continued on page 4)

National Popular Vote

(continued from page 3)

Twenty-three states, Kansas included, had a negligible percentage of presidential advertising because the candidates spent the majority of their money and time in only a handful of battlefield states.

If a million votes in Kansas count as much as a million votes in Ohio, we'll see the candidates again. National Popular Vote is worth a try. More info? See the web site www.fairvote.org/presidential.

We were able to get this previously non-recommended study to be one of our new national studies along with Reform of Health Care and Global Climate Change. 3

Coalition Works to Protect Kansans' Access to Lifesaving Therapies and Cures

The Kansas Coalition for Lifesaving Cures was formed in 2005 to oppose the efforts of some politicians in Topeka to limit or ban important kinds of stem cell research.

The overwhelming majority of medical experts believe such research will lead to treatments for diseases and injuries like Parkinson's, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and spinal cord injury. It is the policy of the coalition that any stem cell research, therapies, or cures allowed by federal law should remain legal in Kansas and available to Kansas patients.

"While no unfair state-level restrictions have passed, each session of the Kansas legislature sees renewed attempts to ban and even criminalize important research," Brad Kemp, the coalition's executive director, said. "Our members believe that such restrictions would be unfair to Kansas researchers—and that Kansans should have access to any stem cell therapies available to patients in other states."

More information is available at www.kansascures.com. Speakers are available to Local Leagues. 3

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The *Kansas Voter* is published by the League of Women Voters of Kansas, a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. LWVK is affiliated with the League of Women Voters of the United States and with local Leagues in Kansas communities.

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