



THE VIRGINIA VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF VIRGINIA

Volume 54, Issue 3

Spring 2008

www.LWV-VA.org

Calendar Highlights:

For full details on events see web site

www.LWV-VA.org
and select 'Calendar'.

April 2008

- 13 LWV FA 60th Anniversary Party
- 23 GA Reconvened

May 2008

- 2 LWV VA Board
- 3 LWV VA Council
- 6 Municipal Election
- 17 LWV NCA Convention

June 2008

- 10 Primary Election
- 13-17 LWVUS Convention

July 2008

- 21 Pre-filing for 2009 GA

November 2008

- 4 General Election

December 2008

- 3 Women's Roundtable Pre-session

As Many as 10,000 Election Officers Needed Throughout Virginia for November

Olga Hernandez, President LWV VA

There is keen interest in elections this year. Primary turn out has been extraordinary nationwide. We have currently three very diverse candidates left on the stage. The first woman and the first African American to be top tier candidates and a Vietnam War veteran, the oldest candidate to run. All three are sitting Senators. There is no incumbent in this race so the choice is wide open.

Because of this excitement people are really coming out to vote! Many issues of concern are driving this effort. The souring economy, the war, health insurance, the national budget deficit, infrastructure, you name it there are a million reasons people are feeling compelled. That is where the problem lies. We predict some very long lines at the poll on November 4th. Unless Electoral boards find enough people to staff the elections it will be an unduly long day. The State Board of Election Secretary stated last week that VA may be short 10,000 Election Officials for this fall. You can help. We encourage you to serve at the polls this fall. It is imperative that enough people be trained and available. In some locations you can even split the day with a buddy, although you need to find your own partner. You can also encourage your neighbors and perhaps anyone over 18 year olds work that day. Public schools are closed and some high school seniors would jump at a chance to make \$100.

The League tried to persuade legislators to allow people to vote absentee without having to state a reason, that effort failed. They did add a provision that expands the reason list to include physical and health disabilities. If you or anyone you know meets one of the criteria to vote absentee whether via mail or in person I encourage you let them know to apply for a ballot early. This link to the State Board of Elections will direct you the Absentee ballot section http://www.sbe.virginia.gov/cms/Absentee_Voting/Index.html. Also remember if you have family members that serve overseas voting information can be found on the link above. The offices are working hard to make every effort to have a smooth election, citizens can help. Call your local Office of Election now and tell them you can help.

The VIRGINIA VOTER is published by the League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV VA).

The League of Women Voters of Virginia, a non-partisan, political organization encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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From the President's Desk

Olga Hernandez, President

For the first time in Virginia history women are leading ten of the 24 standing committees in the General Assembly. Although that is not the same percentage as the 50.8 percent of women in Virginia's population, it is a major increase in leadership positions. Seven of the committee chairmanships are in the Senate, they were appointed by the new majority party. Three are in the House where two more female chairs were appointed this year. It's been wonderful to watch these women set the agenda and take their proper place as they have risen in seniority. We congratulate them all as they do their best to serve their districts and bring a different point of view to the job.

So far in the 400 years of our legislative history 76 women have served in the General Assembly. Sixty one served or are serving in the House and fifteen in the Senate. Currently, fourteen serve in the House and eight in the Senate. It will take time for women to catch up the numbers and have true numerical representation in the legislative body. The only way it will happen is if more women choose to run and win. Only one woman was ever elected statewide, that was Mary Sue Terry who served as Attorney General and then ran for Governor. Three rose from the General Assembly and were elected to Congress.

As we approach 2009, we will celebrate the centennial of the women's suffrage movement in Virginia. It was then that women first started meeting to become more involved in civil life. We have several members that started their interest in public office by being League members. Some of our members are currently elected officials at every level of government. You never know who is interested in becoming involved in the League and perhaps in public office unless you ask. We all like to be invited to join activities, are you asking your friends to join us?

Since December I have been busy representing the LWV VA at various meetings around Richmond and across Virginia. I attended

most of the Privileges and Elections Committee meetings during the 2008 General Assembly session. I went to all three *Women in Politics* series forums conducted by the LWVUS, you can find them webcast on the LWV.org website. Also, I represented the league at; public hearings on the state budget, the elections events of Chesterfield County, and press conferences for the redistricting bills and the pre-school funding initiative. I also took the membership recruitment training conducted by LWVUS and participated in the public roundtable with the editors of the *Richmond Times Dispatch*. This LWVVA board is seeking to raise the visibility of the League and thus our effectiveness. We are continuing to work to increase our election activities for this fall.

LWV VA Editorial Printed in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*

The *Richmond Times Dispatch* printed our Op-Ed on the front page of their Commentary section on March 16th. The Editorial, "Why Does GA [Virginia General Assembly] Partially Shield The Sunlight?" speaks about how the General Assembly can be more open to the people by providing better citizen access.

Check it out on our website www.LWV-VA.org and select 'Press Releases' and then select 'Letters to the Editor'. Or type http://www.lwvva.org/files/op_ed_march_08.pdf into your browser.

The Library of Virginia responded to our suggestion for LIS training of librarians around the state.

New Legislative Directory

The LWV VA published a new legislative Directory for 2008-2009. The directory includes both Richmond and Home District contact information.

Each League received copies to distribute to members and their community. Please contact your local League for a copy or contact the state League if you are a member at large.

May 6th Municipal General Election

On May 6th there will be Municipal Elections held across Virginia. These elections include many Mayor, Town Council, and School Board races. The last day to register to vote in this election is April 6th. The last day to request an absentee ballot by mail is April 29th and in person is May 3rd.

You may verify your voter status through a new service provided by the State Board of Elections web site. To verify status on line, go to www.sbe.virginia.gov select 'Voter Information' then select 'Voter Registration'.

Final Call to LWV VA Council

LWV VA Council 2008 will meet for a day long meeting on May 3, 2008 in Charlottesville at the Doubletree Hotel on Route 29. According to our bylaws Council is a gathering of the Presidents and one delegate from each League.

This year we are offering a training session for web administrators and membership directors. We ask that the Presidents bring their members who hold those positions for this important training. Specific information and a registration form were emailed to each President. Lunch will be included in the \$35.00 registration fee. Check with your President if you are interested in attending.

LWV US Convention

The LWV US Convention convenes in Portland, Oregon on June 13th to the 17th. Each Local League is allotted a number of delegates depending on membership. Anyone interested in attending the convention should contact their Local League President to see if there is a slot open.

Fluvanna has an open slot for anyone interested in paying their way. Other Virginia Leagues may have openings that can be filled by members of another League or MALs. The www.LWV.org website has lots of information, also the unofficial website run by Barbara Wardenburg <http://home.pacbell.net/barbward/unofficl.htm>. Contact Olga Hernandex at President@LWV-VA.org for details.



Study of Restoration of Civil Rights of Felons in Virginia

Molly McClenon, Study Chair

Congratulations to the nine Leagues who sent their reports in on time! And thanks to the three Leagues who will do their interviews and send them ASAP. We will try to include them all.

During the next phase, the state committee will compile your findings, propose consensus questions for LWV VA board approval, and prepare the findings and other study materials for your use during your fall consensus meeting. These materials and a time for Q&A will be available at the fall workshops in September. Plan to send a strong delegation in September 2008. Consensus reports will be due around the first of the year. Consensus will be voted on at the spring convention in 2009.

It has been fun to read the interviews. A quick cursory review indicates that parole/probation officers are likely to be the most help; that VA CARES, C.U.R.E. and several other groups offer help; and that there is significant ignorance about how to help felons get their civil rights restored. Even judges, lawyers, and registrars are not well informed about the process.

Most leagues established relationships with local groups or agencies that help felons. This is good, for these groups can be contacted for support when we get to the action phase. Local leagues should plan fall meetings to discuss the findings and the consensus questions. Consensus will be voted on at the spring convention in 2009. Then the action phase begins!!

LWV VA Web Site

Our web administrator is working with our three MAL units (Middle Peninsula, Prince William and Washington County) to put their information on the state League website. Information should be posted in the next couple of months.



General Assembly

Coalition Activity

Lynn Gordon, First Vice President and Action Chair

Throughout the 2008 General Assembly session, the League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV VA) worked with a number of coalitions. Listed below are the highlights:

Virginia Redistricting Coalition – We have been extremely active with this Coalition, including participating in a press conference. Unfortunately, despite the bill making it out of the Senate; it was doomed in the House, never making it out of committee. Members of the Coalition, including the LWV VA are already hard at work preparing for the 2009 session. In the coming months, watch for requests to become part of this important grassroots movement.

Expanding Health Care Coverage in VA – Together with 26 other organizations and led by the Virginia Poverty Law Center, the LWV VA joined this coalition early in the 2008 General Assembly session. Throughout the session, the coalition supported expanded prenatal care (FAMIS Moms), health safety net providers (i.e. free clinics and community health centers), VirginiaShare, free screenings for breast and cervical cancer, and the Virginia Dental Association's Missions of Mercy (MOMS) Projects. Some modest gains were made in a difficult budget year.

The eligibility level for FAMIS Moms was increased from 185% to 200% of poverty, allowing 400 more uninsured pregnant women to gain access to necessary and cost-effective pre-natal care. The increase in eligibility was passed by the House and the Senate; unfortunately, implementation will be delayed for one year until July 1, 2009.

Additionally, members of the General Assembly have agreed to provide funding for community health centers, free clinics, and the MOMS dental project. They have also agreed to increase funds in FY 2010 to provide free screenings for breast and cervical cancer.

VirginiaShare would have been a pilot program with the costs shared between the

employee, employer and the state. It would allow small businesses and their low income, uninsured employees to purchase health insurance for basic health care. The governor's budget provided for \$7.7 million and would have reached 5,000 uninsured workers. Unfortunately, budget conferees eliminated all funds from this initiative.

Working Families Child Care Coalition – This coalition was initially formed to work on increasing child care subsidies to low income working parents to help pay for child care. In his budget proposal, Governor Kaine proposed a \$17 million investment. The League participated in a press conference and ultimately the General Assembly voted to preserve this investment.

Pro-Choice Coalition – The League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV VA) took an active lead in this coalition with Robin Gilbert agreeing to serve as co-chair of the coalition and Lynn Gordon attending many hearings on these bills during the session, and testifying when needed. Unfortunately, none of the coalition's bills passed, such as the one sponsored by Senator McEachin that would have required instruction on all FDA-approved methods of contraception be added to family life education curriculum in public schools. We did, however, have good fortune in defeating many bills that made it out of the House and into the Senate such as one which would require ultrasounds before every abortion and another requiring fetal anesthetization. For information about these and other bills, please visit www.ppav.org for additional information.

Virginia Fair Trial Project; also, Juvenile Justice Coalition – Through the Virginia Fair Trial Project and the Juvenile Justice Coalition, we followed a variety of bills, with a combination of results. Through the hard work of the Virginia Fair Trial Project, we have successfully been able to increase payment for court appointed attorneys handling high-level felonies that remain in Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Additionally, appeals of the transfer of juvenile cases to adult court will be studied by the Crime Commission during the interim between sessions. At the most recent meeting of the Juvenile Justice Coalition, there was discussion about the need to allow citizens to testify at full committee hearings if they were unable to attend the sub-committee hearing when the bill was initially heard.

Legislative Session (Minus the Current Special Session & Veto Session)

Anne Sterling, Second V.P. & Legislative Coordinator

The aftermath of the Virginia Tech events, along with a major budget shortfall, dictated that the General Assembly (GA) of 2008 would be absorbed by mental health and gun issues, plus safety net budget items. Then, transportation reared its head in the very last week, with a VA Supreme Court ruling unraveling a big piece of the 2007 omnibus bill. Here's how LWV-VA fared on our top priority issues:

Civil Rights: Our study on Restoration of Felons' Civil Rights continues this year. Until we have reached an official position, LWV VA can not work on this. Senator Y. B. Miller (YB), champion of this cause, had no legislation in, this year, but there will be likely be bills in 2009.

Election Laws: Our extensive work with the verified voting coalition paid off, with passage of four bills: Real Recounts (SB 35), Certification Procedures (SB 536), Disabilities for Absentee voting (SB 7), and Pilot Audits (SB 292). Other measures extended the list of who can vote absentee. A bill passed easily (SB 67) that organizations registering voters must provide identifying information on a tear-off receipt, so voter has recourse if he doesn't find himself on the voter rolls. Also passed: a tightening of campaign finance reporting by those raising money for a candidate via the internet. This will allow the VA Public Access Project to carry more information.

Environment: Several no-smoking bills bit the dust: Indoor clean air bills (no smoking in restaurants) by a number of lawmakers failed. Smoke free air bills (no smoking in public places) by Delegates Hamilton and Morgan, and Senators Whipple and Howell also failed. Also, an attempt to consolidate several citizen environmental boards (air, water, etc.) and remove their permitting authority, a power grab by industry, was defeated in a packed meeting in Senate Room Three, late in the session.

Health Care: Great attention was given to mental health matters, in an attempt to catch potentially violent persons before they can harm themselves or others. Long hours were devoted in committees on both sides, to grapple with the issues; many citizens and health care professionals testified. Several bills passed, including tightening commitment hearing standards, a new initial commitment period (HB 560); and a number of others dealing with diverse matters such as emergency custody orders, and crisis intervention.

Another VA Tech issue relates to public health and safety: gun control legislation failed totally. The effort to close the gun show loophole didn't have a chance, as bipartisan forces combined to defeat it, despite the appearance of many VA Tech families. Two bills known unofficially as "Guns in Cars" and "Guns in Bars" also passed, despite pleas from the Virginia State Police. They were fortunately vetoed by the Governor. LWV VA has a strong anti-gun violence position.

Redistricting: The Bipartisan Redistricting Bill (SB 38) was one of our major efforts this year. A number of bills started (SB 105, SB 243, SB 625), but the one that passed the Senate would have allowed for a seven-member commission to draw the initial lines, then invite public input. The GA would keep the final say. This was killed in the House P&E Subcommittee by a 3 to 2 straight party vote.

Transportation: A special session is being proposed to deal with the transportation funding dismantled by the State Supreme Court decision of February 29.

LWV VA - Your Virginia Government

In the belief that an informed citizen is the cornerstone of good government, the state League has prepared "Your Virginia Government" booklet for the citizens of Virginia -- students, longtime voters and new citizens of our state.

Ordering information for this publication can be found on our league web site, www.lwv-va.org click on *Publications*. You can also contact publications@lwv-va.org or (434)295-43

Donations to LWV of Virginia

The LWV of Virginia appreciates the donations of members and nonmembers. Your contributions will allow us to do more to inform voters and advocate for our positions. For donations to be tax deductible they must be made to the “*LWV VA Education Fund*”, those funds can only be used for educational purposes. Thank you for including the League in your charitable donations. Send your checks to **LWV VA, 6415 Emerald Green Court, Centreville, VA 20121-3824.**

I want to support the important work of the League of Women Voters of Virginia. Enclosed is my contribution.

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