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2010 Session of the General Assembly Women's Roundtable Report

Legislative Forum

*meets every Wednesday during session 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. 3rd floor conference room West
Notes by Amy Burgett of Richmond*

February 17, 2010

LWV-VA President, **Olga Hernandez** opened the WRT with introductions. She noted that resolutions concerning the founding anniversary of the League of Women Voters (February 14) had been read in both houses:

- HJR210, brought by **Del. Charniele Herring** congratulating the League on its 90th birthday, “**Commending the League of Women Voters of Virginia on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the organization's founding, as well as the historic 100th anniversary of its precursors' participation in the suffragist movement.**” and
- SJR44, brought by **Sen. Janet Howell**, commending the League for many years of service, “**SJ 44 Commending the League of Women Voters of Virginia on the occasion of its 90th anniversary.**”

President **Hernandez** noted that the League's popular publication, Virginia General Assembly Legislative Directory 2010-2011 has been received from the publisher; copies are available from the front desk, at the WRT, and have been put into all of the legislators' mailboxes.

Anne Sterling, LWV-VA Legislative Coordinator, reminded those assembled that “crossover” was yesterday, and the legislators are catching their collective breaths before tackling legislation coming for the other body.

- A number of “gun bills” were passed by the House yesterday, loosening restrictions. One bill would nullify federal firearms regulations in regard to any gun manufactured and used in Virginia. She remarked that Delegate Albo, chairman of the House Courts of Justice Committee, showed leadership on the House floor, in calling this bill dangerous.
- She noted that the redistricting bill that the League has been watching closely was killed in subcommittee. However, Senator Vogel's SB626 was rolled into Senator Deeds' SB173, which passed the Senate and has been referred to the Elections subcommittee of House Privileges and Elections, “**SB 173, Bipartisan Redistricting Commission created.** (Patron Deeds) Establishes a seven-member temporary commission to prepare redistricting plans in 2011 and each tenth year thereafter for the House of Delegates, state Senate, and congressional districts. Appointments to the Commission shall be made one each by the four majority and minority party leaders of the House and Senate and by the state chairmen of the two major political parties. Those six appointees shall appoint the seventh member and chairman for the Commission. If they cannot agree, they shall submit the names of the two persons receiving the most votes to the Supreme Court for the Court to select the chairman. The Commission will prepare plans and submit them as bills to the General Assembly. The General Assembly shall then proceed to act on the bills in the usual manner. The bill provides for Commission comments on plans as they change in the legislative process. It also spells out the standards and process to be followed by the Commission in preparing plans, including limitations on the use of political data and opportunities for public comment on the plans.”
- It was announced that Governor McDonnell is giving a press conference on the budget at 10 am, Patrick Henry Building, West Conference Room this morning, and all were encouraged to attend.

Delegate Kenneth Plum engaged the assembly,

- He spoke with disappointment about how his bi-partisan redistricting bill, HB 323 was left in Privileges and Elections in the House. He noted that the Sen. Deeds' SB173 is still alive, and urged the assembly to be active in contacting their delegates, and the Governor in support. Del. Plum predicts that if SB173 does not

pass, the Governor is likely to create and appoint a non-partisan redistricting commission.

- In response to a query, **Del. Plum** expressed concern about how education funding shortfalls will be resolved. He advised the assembly to determine whether the funding formula were changed, or categorical funding is rolled into block grants to the localities, which leaves very deserving programs competing for limited funds.
- Additionally, in response to a question, **Del. Plum** explained his interpretation of a binding caucus: if two-thirds of the members of a caucus vote a measure, the entire caucus is expected to vote the same way when the measure comes to the floor. He noted that his party does not have a binding caucus.
- In regard to the many gun bills that passed the House, **Del. Plum** expressed disappointment that the “1 handgun/month” bill previously entered into law will be struck. He noted that in this General Assembly, protection of individual rights (2nd and 10th esp.) is a recurring theme.

Ben Greenberg, Legislative Coordinator for VOP, spoke to four issues:

- There is a rally at the Bell Tower tomorrow at 11 am, in opposition to the cuts in health care spending, and in support of health care reform.
- Of the many bills on predatory lending introduced this session, only one is alive, SB606, also known as Car Title Lending, which passed the Senate unanimously. He noted that it passed with amendments that enhance consumer protections, and limit interest rates somewhat. A handout was distributed.
- HB392 was passed by the House on to the Senate Transportation. This bill raises the limit on the amount of water damage a car may have incurred from \$1000.00 to \$5000.00, and still be sold without disclosure.
- There is a proposal to limit the Medicaid Child Health Insurance Protection (CHIP) enrollment, which includes refusing some federal matching funds. He noted that many organizations are watching this closely. The Virginia Organizing Project strongly opposes this effort.

Becky Bowers-Lanier, contract lobbyist for several groups, noted that

- HAV Coalition including the VA Hospital and Healthcare Press Conference later today. She noted that some of the House budget bills are deceptive, that the Senate’s are more transparent and the effect is drastic.
- The license plate bill, “Respect Women, Trust Choice” has come under all sorts of special conditions that have not been assigned to other special license plates with values messages. Supporters are still fighting for it,

Delegate Vivian Watts who sits on the House Criminal Laws Committee has been appointed to a newly created Constitutional Law subcommittee. This committee is dealing with some difficult questions on personhood, and on mental health legislation. She was roundly applauded for her leadership on many issues dear to the assembly.

Delegate Jimmie Massie addressed the assembly. He spoke about how challenging his work has been on the House Appropriations Committee. He noted that budget issues are very important and very difficult. He reminded all of the positive things to focus on about the Commonwealth: Virginia is the best state to do business in, one of the best in which to raise a family, that while we are facing financial challenges, we are faring better than many other states.

Senator Patricia Ticer spoke about her bill,

- SB564, Coal surface mining; refuse control. Prohibits the issuing of a permit for coal surface mining operations unless the applicant affirmatively demonstrates, and the Director finds in writing, that no spoil, refuse, silt, slurry, tailings, or other waste materials from coal surface mining and reclamation operations will be disposed of in any intermittent, perennial, or ephemeral stream.” She noted that a public hearing had been held last week, at which many people on both sides of the issue spoke. She felt that the opening of dialogue was a good start, and therefore left her bill on the table in Senate Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources.
- In response to a question, she agreed that efforts to bring technology and particularly high paying IT jobs to the depressed areas of southwest VA, which are the coal mining areas, would be a good and positive investment for the state, and that federal dollars could be directed that way.

WRT adjourned at 9:45 am.