



Voter

League of Women Voters

League of
Women Voters of
Bellingham/
Whatcom County

February 2012

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An Upcoming Event:



February 17: League Lobby Day is coming up soon in Olympia --wouldn't you go? The session is working hard to balance the budget and our lobby team will be there to help you express your concerns about education, health care etc. The state league has come out strongly for new revenues and no more cuts. Speakers will include the Secretary of State, advocacy trainer **Nancy Amidei**, our lobbying **Lonnie Johns Brown** and the governor has been invited. We can carpool!! Make your voice heard. Contact KayIngram123@comcast.net

Welcome new member:
Megan Taylor

Alert! Different Time and Place

LWV General Meeting

Date: February 18, 2012

Time: 9:45 am—12 noon

**Place: Lynden Public Library
216 4th Street. Lynden, Washington**

Topic: Conservation Districts (CD's) and the LWVWA Study about them.

George Boggs, Executive Director of the Whatcom Conservation District, a staff person and a county resident who has participated in one of the programs will tell us more about the Whatcom CD, its history, programs, and how district supervisors are elected. More information can be found at www.whatcomcd.org. The LWVWA study has resulted in a 24 page document which is available at <http://www.lwvwa.org/studies.html>

Note: Members only—If your last name begins with M thru Z, please bring cookies, sweet breads, or fruit to be served at this event.

A Potluck of Great Food and Varied Program Topics

On January 21 League Members were rewarded with a table full of tasty food and enjoyed a spirited conversation about which public policy issues we need to work on this year. Members reviewed the Public Policy Positions of the LWVUS and did not recommend any updates or new studies. However, members enthusiastically supported the League's speaking out more on several hot topics for which we have strong positions already.

The top issue for emphasis locally is the **Cherry Point deep water port**. Our League will work independently and in coalition with other groups to promote a transparent and open process so that citizens can be involved and

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A Potluck of Great Food ..., cont'd

will also advocate for adherence to environmental protection laws. If you wish to be more involved on this issue, please contact **Jayne Freudenberger**.

Health Care is our high priority concern at both the national and state levels. Members **Sheri Lambert** and **Anna Marie Ross** will be working with our state lobby team to keep all informed about health care bills during this legislative session. Our members agreed that LWVUS should advocate and support legislation that moves toward a national health insurance plan.

Members voiced their frustration with **campaign finance reform** and concern about the negative impacts of the Citizen's United Decision and wanted to urge that LWVUS work harder to mitigate the impacts of that decision – by legislation or by joining a coalition in support of a Constitutional Amendment. Good news is that League Organizations in 12 other states have joined the efforts against the Citizens United Decision.

Call for Action: If you are interested in working together to overturn Citizens United and inform the public about the issue, join our C.U.D. Interest Group. We will start meeting on Fridays at 3:00 pm at the Colophon Cafe. Contact Annette Holcomb if you have questions (318-7551).

Sentencing Policy – At the meeting, members voted to support a concurrence to adopt a Sentencing Policy that was proposed by the Washington DC League. There are two policy positions proposed: (1) LWVUS believes that alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime and (2) LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses. More information is available at: <http://lwvdc.org/CONCURRENCE.html>

It was suggested that we present an informational meeting about local housing issues here in Bellingham. The topic might include the rights of renters and landlords or affordable housing.

Thanks to all who came to express their views about our program and public policy action at this meeting. Thanks also to everyone who offered to give the time and skills to work on these important issues. And thanks to the great cooks and kitchen helpers, too.

- Annette Holcomb

Kudos: Thanks to **Martha Mills** for agreeing to serve as our Observer Corps chair. Martha is looking for volunteers. Observers attend meetings of government bodies and send written reports to the board and the website. So if you are interested please contact Martha.

Thanks also to **Jo Collinge** and **Dan White** who have agreed to serve as Observers at Bellingham City Council Meetings.

Another thank you to **Martha Mills** for her donation of a coat rack to the YWCA with the proviso that the League can use it anytime we have a meeting there.

To all of our members who attended our Program Planning Meeting last month and who brought such delicious food for our potluck. Many thanks. Since the consensus seemed to be that everyone enjoyed the potluck....we might do that again.

Congratulations to **Mary Dumas** who did such a great job guiding us through our meetings on *Civil Discussion in Uncivil Times*. Mary has been working with the State League to expand the program and has just received a grant from the LWVUS Education Fund for a state wide Civility in Our Democracy project.

Tired of the rhetoric? Wondering how to get YOUR IDEAS to leaders in Olympia and the other Washington this year?

In May 2012 the League of Women Voters of Washington will launch a statewide Civility in Our Democracy program to give League forum moderators, public officials, and community partners a tune up on moderating high-conflict conversations and public forums, as well as making sense of the many new technologies and media being used in today's campaigns.

Two introductory workshops (4 hour) will be held (one on each side of the state) for League members, public officials, and nonpartisan partners. League members who complete the introductory workshop are eligible to participate in the 6-month moderator training that will build on existing League training materials, specifically strengthening skills for facilitating large group discussions about contentious issues. Support from the LWVUS Ed Fund will help the LWVWA train a pool of 100 skilled, non-partisan moderators who can support Leagues across the state in helping citizens access non-partisan, fact-based information and discuss the

candidates and ballot issues productively with neighbors and community members, in 2012 and in the years to come.

The Bellingham-Whatcom League launched a pilot of this program in 2010 with the *How to Have a Civil Discussion in Uncivil Times* workshop and follow up sessions with Dumas & Associates, Inc.

Look for forthcoming information about our 2012 Civility in Our Democracy program registration, locations and training dates.

With over 90 years on the front line of voters' rights, the League of Women Voters is viewed as a reputable source of nonpartisan, fact-based information on public issues and civil election forums. Whether it's through a League website or a highly-acclaimed League campaign forum, let's keep it that way!

**-Mary Dumas, League Member
Dumas & Associates Inc.**

Co-President Jayne Freudenberger's Message

"Well, when we get this done, maybe we should tackle world peace!!!"

This wry remark from one of our members capped off our program planning session in January. I laughed and then thought, "Have we taken on too much here?"

Let's see --we want to work on ways to overturn or, at the very least, mitigate Citizen's United.

And although we are fortunate our voting laws seem to be safe from the attacks other states are facing, we are going to be busy registering as many new voters as possible.

Then our members were really motivated toward the struggle for universal healthcare—we plan to keep advocating and informing the public of the benefits of single payer systems.

Looming over all of this is the most significant environmental issue that will face our county in our lifetime—the proposed coal terminal. We have formed coalitions with other local groups, and we are writing letters, lobbying, and watching closely as the time approaches for the Environmental Impact Statement.

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Co-President's Message, cont'd

Whew—and these aren't even our scheduled meetings. We just helped City Club with a Growth Management meeting and next up for us is a meeting in the County on Conservation Districts. Are we an active league or what?

Thank you to all of you who signed up to help on these issues—we hope some of you just took the form home to think about—we know you want to help. Whether you work on a committee—come to a letter writing session—set up for a general meeting—all help is appreciated. We have 124 people in our league now and together we are strong. So next time we ask you to make a phone call or attend a meeting, we hope you will say yes.

Hey I am an optimist—maybe someday we will be able to move on to world peace!!

From the Board

We are sorry to report that **Angela Murray** has resigned from the board due to the expanding demands of her job. We thank Angela for her service--all those voter forums last fall!!--and wish her the best.



We are very pleased to welcome **Amy Van Pelt** who has graciously stepped up to fill Angela's term as 1st Vice President.

Amy has been doing stellar work with the program committee and has also agreed to join **Annette Holcomb** as co-chair.

Quick Updates

Privatization – A Public Policy Debate

Privatization is a movement to deregulate private industry and transfer many government services, assets and functions to the private sector. Join in the discussion of the ins and outs of Privatization at our March 17, 2012 meeting at the Bellingham Public Library. Reports from the LWVUS study will provide the framework for this meeting.

Fairness for All – Does our court system work well for everyone?

Article 1 Section 10 of the Washington State Constitution spells out our rights in the Administration of Justice stating: “Justice in all cases shall be administered openly, and without unnecessary delay.” This is one of the questions to be investigated in our Fair Judiciary seminar on April 21, 2012 at Northwood Hall. Supreme Court Justice Steven Gonzalez will be keynote speaker. More details to come.

Walking and Talking

Rain or shine, we continue to meet at the top of Taylor Street Dock at 2 p.m. on Fridays where we decide what route to take for walking.

We end up at 3:00 p.m. at the Colophon Café in Fairhaven for refreshments and further chit chat ... so if you can't make the walking portion, please feel free to join us at the Colophon.



What is a Conservation District?

The League of Women Voters of Washington (LWVWA) decided in 2009 to do a study of conservation districts throughout Washington State. Since then members have been gathering information on how conservation districts are composed, what they do, and what their election/selection processes are to choose district supervisors.

Conservation Districts (CDs) are political subdivisions of the State of Washington. Their authorities, powers and structure are set forth in chapter 89.08 RCW. They are governed by a volunteer board of five supervisors who are all local residents. Three are elected by the residents of the district and two are appointed by the Washington State Conservation Commission. (The next election for the Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) is March 13, 2012; please contact them at 354-2035 for more information about becoming a candidate or getting a ballot.). The Board of Supervisors is assisted by a staff of professionals with diverse skills, training and experiences necessary to accomplish the District's goals as set by the Board of Supervisors.

We have learned that in Washington there are 47 conservation districts with the mission to promote conservation within their borders. Most of these CDs approximate county boundaries. Each CD has a unique mission statement describing its work to preserve natural resources within the district. WCD's mission is "to serve present and future generations of Whatcom County through a natural resource conservation program of leadership, partnership, and technical, educational and financial assistance to foster a healthy sustainable relationship between people and the environment". Since 1946 the WCD has been dedicated to this mission and has accomplished many successes.

Conservation Districts are funded through public and private grants, contributions and partnerships. Fifteen County Conservation Districts in Washington state are authorized to collect special assessments to fund projects however Whatcom CD is not one of them. The 2011-2012 budget for the WCD is about \$1,055,800.

Many of us know about the Annual Native Plant Sale and EXPO held by the WCD (this year on March 24 at Whatcom Community College) but have you heard of the WCD efforts to help farmers improve water quality in the streams that cross their land? The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) provides landowners a combination of federal and state funds to restore critical salmon habitat. You might have noticed blue tubes with something planted in them standing in rows near streams in fields out in the County. The vegetation planted will eventually shade out canary grass and help reduce the need to dig out the creek to prevent flooding. The fish will also benefit from the cool and shaded water. 28 CREP participants have been approved for installation this spring.

Dairy Nutrient Management is another program offered by the WCD. Nutrient management is the practice of utilizing on farm nutrients (manure) in a way that maximizes forage and crop growth, protects natural resources (soil, water, and air), and increases the efficiency and productivity of a farm. Manure should not be viewed as waste product, but rather as a valuable nutrient asset that when used responsibly, can increase the tilth and productivity of soil, maximize crop and forage growth, and reduce the import of chemical fertilizer onto the farm. Part of properly managing nutrients is knowing how to apply them in such a way that minimizes the risk of resource pollution, while also maximizing availability to plants. The Application Risk Management System (ARM) was developed by WCD to help dairy farmers through the process of properly assessing, managing, and reducing the risks associated with

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What is a Conservation District, cont'd

applying manure to their fields. The system is meant to be used in conjunction with a Nutrient Management Plan, which lays out the risks associated with farm fields and how to individually manage them.

These are only two of the many WCD programs and activities we are learning about. More information on programs and activities as well as CD elections and voter registration can be found at www.whatcomcd.org.

The LVWWA study has resulted in a 24 page document which is available at <http://www.lvwva.org/studies.html>. We want to share what we have learned so on February 18, 2012 the LWV of Bellingham/Whatcom will host a meeting at the Lynden Public Library at 9:45 a.m. **George Boggs**, Executive Director of the Whatcom Conservation District, a staff person and a county resident who has participated in one of the programs will tell us more about the WCD. The public is welcome.

Elsie Heinrick & Lynne Rein

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www.lwvbellinghamwhatcom.org



**League of Women Voters of
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LWV of Bellingham/Whatcom County
P.O. Box 4041
Bellingham, WA 98227-4041

Phone: 360-734-2366
Fax: 360-734-2366

Website: www.LWVbellinghamwhatcom.org