



Voter

League of
Women Voters of
Bellingham/
Whatcom County

January 2012

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An Upcoming Event:

January 25, 11:30 am-1:30 pm (lunch charge).

**“Growth Management:
What is All the Fuss?”**

City Club—with handouts
from the LWVBWV.

Northwood Hall

Kudos

“Conversations with Elected Officials” was a grand success thanks to the hard work and careful planning of board members **Lorene Lewis, Annette Holcomb** and **Kathy Gablehouse**. And thank you to the **13 members** who provided delicious canapés to supplement our donation from our “sole corporate sponsor”, **Trader Joes**. Be sure and thank the folks at **Trader Joes** when you shop there for supporting this important community event.

Welcome new members:

Anita Aparicio
Jocelyn Marchisio

Alert! Different Time and Place

Date: January 21, 2012
Time: 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM
Place: YWCA

It’s a potluck! Bring food to share (8-10 servings)
Last names beginning with A-G Salad
H - M Main Dish
N - Z Dessert or Bread
We will provide beverages, plates and silverware.

It’s a New Year
Resolve to Get Involved in League Program

During the last few years surveys of our members’ interests revealed that the top issues of concern are:

1. Campaign Finance & Voter Rights
2. Health Care
3. Natural Resources

If you follow the press releases of the LWVUS, you’ll see that our national organization is directing it’s efforts to these same broad areas – protecting citizen’s access to the ballot, fighting for affordable health care and lobbying to protect our air and water.

At the January 21 meeting members can find out about the issues we’re working on locally and discuss how we can use national positions to strengthen our voice and credibility in the community. In particular, we will share and brainstorm the next steps with the Cherry Point development process, ways to monitor health care access in Washington State, and actions we can take in the areas of campaign finance reform and voter registration.

All politics is local; and we’re a grass roots organization! This is the time of year we review our local priorities and how they are supported by the national organization. You are invited to be part of this grass roots effort to review League’s positions on
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public policy issues and let the national board know what direction we want them to take with new studies or areas of emphasis. Local Leagues will report members' opinions and then the national organization will adopt the program agenda at the June 2012 convention.

The League's grass roots process is a core element in our mission and insures that our voice is trusted when we speak out. Members are involved in program planning, then study, consensus and advocacy. Get prepared for the meeting by reading the LWVUS Summary of our Public Policy Positions: http://www.lwvbellinghamwhatcom.org/files/ioi10-12_publicpolicypositions.pdf

If you want to know more, refer to Impact on Issues, the complete guide to LWV Public Policy Positions. http://www.lwv.org/files/ImpactonIssues_2010-2012.pdf

Consider the following questions:

Which 3 issues are most important to you personally?

What issue is most critical for public education and advocacy at the national level?

Do you have a major concern that's not addressed in our Public Policy Positions?

Which positions are most useful to us in advocating for a thorough environmental impact review of the proposal for a deep water port at Cherry Point and expansion of coal exports using that facility?

Our League can propose a new study in one of the broad areas of Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources or Social Policy. We can also propose that a position be updated or recommend an item for concurrence based on a local or state study. (See below a concurrence proposal from the Washington DC League)

If you have a new study topic in mind we need to explore if there is widespread member interest in the topic? Is it a timely issue? Is government action the most effective way to address the problem?

Come to the potluck on January 21 and help nurture the grass roots!

Concurrence to Adopt a *Sentencing Policy*

The local LWV of Washington DC has made a proposal that we adopt a Sentencing Policy position at the June 2012 convention. Educational information in their report on the topic is posted on their website: www.lwvdc.org

They propose we adopt the following positions:

(1) The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime.

The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.

Should we support this proposal?

What is Happening with the Gateway Pacific Project and the League's Role

Co President Jayne Freudenberger testified for the League at the County Planning Commission's public hearing concerning some zoning changes to the Birch Bay Watershed Plan which seems to leave a loop hole for the Gateway Pacific Terminal project to skip some of the mitigations to the shoreline that we feel are important. We supported the staff's suggestion that all industrial use be prohibited from the changes. Unfortunately the planning commission did not accept the county planner's recommendations. This is not final and another public hearing is scheduled on January 12th. (League testimony can be found on the website under Cherry Point along with related articles)

Meanwhile as a massive public relations campaign is under way by the proponents to paint this project in glowing terms, the League and its community partners are seeking ways to make the scoping process as transparent and all encompassing as pos-

sible. Scoping is a process undertaken by the Department of Ecology and the Army Corps of Engineers to determine what impacts should be considered when the Environmental Impact Study commences. Pre-scoping has begun but the public input process is yet to be announced.

It is the League's position that impacts beyond the site including, but not limited to rail traffic, health ramifications of coal dust, actual jobs to be created and/or lost due to the coal activity and number of trains, and impacts to the marine environment due to the major increase in shipping traffic should also be part of the EIS.

Comments from the public will be sought in the near future for their input on this issue. Look for an e-Blast from the League alerting you as to whom to address your concerns to. A guide to scoping comments is posted on our web site.

The League's Position on a deep water port at Cherry Point can be found under positions.

- Jayne Freudenberger

Co-President Kay Ingram's Message

We often ask for your input on issues and concerns that our league should address. Perhaps you wonder:

"What ever happens to that input?"

Well, we....

- Listen to you when you talk to us
- Tally the results of surveys
- Discuss your ideas at our board meetings and annual retreat

And here's what can happen:

Over the last few years members have expressed interest in issues surrounding our judiciary. So when LWVUS' Education Fund implemented its education campaign on the importance of a fair and impartial state judiciary, we began to discuss how that might align with our interests.

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Co-President's Message, cont'd

Concerns that we heard here in Whatcom County included:

- Methods of judge selection (merit vs. elections)
- Campaign financing related to judicial elections
- Who is being incarcerated?

So we expressed interest in pursuing these topics with the national office. While their initiative is titled "Quest for a More Diverse Judiciary", all of the topics that we raised seemed to fit into their broader scope which we agreed needed to be addressed as well and we were encouraged to submit a proposal for funding of our project.

The Program Committee took on the task of crafting an approach to this topic. The result: a half day seminar designed to raise awareness of the challenges facing the courts, the benefits of diversity in the system and how the selection of judges meets the needs of the citizenry.

I am delighted to report that we have received a \$7000 grant from LWVUS-Education Fund to implement our initiative.

While we are in the early planning stages, I can announce that newly appointed **Washington State Supreme Court Judge Steven Gonzales** will be our keynote speaker.

So please mark your calendars now for:

**Saturday, April 21 from noon to 3:00pm.
Northwood Hall
Lunch will be provided.**

You'll hear more about this at our January 21 Program Planning Potluck so I hope to see you there.

-Kay Ingram – Co-President

Quick Updates

Membership: We are going into our annual PMP count with National with at least 30 new members since June. That brings us to 123. Welcome to all of you and please let us know what we can do to keep you informed and interested in our mission. All of our committees are open to your participation in what ever time frames you have to give. We do appreciate your support in helping to make democracy work.

e-Blasts: Our new way of contacting you is using the internet service Mail Chimp. This service is an easy way for our web chair to alert you to meetings, calls to action and other important news. We promise not to overdo it, but when you see League of Women Voters Bellingham/Whatcom (actually League of Women.... will be showing in your inbox), please check it out. When you open the e-mail, click to download the pictures and graphics. This sight is safe and secure. Soon your newsletter may be coming the same way.

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Campaign Finance Action

January 20th marks the two year anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission (FEC). The Supreme Court removed restrictions on how campaigns are funded and thereby permitted corporations and unions to pour money into campaigns anonymously to support or defeat candidates.

The ruling reversed decades of campaign-finance laws aimed at preventing undue influence over local, state, and national elections, including striking down two major Supreme Court decisions and part of the landmark McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform legislation.

Many organizations, towns, cities and counties that have passed resolutions in support of a Constitutional amendment stating corporations are not people. The LWVUS has not made any statement regarding such an amendment. The WA State League asks if we would agree with any or all of the following proposals:

- A) Encourage LWVWA and/or LWVUS to support resolutions proposed in the federal legislature that regulate corporate expenditures for political speech but do not try to repeal corporate person hood.
- B) Local League to provide “facts sheets” with information on this issue and/or a speaker list on the subject.
- C) Encourage LWVWA support for passing the WA State resolution that corporations are not persons under the law.
- D) Contact Leagues in other states to discuss and promote action on this issue.
- E) Propose a resolution for the LWVWA supporting a constitutional amendment stating that corporations are not natural persons, that they do not have the same constitutional rights as human beings, and that they cannot anonymously spend an unlimited amount of money influencing elections.
- F) Present a constitutional amendment resolution for adoption at the next LWVUS convention stating that corporations are not natural persons, that they do not have the same constitutional rights as human beings, and that they cannot anonymously spend an unlimited amount of money influencing elections.

Do you agree with any or all of these proposals? Email our Voter Editor, Margaret Woll , <mhildeb408@aol.com> to express your view.



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The search words are “League of Women
Voters of Bellingham Whatcom County”!

Quick Updates, cont'd from page 4

Nominating Committee: The nominating committee begins its important work this month to find new board members and committee members. We hope many of you will be interested in getting more involved. We always stress how important our work is but the hidden side is that it is also fun and rewarding to get to know and work with a great bunch of intelligent, witty and committed women (and some great men too!!) So let us know if you are interested and when the committee knocks on your door—take a chance and get involved. Georgia McGregor rmac2@comcast.net

Privatization Study: LWVUS has posted interesting reports and discussion questions for the Privatization Study on their website <http://www.lwv.org/member-resources/privatization>

Privatization of government assets, services and functions has been occurring for decades at all levels, and the consequences may improve services to citizens and may save money- but there are no guarantees. Contact Kay or Jayne if you'd like to help with this interesting topic.

“Conversations with Elected Officials”: Our fourth annual event was a great success again with over 75 attendees and 17 public officials. With the election over, it was time to chat with new and sitting officials about the challenges ahead. We always come away with a renewed sense of the dedication of our public office holders and it is gratifying to hear their thanks for our well run forums and our service in informing the community.



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