



Voter

League of
Women Voters of
Bellingham/
Whatcom County

January 2011

From Co-President Jayne Freudenberger

I don't know about you, but I enjoyed Christmas. I turned down the TV and radio, skimmed the editorial pages and tried to just tune out all the political rhetoric and enjoy the good will that the season brings us.

Then came January. Yesterday ---new governors were sworn in across the nation. One has to wonder why they even wanted to run---every one of them is facing enormous challenges to fund vital programs and cut their state budgets while the new Congress is promising more austerity. Our own state is no exception. Now more than ever, it is important to pay attention---no more sloughing off. You will be receiving many alerts from our lobby team asking you to support their efforts to address the most important concerns in Olympia. I hope you will give them your support and when asked to e-mail or call a representative--- please add your voice.

One of the bills being introduced in our state senate is to provide transparency to our electoral system. The money will still flow in obscene amounts thanks to the Supreme Court's Citizen United decision, but this bill would at least make it incumbent in our state to tell us who is really footing the bill for the ad. Our January program will also address the Citizen United issue---we hope to garner new information about our founding father's intentions and the role of the media in democracy.

(cont'd on page 2)

Why Deliberation Matters: Politics Past & Present in Our Democracy

Johann Neem, WWU Department of History
“**Democratic Deliberation
from James Madison to Today**”

and

Brad Howard, WWU Department of Journalism
“**An Idea Without a Home: Democratic
Deliberation and American Journalism**”

January 15, 2011 9:30-noon
Bellingham Public Library
Lecture Room

Join us for a discussion on the ideas of the founding fathers, how their view might differ from the debate dominated by moneyed interests, and what the role of the media is in our deliberations.

***Members only---If your last name begins with A through M, please bring cookies, sweet breads, or fruit/nuts to be served at this event.**

??? Want to be Proactive ???

Do you have an interest in helping your League be proactive in our local environment? We are involved in a project that has important implications for the environmental sustainability of our community. If you would like to be a part of this effort, please email Tanya Baumgart at PR@LWVbellinghamwhatcom.org

From Jayne, cont'd

Local issues will also be on the table. In February, look for a forum discussing the proposed design and controversy over the new jail. Growth Management is back on the table also, as Whatcom County is not in compliance with the Growth Management Act. What will be the County government's response? We will be losing huge amounts of funding for our County if this isn't settled.

So I hope you enjoyed the holidays—there is a lot of paying attention up ahead.

WE NEED YOUR HELP !!!

It is time to give our suggestions to the state league on our priorities for studies, legislative action and advocacy for the period of 2011-2013.

The League must have a position before it takes Action. Local leagues choose issues and decide what programs the state and national league should pursue. The process culminates when the program is adopted at the local annual meeting and the biennial state or national convention.

Detailed information on the current state positions can be found in Program for Action on the LWVWA website www.lwvwa.org.

Here are some questions to consider when selecting an issue for League work

Which issues are of such vital concerns to our members and our community that they demand attention now?

Which issues will benefit from the League's special expertise or perspective?

Will League work on this issue have a measurable impact on our community or state?

How will the results be evaluated?

Will working on this issue give League opportunities to collaborate with other groups and individuals?

The board of LWV Bellingham Whatcom County is considering the recommendations on the following page to send to the State. Please rank them in order of importance to you and use the space at the bottom for any further priorities you would like to suggest.

Mail the recommendation page to us (LWV of Bellingham/Whatcom County, P.O. Box 4041, Bellingham, WA 98227) by January 30, 2011.

Thank you for your participation.

Suggested Program Recommendations to LWVWA for 2011-2013

1. Action Emphasis - League should give high priority to monitoring campaign financing & encouraging more transparency about financing of campaigns for initiatives & referendums.

Rank _____ (one to three with one being highest)

Rationale: National campaign finance limits have been watered down by the Supreme Court decision and the 2010 elections were heavily influenced by money from corporations and political action groups. What can be done at the state level to inform the public about campaign financing? We believe state league should investigate any loopholes in the existing law and lobby state legislators to enact any changes that promote transparency in our elections. We have strong positions under our Representative Government area now. League can be a leader in educating the public about this issue.

2. Update and integrate LWVWA positions on energy, port districts, transportation, and the LWVUS position on global climate change to enable us to address the implications of exporting coal from our port facilities. **Rank** _____

Transportation positions should be updated to include the environmental impacts of moving hazardous materials by road and rail. League supports the development of alternative, sustainable energy sources but has no position to discourage trading carbon intensive resources. Transporting coal out of the state to sell to other countries for energy production seems to contradict our national global climate change and clean air positions. There are compelling economic pressures to develop our ports for coal transport; a stronger statement would help us address the issue in a way that is compatible with the goals of the League.

3. Concurrence with LWV Seattle's Privatization Position **Rank** _____

Rationale: There is national study on this topic, but we recommend that the state concur with the positions from Seattle's study. Since there will be numerous proposals to transfer services to the private sector with the new budget constraints, it behooves the League to have a strong position regarding the core services and functions that should remain with the government. State should adopt the LWVUS positions on Privatization. (The Positions are shown on page 6).

4. New study: Election vs Selection of our State Judges **Rank** _____

Rationale: It is critical that our judges are non-partisan and not influenced by political contributors or special interests. The voters are usually less interested and informed about judicial candidates so elections can be influenced by special interest groups. This study would review the current selection process and investigate alternatives such as merit selection systems that have been implemented in other states.

(League last examined the selection of judges in 1977)

Member Suggestion:

Thank you, thank you kindly . . .

Jeanette Cochrane—for responding to our call for more observers. Jeanette will be observing the Bellingham City Council at their second and fourth Monday night meetings.

Sheila Hardy—for serving as Secretary . Sheila has had to resign from the board, and we are most grateful for her service to the organization.

Isabel Vanderslice—for agreeing to carry on the duties of Secretary until the next Annual Meeting.

A Hearty Welcome

To Karen Summers, a former National member who has joined our local group.

Observers for Whatcom County Council



For lo these many years, **Jo Anne Feringer** has faithfully watched the County Council deliberate at their meetings every other Tuesday night. She would like some help in this endeavor.

Give her a call at 733-2793 and talk to her about what's involved, and how you might help out.



Walkin' and Talkin' - Hopefully Along the New Boardwalk.

We continue to meet at the top of Taylor Street Dock at 2 p.m. on Fridays when we decide what route to take for walking. The newly opened boardwalk leading to Boulevard Park will be a good possibility this next Friday. Join us then or at 3 p.m. for refreshments at the Book Fare (upstairs in Village Books in Fairhaven)



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Federal Health Care Reform What Does It Mean?

By Helen Hutchison

Everyone is unhappy about health care, particularly health care costs, but not everyone realizes that a national health care reform bill is law, or what is in it. Research shows that many Americans don't even know that a reform bill has passed. Start by informing yourself about what is—and is not—in the bill, and then make it a point to talk to your friends and neighbors.

Some of what is included in the landmark Affordable Care Act:

- a guarantee that insurance companies can no longer discriminate based on pre-existing conditions
- an end to lifetime caps
- a requirement that insurance companies can no longer can drop people when they get sick.

In addition, the bill:

- gives tax credits to small businesses for providing coverage for employees
- requires insurers to cover preventive care at no cost.

There is misinformation being circulated about the bill's effects on Medicare. Don't let the naysayers scare seniors!

- Medicare is actually being improved and strengthened.
- The Affordable Care Act attacks waste and fraud.
- The bill adds benefits for those on Medicare:
- helps seniors stay in their homes
- bans discrimination based on pre-existing conditions
- provides preventive care with no co-pays.

Yes, there are taxes—but only for those with incomes over \$200,000-\$250,000. These taxes will provide for the largest investment in the health care workforce ever made. There is a huge need for primary health care providers, and the Affordable Care Act will help fill the gap by investing in education and training, and providing incentives for these desperately needed caregivers.

Finally, for those who advocate repealing the act this is an even more costly choice than enacting it! Repealing the act would cost an estimated \$455 billion.

What about California?

California is on the forefront of federal health care reform. This fall, the governor signed two bills creating the California Health Benefit Exchange. There are a number of challenges on the road to an operational exchange by 2014; the League will be active both in advocacy and community education. If you are interested in working on this issue, contact [Helen Hutchison](mailto:Helen.Hutchison@league.org).



Sign up for action alerts on the [WWVC Web site](http://www.wwvc.org). Go to www.wwvc.org and click on "Sign up for E-News" at the upper left. On the sign-up page, choose "Action Alerts."

Do you want to know more? Here are sites where you can find good information:

<http://www.healthcare.gov/law/introduction/index.html>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/healthreform/healthcare-overview>

www.chcf.org/health-policy-office

Positions about Privatization of Government Services (Seattle League)

The LWV of Seattle studied privatization of government services in 2009 and came to the following positions. If you wish to read their study, it is available on the Seattle LWV website: [http://www.seattlelwv.org/library ns](http://www.seattlelwv.org/library/ns)

Privatization

The following core services, functions and assets critical to the well-being of the people, should remain with government and not be transferred to the private sector: Courts, police, public health, public schools, prisons, voter services, taxation, parks, lakes, water and mineral rights, beaches, streams, and forests. 2010

The following criteria should be the basis for decisions regarding whether core government services, functions and assets not listed in the preceding section should be transferred to the private for-profit sector: 2010

Criteria: Does the proposed transfer

1. serve the public interest today as well as for future generations;
2. align with public health and safety concerns;
3. assure quality of life for residents in the region;
4. ensure adequate government control and oversight including performance audits;
5. include provisions for transparency, public involvement and competitive bidding; and
6. protect individuals from abuse.

Public agencies are required to make a documented finding of adequate return on investment for the public for any government contribution of funds or assets to the private sector. Periodic performance audits should be required and made public regarding whether stated public benefits were met. 2010

Government employees and elected officials after leaving government service should be prohibited for two years from working for any private company for which they had oversight responsibilities or authority over awarding contracts. 2010



**League of Women Voters of
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