



Voter

League of
Women Voters of
Bellingham/
Whatcom County

March 2010

Co-President's Column

March is Women's History Month, and we often take this opportunity to look back and see how far we've come. Last year we began the celebration of 100 years of suffrage in Washington State, and this year we are beginning the celebration of the 90th anniversary of the League of Women Voters. The League of Women Voters of Washington State was organized the same year as the national league, 1920. Seattle and Tacoma were the first two local Leagues in Washington State. It's interesting to note that women already had the right to vote in Washington Territory in 1883. But they lost their vote in 1887 when the Territorial Supreme Court ruled that Congress did not intend to give territories the power to enfranchise women. It wasn't until November 1910 that the state constitution was amended to allow women to vote. This made Washington the fifth state to give women the right to vote – over nine years before the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution extended the vote to all the nation's women.

The Bellingham/Whatcom County League is continuing its participation in the State League's Civic Engagement Project and educating our members about the Washington state tax and budget system and ways it can be improved. The League position is that taxes should be based upon ability to pay, but in our state it is the inverse. The poor pay a much higher percent of their income to support local government than do the most prosperous citizens. This is because our state depends largely on sales and excise taxes, which results in a grossly unfair and regressive system. The sales tax supplies about 55% of our tax revenue to the state general fund. The poor pay close to 18% of their income, while the rich pay close to 3%. Our neighboring states are doing much better than we are regarding sharing the costs of government equitably—something we

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LWV General Meeting
Saturday, March 20, 2010
YWCA Ballroom
1026 Forest St.

9:30 a.m. Social Time
Refreshments will be served

9:45 a.m. Program
"It's a Taxing Subject"

Speaker: Jeff Chapman,
Research Director of the Washington
State Budget & Policy Center

Embracing the League's statewide effort to educate the public on Washington State taxes, we encourage everyone to come to "It's a Taxing Subject," the last of a three part series on taxes. **Jeff Chapman** will address key questions about Washington State's tax structure, and how we configure our budget.

Jeff is an expert on economic and fiscal policy. As the research director of the Budget & Policy Center, his focus is on improving public policy through solid and accessible research. He serves on the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors. Previously, he was an economist with the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC.

The audience will dig into the meat of the topic; actually looking at how the budget is created, simulate developing our own version of a state budget, and will discuss ideas for tax reform. **The worksheet we will use can be found at:**
http://www.lwvbellinghamwhatcom.org/files/2_funding_state_government_rev011410.pdf.

***For Members Only—If your last name begins with N through Z, please bring cookies, sweet breads, or fruits/nuts to be served at this meeting.**

From Co-President, cont'd

must strive for. With this in mind, we hope to see you all at our March 20 meeting to learn about how our tax system measures up and ideas for changes that might help to make it more equitable.

We are celebrating reaching 101 members in the Bellingham/Whatcom County League. This reminds us that the best recruiters are our own members. Please tell your friends about all that we do and why you are a member. If you know a prospective member, please contact **Robbi Ferron** (715-9588) who will send an information packet. In order to continue to thrive we need to retain our current members, add new ones and urge everyone to become involved. Your league is making a difference.

-Elsie Heinrick

Mail Call

An important part of our League membership is advocacy. And an easy way to do this is with a Letter to the Editor. We would like to encourage our members to help combat the legion of misinformation that appears on the opinion page by writing a letter on behalf of the positions that we have studied and support.

Here are some tips:

Be timely... Be original... Be brief.....Be civil
Letters can't be sent anonymously and must be 200 words or less.

Send to the Herald at letters@bellinghamherald.com
Or mail to Letters to the Editor, The Bellingham Herald, 1155 N. State St. #200 Bellingham WA 98225

Fact Sheets on the Tax System

Over the years, the League has worked to promote a balanced, fair, flexible and adequate tax system. We have published a number of fact sheets about the tax system over the years and have lobbied for and against tax initiatives in support of our position.

Check out the fact sheets at:

http://www.lwvwa.org/tax_study_resources.html

Civic Engagement Project

The 3 Major General Fund Taxes

Most of the money the state uses to pay for services comes from the 3 major state taxes of the General Fund: sales tax, the Business and Occupation (B&O) Tax, and property tax.

1. Retail Sales Tax: "Retail sales taxes are added to the selling price of most goods sold for consumption, such as clothing, movies, cars, and construction. Some services, such as haircuts and dry cleaning are taxed. Other services, such as lawyers' fees, are excluded from the retail sales tax. Food and prescription drugs are currently exempt."

- "The tax rate levied by the state is 6.5%. Local jurisdictions are authorized to add local sales taxes, not to exceed an additional 3.1%."
- Of the 3 major General Fund taxes, sales tax generates the greatest revenue and accounts for approximately half of all General fund State revenues."

2. Business and Occupations Tax: "The B&O Tax is a tax on the gross receipts of a business, unrelated to any profit." It is measured by gross sales, gross income, or the value of products made within the state."

- This tax "treats corporate and non-corporate business alike," but it also "imposes a heavy burden on startup firms and those with low or no profits."

3. Property Tax: Property taxes are based "on the value of real property (land and buildings) and personal property (moveable items like business equipment and machinery) owned by individuals and businesses.

- "Everyone in a jurisdiction pays the same rate. People with higher value property and more property pay more taxes."

4. Sales tax = 51.6% ; B&O tax = 19.4% ; property tax = 12.4% ; other = 16.6%

- * Other includes the real estate excise tax and revenues from liquor, tobacco, lottery, etc.

League of Women Voters of Washington Civic Engagement Project, October, 2009

Kudos

League member **Catherine Chambers** organized a celebration for International Women's Day on March 8th at the City Hall from 11am to 1pm. Displays were from women's organizations. Food and speeches were part of the festivities. Good job Catherine.

The League's delightful display promoting our programs was created by new League members, **Jan Fensch** and **Marsha Riek**. The display highlighted memorable moments in League history as well as the work we are engaged in now.

Phone committee members have been busy keeping in touch with all of you. They are **Rosemary Hostetler**, **Phyllis Haberstroh**, **Lorene Hofstrand**, **Dorothy Davis**, **Lynne Rein**, **Mary LeDonne**, **Mary Ellen Woods**, **Martha Burns**, **JoAn Agnew** and **Pam Went**. Thank you all!

League member **Sheila Hardy** stepped up to answer questions about the Conservation District election March 9 for the Study Team from LWVWA. Pierce County did a study on this and members at the State Convention last June voted to concur and form a State Study team.

International Women's Day

The LWV of Bellingham Whatcom County participated in a celebration of International Women's Day, held March 8th noon at City Hall. For the first time the City of Bellingham co-sponsored the event with Community to Community/ Women's Alliance. Other participating groups were the AAUW, the YWCA, Whatcom Democratic Women, N.W. Central Labor Council and the Whatcom Peace and Justice Center.

The Event was the first of a three part celebration which included an afternoon march and an evening event held at the St. Luke's Education Center. At that meeting our own League members **Robbi Ferron** and **Catherine Chambers** received awards for being community activists.

Speakers at the noontime event included Community to Community Director **Roalinde Guillen** who told us that we should include men in our march toward an equal society. Our work should be shoulder to shoulder with neither gender in the lead.

Hannah Stone, lawyer specializing in immigration, reminded us that our values concerning family need to be extended to immigration laws. Breaking up families by deporting a parent does not serve the greater good of raising children to be good citizens.

Shurla Thibou, professor in the Women's Studies program at WWU, told us of the cultural differences we need to be aware of when we work on an issue with women in other countries; a woman who doesn't have clean drinking water might not be as concerned about banning carbonation in soft drinks as those in developed countries.

Thank you again to **Jan Fensch** and **Marsha Riek** for putting together our League display.





League of Women Voters of Bellingham/ Whatcom County

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Recommendation to the LWVUS on Program Planning

In February, the Board discussed our recommendation to the League of Women Voters of the United States on program planning. The following was recommended and passed.

Our League Recommends: A review of an existing League Position

Position Heading: Representative Government

Position to Review: Campaign Finance Reform

Brief Summary of Scope: We should strengthen our position and actively support public financing of campaigns so that anyone can afford to run for office. We should make it a priority to work toward a legislative solution to combat the effects of the recent Supreme Court decision which could give corporations excessive influence. We are especially concerned about the effect on judicial campaigns and elections.

A Hearty Welcome to our Newest Members

Judy and Milt Krieger
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Lee Shapiro
4567 El Dorado Way, Apt. 220
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Julie Fleetwood
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This brings us to 101 total members. We have 69 individuals, 12 families and 8 National members.