

LEAGUE UPDATE

PRINCETON AREA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

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LEAGUE WINTER PROGRAM

A League meeting will be held at Stonebridge February 11 to reach consensus about Voting Rights of Probationers and Parolees and to make recommendations for state programs in preparation for the LWVNJ convention, coming up on May 2, 2009. Please let Chrystal Schivell know if you are interested in this meeting so that we can come to a consensus about whether to hold the meeting in the afternoon or evening. (Some of you already indicated your interest on the flier that was circulated at the last meeting held at Sheila's house.) Chrystal can be reached by e-mail at chrystal.schivell@verizon.net.

Materials for the study on voting rights, as well as the 2009-2011 Program Planning Packet, are available at both the Princeton Area and New Jersey LWV Web sites. If you cannot download the materials, call Chrystal, and she will get a copy to you. Both documents are short; the study can be done at home in one's leisure any time before the consensus meeting. If you're interested, just be sure Chrystal knows so you're not left out.

More on Voter Service

Voter Service is hoping that members have been thinking about issues so that LWVPA can generate good questions for Candidates' Questionnaires this spring. We have collaboration with The Princeton Packet and would like to uphold our commitment. Anyone who is familiar with the Princeton Board of Education or with West Windsor should call or e-mail Chrystal with ideas for questions. Elections for these two bodies are coming up fairly soon.

A Look Toward the Future

In addition to the study group on Voting Rights of Probationers and Parolees, the League would like to reactivate its study of the Consolidation of the two Princetons. The League has a position but finds this an issue that needs to be revisited. If anyone is interested in leading such a group please call Chrystal Schivell.

2008-09 Committee of the Whole

Co-Chairs: Frieda Gilvarg and Rita Ludlum
Treasurer: Ellen Kemp
Voter Service: Chrystal Schivell
Update Editor: Beverly Kestenis

Members at Large: Edith Neimark,
Ruth Ann Mitchell, Anne Zeman,
Carole Krauthammer

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEW JERSEY (LWVNJ) STUDY ON VOTING RIGHTS OF PROBATIONERS AND PAROLEES

The following are excerpts from the full report which you will find on the website www.lwvnj.org.

Background for LWVNJ Interest-

At the 2007 biennial convention of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey, delegates approved a study of the voting rights of probationers and parolees. The study would examine current state law and its impact. The study would serve two purposes: 1) to educate League members and the public about current law; and 2) to offer League members an opportunity **to** reach consensus about voting rights for probationers and parolees.

Understanding New Jersey Law and Comparison with other states

While the Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court have a significant role in setting standards for elections, each state has some authority to determine who has the right to vote. Various amendments to the Constitution and Voting Rights acts have “federalized the right to vote (i.e., forbidden discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin), but the states still have considerable discretion about aspects not covered in the federal laws. It may not be surprising, therefore, that our nation’s voting laws vary considerably. This variation is especially evident with regard to states’ laws defining whether probationers and parolees have the right to vote.

In New Jersey individual with a felony conviction many not vote while they are incarcerated, on parole, or probation. A convicted felon who is released from prison and has completed parole may re-register (or register for the first time) to vote. Only two states, Maine and Vermont, allow incarcerated citizens to vote. Like 19 other states, New Jersey does not allow probationers and parolees to vote.

More information is provided in this report which includes the following abbreviated **Discussion Points**:

1. Is the right to vote an inherent right of all citizens, regardless of their behavior? If so, then depriving any citizen of that right would be wrong, whether prisoner, probationer, or parolee. If not, then states may restrict voting for persons who have violated the law.
2. Is the right to vote a responsibility of all citizens? Or is the right to vote a privilege?
3. Should society try to rehabilitate those convicted of crimes?
4. Is the value of integrating ex-felons into society, and potentially reducing recidivism as a result, a good reason to give probationers and parolees (who are still in the criminal justice system) the vote?
5. Everyone agrees that members of minority groups are disproportionately impacted by disenfranchisement of probationers and parolees. If this is an incidental effect resulting from a disproportionate number of minority individuals committing crimes, is that impact acceptable?

NEWS FROM NATIONAL

Please go to the National LWV Web site for complete details on these selected topics: www.lwv.org

Public Input on Health Care Reform

Tom Dschle, Health and Human Services Secretary-Designee, has posted a request for public input on health care reform on the Obama-Biden Transition Web site, www.change.gov. As the team works to put together a health care proposal, it is important for citizens to let their views be heard. League members are encouraged to take this opportunity to participate and urge the new administration to act quickly to pass legislation containing this provision: A basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all U.S. residents as a matter of public policy. It is critical that health care reform include the equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total national expenditure level for health care.

LWVUS National Popular Vote Compact Study Pro and Con Articles

Detailed articles giving pro and con for the National Popular Vote Compact Study committee are posted on the Web site.

The most appealing argument in support of the NPV Compact is that every vote, of every party and of every voter, is counted fairly and equally.

Youth Engagement Activity: Building Democracy 2.0

Following the historical 2008 election season, the LWVUS continues to work to engage young voters. The LWVUS will join organizations such as Mobilize.org, [Declare Yourself](http://DeclareYourself.org), the [National Conference on Citizenship](http://NationalConferenceonCitizenship.org), and others at the [Constitutional Convention: Building Democracy 2.0](http://ConstitutionalConvention.org). This event encourages young people (ages 16-30) to develop solutions to various challenges in their communities. The League is proud to have been asked to participate in this event as an “expert advisor” and help select winners. Winning proposals will receive funding for their visions. All League members are encouraged to share this opportunity with young leaders in your community.

Sunshine Week 2009

As the LWVEF continues its work on openness in government, a panel discussion on this important topic will be sponsored in Washington, D.C. during the Sunshine Week. Scheduled for March 20, this year’s event will include national policymakers and journalists. It will be webcast live, and Leagues are encouraged to hold local events around this discussion.

Fourth Article from the LWVUS Climate Change Task Force

“Carbon Offsets: A Cautionary Tale,” the fourth in a series of five two-page articles covering climate change issues of general interest to League members and their communities is available at www.lwv.org.