

2017 LWV-VA Convention

Break Session Reviews

Provided by the League of Women Voters of
Fairfax Area

Our thanks to the members of LWVFA who prepared these Reviews
and for allowing them to be shared with all of our members.

Leadership for the League: Meet the 2017 - 2019 Board Nominees.

This was a very informal session with the opportunity to meet and discuss issues with some of the nominees for LWVVA board. There were no formal speeches by the candidates, and there were no contested races. The nominees were: Sue Lewis – president, Linda Garvelink -1 st VP, Lynn Johnson-2 VP, Marti Rollins-Sec, Pat Hurst-Treasurer. The Directors nominated were; Meghan Dorsett, Valerie Fillgrove, Maggi Luca, Carol Lindstrom, Ann Smith, and Adarsh Trehan. Nominating Committee for 2017-19 is: Kathy Matusiak, Chair; Dianne Blais and Anne Sterling, members.

Submitted by Sue Worden

Summary: “Celebrating our History; Envisioning our Future”

Brenda Rogers, LWVUS Board Member and Liaison to LWVVA

The LWVUS is emphasizing continuity, tradition, past successes while building for the future and adopting new technologies. Strategies:

- LWVUS is encouraging participation in upcoming 100th anniversary celebrations.
- She described League’s role in the January Women’s March.
- “Journey” is the League’s transformation process, with an emphasis on open-ended and joint efforts among national, state and local Leagues.
- The notion of “change” is off-putting to many. The League will be emphasizing “transformation”. LWVUS will amend the process, but retain principles and values.
- There will be a strategic increase in engagement, and therefore a concomitant increase in power. The League will draw more heavily on the ideas of its members, especially those of the youngest and newest members. We must remain open to changing meeting times, meeting structure, and agendas.
- We must open dialogue, not close it off. “Yes, AND.....” instead of “Yes, BUT.....”
- Transformation Agenda Vision: reclaim #1 position on election reform, voters’ rights, voter education and re-districting.

And all of these changes are to what end?

- Strengthen local Leagues
- Free local Leagues for political activism by reducing administrative tasks.
- Ensure financial stability of local Leagues.
- Define, offer, and accept many different kinds of engagement.
- Build databases.
- Improve communication with local Leagues.

The LWVUS is committed to empowering citizens to improve local communities. The national board is re-examining all policies and procedures to streamline, refocus, and encourage membership.

Virginia is for lovers AND Leaguers!

Submitted by Kathleen Pablo

Convention Reception Speaker: Dahlia Lithwick, Senior Editor, Slate

Ms. Lithwick gave an informative and interesting talk about her coverage of the Supreme Court. While she gave some glimpses of the persons behind the robes, she traced the polarization of the Court to the appointment of Justice Kennedy. She described Justice Scalia as a “Lion of the Conservative Movement” and attributed the

defeat of voting rights to his views and influence. Ms. Lithwick expressed concern about the silence from the Court about federal judge and Supreme Court vacancies. She referred to the ages of Justices Bader Ginsberg and Kennedy and the rumor that Justice Thomas is considering retirement.

In Ms. Lithwick's opinion, Justice Gorsuch is an "open book" about League positions. He is far to the right of Justices Scalia or Alito. He opposes the "right to die", will be open to expanding Citizen's United and gun rights, and he has an expansive view allowing for employers' support of Hobby Lobby. Ms. Lithwick believes that the Supreme Court will be very "interesting" with Justices Thomas and Alito to the right and Kennedy and Roberts to the left. Ms. Lithwick believes that had Merrick Garland been appointed as a justice there would have been a more "centrist" court.

Editor Lithwick concluded her remarks on a positive note citing the recent redistricting Court decisions and the Ohio voter registration purge. She stated that we need to ensure that judges are protected and revered. She opposes electing judges citing that this process destabilizes the judicial branch, and that we need judicial independence.

Submitted by Peggy Knight

ERA: 2 Away!

Pat Fishback conducted this session on ERA: 2 Away! She opened by calling our attention to the Declaration of Independence statement that "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal" implying that "men" meant everyone but hasn't been carried out that way.

The ERA was written in 1923 by woman suffrage movement leader Alice Paul. It was introduced in Congress and reintroduced in Congress annually for 50 years. It guaranteed a legal remedy against sex discrimination for both men and women. The ERA passed the Senate and the House of Representatives March 22, 1972 by a 2/3 majority and was sent to the states for ratification. The original deadline was extended to June 30, 1982. It required 38 states to ratify and was short 3 (now only 2) states. It is not yet part of the Constitution but is still needed. The excuse being that the deadline has passed. Pat pointed out that there is no actual law regarding a deadline; that the deadline could be changed. It is possible Congress has the power to change the time limit on the ERA ratification if it chose to do so.

The ERA packet, for this session, included helpful material on "The Equal Rights Amendment: Why the ERA Remains Legally Viable and Properly Before the States", a copy of the Constitution, "The Equal Rights Amendment: Frequently Asked Questions", "Constitutional Amendment Process", and "ERA Action! Things You Can Do to Encourage Participation." The most interesting was a seventy-eight cent "Dollar" with Alice Paul's photo replacing the ONE on the back side and ERA information on both sides.

Report submitted by Shirley Olson, LWVFA.

Fracking in Virginia Breakout Session

LWV-VA Fracking Study Committee: Meghan Dorsett, LWVRMA

On 10 June 2017, Meghan Dorsett of LWVRMA spoke to the LWV-VA about Fracking in Virginia. The talk focused on the (extremely well written and comprehensive) statewide Fracking study, which was compiled using data researched by the LWV-VA Fracking Study Committee. Issues discussed included types of Fracking and how the Virginia League and League members can use the State study and resulting position to engage at the state legislative and local levels of government. The State League website has a link to the main Fracking

webpage (<http://www.lwv-va.org/fracking.html>) where the study materials and adopted position on "Extractive Industries: Hydraulic Fracturing" can be viewed and there are also several social media pages available for League members (Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.)

The main points of the breakout session are below:

- Fracking occurs in three areas in Virginia (see figure 9 in LWV-VA Fracking Study for details):
 1. Western Coal Beds: Methane builds up as old coal mines decompose. This methane is naturally vented through earthquakes, but when it is not, these old mines are "tapped" and the methane is pulled out. This has been occurring for well over 50 years.
 2. Shale Fracking: Occurs on the eastern slope of the Alleghenies.
 3. Mesozoic Basin. The bowl in between the two fault lines (Between Richmond/DC/and the Eastern Shore)
- Q: Did the local GIS (Geographic Information System) support the Fracking Committee?
A: Absolutely. The maps found in the study were courtesy of the local GIS.
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- Where Decisions are Made about Fracking at the Local Level: (note: this section has been modified in order to provide the official name of the various groups/departments-cl-communications)
 1. Local Planning Commission(s)
 2. Local Dept. of Planning and Zoning
 3. Local Board of Zoning Appeals
 4. Town or City Council, County Board of Supervisors
- At the conclusion of the study, the committee found that drilling companies need to make medical and emergency personnel aware of the types (as well as the concentrations) of chemicals being found when drilling. The disclosure of this information would allow doctors to track patterns in local patients potentially linked to fracking-related activities. Drilling companies

*No author noted

Gun Safety: Can We Change the Tide

"Gun Safety: Can We Change the Tide" presented by Ruth Hoffman and Judy Helein updated the group on the progress the Firearm Safety Task Force has made since its creation in 2015. Their mandate is to promote greater gun safety through education and lobbying primarily in the areas of domestic abusers and child access prevention. This forty plus member task force from across the state has numerous accomplishments including: Passage of domestic violence firearm permanent protective order; establishment of LWV-VA Gun Safety Facebook Group; numerous screenings of "Under the Gun" with panel discussions; gun safety forums; lobbying for key child access prevention bills; and, cosponsoring #WearOrange. Only twenty-three states have child access prevention laws and, of that number, Virginia is the weakest. In the US two children are killed weekly from unsecured guns and two million children live in homes with unsecured guns. These statistics demonstrate the pressing importance for the League to educate lawmakers and the public as to the dangers of unsecured weapons. The goals of the task force are to raise their profile, improve communication, educate voters through forums and screenings, get candidates' positions on gun safety, and train additional members to become gun violence prevention experts.

*No author noted

Breakout Session: Using Technology to Understand Members (June 11, 2017)

Beth Tudan from the Fairfax Area League gave an excellent tutorial on the various software packages we use to connect with and inform our members of the activities we are engaged with. Although this session was more pertinent to groups who are selecting or implementing software strategies, it was very helpful to understand the “back-end” of our web interfaces. Beth described the advantages of using the following packages:

Constant Contact is used for weekly alerts. The software is better than sending email because it permits the use of images and tables of contents, and transmissions won't go to junk mail. It allows the administrator to create groups based on interests and saves time by re-using announcements that recur each week or year.

Google Calendar is linked to our web site for activities of the LWV and other organizations. It is part of Google's G-Suite, which we use for forwarding emails to board members and committee chairs.

Square Space on our web site allows us to share the look and feel of web pages with other Leagues. It enables the addition of links to other sites and can accommodate video clips.

Signup Genius facilitates member signups for community elections, candidate forums, and other events for which we rely on many volunteers. Although the basic software is free, we pay a modest license fee for added editing capability and an archive of postings.

Survey Monkey is the platform on which we gather input from our members. Responses from Survey Monkey can be imported to Excel for sorting and analysis.

EventBrite helps us manage RSVPs to events, and we use social media, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, to push news and information to anyone who signs up with us.

Beth provided valuable tips on how to manage all the various software packages and ways to ensure that the data is accurate. Some of the work of maintaining the content is assigned to other League members, but she gives out passwords sparingly to maintain the integrity of the web site and other communication points.

*No author noted

Summary: “LWV Grassroots Advocacy and Action”

Jessica Jones Capparell, Grassroots Advocacy Manager, LWVUS (five-year veteran)

National board LWVUS priorities:

- Money in politics
- National Ethics Commission (there is concern that this will be devoted primarily to support false claims of voter fraud)
- Securing funding and technological expertise for EAC
- Directly engaging (or amicus briefs) in lawsuits regarding redistricting
- Public Advocacy Voter Protection --- automatic and on-line voter registration, no-excuse early voting
- Health care services for women, emphasis on retaining access to full-range, ensuring no restrictions or elimination due to pre-existing conditions

Since 2016, there has been an upsurge in interest expressed by new activists. Local Leagues have the best contact info for these prospects, and should build databases, sign up activists for local alerts, facilitate contacting Congress by phone as the most effective way to lobby on issues. Local Leagues can also suggest appropriate

wording for e-mails and provide alternative wording. Letters and card-writing should be suggested again with alternative texts. But the most successful strategy is to develop personal relationships with local and national leaders and their staffers. Provide sample questions and conversation points to pursue various issues. Finally, convene forums and meetings, inviting interested parties to discuss current issues and concerns.

Action Kits are available on the LWVUS management site on redistricting and money in politics. (Additional topics are being developed.) These kits contain sample letters, talking points, questions to pursue, and suggested agendas for local meetings. **Grassroot campaigns win elections.**

Activism is important not just on the national level. It is perhaps even more effective on the local level, and the LWV is well-equipped to pursue this. Assistance is available from the national staff on developing strategies, engaging on issues, filing amicus briefs, etc. Local Leaguers are invited to participate in the lobby corps.

Submitted by Kathleen Pablo

LWV Sips and Civility

Falls Church Unit presented two new programs focused on engaging community members in civil discourse while raising the League's profile. Both programs emphasize informality targeting parents and young professionals by meeting at local venues on weeknights after work, typically 7:30 pm. In September the FC Unit began "Sips and Civility" which invited anyone to meet at a local restaurant for courteous, nonpartisan conversation. Promotion of the monthly event is primarily done through social media. By scheduling the event on Monday or Tuesday evenings, typically slow business nights, most restaurants are willing to set aside tables. A League member joins a table as a moderator ensuring everyone gets a chance to speak without censure. Each person who attends signs in allowing the League to keep in touch through email/Facebook. The second program is "Civics Game Night." This event meets at a comic book store and engages people through games. Again, the emphasis is on communicating across and beyond party lines to educate oneself on one's civic role and responsibilities. Each group stresses involvement and fun. For more information contact Amy Hjerstedt (amy.hjerstedt@gmail.com).

What's Next For Virginia Redistricting? Submitted by Sue Worden

The speaker was Brian Cannon, Executive Director of ONEVIRGINIA2021. He started by giving the recent history of redistricting in VA. In 2011 both parties participated in political gerrymandering with the Republicans in charge of drawing the delegate lines and the Democrats drawing the senate districts. The general assembly didn't draw the Congressional districts until 2012. The 3rd Congressional district was contested and was redrawn by the courts.

In 2014 ONEVIRGINIA2021 was formed and has been working/lobbying to accomplish fixing the redistricting mess before the next redistricting takes place in 2021. It has filed 2 lawsuits on racial gerrymandering: one about the Congressional lines and one about the House of Delegates lines. It has also brought a suit dealing with the definition of "compactness" which the Constitution requires. The Congressional suit has been settled but the House of Delegates suit has yet to be settled. On 3/31/17 the court ruled against the organization's law suit and it will go to the VA Supreme Court on appeal. The case on the "compactness" of the drawn districts is to be heard in August, 2017.

In 2015 when Brian took over as Executive Director the organization had 3500 members, today it has 50,000 and the expectation is that after the primary it will grow to 60,000.

He stated that the upcoming Governor's and Lt Governor's races are very important for redistricting reform because they will be in office in 2020 when the next census takes place and may control the 2021 redistricting. Brian stated that the question has changed from should there be redistricting reform to what kind of reform should there be. 60 out of 100 delegates in the House and 35 out of 40 Senators have said they support some kind of reform. Northam says reform is a top issue for him and while Gillespie has made no public statement he leans toward thinking that the status quo needs to change.

Brian then explained that a Constitutional Amendment will be needed and the steps needed to do that. He stated it's not impossible and that legislatures in NY, OH, & NE legislatures have voted for reform. He said that ONEVIRGINIA2021's proposal is for a 7-person commission (2 Republicans, 2 Democrats, and 3 independent members) but other configurations are possible. Bottom Line: it can happen in Virginia!

Submitted by Sue Worden

TRANSPARENCY VIRGINIA – Presenter Becky Bowers-Lanier

The group known as Transparency Virginia is a "collection of lobbyists and advocates (*including nonprofits such as the LWV*) monitoring transparency in the (*Virginia*) General Assembly." The volunteer group came together in 2014. <https://transparencylvirginia.wordpress.com/>

The group members report on how well Virginia lawmakers adhere to three recommended transparency practices. First, how well do lawmakers provide adequate notice of meetings and bill dockets? Second, how well do lawmakers provide an opportunity for bills to be heard and discussed in a public forum? Third, how often are lawmakers' votes on bills actually recorded in the public record so that voters can see how their elected officials voted on specific issues?

The organization's findings for the 2017 Legislative Session included: 87.9% of the bills in the House of Delegates that were defeated, were defeated by voice vote where it is not possible to know how a particular lawmaker voted; By way of contrast, 85% of the bills that were defeated in the state Senate recorded the specific vote of the lawmaker; More than half of the lawmakers signed a letter to the House and Senate Clerks asking for electronic voting machines to be installed into all committee and subcommittee meeting rooms.

Virginia's Legislative Information System, www@LIS.Virginia.gov, provides information about the dates of upcoming committee hearings.

Transparency Virginia stated that many transparency practices will be served when all bills receive public consideration, all voting on bills is conducted by electronic voting or a roll-call vote, the Senate approves a meeting notice system similar to that used by the House and Committee and subcommittee meetings are audio and video recorded and archived with adequate search capabilities.

*No author noted

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 61st UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW 61)

....Jill Follows, LWVUS delegate to CSW61; member LWVFA

The LWVUS sent 16 delegates to CSW61, held at UN headquarters in New York City in March 2017. This year's theme was "Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work." The meetings were held against

the backdrop of the feminization of poverty. More women than men live in poverty, women's work is undervalued and 23% of women earn less money than men who are performing the same work or work of equal value. Only 23% of elected leaders are women. Only 4% of CEO's of Fortune 500 Companies are women.

The Commission concluded that women's economic empowerment is essential for achievement of the goal of 50:50 economic parity between men and women worldwide by 2030. The Commission developed actions to strengthen women's collective voice, leadership and decision-making influence. Some actions are: Create new policies to uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value; Emphasize STEM programs in girls' education; Create more affordable child care services and early childhood education and elder care programs; Support programs that emphasize the equal sharing of responsibilities for family member care; Enact gender-sensitive national strategies to improve access to timely, affordable and quality health care systems for women and girls; Eliminate violence and sexual harassment against women and girls; Develop gender responsive strategies to mitigate climate change and extreme weather events that have a disproportionate impact on women; Measure the value of unpaid care and domestic work to determine its contribution to the national economy; Ensure that indigenous women have access to quality education, freedom from violence, meaningful participation in the economy and decision making at all levels of society.

Next year's Commission on the Status of Women, CSW62, will be held March 12, 2018 through March 23, 2018. Any interested League member is encouraged to contact me at UN@lwv-fairfax.org for additional information.

*No author noted

Voting Rights and Civil Rights in Virginia Breakout Session

Carol Noggle, LWV-VA & Claire Guthrie-Gastanaga, Virginia ACLU
Claire@acluva.org @changeservant (Twitter, facebook)

On 10 June 2017, Claire Guthrie-Gastanaga of the American Civil Liberties Union spoke to the LWV-VA about Voting Rights and Civil Rights in Virginia. The talk focused mainly on voter disenfranchisement, specifically reestablishment of voting rights and absentee voting. I have attached a voter toolkit published by the ACLU for citizens convicted of felonies wishing to have their right to vote reinstated. The main points of the breakout session are below:

- ACLU stance on voting: Voting is neither a privilege nor a punishment, it is the cornerstone of our democracy.
- 40% of people in jail are eligible to vote absentee. (i.e. their cases have not come up for trial, they have been convicted of misdemeanor DUI, etc.)
- 1/5 of Voting Age African American men in Virginia cannot currently vote.
- ACLU does not support the segregation of voting rights restoration based on violent and nonviolent offenses.
- There is an ACLU toolkit for citizens convicted of felonies wishing to have their right to vote reinstated available online (attached.)
- ACLU believes in no-excuses absentee voting (i.e. if anyone gets to vote absentee, everyone gets to vote absentee.) Currently, absentee voter rolls are public record. This means if a person applies to vote absentee they have to give the reason and this becomes a matter of public record. ACLU believes this impedes on a person's right to privacy. If absentee voting is offered in Virginia, all Virginia voters should have the option to vote absentee without being compelled to publicly disclose a reason for doing so.
- ACLU believes prisoners should not be barred from voting because when Virginia voting districts are drawn up, prison populations are counted as part of the voting population. Therefore, by not allowing prisoners to vote, their ability to vote is being counted but then denied.

- Q: What are the chances of raising the felony threshold in Virginia above \$200?
A: Police are not against it, but the merchants are. People will need to lobby for the change in order for it to occur. Other states are at \$1,000 or more. There are two merchant groups (one represents large merchants and one represents small merchants.) Data from states with thresholds of \$2,500 or more shows no change in the rate of theft over 10 years. This indicates that a low felony threshold (ex: \$200) does not deter crime.
- Q: Are sentencing guidelines set by a legislative body?
A: No, they are set by the judicial branch.

Submitted by Erica Hedrick

Resources: <http://www.lwv-va.org/felonrights.html>