

Page and Blais Farewell Thoughts: Stay Woke

[Lois]

The young pastor of my church, who has proved himself very culturally aware, recently worked a sermon around a term I hadn't heard before (not being all that culturally aware)—“STAY WOKE.” Even without knowing the background of the expression, I found it very compelling, like something I would want to do. It wasn't the same as “stay awake,” something I might urge my husband to do during a movie or a sermon. It seems a more powerful, more urgent.

As the sermon progressed, it became obvious to me that the invitation might be something that could be applied to the League of Women Voters of Virginia and everywhere. A little research led me to its apparent origins in the Black Lives Matter movement and, according to Google, the source of most knowledge, “instead of just being a word that signaled awareness of injustice or racial tension, it became a word of action. Activists were *woke* and called on others to *stay woke*.”

Doesn't that sound like the League of Women Voters to you, we activists are “woke” and we call on others to stay “woke.” It underlines beautifully our theme for this convention—Honoring our Legacy with Action.

Of course, the word *stay*, implies that we are already woke and I would like to claim that the during the past two years your state League has build on the legacy of state Boards of the past and

became even “woker.” (Yes, I know all you grammarians out there are worrying about turning a verb into an adjective. Just get over it for a few minutes!)

[Dianne]

Your convention program includes a report from us on the highlights of this board’s accomplishments. Areas covered include a significant increase in members and local Leagues, greatly increased efforts at varied and frequent statewide communication, efforts to share best practices among local leagues, LWVUS, and National Capital areas, collecting hard data to show how we increased the number of Leaguers storming the General Assembly this year. We also collected data on how many voters we registered, how many candidate events we hosted. And how many hits we had on VOTE411. We leveraged our influence by working closely with other progressive organizations. We oversaw the production of an impressive definitive statewide study on fracking. And through it all we held a number of successful statewide events such as the two Legislative Pre-sessions, the Women’s Legislative Round Tables and League Days at the GA, two workshops, a Council meeting and a Convention. All while moving from one state office location to another.

[Lois]

WOKE!!

[Dianne]

To highlight just one accomplishment on the list above, LWV-VA now has 1558 members and counting, an increase of 50+%. Washington County has been brought on as a full League and two Leagues-at-large, in Fredericksburg and Roanoke, are working toward fulfilling the requirements of full League-ship. Civic-minded people are seeing the League as an answer to the uneasiness that has gripped the country. People are worried about challenges to their voting rights, among other things, and see us as having the means (LEGACY and experience to take ACTION with them.

[Lois]

So what are Dianne's and my hopes for this League going forward?

We want us to stay WOKE!! How?

- 1) Keep on doing what we have been doing well, but do it even better.
- 2) Reach out to voters in underserved areas. We discovered from data collection that many of us are trying to register voters in areas where almost everyone is registered.
- 3) Turn registration events into full service voter information events. AND KEEP RECORDS OF THOSE REGISTERING AND THOSE SERVED.
- 4) Find ways to make candidates available to voters even if some refuse to come. COUNT THE NUMBER OF ATTENDEES. Learn how to use VOTE 411 and increase advertising for its use.

- 5) If you don't have them, set up websites and facebook pages. This is where our replacements are hanging out, folks. And don't let anyone unsubscribe from Mail Chimp or they are being cheated out of state and national connections.
- 6) Speaking of hanging out, experiment with proven ways of drawing in the young folks who are so eager right now to "do something." Talk to Falls Church about Sips and Civility.
- 7) Get even more people to Richmond during the GA, to workshops, to Council.
- 8) Find ways to encourage a more diversified leadership. The same people should not have to continue year after year.
- 9) And here is the kicker: INCREASE FUNDING. We discovered this year what a difference increased funding can make in efforts to advocate for our positions in the General Assembly. The grant we received allowed us to fund travel expenses and provide refreshments that helped to draw legislators and attendees. The state needs to increase its funding efforts but locals do too. None of us can count on the funding from dues to allow us to do what we need to do. Nor should we keep counting on our members to foot the whole bill. We provide a great service to America. We deserve community support. Funders demand something for their contributions and we need to be ready with facts and figures, or to use the business phrase, *metrics*. So set up some collection methods. And polish up your elevator speech.

We are on the move, we are woke, we just need to stay that way.

