League Lobby Day Plans Set for February 4

In this issue you will read about the upcoming League Lobby Day. You will hear about what Leaguers observed about Photo ID, what has been done with our Voter Protection Grant from the LWVUS Education Fund, some local League activities that deserve a state-wide mention, what happened at the WLRT Pre-session. You will hear what Carol Noggle, our Legislative Coordinator, and Anne Sterling, our President, are planning to emphasize as they tirelessly attend committee meeting after committee meeting before and during the General Assembly. You will learn that progress is being made in restoring felons’ civil rights, and a new League-led coalition called TransparencyVirginia has been formed with the goal of opening up the legislative process, especially in regards to the ever-important committee activities.

Embedded in the articles you will occasionally find a link to even more useful and eye-opening material. We urge you to follow those links as well. You might even find out what “fracking” is!

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President’s Message

Elisabeth Macnamara tells me recent research shows: when it comes to trustworthy information, many people trust LWV right after their own mothers! Though the League always cites sources, don’t ask me about that one . . . but it’s a charming thought.

The current state executive branch—like the previous administration—believes we’re an important ally. In the past month or two, various board members and I have sat in small meetings with the Secretary of Administration, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Attorney General of Virginia, and the Lieutenant Governor. The Governor expressly invited LWV-VA leaders to attend his press conference in Virginia Beach—and I will attend another gubernatorial press event—by invitation—tomorrow.

These matters are not conveyed to show how great your board is (though that is true!) Rather, they illustrate that our organization is respected for getting things done—by exerting genuine moral authority. That authority is based on hundreds of us, across Virginia, doing the research, looking for what needs doing, and making good on our responsibilities to fellow citizens. We earn this reputation every day, in every community where a local League exists . . .

The new organization OneVirginia2021 (for redistricting reform) has major League leadership. LWV has been represented on the central policy board since the group’s inception. The new 1VA office is just two doors away from the LWV-VA office—by choice. Our close connections with 1VA have become stronger as a number of local Leagues have hosted outstanding programs on redistricting. The new executive director and new legislative associate will both add further talent.

Another coalition, Transparency Virginia has come together in response to a clarion call from LWV. At the second meeting, members asked LWV to continue chairing the effort. The group’s first press conference took place in the House Briefing Room, just before the opening of session. This coalition of 17 organizations is dedicated to raising the standards of fair procedure in committee—not just most of the time . . . but all the time. They will document any lapses . . . diligently, and record them.

Lobby Day is February 4th this year . . . with our colleagues from NOW, AAUW and Women Matter. After lunch at the Tobacco Company, attendees are invited by the Lieutenant Governor to be his guests. Lieutenant Governor Northam and his staff will offer an overview of his duties and the special charges of his office—including his leadership of the Commonwealth Council on Children. This work capitalizes on his career as a pediatrician.

A Presidents’ Summit—for local League presidents (or their designees)—will be held in Richmond on March 12. This will be a time to exchange information about local problems and challenges . . . and the overall direction of LWV-VA. The board will be listening carefully to our local leaders—and it judges this event to be so important that hotel and some meals will be underwritten by the state League. More information will be forthcoming.

Our LWV State Convention will take place in Charlottesville on May 29 and 30. Please begin deciding whether your League will be submitting resolutions. To take full advantage of the event, you should do so! Soon your League will receive guidelines for choosing delegates. If you are not named this time, you should definitely consider attending as an alternate or observer.

Our liaison from the LWVUS Board, Peggy Appler from South Carolina, will be with us—and you will hear from other distinguished—and fascinating—speakers. The networking, the caucuses, the lively discussions, and election of a new board . . . this one will be memorable!

Ending with current news. . . please consult our website (www.lwv-va.org) for updated information on our legislative agenda at the 2015 session. This year we have two bills of our own—generated by our Working Group on Legislation: both concern voting. We have a further cache of bills on elections. And LWV-VA will be working closely with 1VA on seven different redistricting bills—every one better than the current system. Finally, we are cheering on LWV-RMA: they have received permission to lobby on our behalf—to get Virginia to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. We deserve this in our lifetime! We deserve it now!

Anne Sterling
League Lobby Day Scheduled For February 4 In Richmond

League Lobby Day is February 4 with the opening session from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The location is the General Assembly Building, Senate Conference Room, 3rd Floor West. Legislators join the group and talk about their priorities for the session.

At 9:30 p.m. members are encouraged to seek out their representatives, perhaps make an appointment for later in the morning if a legislator is tied up, and talk to as many as you can about issues of concern to you. Often those issues will have come up at the earlier forum. AAUW will be joining us for this forum, along with NOW, Women Matter, and others. LWV-VA has moderated this WLRT session for years. The legislative sessions will start at noon and you are invited to attend as the League will be recognized. (There is a cafeteria on the 6th floor, a great place to gather for coffee and breakfast before the session.)

Participants are invited to join other attendees and members of other organizations for lunch. This is a good time to get to learn more about these organizations who have similar values as the League.

**Schedule of Events**

7:30 - 8:30 A.M. - Meet for breakfast - 6th floor cafeteria of the General Assembly Building

8:30 - 9:30 A.M. - The Women’s Legislative Roundtable - 3rd Floor West Conference Room

9:30 - 11:30 A.M. - Briefing and talking points by LWV leaders. Visit your Legislators (Make appointments ahead) Attend a House or Senate committee meeting

11:30 A.M. - Leave General Assembly Building and walk to Capitol, across the lawn. Go to House or Senate Gallery antechambers to await admission to Gallery

12:00 NOON - Be in Senate or House Gallery to be introduced as LWV-VA members

12:45 - 2:00 P.M. - Lunch - Walk to The Tobacco Warehouse, 123 East Carey Street. During lunch enjoy networking. Share insights from this legislative session.

2 P.M. - Lieutenant Governor Northam and his staff have

Women’s Legislative Roundtable Follows on Succeeding Wednesdays

This informational forum is where legislators and other non-profit organizations talk about pending legislation and issues of concern. Sessions are sponsored and moderated by the League of Women Voters of Virginia (LWV-VA). Women’s Legislative Roundtable (WLRT) meetings are held at 8:30 AM every Wednesday during the Virginia General Assembly Session, starting the Wednesday after the General Assembly convenes in January.

Meetings traditionally have been held on Capitol Square at the General Assembly Building. See the LWV-VA Calendar Tab for 2015 WLRT dates and location. Leaguers are encouraged to attend at least one session, followed by meetings with their legislators.

If you cannot make it Feb. 4, the following Wednesdays will also include a WLRT session, same time, same place: Jan. 21, Jan. 28, Feb. 11, and Feb. 18. The state League will pay for two rooms, double occupancy (or half the cost if you do not want to share), for each of these sessions at the Hilton Garden Inn for the first people to ask. Email Brenda Carswell, bcarsy@verizon.net if you would like one of these.

**What Do I Talk About?**

First, be yourself. Talk about those voter protection issues that you care about. Legislators are regular people like you and they want your opinion on issues regardless of whether they agree with you or not.

You might develop some of your talking points from the list of subjects below. Some have links to longer articles elsewhere on the website.

- Redistriction
- Human Trafficking
- Photo ID
- Felon’s Rights
Picture Gallery From Last Year’s League Lobby Day, Richmond, VA

Leaguers meet with Senator Barker

Standing room only

Hmm. What am I supposed to do now?

Session leaders - Noggle & Sterling

President Anne Sterling and participants in Senate Gallery

Representative of Each Group - (l to r) Leslie Tourigny, AAUW; Elaine Head, LWV-VA, Marj Signer, NOW; and Pat Fishback, Women Matter

The Tobacco Warehouse Restaurant

Forty attended the luncheon

www.lwv-va.org
The League of Women Voters of Arlington and of Falls Church join with the American Association of University Women of Falls Church to present a forum and discussion of human trafficking in Northern Virginia.

Human trafficking is modern slavery. Worldwide, there are more than 21 million incidents of human trafficking each year. Human trafficking produces more than $30 billion in illegal revenues and is now the second largest criminal enterprise. Northern Virginia is a hub of human trafficking due to Dulles International Airport and Route I-95 as well as being a major metropolitan area. To learn more about this tragedy in our own area and what you can do to fight it, please join us for:

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING: HERE AND NOW!**  
**YES! IT’S IN OUR BACKYARD!**  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2015  
3:00 – 4:30 P.M.

The Falls Church Community Center Art Room  
223 Little Falls Street, Falls Church, VA 22046

Panel Includes:  
Detective Bill Woolf, Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force  
Representative, Courtney’s House  
Lee Hopkins, Tahirih Justice Center

For more information, visit  
[www.fallschurchlwv.org](http://www.fallschurchlwv.org)  
[www.lwv-arlingtonva.org](http://www.lwv-arlingtonva.org)  
[www.fallschurcharea-va.aauw.net](http://www.fallschurcharea-va.aauw.net)

We extend our sincere thanks to the following sponsors of this forum:  
_Arlington County Commission on the Status of Women_  
_Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Zeta Chi Omega Chapter®_  
_Fairfax County Commission for Women_  
_Northern Virginia Urban League Young Professionals Network_  
_The Northern Virginia Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority, Inc.®_  
_Northern Virginia Urban League_
State League Announces Legislative Priorities for Upcoming General Assembly Session

By Carol Noggle, LWV-VA Legislative Coordinator

In 2015 the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act should remind us that we need to continue to be vigilant to protect voting rights – even 50 years after August 6th, 1965.

Will we let Virginia regress?

Just recently, in this Century, since the signing of a Photo ID bill in 2013 the LWV-VA has had to work diligently to prevent implementation of regulations that would create unfair burdens for voters and would reduce voter participation. From advocating to eliminate the felony statement on the photo ID application, to requesting adequate funding for public announcements, to making a multitude of statements on the Regulatory Townhall in opposition to requiring an unexpired Photo ID, to distributing thousands of cards with Photo ID instructions to voters before Election Day 2014, the League and our partners have worked tirelessly throughout the Commonwealth for Voter Protection.

Will we let voting rights regress during the 2015 General Assembly?

No, because we have priorities to stand behind and will guard against unfair legislation as well as support legislation that provides fairness.

Our primary legislative priority continues to be Voter Protection.

1. We will support legislation that will
   ➢ Define “valid” to allow the use of expired Photo IDs
   ➢ Expand eligible Photo IDs to include private high school IDs
   ➢ Prevent erroneous removal of eligible voters from rolls by requiring a careful voter list maintenance process with a 90-day deadline prior to any election.
   ➢ Allow for No-excelent absentee voting
   ➢ Allow for convenient Vote Centers to help decrease the cost of and increase turnout at primary elections
   ➢ Increase voter registration by including 17 year old citizens
   ➢ Restore voting rights of felons automatically

2. We will oppose legislation that would
   ➢ Require a photo ID for an absentee ballot application
   ➢ Require proof of citizenship to register
   ➢ Require proof of residency to register
   ➢ Decrease the days or hours of voting

3. We will support our own LWV-VA bills designed to assure more convenience and fairness for voters:
   ➢ The “Head of the Line” bill will provide easier poll access and more convenience for voters over age 75 or with physical disabilities when there is a line at the polling place. The bill is HB 1327 [http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?151+sum+HB1327: Delegate Filler-Corn is the Chief Patron].
   ➢ Counting prisoners at their home district, not at the prison address, in 2020 is designed to assure that voters in local districts have equal voting power; that is, LWV-VA opposes prison gerrymandering. This bill is HB 1465 and SB 765. In the House: [http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?151+sum+HB1465: House patron is Delegate Rasoul; Chief co-patron is Delegate Albo; Delegate Hope is listed as a Patron. In the Senate: [http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?151+sum+SB765: Senator Edwards is the Chief Patron].
Proper voter list maintenance procedures will prevent removal of voters improperly and not within 90 days of any election. Still awaiting a filing confirmation from Senator McEachin’s office. Not listed as filed yet. The final date for filing all bills is January 8.

Our second legislative priority is to support a fair decennial redistricting plan.

1. LWV-VA will advocate for passage of a bill in 2015 to provide for a constitutional amendment to require a bipartisan reapportionment commission so that the same bill can be approved in 2016 and have the amendment on the ballot in the November 2016 election.

2. LWV-VA’s criteria for fair redistricting includes districts that have equal population and are contiguous, compact, that honor natural geographic boundaries and jurisdictional boundaries, are competitive and consider communities of interest.

Leaguers Report on Photo ID Experiences

Compiled by Lois Page, Voter Coordinator

[Ed note: following the Nov. 2014 election in Virginia, when photo ID was first required of voters, we sent out a request for what they observed regarding the effects of Photo ID on the election from our many members who are involved with voter protection activities. Most of the responses indicated few problems with the process. Many praised the work of the registrars and election officers for their outreach efforts. What follows is a selection of some of the responses. A complete list may be found on our website: [www lwv va.org/files/advocacy 2015_12_01 localexperiences page. docx]

From Kathleen Henry, LWV Fairfax area:
[Following a description—reproduced on the website—of the extensive efforts volunteers at Greenspring, a large retirement community, put in to make sure everyone was informed and supplied with “valid” Photo IDs, Kathleen reports what follows.] “I was an election officer on Nov. 4 and I was very anxious to see, after all the effort that had been put into getting everyone an ID, how many residents would come without an acceptable form. Out of 1224 voters, 4 did not have what they needed...2 men had very old passports, 1 man had a very old license and one woman had perfect credentials - but from South Carolina where she used to live. Not bad, I’d say...all our efforts were worth it.”

“But not everywhere is Greenspring where we were able to bring considerable effort on many levels to bear on the problem. I’ll be interested in hearing the League’s report about how things went across the state.”

From Althea Johnson, LWV Falls Church
“I think people just did not come to the polling place if they had no photo id. Good states encourage voting by making it easier—not harder; it does not take much to discourage people from making the effort if they feel unwanted. I think it might be worth it to canvas certain neighborhood for people with no photo id and take them to get it if they are willing.”

From Patricia McGrady, LWV Arlington
“I drove voters to the polls for my party…. I asked at each polling place if they had had any problem with lack of photo id, and found none…. but I heard a report from our registrar afterwards that there were some, but no clear description of exactly how many and the outcome of each…. I was even on the driver list to drive these provisional voters to the registrar’s office to get a photo-id if they needed it, and to legalize their vote, but I never was called....

“I would like to suggest that the Virginia League ask all state registrars to report publically and in detail all of the cases that they had, and the outcome of each…. I think this is the only way to get the actual facts, which I think is critical…. in addition, I think it would be valuable to document the outreach activities in each jurisdiction before the election, and the results of that…. I know our registrar’s office was offering photo ids for free weeks in advance of the election.....and I heard that our registrar also sent staff out to senior residences and issued photo ids on the spot…. but I have no idea of the details of how many places, and how
many ids issued…. again I think it is important to publicize the facts, which might also encourage other jurisdictions to follow this example….

“I have long been interested in doing the same thing for ALL provisional ballots at all elections…. report on how many, the reasons, and the outcomes…. I think this is a very murky area that the League is ideally suited to investigate…. “

Alison Wilson, LWV Montgomery County and Elections Official

“My experience this year in Precinct A1 - Montgomery County was that the polling went surprisingly quite smoothly. Most voters had both a photo ID + voting card to provide, they were unsure so brought both. A drivers license was provided most often, but it should be noted that to get to our precinct polling place, transportation would be necessary for most voters - it is located a few miles out of town (Blacksburg).

I felt that our local registrar’s office did a good job in attempts to expedite the checking in (poll book) process. Particularly notable was the effort to be flexible with middle + last names of women married or recently divorced. Also with address changes within the same precinct.

There were no provisional ballots in our precinct linked to photo ID. …I was anticipating problems that did not arise at A1 Slussers Chapel.”

From Glenn Marshall, Assoc. for Manufacturing Excellence (not a League member):

“We should make voting as easy as possible while insuring every registered voters has access to a Photo ID to function in society, as well as vote. This process is not intended to prevent citizens from voting but protect their right to vote while insuring that only eligible citizens votes get counted. Be interesting to see how many people got turned away? If any? ID’s are not the issue it is who is eligible to vote and does not have ID to vote?”

From Carol Weber, LWV Alexandria

“I work at the polls in Alexandria. I checked in voters nearly all day and everyone I and a coworker checked in had a photo ID. The funny thing is that even though the names matched hardly anyone looked like their photo! Quite ironic.”

From Gail Schweickert : LWV Richmond Metro

“I was a officer of elections at my poll in Midlothian, VA. I checked in voters with our computers for Chesterfield County. The only problem I had was a voter with an Arizona drivers license but registered in the correct polling place in VA. She was allowed to vote by provisional ballot. She had always voted in VA in the past. She has two homes, one in VA and one in AZ. “

From Margaret Hoover, LWV Charlottesville

“At the age of 93, my mother moved from California to Virginia to be nearer to family. After falling and breaking her hip, she uses a walker. At 80 pounds, she is frail and has difficulty standing for long periods of time. As she prides herself in her consistent voting record, we went to the Department of Motor Vehicles in Pantops (near Charlottesville, VA) to get a Virginia ID card. We were armed with the necessary documentation necessary to allow her to vote. She had her birth certificate, Social Security card and statements, Medicare card, lease agreement and her California Driver’s License, which had expired.”

[Ms. Hoover then details the many difficulties she and her mother, primarily because of a name being misspelled-- in a compelling narrative that did have a happy ending; she was allowed to vote because she had a passport. The entire story is on the website.]

She ends with the following: ” Common sense should prevail. I am certain that in 1920 there was not the awareness for the need for accuracy that there is today. Through her years, she was able to obtain a Driver’s License, a Social Security card and a Medicare card that did not match her birth certificate. So why not a Virginia Photo ID? …I do worry about the elderly who may not have transportation, access to their birth certificates or other documentation needed. My mother was lucky that she had a passport.)”

From Frances Schutz, LWV [Fluvanna County]

“….We had only 2 people who showed up without proper ID – one of these was a woman with a GA driver’s license, and other ID with her Fluvanna address. She was willing to drive the mile to the registrar’s office to get her temporary ID, & returned to vote. Another woman left without voting, and didn’t return. This is a very small percentage of those voting. While I would have preferred no one being turned away, the dire scenario painted by some simply did not occur in our county, I believe.

From Walter Van Eck, Portsmouth

“….at my polling location, where all but two voters were African-American, the voters all arrived by private car, which meant that, with the possible exception of the very occasional passenger, they all necessarily had a VA driver’s license. It became clear from my exit polling that these voters had already been producing their drivers’ licenses in previous elections, where ID was required even though it
had not been photo ID. Thus, they did not experience any change in their personal voting experience.

“I have to wonder if this is the result of voting in an off-year election, where relatively few voters vote and where those that do tend to have automobiles. I think it is likely the Presidential election years that may motivate voters to come out who do not have automobiles for easy access to the polling locations and, therefore, are more likely not to have drivers’ licenses. Furthermore, inner city polling locations are likely to have more voters who do not own automobiles and therefore are less likely to have photo ID than non-inner city locations such as the one I was monitoring.”

**Effect of Photo ID in the Virginia 2014 General Election:**

*a Still Unanswered Question*

By Therese Martin, PAVP Coordinator

When LWV-VA board members didn’t see many comments about the effect of photo ID implementation for the 2014 general elections in the Virginia press clippings that many of us receive from VaNews, we turned to our members asking for their comments and opinions. Some of their comments are included elsewhere in this issue of the *Virginia Voter*. The result? We still don’t know, but guess that it was probably less significant than was the case in other states such as Texas, Kansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania or North Carolina. It is my personal belief that was due to the efforts of the newly established Virginia Department of Elections to make the free Virginia voter photo ID as available as time and money would allow.

Nationally, there are conflicting opinions on the effect of photo ID on the election turnout. I read several of these when preparing to write this article. [Try googling voter turnout in the 2014 elections!]

While national voter turnout in 2014 was the worst in a midterm election since 1942, Virginia had even lower voter turnouts in the midterm elections of 2002 and 1998. Likely reasons for this indicate why photo ID may not be the only culprit in decreasing turnout. In Virginia’s 2002 general election, there was no major party contest for the U.S. Senate seat on the ballot and there were six congressional districts with no major party competition. In 1998, there was no Senate seat on the ballot and seven of the eleven congressional districts had no major party contests.

In the 2014 elections, the total vote for congressional candidates in two districts without major party competition was 40,000 less than the turnout four years earlier when there was major party competition. One of these districts was the majority minority 3rd congressional district where the congressional vote dropped by over 16,000 from two years earlier. Yes, the effect of Virginia’s gerrymandered districts plays an important role in our low voter turnout, along with voter suppression measures such as photo ID.

However, one cannot overlook the reports (see especially those from the Brennan Center) that, in general, photo ID laws such as that implemented in Virginia for the first time last November, generally reduce turnout by about 2.4%. A GAO report also attributed declines of over 2 percent in voter turnout in 2012 in several states to voter ID laws. Interesting, but probably serendipitous, the Virginia turnout in November 2014 was 2.4 percentage points below that of 2010.

A recent report issued by the Center for American Progress discusses voter turnout and the effect of photo ID laws on low-income and African American voters, noting that they are most likely to lack the required identification. Based on what we have heard, I would add the elderly to the list of those most affected by photo ID requirements. In addition to lacking the identification, these groups often lack the access to information sources about obtaining a free Virginia voter photo ID or the ability to get to an elections office to obtain one.

The Department of Elections and, based on reports we have seen, probably most of Virginia’s jurisdictions made every effort to provide the free Virginia voter photo ID to all registered voters; however, too few took advantage of the opportunity. By election day, only 3200 registered voters had requested an ID from voter registrars; this number increased to slightly more than 4000 by January 5th.
The responses to our request for comments that are included in this Voter indicate that those few cases where the lack of a photo ID resulted in a loss of the right to vote affected primarily elderly voters, including those with expired IDs. This was certainly the case of the only broadly publicized situation, i.e. Virginia Whittaker. What we don’t know is how many more there are out there whom we haven’t heard from or about.

Unfortunately, the result of the 2013 Supreme Court decision in the Shelby case which invalidated core protections in the Voting Rights Act, was as we predicted at the time. What we need to do now is continue our efforts to: prevent further voter suppression legislation; support proposals to eliminate or lessen its effects; monitor implementation at both the state and local levels; and make new efforts to reach those who need to obtain a free Virginia voter photo ID.

But we also need to increase our usual voter service and get out the vote activities. According to Department of Elections’ reports, the voter turnout in 2014 was 41.6 percent of registered voters. Do you know what it was in 2011, the last election year similar to that which we will have this year? 28.61 percent! League members – and others – we have a lot of work to do.

Pre-Session Convenes Civic Activists

By Lois Page, Voter Coordinator

Sixteen representatives of state-wide advocacy organizations plus three state officials shared their hopes and goals for the upcoming legislative session at LWV-VA's Pre-Session Women’s Legislative Round Table last month in the General Assembly Building in Richmond. The League has been sponsoring this gathering for a number of years. Participants were introduced by LWV-VA President Anne Sterling.

Ric Brown, Virginia Secretary of Finance, warned that everything that happens in the General Assembly this year will be affected by the 322 million shortfall that existed in the state budget at the time he presented. Revoking tax preferences and cutting transportation, child welfare, mental health, higher education tuition assistance, campus security are all on the table. Revenue can turn on a dime.

Secretary of Education Anne Holton wants to eradicate the education achievement gap, reform the school accountability process by rewarding schools that foster creativity, deep thinking and research, make more connections with the work force, and address sexual violence on campus.

Levar Stoney, Secretary of the Commonwealth, is promoting energetically the restoration of civil rights for felons, saying it should be automatic for non-violent felons who have served their sentences. As it is, the Governor has instituted a number of reforms, has restored the rights of 4800 people so far, has reduced the waiting time to 3 years, and has designated a number of drug offenses as non-violent. (See article elsewhere in this Voter on restoring felons’ rights.) Mr. Stoney also urged participants to volunteer for the number of state-wide boards and commissions.

The various advocacy organizations included a number of long-time League coalition partners. AAUW is pushing legislation to protect victims of human trafficking. Ben Greenberg of Virginia Organizing urged everyone to challenge injustice by advocating, writing letters to the editor, attending meetings. Andy Goddard of Virginia Center for Public Safety pointed out that Virginia is now #2 in the country for gun trafficking. Guns, he said, are more of a defining element in domestic violence than mental health. Jill Hankin of the Virginia Poverty Law Center has concerns for various issues affecting low income people such as predatory lending and lack of health care. She said the lack of Medicaid expansion in Virginia affects everything. ”We are forfeiting 2 billion a year.”

Other speakers generally had concerns about the underserved populations in Virginia: the under-insured, those lacking retirement income, volunteer caregivers, the under-housed and fed, those facing unjust laws, same sex couples still facing discrimination, the mentally ill, the undocumented, those seeking contraceptive equity.

The luncheon following the morning session allowed for people concerned about the various issues raised to do some serious networking. Carol Noggle, LWV-VA Legislative Coordinator and Brenda Carswell, LWV-VA Arrangements Chair, were commended for their efforts to gather all the participants and arrange all the meeting details.
Panelists Offer Insights on Integrity, Redistricting, Improving the Election Process

By Lois Page, LWV-VA Voter Coordinator

Two sets of expert panelists treated those attending the LWV-VA Pre-session Luncheon to a range of points of view on issues of concern to Leaguers. The first panel dealt primarily with the recent convening of the Governor’s Integrity Commission, the second with ways to improve Virginia’s process of conducting elections.

“A New Virginia Way in 2015: Really?” was the title of the first panel and featured Viola Baskerville, former member of the House of Delegates, an impressive array of other organizations, and a member of the new commission. She explained that the commission, whose first report is on the Governor’s website, has five area of responsibility:

- ethics oversight and enforcement
- loans and gifts
- conflict or interest
- disclosure requirements
- post public service restrictions

The commission will be able to vet ethical issues, investigate, issue civil penalties and refer criminal case, conduct random audits, and act on applications for waivers. She said they will need appropriations to hire staff. Their primary purpose is not punitive.

Ms. Baskerville included insight to some of their work so far. They want to regulate intangible gifts as well as tangible, expand the definitions of conflict of interest to immediate family members and close business associates, enforce a one year ban on post service lobby and extend this to cabinet members.

Former Delegate Shannon Valentine passionately promoted another aspect of the Integrity Commission, the need for redistricting reform. Since 40% of our electorate identify themselves as independent, they are left out of the current redistricting process entirely. She claimed, “The momentum is with us” and told the story of a 92 year-old of her acquaintance who will contribute $50 a month to RD efforts until he dies because “this is so important to our country.” Ms. Valentine is on the Advisory Board of OneVirginia2021. They plan to prepare a documentary to distribute around the state to educate the electorate of the need for reform. “Better is possible,” she says.

“Virginia’s Elections,” the second panel, was arranged by PAVP coordinator Therese Martin as part of a grant by LWVUS Education Fund. The new Commissioner of the Department of Elections, Edgardo Cortez, explained the new elections organization plan for the state. The State Board of Elections, all volunteers, writes election regulations, the new Department of Elections implements them.

Cortez outlined his goals as follows:

- Increase the transparency of how elections are administered
- Increase access to voting
- Increase funding for election administration (He pointed out that recent cuts have had a critical effect on smaller electoral boards.)

Concerning the most recent election:

- He was proud that the department was able to provide the required Photo IDs by way of an in-house system that saved a lot of money.
- He was pleased that they were able to make acquiring the IDs as accessible as possible by having no cut off dates for application, and issuing temporary IDs which could be used to make provisional ballots count. (500 IDs were issued on election day.)
- He has a concern about the old voting machines and the lack of replacement money.

Renee Andrews, long-time member of the Falls Church Electoral Board, shared some of the complications attached to elections. Local governments have to foot the bill for recounts when the difference is under 1% of those voting. Few localities budget for this but still must find the funds. Another problem, 19 election localities are open only 3 days a week.

Regarding how election oversight is organized, she pointed out that General Registrars are paid, some have staffs. Electoral Boards are part timers and pay ranges from $1500 to $9000. State reimbursement has gone down but many changes have complicated things, such as Motor Voter, HAVA, overseas voters, the need for more computer literacy. The boards have to recruit election officials, provide and maintain equipment, oversee the Registrar, set up a security plan and an emergency plan. She said we now have 5.5 million voters with only 133 people overseeing the elections.

Tracy Howard is the General Registrar for the City of...
Radford. He began by saying that a court battle is coming because the support for elections by the state is too low. People are being disenfranchised by part time Registrars who are making 60% of what the lowest paying states pay. They are working with aspects of job descriptions from 1880. “Free elections are not free,” he added. And all elections are local. “People must mobilize who care.”

His organization, Voter Registrar’s Association of Virginia, has three bills they are advocating:

- Move the June primary to the 3rd Tuesday rather than the 2nd to avoid school sessions
- Increase the upper number for recording write-in votes to cut down on needless paper work.
- Amend the special election law to reduce their number; push them to the next general election more often. (Montgomery County had one precinct with 3 voters in the last special election.)

New Group on Transparency to Hold Press Conference

We the undersigned advocacy and non-profit groups are pleased to announce the formation of Transparency Virginia (TV).

Transparency Virginia believes the legislative process in Virginia must be as open and transparent to the public as possible.

Our General Assembly has a proud tradition of service to the people of the Commonwealth; however, due to the brevity of the legislative session, best practices respecting public accountability and participation are sometimes shortchanged.

We therefore request committee and subcommittee chairs in particular, and all legislators in general, to pay special attention to the three areas TV will be monitoring during the 2015 General Assembly session.

- Meeting notices: Notice should give the public adequate time to attend and/or give testimony
- Consideration: All of a subcommittee’s assigned bills should be heard before the end of its last meeting, both before and after crossover and before session adjourns.
- Votes: Sub/committee votes should be recorded – by show of hands or roll call – on all votes, including votes not to recommend and included in the Legislative Information System.

We ask each legislator to support these best practices to enhance transparency in the legislative process. Such practices belong within the broader category of the highest ethical standards of government.

Transparency Virginia will hold a press conference Tuesday, Jan 13, at 11a.m. in the House Briefing Room on the first floor of the General Assembly Building. Legislators and the public are invited to attend.
Governor McAuliffe Announces the Restoration of Civil and Voting Rights to Over 5,100 Virginians

~ Application for more serious offenders has been reduced from 13 pages to one page and no longer includes burdensome requirements ~

RICHMOND Governor McAuliffe announced that Virginia has restored the civil and voting rights of over 5,100 ex-offenders, more than any other governor has done in just one year. Additionally, the governor announced major changes to the restoration of rights application process for offenders of more serious crimes, including shortening the application from 13 pages to just one page and removing burdensome requirements such as notarization and letters to the governor.

“Today marks an important milestone in Virginia history”, stated Governor Terry McAuliffe at the First Baptist Church in south Richmond. “I have always believed that people who have served their time and paid their debts to society should have the opportunity to be contributing members of society again. By providing Virginia former offenders with a second chance, we can reduce recidivism, increase participation in our democratic processes, and build a new Virginia economy.” Governor McAuliffe also personally gave three former offenders grant orders that restored their civil and voting rights at the event.

Secretary of the Commonwealth Levar Stoney continued, “while Virginia has traditionally been one of the most restrictive states in restoring ex-offenders civil and voting rights, this administration has focused on reducing burdens for those who deserve a second chance. This announcement builds upon the progress our administration made earlier this year in streamlining the restoration of rights processes and will provide more Virginians with pathways to success. “

Governor McAuliffe announced in May of this year significant changes to the restoration of rights processes, including moving all drug-related offenses into the non-violent category and reducing the waiting period for more serious offenders to get their rights restored from five to three years.

Virginia is one of twelve states that have the most restrictive restoration of rights processes and prohibits voting and civil rights even after a person has served his or her sentence and is no longer on probation or parole, unless approved by the Governor.

The steps Governor McAuliffe has taken this year aim to reduce recidivism and felony disenfranchisement in Virginia, which currently ranks the fourth highest in the nation. However, according to the Virginia Department of Elections, 71% of Virginians who have had their rights restored this year are already registered to vote.

Speaking about the announcement, Delegate Peter Farrell (R-Henrico) stated, “I am glad to see restoration remains a strong focus of the administration. This is important work for our commonwealth. We want people to rejoin society and participate in a positive manner and this step can help in that process.”

Senator Mamie Locke (D-Hampton) added, “Today’s announcement represents a positive step forward for the Commonwealth of Virginia. I commend Governor McAuliffe for his hard work, dedication, and leadership. He is a strong believer in the idea that once you’ve paid your debt to society, you should be able to participate in the civic process, including voting.”

NOTES:
1. Volunteer opportunities to assist with Restoration of Rights exist in the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Contact: Anne Forsythe, Tel 804-692-2586, E-Mail: anne.forsythe@governor.virginia.gov
2. Local leagues - please indicate if you are working with local re-entry councils.

Congressman Bobby Scott Responds to Governor’s Announcement: Adds Striking Statistics

If there is one collateral consequence to a conviction that most people do know, it is the fact that in almost every state, a felony conviction results in loss of the right to vote. While most states restore the right to vote after completion of the sentence, in a handful of states, including the Commonwealth of Virginia, restoration of voting rights comes only by pardon or gubernatorial act. To read the full text of his statement visit our website at <http://www.lwv-va.org/files/announcement_2015_12_01_scottonfelons.pdf>
News From National . . .

Webinar on Program Planning Scheduled

The LWVUS Program Planning and Support Committee is a new committee which expands the work of the Program Planning Committee to the entire biennium, not just the months leading up to convention.

Plans are underway for the Program Support and Planning Committee Chair, Barbara Zia, and Advocacy Chair, Chris Carson, to hold a webinar on January 21 at 3pm ET (2pm CT, 1pm MT, 12pm PT) on the basics of the League’s program process. The webinar is designed to help Leagues understand League program from A to Z, including how to use national positions to take action locally. We believe this webinar will be a good way for League members who are unfamiliar with the program process to learn the basics and for seasoned League members to refresh their knowledge.

Registration Link: <https://events-na4.adobeconnect.com/content/connect/c1/831402129/en/events/event/shared/default_template_simple/event_landing.html?scoid=1204427530>

Virginia Leaguers Making Progress on Suffragist Memorial Goal

LWV-VA members from around the state have succeeded in contributing three quarters of the amount needed to have “The League of Women Voters of Virginia” inscribed on the Donor Wall of the Turning Point Suffragist Memorial.

The garden-like memorial, which tells the story of the long slog to voting rights for women, is slated to be built in Occoquan Regional Park in southern Fairfax County.

The site was chosen because of one of the major turning points in the campaign, the imprisonment and torture of women for picketing the White House. The women were jailed at the Lorton Workhouse which is next door to the park site. (The story of this imprisonment is told in the HBO film “Iron Jawed Angels” which many Leaguers have viewed.) The resulting publicity helped the final push to Congressional passage of the 19th Amendment.

Virginia Leaguers have either donated or joined Turning Point for a grand total of $753 out of the $1000 needed to reach Donor Wall status. Leaguers can learn more about the project or how to either donate or become a member by going to <http://www.suffragistmemorial.org> LWV Fairfax Area was one of the founding organizations for the memorial and continues as one of its partners.

VOTE411 Use Increased in Virginia in 2014

By Sue Worden, LWV-VA Voters Service Director

For the 2nd year LWV-VA fully funded local Leagues’ participation in VOTE411 for the 2014 November election, using the system to produce Voter Guides for US House of Representatives, and US Senate races. The candidates’ responses to local League-developed questions were available to any voter throughout the Commonwealth.

A review and analysis of citizens’ use of the VOTE411 system in Virginia indicated that the number of citizens visiting the site increased over usage in 2013. While exact numbers are hard to come by, there were voters who visited the 411 site in all parts of the Commonwealth with the most usage in the heavily populated areas of northern Virginia, the Richmond metro area and the Norfolk/Hampton Roads/Virginia Beach areas.

Thanks to all Leagues that participated for getting the word out and for inputting all the data to make VOTE411 a success. With this background and with 2015 being a huge election year with all 140 General Assembly seats in play, the LWV-VA board voted at its last board meeting to invest again in VOTE411 in 2015.

The state League will fund local Leagues’ participation and each local League can therefore use the system for any state or local races they may have in 2015. The cost to the state League will be substantial, so each League should start planning their use of the system now. You might want to do voters guides for your local elections as well as the November General Assembly races.
Local League News . . .

[Ed. note: The Virginia Voter would like to include more news about local League activities. We included a survey last spring but would like to include your news in every Voter issue.]

Three Issues from Fairfax Area

LWV Fairfax Area has published in recent months three studies that their program chairs, Judy Helein and Karole McKalip, feel have statewide implications. The complete studies will be posted on the website but we are providing a hint at the coverage. We urge you to check out these discussions of significant issues to Leaguers on our website.

Firearm Safety

This article (http://www.lwv-vt.org/files/studies_2014_12_01_firearmsafety_helein.pdf), dated February 2015, is entitled “Improving Firearm Safety in Virginia” by the Firearms Safety Committee of LWVFA. It begins: “For the third year in a row, more Virginians died due to firearms than traffic accidents. While no law can prevent every firearm death, there are key areas in which Virginia’s laws could be improved to help significantly lower the risk of death by firearm.”

This is the third article in a series that concentrated on the fact that firearms are the method used for the vast majority of both suicides and homicides. Part I, dated June 2014, <http://www.lwv-fairfax.org/files/2014_June_Voter.pdf> examined the legal framework by which firearms are governed in Virginia. Part II, dated September 2014, <http://www.lwv-fairfax.org/files/2014_sept_voter.pdf> discussed the use of firearms in Fairfax County and the local impact of state and national laws. Both emphasize firearm safety.

Hydraulic Fracturing

This article, first published in LWVFA’s October 2014 Voter and since updated, explains exactly what “fracking” is and details some of the arguments pro and con. It provides extensive source material as well. This issue is likely to appear in upcoming Virginia legislative sessions. Maryland recently decided to allow fracking but with some very stringent restrictions. We all will be better off having some facts about this issue. LWV-VA has no specific position on fracking except what might be inferred from its “Water Supply and Distribution” positions. <http://www.lwv-vt.org/files/studies_hydraulic_fracking_lwv-fa_2015_08_01.pdf>

Human Trafficking

A position on human trafficking was adopted by concurrence with a position developed by LWV New Jersey at the June national convention. Leagues will be receiving more information from LWVUS sometime in the next two years, but Leagues in Virginia, in coalition with a number of other large, mostly women’s organizations are getting a head start. Information about a large forum in northern Virginia appears elsewhere in this Voter. Meanwhile you can gather insight about the problem nationwide by reading this edited version, published in November of 2014 in LWVFA’s Voter, of what the New Jersey League distributed and used to convince an entire convention. Fairfax will be publishing a study of local trafficking information later this year. <http://www.lwv-vt.org/files/studies_2015_08_01_human Trafficking_lwv-fa.pdf>

LWV Montgomery County Hosts Redistricting Panel

The Montgomery County LWV will be giving a program January 26, 7 pm, at the Blacksburg Town Council Chambers titled, “Redistricting: Fostering or Stifling Competitive Elections? “ Dwayne Yancey, Editorial Page Editor of The Roanoke Times will be the Moderator. Panelists will be: former delegate James Shuler who was the patron of nonpartisan redistricting legislation for almost every GA session in the last decade of his tenure in the House of Delegates and Professor Jason Kelly, Political Science, Virginia Tech, who is an expert on Congressional elections. That program will be video-taped and put on YouTube.

LWV Williamsburg Hosts Great Decisions Discussion on Russia

[Ed. Note: Williamsburg President Linda Rice reports that Larry Wilkerson is one of the speakers for Great Decisions, sponsored by LWV-WA. Great Decisions is America’s largest discussion program on world affairs. Each year, eight topics are chosen by a panel of experts from the Foreign Policy Association. The event will be held at the Williamsburg Library Theater, each Tuesday (one exception) at 10:30am. Single tickets are available at the door. Go to the LWV-WA website for more information. Mr. Wilkerson sent the following as a preview of the discussion he will lead on February 10.

To Russia, With….Regrets?

By Lawrence Wilkerson*

Today’s fractious U.S. relationship with Russia has several causes. Vladimir Putin is one of them, but not so much as many suppose. Without a series of U.S. mistakes,
My name is Emily Voss and I work at the Center for the Constitution at James Madison’s Montpelier. I also coordinate a great civic education program for middle and high school students called We the People: The principles of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. It is based on a six-unit curriculum that takes students from historical principles to the role of the citizen.

The culminating activity of We the People is a competition in which students demonstrate their understanding of constitutional principles and have opportunities to evaluate, take positions and ultimately defend those positions on relevant historical and contemporary issues. The competition takes the format of a simulated congressional hearing. Students present testimony and answer questions about historical, political, and constitutional issues before a panel of three judges acting as a congressional committee.

Regional competitions in Roanoke, Purcellville, Glen Allen and Newport News precede the state final in Williamsburg, which determines the team that will represent Virginia at the national competition in Washington, D.C. (Last year Virginia took 3rd at Nationals!) In 2015, the High School finals will be held on January 30th and Middle School finals will be held on January 31st. Both competitions will be held at the Williamsburg Lodge, and both will run from 9:00-4:00. I would be delighted to have members of the Williamsburg League of Women Voters present to observe the competition, or, if any of your members would like to volunteer, we could certainly use the assistance!

This is a great opportunity for you to work with some highly-engaged high school and middle school students from your area! In fact, it would be possible for you to provide some words of greeting or congratulations to the students if you were interested.

I would be happy to discuss this opportunity with you further. My e-mail is evoss@montpelier.org and my phone number is 540-308-2063. Thanks very much and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Emily Voss
We the People Virginia State Coordinator

Letter to the Editor . . .

We the People Competition for High School Students

My name is Emily Voss and I work at the Center for the Constitution at James Madison’s Montpelier. I also coordinate a great civic education program for middle and high school students called We the People: The principles of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. It is based on a six-unit curriculum that takes students from historical principles to the role of the citizen.

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Efforts Under PAVP Grant Continue to Work Toward Facilitating Voting in Virginia

By Therese Martin, PAVP Coordinator

Only three months remain of the (slightly less than) one-year grant the LWV-VA received from the League of Women Voters Education Fund for voter advocacy efforts. As often happens, circumstances have required a change in some of the original plans for activities to be undertaken under the grant. What has not changed is the emphasis of our grant proposal to demonstrate that the League’s efforts are aimed at facilitating voting by all Virginia citizens, hoping that it would give us a greater chance of success on issues such as no-excuse absentee voting. We also continue to urge that Virginia adopt the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, which was the keystone of our panel at last April’s LWV-VA Council.

This article describes the efforts that have been accomplished or are underway to deal with these issues:

- Improved polling place management.
- Early voting or no-excuse absentee voting.
- Increase access to voter registration at DSS agencies (NVRA).
- Oppose photo ID and documentary proof of citizenship.

For a complete description on the website of these efforts, go to http://www.lwv-fa.org/files/advocacy_2015_12_01_ideffectonelection_martin.pdf.

With less than 3 months prior to the election, the League and other members of the VCET began an intense period of public outreach, which added to the already heavy burden of registration and GOTV activities. I want to acknowledge that this burden was also shared by the Department of Elections and local elections officers, some of whom were specifically acknowledged in your comments on the effect of photo ID on the November elections. The League joined with others in considering and then deciding against bringing a court suit to delay or stay implementation of the photo ID legislation. Due to the production of outreach materials funded through the VCET, most local Leagues limited their production of special materials, preferring to use those made available to it at no cost. Reimbursements were sent to the three local Leagues that (additionally) prepared their own materials according to PA VP requirements.

A Reminder. PAVP grant funds can be used for advocacy, but not for lobbying. This will limit their use during the General Assembly session. We need to draw the line carefully, which I plan to do.

Save the Date:
May 29 Through 31, 2015

- League of Women Voters of Virginia State Board Meeting and Convention
- Charlottesville, VA
- Election of Officers
- Program Adoption
- Speakers and Workshops
- Theme: Strategies for Reforming Redistricting in VA: “We are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For.”* (with apologies to author Peter Levine whose book has the same title.)