We expect the 400th year of the Virginia General Assembly, the longest serving deliberative assembly in the world, to be the year that the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified. Virginia can be the 38th state to ratify the Amendment adopted by Congress in 1972—three-quarters of the 50 states. Virginia leaders fostered egalitarian ideals in the founding of our republic. Virginia legislators of today will take another step and recognize the equality of women and men under the law. Our country needs to ensure the same judicial standard for sex discrimination provided for race, religion, and country of origin under the 14th Amendment.

The time is now. We are ready to celebrate! We meet at the Capitol to welcome our legislators at the start of this historic session on January 9, 2019. The League of Women Voters of Virginia is working with our coalition partner VARatifyERA to welcome the members of the General Assembly to Richmond and to show our support for Virginia’s 2019 ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution. LWV-VA is co-hosting a kickoff event and registration for the day’s VA ratify ERA activities from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on the fourth floor of the Pocahontas Building, 906 E. Main St., Richmond, VA from 9:00-11:00 a.m. After this event, VARatifyERA will organize participants to line up at the Capitol Bank Street entrance to show the Legislators our strong support for Virginia’s ratification of the ERA in the 2019 General Assembly.

Party4Parity! SunTrust Center 4th Floor Piedmont Room. 3–5 PM. Brief remarks at 3:30 pm. Organized by Greater Richmond American Association of University Women. Catering by Mosaic. Cost--$15.00 at the door or $8.65 ($7.50 +$1.15 Eventbrite fee) in advance.

Advance ticket sales end on January 6th!!
Order on Eventbrite at

http://bit.ly/1ratifyERA

Go to http://www.VARatifyERA.org to sign the petition of support, receive updates, and donate.

FEBRUARY 6 LEAGUE DAY

8:30 – 9:30 am. Women’s Legislative Roundtable, SunTrust Center, 919 E Main St., 1st floor, Tilgham Room (coffee & pastries)
9:30-10:45 am. Visit legislative offices.
11 am. Capitol Gallery Lineup for House and Senate; Sessions and recognition ceremonies start at Noon.
12:30-3 pm. Networking Lunch at Berkeley Hotel, 1200 E. Cary St; Italian Feast Buffet! $35 Register online for lunch by Feb. 1:
https://goo.gl/forms/F0mwhHqayeP4nBf2.
Payment by PayPal or by check to LWV Ed Fund and mailed to LWV 2019 League Day, 804 Ridge Place, Falls Church VA 22046-3630.

Special rates at Berkeley Hotel: $139 for LWV members.
Deadline for reservations at special rate is 2 weeks in advance—January 23 for League Day. Contact Berkeley directly at 855-516-1090 and ask for the League of Women Voters rate.
For special arrangements with LWV-VA before other WLR events, please email Lynn Johnston, Events@lwv-va.org with at least two weeks’ notice.

Get printable Flyer for sharing League Day:
Virginia’s Ethics Framework Still Lags Behind Other States

By: Laurie Sherman, Policy Adviser, Coalition for Integrity

The Coalition for Integrity released its “States With Anti-Corruption Measures for Public” officials (S.W.A.M.P.) Index. The index rates the 50 States and District of Columbia based on the laws and regulations governing ethics and transparency in the executive and legislative branches of individual states. Virginia scores 35, ranking in the lowest third, evidencing that it still has significant shortcomings.

Virginia improved its ethics laws with respect to gifts following the troubles of Governor Robert McDonnell but has done nothing to address the lack of enforcement power of its ethics agencies. It is essential that state ethics agencies have the power to independently investigate, hold public hearings, and issue subpoenas, reprimands, and fines. A toothless ethics agency cannot serve the public well and will be unable to effectively carry out its mission.

The Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council is an advisory body, as are the relevant Senate and House Ethics Advisory Panels. None has the authority to sanction violations of the ethics rules.

The S.W.A.M.P. Index focuses on eight questions relating to the jurisdiction and scope of ethics agencies, the powers of those agencies, acceptance and disclosure of gifts by public officials, transparency of funding independent campaign expenditures and client disclosure by legislators. Some of the key findings are:

- All states should have an independent ethics agency with jurisdiction over the executive and legislative branches and that agency needs wide powers to investigate and sanction all government personnel.
- Legislators should be subject to the same treatment as elected executive branch officials and employees. In states where legislatures have a separate ethics entity, it should be independent of the legislature, composed of members of the public and not legislators.
- Gift rules should apply equally to all government officials and should prohibit all gifts above a reasonable threshold, regardless of the source and regardless of the intent of the recipient or the gift-giver.
- Legislators should disclose the names of all clients for whom they work, whether the client directly hires the legislator or hires the entity which employs the legislator.
- States should take the lead in mandating disclosure of the beneficial owners of limited Liability Companies (LLCs) and donors to 501(c) organizations which contribute to independent campaign spenders.

The laws of the higher-scoring states provide examples of best practice that Virginia can follow to improve the State’s ethical framework and transparency. You can access the full report with our findings and analysis and the one on Virginia at http://swamp.coalitionforintegrity.org.

The Coalition for Integrity is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, working in coalition with a wide range of individuals and organizations to combat corruption and promote integrity in the public and private sectors. For more information, please contact Shruti Shah, CEO, sshah@coalitionforintegrity.org, 202-589-1616.
Does Virginia Fail the S.W.A.M.P. Index Test?

The Coalition for Integrity (C4I) S.W.A.M.P. Index gives Virginia a score of 35 out of 100 that puts us in the bottom third of the states. The Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity states that Virginia has begun to make progress to curb some of its worst abuses of the public trust. Are our ethics laws and regulations too lax or toothless?

Virginia’s Conflict of Interest Act was approved by our General Assembly in 2014 after the major ethics issue regarding extensive gifts (value of $175,000) received by former Governor McDonnell from one donor who was defined as a personal friend. The Act declares that, “...the citizens are entitled to be assured that the judgment of public officers and employees will be guided by a law that defines and prohibits inappropriate conflicts and requires disclosure of economic interests.” The Act established the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council.

The “Advisory” status is the weakness that ranks Virginia low on the S.W.A.M.P. index. How powerless is the Council?

Do our legislators meet the reporting requirements for the Statement of Economic Interest (SOEI) disclosure without enforcement measures? The Act requires that elected officials report gifts over $20 in value. It defines gifts and non-gifts to personal friends, immediate family, Lobbyist, person and “widely attended event”.

The public can see every entry and line of a legislator’s SOEI that lists their business or employer, debts, securities, business interests, rental property, real estate; payments for talks, meetings, and conferences, representation and services; Real Estate contracts with State Governmental Agencies, and Lobbying and Lobbyist relationships, and Gifts. The report does not require tax returns or donations to charities.

The goal is for the public to know if the elected officials’ economic interests might affect how they will vote on legislation or prescribe policy and regulations.

Do we need “Integrity Monitors” or watchdogs to assure there is compliance? Or is there strong motivation to comply? Are the disclosure requirements changing the influence of money since the scandal? Reports in the news and extensive analysis online at the Virginia Public Access Project (VPAP) show a significant decrease in gifts to lawmakers and far fewer entertainment events by lobbyists.

The C4I criticizes our Council’s lack of enforcement power. However, Virginia Code §30-111.B states that, “Any legislator who knowingly and intentionally makes a false statement of a material fact on the SOEI is guilty of a Class 5 felony and shall be subject to disciplinary action for each violation by the house in which the legislator sits.” Legislation in 2017 per SB1312 provides that written informal advice from the Council may be admitted into evidence in any trial of a person for violating the Conflict of Interest Act.

Can we raise our S.W.A.M.P. ranking? Will legislation this year determine if the current laws are effective in promoting public trust and confidence in the service of public officials? The charge is to identify what laws should be repealed, amended, rewritten, or retained.

A 2019 legislation proposal, HB1617, would prohibit converting campaign contributions to personal use, and a Constitutional Amendment proposal, SJR 258, would give “the General Assembly the authority to regulate the role of money in elections and in governance to ensure transparency, to prevent corruption, and to protect against the buying of access to, or influence over, elected officials.”

These proposals show our legislators’ interest in robust ethic requirements that should rank Virginia higher on the S.W.A.M.P. Index.

Websites:
- Coalition of Integrity (C4I) https://www.coalitionforintegrity.org/
- Center for the Advancement of Public Integrity (CAPI) https://www.law.columbia.edu/public-integrity
- Conflict of Interest & Ethics Advisory Council https://www.law.columbia.edu/public-integrity
- VPAP: https://www.vpap.org/lobbying/spending/
- VPAP: Legislators’ Conflict of Interest Disclosures: https://www.vpap.org/updates/2927-legislator-conflict-interest-disclosures/
Recap of December 5, 2018 Women’s Legislative

Comprehensive reflections of Linda Rice, Williamsburg Area, who captures the thoughts of many:

1. I was proud that so many women were the Executive Directors or spokespeople for the various non-profit organizations. Women are the backbone of our society and that was evident by their dedication and the diversity of interests and concerns expressed.

2. Aubrey Lane was very informative. More people around the Commonwealth should be listening to his insights about the budget and the needs of Virginians. I liked his recommendation of the Secretary of Finance position needing continuity in order to better manage the finances. I agree that we need a CFO not a position subject to the whims of politicians.

3. It was a joy to hear Jill Hanken of the VA Poverty Law Center express her pleasure that Medicaid expansion was a reality. She, along with others, worked on this issue for 10 years, and the audience shared her happiness about that significant accomplishment.

4. Chris Piper was very informative. My regret is that we could not ask him more questions. The LWV-VA and local leagues should consider having him speak at other events. In a conversation with him after his presentation, he mentioned the importance of the local and state electoral boards which hire the registrars. Those local meetings need to be attended by local league members.

5. I found all the speakers informative. I was appreciative of their hard work and optimism despite the challenges in the General Assembly.

6. Redistricting reform should be the top priority for all leaguers. This effort will be instrumental in giving us the leaders that better reflect the desires of the citizenry- such as gun control, improvement in the care of the mentally ill, and badly needed increases in teacher salaries.

Walt Latham, Director of Elections, York County, who rocked the hall with his analyses: The three priorities of the Registrars Association in the 2019 Session of the General Assembly are (1) achieve compensation equity for the state’s directors of election/registrars, (2) move the primary to the third Tuesday in June (it is currently on the second Tues-

day), and (3) reorganize the State Board of Elections and Department of Elections.

Beth Kariel, a first-year Charlottesville Area League member who raised questions about childcare: There is evidence to support that Virginia doesn’t have enough daycare, that there is not enough training for daycare workers and they have low wages and that Daycare Licensing, which is part of the Department of Social Services, does not adequately enforce current regulations."

Rebecca Arrington, an organizer with Inspire Virginia, who found all speakers very engaging, especially those from FairVote and NARAL, plus awe for the beauty of the John Marshall Building: My first impression was that it is wonderful to be surrounded by women supporting other women!

Donna Granski, Richmond Metro, standing for the most dramatic issue: I am excited that the State League has made the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment a legislative priority this year. As we witness piecemeal legislation that provides protection for women, it is imperative that the ERA is part of the United States Constitution. Without this foundation, we cannot rest. Let’s make history in 2019!

Frances Schutz, Charlottesville Area: I’ve said often that the Pre-Session WLRT is my very favorite thing the state LWV does. I try not to miss it, even when I am the only one coming from our area, and I can’t carpool. The information provided by the speakers who represent the state government is fascinating, and obviously timely, as we begin to assess what might be possible in the coming GA Session. It is good to have our many coalition allies call our attention to bills and issues they consider important so that we can coordinate our advocacy efforts. Sometimes it can feel a little lonely typing a letter to a Delegate or state Senator, or calling them on the phone, or even making an appointment to see them on League Day or another day of the session. It is good to know there are people who tend to focus more singly on some of the many issues on which the LWV-VA has positions. They are valuable resources for talking points and data to support our requests for action from the legislature.

Melanie Perez-Lopez, South Hampton Roads: Marvelous!