



Bulletin - February 2013

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February 2013

President: Ann Cobleigh

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League of Women Voters of Andover/North Andover Newsletter

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President's Letter

Dear Members,

The League has a lot going on, and this month's Bulletin is full of information that I hope you'll take time to peruse.

The spring political scene is heating up. Andover has a special Town Meeting this month, on February 11. The [Finance Committee Report](#) can be reviewed by clicking on the link. Both Andover and North Andover have candidates' forums in the works in advance of their respective March 26th Town Elections. Look for more information in upcoming Event Updates.

Thank you to everyone who braved the bitter cold in order to attend the Winter Dinner. Let me thank Stefani Traina, Maureen Sundberg, Heather McNeil, Molly Foley, Heather Holman, Peggy Kruse, and Susannah Abbott for food donations and volunteer time spent making the January Winter Dinner/Meeting such a success. We enjoyed the food and hearing from Mary and Jim Todd about their work with Iraqi political refugees. Following the dinner, I had occasion to speak with the Todds who reported having numerous and various offers of support from League members for which they are very grateful. During the business portion of the Winter Dinner, the membership voted to increase certain dues levels commencing with the 2013-14 membership year. It has been a very long time since our League has made any change in the dues amount and it was a decision made with much thought and analysis. If anyone should wish to discuss this any further, please feel free to be in touch with me. Those in attendance also weighed in on state League Program Planning. Articles below will fill you in on the details of the evening.

Those who attended the dinner also heard from a community member about an issue that will be coming up in the current legislative session. Eliza (a pseudonym) is our guest columnist this month and writes about an agonizing gap in disability benefits in a compelling article. I, for one, now realize my lack of knowledge on this aspect of the topic and look forward to learning more.

The Board received back a few Member Surveys at the Winter Dinner, but we're looking for input from many more of you. Please check out the survey below, and let us know how you want the local League to work for you. We look forward to reporting the survey results to you.

FUN and Community Service Together! The League plans to make a return



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appearance in the Andover Funds for Education 15th Annual Spelling Bee. We plan enter a team of four people for the event taking place on Friday, March 22 at the Wood Hill middle school. Look for more information in the March Bulletin.

Sincerely,

Ann Cobleigh, President
anncobleigh@gmail.com

Winter 2013 Calendar

For the most up to date calendar information visit [our website](#).

February

- 5 Tue Last day submit nomination papers 5:00 pm Andover Town Clerk
- 7 Thu Monthly Board Meeting, 7-9:00 PM Memorial Hall Library, Andover.
All members welcome.
- 11 Mon Andover Special Town Meeting, 7:00 PM, Collins Center.
- 22 Fri Submission Deadline for February Bulletin. Email ideas or content to: rrsundberg23@gmail.com

March

- 6 Wed Candidates Event, evening, No. Andover, details TBA
- 9 Sat Candidates Event, afternoon, Andover, details TBA
- 13 Wed Day on The Hill, State House, Boston, details TBA
- 14 Thu Monthly Board Meeting, 7-9:00 PM Memorial Hall Library, Andover.
- 26 Tue Local Elections Andover & North Andover

May

- 17-18 Fri-Sat "Save the Date" LWVMA State Convention, Beverly, MA

Winter Dinner & Business Meeting Follow Up

The dinner was excellent, the setting charming, and the conversation enlightening. Guest speakers Mary and Jim Todd spoke compassionately about the families they have helped to settle in the Merrimack Valley. Mary shared a current wish list. [Click here to find the list](#). The needs are constantly changing, so get in touch with the Todds at mtodd75@verizon.net if you have items you wish to donate.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Mary retired from the Career Center at Bunker Hill Community College in Boston in 2002. She and her husband Jim, a retired United Methodist pastor, have been volunteering with the Iraqi families since January 2009. They reside in Lawrence and are active members of Merrimack Valley People for Peace holding flags for peace at Andover's Old Town Hall and at Shawsheen Village. Mary has been a tireless volunteer working to improve the world around her.

League attendees also voted to raise membership fees for the coming year: July 2013-June 2014. The new rates will be:

- Basic member - \$60
- Contributing member - \$65
- Sustaining member - \$75

Patron - \$100
Senior Citizen member - \$40
Student member (18-24 yrs) - \$35
Family membership - \$75

With this increase, the local League will be able to fully meet Per Member Payments (PMP) to national and state Leagues for all but senior memberships. Many members make an additional, and greatly appreciated, contribution to the local League beyond the cost of their dues.

Members also voted on input to the Massachusetts State League program planning. See related article below.

Business Meeting Follow-Up Re: LWVUS PMP

The following detail is provided in response to inquiries that were made regarding what services and benefits we, as a local league, receive from the national league for the PMP fee we pay. Here is a brief summary of LWVUS' revenue breakdown: 23% comes from local league PMP, 45% from direct marketing efforts at the national league office, and the remainder from multiple foundation grants (directed toward operating expenses).

WHERE DOES THE LWVUS/EF BUDGET GO (PMP covers 23% of these costs)

Overview

LWVUS has 2 main functions that reinforce each other in important ways. They are performed by the national Board, relevant committees and task forces, and staff:

- *To represent the League in its entirety to the federal government, national media, national donors and foundations, and the public at large;*
- *To assist and otherwise support state and local Leagues on both internal infrastructure issues and external programs and outreach;*
- *And, to support both these core functions with prudent management and financial oversight, and adequate information technology.*

National Activities and Representational Functions

Advocacy before US Congress and Executive Branch

- *Lobby directly on legislative priorities (climate change, health care, money in politics, etc.)*
- *Support DC area members of Lobby Corps*
- *Engage over 100,000 members of electronic Grassroots Lobby Corps through Action Alerts and other means*
- *Work in 13 coalitions*

Outreach to media and general public to obtain visibility for League efforts and views

- *Issued over 150 press releases and letters to the editor in this biennium*
- *Approximately 100 media interviews given*
- *Ran paid TV and radio ads in selected states on health care reform*
- *Ongoing updates to League website - www.lwv.org*
- *Created LWVUS Facebook page, that now has over 6,000 "likes"*
- *LeagueE-Voice distributed monthly to 75,000 people*
- *E-engagement mailings on timely issues approximately 3 times a month*

Educational Projects and Products

- *VOTE411*
- *Hold conferences on national topics*

Fundraising - using reach and economies of scale of national office

- 45% of LWVUS/EF revenue raised through direct marketing - mail, telephone, and electronic
- 18 separate foundation grants were obtained in this biennium, and these cover portions of LWVUS/EF salaries, rent and overhead

Direct Support and Assistance to Leagues

Membership / Field Support Department

- Problem solving responses to over 30,000 emails and calls per year from members and leaders on all topics
- Administer, free of charge, over 300 state and local League Education Funds
- Conduct webinars to train leaders on League processes and growth techniques
- Increased support for membership recruitment and leadership development - through the Membership Recruitment Initiative and the Ruth S. Shur Fellows coaching system

Communications Department

- Weekly Leaders Updates to over 4,000 League leaders. Subscription is open to all members.
- Administer 15 electronic "discussion lists" for interested members
- Create monthly press templates for use by Leagues
- Produce such publications as *Impact on Issues* and *Convention Workbook*
- Creation of "tribute videos" for the 90th anniversary year

Education Fund Projects

- Pass-through grants to over 100 Leagues in such areas as state-level election reform, a fair judiciary, climate change, hosting of international visitors, etc.
- Dedicated assistance to participating Leagues in 16 states on ways to be effective advocates and communicators at the state and local levels
- Provision of particular software packages to participating Leagues

Advocacy Department

- Assistance to Leagues in effectively contacting federal officials on national priority issues
- Assistance to Leagues on effective advocacy at the state and local levels

All Departments

- Support for productive national League meetings - like Convention and Council

Summary

With each level of League focused on its own sphere of influence - but working collaboratively for the common good - the League of Women Voters demonstrates its unique power to combine this broad range of skills and resources to "Make Democracy Work" for all Americans! LWVUS plays an important part - and so do all of you!

LWV A/NA's Input to State League Program Planning

The following topics and priorities, as voted at the Winter Dinner, have been submitted to LWVMA on behalf of our local League.

NEW STUDIES:

List your League's recommendations for any new studies, provide a brief description of the scope and intent of each study, and indicate your membership's willingness to participate in the study. It is important to review LWVUS positions to determine whether a recommended study conforms to LWVUS positions.

In priority order, the votes for a new study, based on the recommendations of the Program & Action Committee were:

- 1) Human Trafficking*
- 2) Balancing Work & Family*
- 3) Modern Technology in Voting*

A new member also relayed a story about her issues with private disability insurance and discrimination related to mental health issues. (Stefani Traina followed up with Carole Pelchat, LWVMA VP for P & A, to discuss HD 977, a bill that addresses the issue raised) In trying to determine whether the League has a position on this issue, we discussed whether this could be covered under the Basic Needs position (further discussed under Caring for Seniors in the Restudy section below). Other possible studies suggested by members were:

Other possible studies suggested by members were:

- 1. Physician Assisted Suicide*
- 2. Conflict of interest (since LWVMA doesn't have a position that covers this)*

While no one signed up specifically, there was interest in these issues, and our League would be willing to recruit members to serve on the statewide committee.

RESTUDY OF A LWVMA POSITION:

List your League's recommendations for updating current positions, describe why your League thinks restudying the position(s) is necessary, and indicate your membership's willingness to participate in the restudy.

After discussing the recommendations suggested by the Program & Action Committee, the restudy suggestions were prioritized as follows:

- 1) Caring for seniors*
- 2) Land use related to farming and conservation*
- 3) New technologies in reproduction*

Note: In Andover there will be a zoning issue at our spring Town Meeting that pertains to an overlay district and senior housing, so the thought was that the caring for seniors restudy would definitely be one of interest to some of our members (in terms of recruiting committee members for a statewide committee).

ACTION ISSUES:

Action Issues are areas of concern for which there is a current state or national position on which members request intervention at the state level, particularly relative to legislative advocacy. Much of this action will be driven by Specialists on the Program and Action Committee. Issues currently being worked on include voting rights, election procedures, transparency in government, health care costs and access, quality and equality in education, safe and adequate drinking water, pollution, fiscal responsibility, and civil rights.

Activities include review of legislation, testifying to House and Senate committees, providing information to League members, working with aligned organizations, contacting media outlets, holding rallies, presenting informational forums, and developing Action Alerts.

List your League's recommendations and rationale for action issues. Please be specific (e.g. increase gun-law restrictions, limit or increase the number of charter schools, initiate election auditing procedures).

Our League voted to support action in all of the following recommended areas:

- *Advocate for reduction, reuse and recycling measures and extended producer responsibility to attain Zero Waste.*
- *Advocate for transparency in the use of tax exemptions.*
- *Advocate for a cost/benefit analysis of the current MA health care plan vs. Improved Medicare for All.*
- *Advocate for a comprehensive approach to water management issues.*
- *Advocate for voting systems and procedures that are easy to use, administer and understand; and encourage high voter turnout.*

One of our members, Amy Janovsky, who has chaired and served on our environmental action committee for many years, mentioned that a current law needs to be changed with regard to invasives and controlling them.

Amy comments that: "One provision of the MA solid waste bans is having an adverse effect on efforts to control invasive plants. This is keeping me from being enthusiastic about lobbying for "zero waste" and enforcement of the bans. Right now, invasive plants are banned from landfills and incinerators along with all other plant material. When I took courses this year toward a certificate in invasive plant management, my professor at UMASS Amherst and the class full of practitioners spoke at some length about how this provision needs to be changed so that seeds from invasives do not contaminate municipal mulch. Otherwise, the mulch, which is used by towns and homeowners, can seed in new acres of invasives, greatly exacerbating the problem. Until this provision is changed, I do not feel that the LWV should be advocating on this issue."

Note: Amy has communicated with Launa Zimmaro about this issue, as well, and there will be some follow-up on it. It appears that some plant material may be permitted in landfills and incinerators, but the rules need some clarification.

Guest Column: Focus on Disability Insurance Inequalities

By Eliza

In the year 2013, people in the United States of America are protected against age discrimination, genetic discrimination, racial discrimination, and sexual harassment, and yet discrimination against the biologic and trauma-based diseases of mental illness in private employer short and long term disability policies is still allowed to ruin many Americans lives.

While health care parity has been successful in leveling the playing field between health care benefits for mental illness and physical diseases, it has cost insurers a minimum increase in premiums: 1.4%. There are stop gaps built into the system that if the increase is too high the benefit does not have to be offered.

Working as a professional Pharmacist and then in the Pharmaceutical Industry for over 15 years, my own depression was able to be successfully treated, and I functioned as a highly productive individual for years. Mental illness is treatable. However, there is a small percentage of patients for whom the medication stops working. This is called treatment resistant or refractory depression. As time went on, my illness worsened to the point that I feared I would not be able to continue to work. My career was a highlight of my life so I desperately tried to find a solution to this dilemma. I even participated in a clinical trial, allowing a medical device to be implanted in me, so that I could continue to function effectively. At the point in my life when I was enrolled with 1 credit remaining for my Masters in Regulatory Affairs in Biologics, Drugs and

Pharmaceuticals at Northeastern University and doing an independent project at the Federal Drug Administration Agency in Woburn, MA, I could no longer function at work.

Having a psychiatric illness in the workplace is not protected like other disabilities by the American with Disabilities Act passed in 1990. I tried to be aware of my rights and to protect myself by asking for a job accommodation of a flexible schedule with a doctor's note before leaving my job. Unfortunately, my supervisor told me that other employees would see this accommodation as preferential treatment. Job accommodations are not preferential treatment, but are supposed to protect those people struggling with disabilities to continue performing their jobs. I did everything possible to try to continue to work, but was finally forced by circumstances to leave my job.

The most disturbing fact I discovered while trying to retain employment, aside from the lack of protection job accommodations offer to those suffering from mental illness, was that private short-term and long-term disability policies may exclude psychiatric disabilities altogether or limit these benefits to shorter time periods than those offered to people with a physical illness. Although I had paid the same premium as those with a physical illness and were granted benefits, I would receive less protection because I suffered from a mental illness.

The discrimination toward those employees with mental illness shifts the economic burden of paying benefits from the insurance companies to the government. Shifting this financial burden is a windfall for the private, for-profit insurance companies. I am left to wonder why this situation does not upset more Americans, or is it just a well-kept secret maintained by the insurance companies because those with mental illness have a hard time advocating for themselves?

I very much want to work and hope to be healthy enough to return to work someday. But, for now, the wage replacement that I thought I could depend on is not there to pay for my shelter, food, health care treatments. It is not there to sustain life's basic needs. I receive social security, and once I lost my private disability insurance, I needed to apply for food stamps, heating assistance, and free medical care and I had to begin relying on local food pantries for food. At this point, I do not know how long I will be able to stay in my home; my car is old and I could not possibly replace it. I have learned that most people with a mental disability end up going through their life savings and eventually need to sell their homes.

The financial distress caused by these discriminatory policies is not just difficult to face, it exacerbate the very illness for which I am claiming benefits. My depression has worsened, and it is now affecting my physical health. I have had to increase treatments. I suffer from feelings of abandonment, fear, sleeplessness, isolation, hopelessness, and the frustration brought on by stress of loss of income. Discrimination by disability insurers due to the nature of one's disability needs to stop.

When the insurance companies were finally forced to provide mental health parity, they said that it would increase premiums to an unsustainable level. This did not happen, but it is reasoning the companies use to allow this discrimination to occur. Because mental health conditions overall are successfully treated, the only individuals who need these policies are the small percentage of individuals with treatment-resistant conditions.

Last year Representative Ruth Balseer, Newton, filed a bill that sought parity for

mental illness in disability policies. She will file the legislation again this year and currently is identified as HD 977. People have until February 1st to contact their legislators to request they cosponsor this bill. I urge League members to follow this legislation.

LWV Clearinghouse: Studies at your Fingertips

The League now has a database of past and present studies completed by Leagues at all levels. Studies are listed by category down the left-hand side of the page.

<https://sites.google.com/a/leagueofwomenvoters.org/clearinghouse/>

Break the Chain - Violence Against Women

It's a disturbing statistic: one in three women on the planet will be raped or beaten at some time in their lives. Many other women will live in fear. Organizers of a worldwide Valentine's Day Flash Mob hope to bring attention to this issue. At 5pm (EST) on February 14th dancers around the globe will perform the same short dance. The Lawrence Eagle Tribune carried an article on January 26 with details about local participants.

<http://www.eagletribune.com/local/x1525008655/Flash-mob-arriving-for-Valentines-Day>

Join a mob or share with the information with someone you love.

Global information at <http://www.onebillionrising.org/news>

Voters Service - Andover

Local elections are Tuesday, March 26. The last day to register to vote in the Town Election is Wednesday, March 6. Voters will vote for candidates running for the following offices:

Moderator (1 year term) one seat

Selectman (3 year term) two seats are open

School Committee (3 year term) two seats are open

Andover Housing Authority (5 year term) one seat is open

Punchard Free School Trustee (3 year term) one seat is open.

The Running for Office Workshop can viewed [here](#). The deadline to return nomination papers is Tuesday, February 5 at 5:00 p.m. The League will be scheduling its annual candidates' event. Stay tuned for more details.

Voters Service - North Andover

North Andover has three seats that will be filled in the upcoming local election on Tuesday, March 26th: one seat on the Board of Selectmen, one seat on the School Committee, and one seat on the North Andover Housing Authority.

Our North Andover Candidates Forum this year will take place at 7:00 PM on

Wednesday, March 6th in the Board of Selectmen's meeting room on the second floor of Town Hall at 120 Main Street. Citizens are encouraged to attend or view the forum live or in rebroadcast on NACAM stations.

Questions for the candidates can be sent in prior to the forum to Heather McNeil at h_mcneil@hotmail.com. Questions must be addressed to all candidates for the particular board.

Congressional Redistricting on the Diane Rehm Show

Congressional Redistricting and The Electoral College
January 28, 2013

Virginia Republicans have launched the latest congressional redistricting effort, a strategy which many say contributes to partisan gridlock in Washington. Please join us to discuss the politics of gerrymandering and proposed changes to the Electoral College.

Listen to the show: <http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2013-01-28/congressional-redistricting-and-electoral-college>

Remembering Dan Scharfman

Dan Scharfman, LWVMA Lotte E Scharfman Fund Trustee, passed away Sunday, Jan. 20, of a heart attack at 55. He was a long-time trustee of the Scharfman Fund, which was founded in honor of his mother, who died during her term as president of the state League. His service on the Scharfman board brought both expertise and continuity. He made a lasting impression on LWVMA and will be missed tremendously. Our sincerest condolences go out to the Scharfman family.

Dan was a valuable member of his community as well as the League, serving as a member of the Belmont School Committee.

Click here to read a news article and his obituary in the Boston Globe.

Immigration

09/29/2011, by Gretchen Knell

The League's History

In the 111th Congress, the League lobbied in support of the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act that would provide a path to citizenship for young immigrants who complete a college degree or serve in the military, thereby enabling them to be a fully productive part of American society. The legislation passed the House, but lacked enough votes to overcome a filibuster in the Senate.

The League's Position

Statement of Position on Immigration, as Announced by National Board, April 2008:

The League of Women Voters believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business and employment needs of the United States; and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas. All persons should receive fair treatment under the law.

The League supports federal immigration law that provides an efficient, expeditious system (with minimal or no backlogs) for legal entry of immigrants into the United States.

To complement these goals the League supports federal policies to improve economies, education, job opportunities and living conditions in nations with large emigrating populations.

In transition to a reformed system, the League supports provisions for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status.

The League supports federal payments to impacted communities to address the financial costs borne by states and local governments with large immigrant populations.

Criteria for Legal Admission to the United States

The League supports the following criteria for legal admission of persons into the United States:

- Family reunification of spouses or minor children with authorized immigrants or citizens;
- Flight from persecution or response to humanitarian crises in home countries;
- Economic, business and employment needs in the United States;
- Education and training needs of the United States;
- Educational program opportunities; and
- Lack of a history of serious criminal activity.

Administration and Enforcement

The League supports due process for all persons, including the right to a fair hearing, right to counsel, right of appeal and right to humane treatment.

The League supports:

- Improved technology to facilitate employer verification of employee status;
- Verification documents, such as status cards and work permits, with secure identifiers;
- Significant fines and penalties for employers who hire unauthorized workers;
- Improved technology for sharing information among federal agencies;
- More effective tracking of individuals who enter the United States; and
- Increased personnel at borders.

The League also supports programs allowing foreign workers to enter and leave the United States to meet seasonal or sporadic labor needs.

Unauthorized Immigrants Already in the United States

In achieving overall policy goals, the League supports a system for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status, including citizenship, by paying taxes, learning English, studying civics and meeting other relevant criteria. While policy reforms, including a path to legal status, remain unachieved, the League does not support deporting unauthorized immigrants who have no history of criminal activity.

Member Survey

from the Board of Directors

The member survey has been available for a few weeks now. If you did not attend the Winter Dinner and fill out your survey there, please take a few minutes to copy the survey into an email and send your input to info@lwv-andovers.org.

If you prefer, mail the survey to LWV ANA, P.O. Box 514, Andover, 01810. Your time and feedback are greatly appreciated.

[Click here to access the survey.](#)

Resources of Interest

Occasionally we come across articles and information that might be of interest to our members. Topics range from running for office to environmental issues and everything in between. We hope this will become a regular way to share interesting information that cannot be quickly found in the usual places. **If you have an item to share, please submit it to bulletineditor@lwv-andovers.org.**

Find information about League studies completed across the country at <https://sites.google.com/a/leagueofwomenvoters.org/clearinghouse/>

Trying to describe the branches of government or the constitution to kids? Looking for great activities about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship? Look no further:

<http://www.icivics.org/>

Check the validity of those political claims:

FactCheck.org (U of PA)

PolitiFact.com (Tampa Bay Times)

Washington Post's Fact Checker

Another tool for voter information is: <http://votesmart.org>

New York Times editorial about Citizens United from March 25 can be [read here](#) .

About the League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters is a 92-year-old national nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of individuals in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League neither supports nor opposes candidates for office, elected officials or political parties at any level of government.

The Andover/North Andover League focuses on topics directly impacting the citizens of our communities.

League membership is open to all citizens, both women and men.