



The Chicago Voter

League of Women Voters of Chicago
Website - www.LWVChicago.org

December 2011
Vol. 62 No. 5



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LWVChicago Events

- Monday, December 5
10 AM to Noon
Social Policy Committee

- Thursday, December 15
Deadline for *Great Decisions*

Events in 2012

Chicago Government in Focus

Alexandra Holt
Wednesday, January 11

LWVIL Issues Update
Saturday, January 28

Primary Election
Tuesday, March 20

Call 312-939-5949
For more information

President's Message

Happy Holidays. As we continue the year end tradition of celebrations that mark the passing of this year and entry into a new year, LWV Chicago has much to celebrate. Our membership has stabilized and is growing slightly. Our finances are sound thanks to the generosity of members and friends of the League. We are participating in National and Illinois League studies. Units meet in several areas of the city. Observers attend the meetings of the City Council and the Board of Elections. The Chicago Government in Focus series at the Union League Club is well attended and attracting an audience beyond League members. As President I salute and thank the hardworking officers and board of LWVChicago, the unit leaders and committee members who make these activities possible.

We honor and celebrate Elizabeth Spiegel who marks her 95th birthday on December 25. Elizabeth is, and for more than 50 years, has been an active member of Hyde Park units. Her interest in education carried her from the presidency of the Chicago PTA to the League's education committee. Elizabeth served LWVChicago as vice-president, chaired the membership committee and was Unit Coordinator. She arranged for white wine and brie receptions for new members in the fall. She attends meetings and is valuable as an historian of LWVChicago activities. Thank you, Elizabeth, for sharing so much about Chicago and the League.

Margaret Herring

Great Decisions to start in February 2012

There is still time to join a *Great Decisions* foreign policy discussion group sponsored by LWVChicago. It is expected that one group will meet on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday afternoons from 12:30 to about 2:30 in the Aqua building downtown (the home of Pris Mims) from February through May. An early evening group would meet in the League office beginning around 5:30 pm, with the day and frequency (once or twice a month) still to be determined.

If you have an interest in participating in either group, please contact Pris Mims by phoning the LWV Office, 312-939-5949, or sending an email to League@LWVChicago.org by **Thursday December 15**. The *Great Decisions* books have to be ordered at that time. Cost will be about \$20. Non-League members may also participate.

Each year, the non-partisan Foreign Policy Association publishes a *Great Decisions* book containing 8 articles and discussion questions on foreign policy topics. The articles generally are about 10 pages long, including maps and photos. You are not expected to have prior knowledge of a topic, just an interest in learning. The topics for 2012 are Middle East Realignment, Promoting Democracy, Mexico, Cyber Security, Exit from Iraq and Afghanistan, State of the Oceans, Indonesia, and Energy Geopolitics.

In addition to expanding your knowledge, *Great Decisions* provides a wonderful way to get to know other Leaguers! That's why a number of Leagues have sponsored *Great Decisions* groups with much success.

Pris Mims

Chicago Government in Focus November 16, 2011

City of Chicago Inspector General Joseph Ferguson spoke to about 60 LWVChicago members and guests at the third ***Chicago Government in Focus*** event cosponsored by LWVChicago and the Union League Club on November 16. The broad mission of the Inspector General is to find waste and inefficiency and promote economy in city government, he said.

Transparency and accountability as exemplified by the additions to the city's website are two of the main foci of the administration of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, he added. Change is not to be confused with reform, he emphasized. The city administration is in a transitional phase, which is expected to continue.

The position of Inspector General was created by former Mayor Richard M. Daley in 2005 and first held by David Hoffman, who resigned to run for the US Senate. Mr. Ferguson was appointed in 2009 and confirmed by the City Council. A graduate of Northwestern University Law School, he has practiced both criminal and civil law in the public and private sectors.

The Inspector General's office looks at the contracts between the city and its 37 unions. The 10-year contracts are ordinances and, therefore, are city law, he explained. Also reviewed are the "side agreements," results of grievances, past practices, work rules and benefits. Mr. Ferguson noted that no single data base can be found for all of these matters, some of which may contradict the content of the contracts.

In 2012, the city needs to say, "We can't afford that anymore," he declared. The challenge is the clash of the institution with deep historical roots and today's situation. The mayor's challenge is to be innovative while still being bound by law. The administration is involved in creative workarounds, accountability and oversight.

Mr. Ferguson discussed the Hired Truck Scandal of 2005. He also described the investigation of the operation of the minority business enterprise program included in city contracts.

Another investigation involved the tax increment financing (TIF) associated with Millennium Park. The "public benefits clause" was reviewed. Contractors needed to donate a certain amount to be used for nonprofit public benefit groups, but the specific organizations to receive the funding were not listed. No one discussed this in 1999-2000, because "people wanted contracts," he said.

Mr. Ferguson also described the structure of city government. Chicago has an off way of working with the "sister agencies," the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Park District, the Public Building Commission, the Chicago Transit Authority and the Chicago City Colleges. All are core operations controlled by the mayor. The Inspector General can pull information together about any of them, but has limited oversight.

Mr. Ferguson said that his office receives about 1,800 complaints per year. Work is initiated both through those complaints and by the office itself. The agenda is driven from the inside.

In discussing the city's \$6.3 billion 2012 budget that had been approved that day, Mr. Ferguson noted that the police and fire departments staff and employees represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union account for two-thirds of the spending. The budget must account for the drop in resources and the level of services to be provided. The pension situation must also be addressed.

Norma Braude

City of Chicago Budget Chicago Government in Focus

On November 16 at a regularly scheduled City Council meeting the \$6.3 billion city budget for Fiscal Year 2012 was passed by a vote of 50-0. There had been numerous hearings and amendments to the budget as originally proposed by Mayor Emanuel.

The next event in the LWVChicago-Union League ***Chicago Government in Focus*** series will be on January 11 and feature City Budget Director Alexandra Holt. She will discuss the budget.

Health Care Briefing Report

Jillian Phillips, the Chicagoland coordinator for Campaign for Better Health Care, was the speaker at the Health Care Briefing on November 12.

Jillian addressed the status of the Health Care Exchange in Illinois. These are part of the Affordable Health Care Act. She explained that the purpose of a Health Care Exchange is to provide a competitive market place for individuals and small businesses to compare various health care insurance policies offered by different companies and purchase which one best meets their needs. Each state will have its own Exchange. The state can choose to develop an Exchange or have the federal government create and run its Exchange.

Since last year the Illinois legislature has been working on developing a Health Care Exchange. At the end of the spring session SB 1555 was adopted to form a committee to study the issue over the summer and present a report. This report was presented the end of September and provided a variety of options for the Health Care Exchange, but did not make any specific recommendations.

The Exchange is a complex issue and the legislature now needs to address the issues of structure, governance, and finance. Decisions about the composition of the governing board need to be made. The board should be structured to support the needs of consumers and small businesses. Thus, the board should represent these stakeholders. It should be composed of representatives of these groups and also reflect the geographic and cultural diversity of Illinois.

The issue was again taken up in the Fall Veto session. Rep. Mautino introduced amendment 2 to SB 1313 regarding the makeup of the governing board. This amendment provided good wide based community representation on the governing board with no one on the board having a conflict of interest. LWVIL sent out a call to action to contact legislators to support this amendment. Other amendments were then suggested that proposed changes to the governing board and made it less transparent, representative, and without a conflict of interest restriction. A final amendment was proposed by Rep. Gabel. As with many other issues in the Fall Veto session no action was taken and it may be considered again at the end of November.

Another important factor is the financing and sustainability of the Exchange. Different proposals have been made to provide this, including charging the consumers or health care providers a fee. Jillian indicated that the position of Campaign for Better Health Care is that the primary source of funding should come from a surtax on the insurance companies reserves. The amount and distribution will be determined by the Illinois Department of Insurance.

The reason for this position is that leading health insurers have accumulated a combined surplus of \$28.3 billion even while individuals and families in Illinois have paid a cumulative average rate increase of 181.8% since 2005. Due to the current economic situation hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans have lost their health insurance. Those with insurance are facing double digit rate increases while at the same time the insurance industry's reserves have increased by more than \$2 billion in just 2010 over 2009 figures. The above figures also illustrate why it is important that part of the exchange boards' function should be the ability to provide rate review and the right to prohibit rate increases by insurance companies.

It is important that the board structure is decided before the beginning of 2012 because federal money is available to help develop the Exchange and the deadline for obtaining this money is the end of June 2012. Many legislators want to wait for the spring session to pass this, but in order to be able to make an adequate application for the grant the state will need to have some structure in place.

Another difficulty with getting more action on this issue is that the Affordable Health Care Act is seen as threatened. Some members of Congress believe that it will be defeated after the next election and some other members are reluctant to take a strong stand because they are unsure if their constituents will approve.

When the extended Fall Veto session begins at the end of November this is one of several issues the LWVIL will be following and may be contacting members for action.

Margaret O'Hara, Health Chair

Chicago Ward Redistricting

The City of Chicago is required by state law to have adopted a new ward map based on the 2010 US Census by December 1. Although the City Council Rules Committee has been holding hearings throughout the city as of the **Voter** deadline no map has been officially proposed to the council. Both the Black Caucus and the Hispanic Caucus have proposed maps. If a map is not passed by the council with 41 votes there will be a referendum on alternate maps held in March.

Primary Election – March 20

Candidates have begun to file nominating petitions for the primary election scheduled for March 20. As of November 28 candidates for the General Assembly, countywide offices and Chicago ward committeeman began filing. Candidates for the US House of Representatives will be filing between December 23 and 27 pursuant to a court order relating to a suit about redistricting.

LWVChicago may be involved in candidates' meetings before the primary election. If you would like to be a participant in these meetings your activity can range from serving as a timer or question sorter to moderating a debate. In order to do the latter it will be necessary for you to have moderator training. LWVIL will provide more information at the Issues Update on January 29.

Social Policy Committee

The LWVChicago Social Policy Committee met on November 7. Members of the committee affirmed that its special areas of interest are job creation policy, food and social welfare policy, and affordable housing/mortgage foreclosures.

The committee is concerned that the Federal Budget includes funds to maintain the current level of Housing Choice Vouchers holders and units of existing public and subsidized housing; and that Congress not cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP" or food stamps).

The Social Policy Committee welcomes interested LWVChicago members. Its next meeting is Monday, December 5 at 10 AM.

Herb Zeigeldorf

Federal Role in Education Consensus Report to LWVUS

At the 2010 convention of the League of Women Voters of the United States, attendees adopted a study of the federal role in education. The existing LWVUS position on education is incorporated in the statement on equality of opportunity in the Social Policy position. This was revised by the LWVUS Board in 1989, based on positions announced by the Board in 1969, adopted at the 1972 convention and expanded by the 1980 convention.

The existing position, in part, states that "the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and housing regardless of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability." The position recognizes that employment opportunities are closely related to education, and LWVUS supports federal programs to increase the education and training of disadvantaged people and efforts to prevent and remove discrimination in education.

The current study addressed three areas: the role of the federal government in education, national curriculum standards and their use in evaluation of student progress and effectiveness of teachers, and equity of funding.

Members of LWVChicago met in their units to participate in the consensus process. They discussed and responded to the consensus questions. A unit member recorded and submitted the unit's consensus to the LWVChicago education chair, Pauline Zdonek. These reports were compiled and analyzed to determine if the responses from the units were sufficiently consistent so that the combined report could state that a consensus response existed for the question. On some questions there was unanimity and on a few there was a range of responses and thus there was no consensus.

The summary was submitted to LWVChicago's Board and adopted at its November meeting. The report was then sent to LWVUS Education Study Committee which will compile and analyze the responses of local Leagues throughout the country. The report of the LWVUS committee will be submitted to the LWVUS Board for approval and then it will be submitted to the 2012 convention in June 2012 in Washington, D.C. for adoption.

Margaret Herring

Deputy Registrar Training

The next training sessions for Deputy Voter Registrars are:

Wednesday, December 7, 11 AM
Saturday, December 17, 9:30 AM
Thursday, December 21, 6 PM

LWVChicago's Voter Service chair, Terry Williams, must register you for the training at least 3 days in advance. Please call the office if you would like to be included in the class.

Overseas Service Personnel Voting

Currently Illinois election results are not final until two weeks after the election. This is an attempt to ensure counting of all absentee ballots postmarked before the polls close. However a sizable number of the late ballots arrive after that time. Most of those ballots are from service personnel on duty overseas.

The Army post office is not concerned about speed. A recently returned veteran told me about its procedures. Mail from a group may be picked up once a week. It may remain at the base another week. Eventually it will be checked for explosives and hazardous material. Then it will go to the censors.

State law allows Election Boards to send absentee ballots by FAX or E-mail, but requires they be returned by standard mail, a certified courier, or through an embassy.

Scanned Internet or FAXed ballots can contain signatures, so these ballots would be handled in the same way as ballots that arrive by mail. Under an agreed court order in the 2009 special election, the Chicago Board of Elections has already used vote-by-FAX for military-overseas votes. Of course safeguards will be needed to prevent fraud. West Virginia and other countries have experience in conducting balloting by electronic means. Perhaps a change in state law will give Illinois service personnel a better chance to have their votes counted. And who better deserves this right?

Terry Williams, Voter Service Chair

Privatization Study

At the 2010 LWVUS Convention the delegates voted to participate in a privatization study. Although it was a non-recommended item the interest was great which indicated that many municipalities across the nation have deep concerns about the selling-off of public entities in order to raise funds. Some information

from LWVUS has recently become available. Our consensus report must be sent in by May 1, 2012.

The LWVChicago Board decided to participate in this study and suggested some topics such as: a review of the Skyway and parking meter sales and the possibility of privatizing garbage collecting, water distribution and aspects of public school services and programs.

The briefing is scheduled for Saturday, March 3. It is necessary to form a committee of at least five people in the near future. If LWV members (or non-members) would like to volunteer for this committee, please leave a message for Esta Kallen at the office: 312-939-5949 or at League@LWVChicago.org.

Esta Kallen

Donations to the Tribute Fund

Memory of Winnie Slusser

Terry Williams

Memory of Ozzie Badal

Dorothy Scheff

Unit Meetings

Unit 1/5 Downtown – evening

Will not meet in December

Leader – Margaret Herring

Unit 9/11 West Side – daytime

Sunday, December 11 – 1:30 PM

Home of Mary H. Austin

Leader – Joan Morton

Unit 21/35 North Side – Evening

Will not meet in December

Co-Leaders – Carol Ziegeldorf and Norma Braude

Unit 22 Downtown – daytime

Will not meet in December

Leader – Bernice Fortini

Unit 41/42 – South Side

Call the LWVChicago Office

Coordinator – Marcia Cowing

Unit 66/74 – Montgomery Place – Daytime

Will not meet in December

Leader – Dorothy Scheff

LWVUS

The League of Women Voters US joined with 277 organizations in a letter to members of the House and Senate opposing passage of a so-called Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution. The League has long opposed the balanced budget amendment as a danger to the economy and the balance of powers between the three branches of government.

On November 10 President Obama sent the Keystone XL Pipeline project back to the State Department for a thorough re-review. Most analysts are saying this will effectively kill the project.

LWV.org has just launched its new Web site designed to be much more “user-friendly.”

LWVIL

LWVIL's Issues Update will be Saturday, January 28. Watch for information on workshops and sign-up in the upcoming mid-December LWVIL **Voter**.

Consult LWVIL.org for other activities of LWVIL and its committees.

LWV Cook County

Cook County Forest Preserve District

General Superintendent Randall of the Cook County Forest Preserve District spoke at the LWV Cook County Lunch & Learn event on October 25. He reported that this district is the “oldest and largest” such district in the United States. Founded in 1914, the Forest Preserve currently has 68,000 acres and comprises 11% of the land within Cook County. In comparison, the Chicago Park District has 5,700 acres. The vast majority of the FP’s holdings are in the suburbs. He is starting to work with PACE, Metra, and the CTA to offer public transportation options.

Supt. Randall provided details on what the FP has to offer, including woodlands, savannas, tall grass prairies, native wetlands, 22 nature preserves, camping grounds, 6 nature centers, 40 managed lakes and ponds, 7 major waterways for canoeing and kayaking, 3 aquatic centers, 10 golf courses, 11 boat ramps, 5 snow mobile areas, 9 model airplane flying fields, 4 model boat areas, designated sledding hills, and 263 picnic groves. Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanical Gardens also are part of the Forest Preserve and, in fact, one-half of the FP’s \$200 million budget goes to support them.

While, under state law, the FP is a separate taxing entity, the Cook County President and Board also serve in the same roles for the Forest Preserve. Supt.

Randall was appointed by President Preckwinkle in Dec. 2010 and soon initiated a desk audit. All 450 full time employees were interviewed. A report was recently issued that contained 118 recommendations; some district-wide and some department specific. The general theme of most of these was the need for more accountability. There were no job descriptions and no employee evaluations. Supt. Randall is instituting a number of changes to address concerns in this report, including regular staff meetings, employee training, and a new automated time-keeping system. The good news is that the FP is in fairly good shape financially and there are no projected layoffs.

Cook County Board Budget

The Cook County Board passed its 2012 budget on November 18, which, for the first time in years, was prior to the start of the fiscal year on December 1. You can read all about the process by going to the Cook County League’s *Observer Blog* at www.cookcounty.il.lwvnet.org, starting with the first meeting of the Finance Committee with departments on October 27, right through the final meeting when the Finance Committee considered 64 amendments prior to the final vote.

Prior to the start of the budget process, members of LWV Cook County met with Cook County Commissioners. The effect of those meetings can be seen in the increased transparency and discussion of special purpose funds during the budget meetings.

If you have an interest in county government and would like to get more involved, contact President Cynthia Schilsky at cook@lwvil.org or at 312-939-5935, ext. 27. In addition to observing the County Board and Committees, LWVCC has Voter Service and Interest Groups for the Forest Preserve, Health & Hospitals, Juvenile Justice, and Structure and Budget.

Pris Mims

The Chicago Voter

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