

May 2009

PO Box 142
Brunswick, ME 04011

The Voter



Items of Interest

- **At-Risk Americans: The Uninsured and Underinsured**
- **Recycling Programs for Electronics**
- **What's Happening at Home?**
- **Quad States Conference in Wells on May 30 and 31**

Save the Date!

~**Topsham Town Meeting, Wednesday, May 20, 7:00 p.m., Mt. Ararat High School.**

~**League of Women Voters Quad States Leadership Conference, Saturday and Sunday, May 30 and 31, Hampton Inn and Suites, 900 Post Road, Wells.**

~**Arrowsic Town Meeting, Thursday, June 11, 6:30 p.m., Georgetown Central School, Baypoint Road.**

~**Georgetown Town Meeting, Saturday, June 13, 9:00 a.m., Georgetown Central School, Baypoint Road.**

~**League of Women Voters of the United States "Virtual" Council, Saturday, June 13, 1:00 p.m., Bangor Public Library, 145 Harlow Street.**



LWVME Supports Same-Sex Marriage

Augusta, ME — On April 26, after months of study and discussion, the League of Women Voters of Maine reached concurrence with the League of Women Voters of Maryland in favor of marriage equality. Based on that position, LWVME endorsed the bill, LD 1020, An Act to End Discrimination in Civil Marriage and Affirm Religious Freedom, pending in the Legislature.

The full text of the position reads: "The League of Women Voters of Maine supports equal rights for all under Maine law. LWVME supports legislation to equalize the legal rights and benefits available to same-sex couples with those available to heterosexual couples. LWVME supports legislation to permit same-sex couples to marry. The League believes that the civil status of marriage should be clearly distinguished from the religious institution of marriage and that religious rights should be preserved. LWVME believes that Maine should recognize the civil unions and same-sex marriages of other states."

The Legislature's Judiciary Committee met at the Augusta Civic Center on April 22 to hear testimony on LD 1020. LWVME was able to submit written testimony to the Committee prior to the April 28 Work Session, when the Committee voted 11 Ought to Pass, 2 Ought Not to Pass, and 1 Ought to Pass as Amended.

When the bill reached the full Legislature, it had strong support in both bodies and was finally enacted in the Senate by a margin of 21 to 13 and in the House by a margin of 89 to 57.

Prior to enactment, Governor John E. Baldacci had not indicated whether or not he would sign the bill. However, he did sign it shortly after it arrived on his desk, stating, "I have come to believe that this is a question of fairness and of equal protection under the law, and that a civil union is not equal to civil marriage."

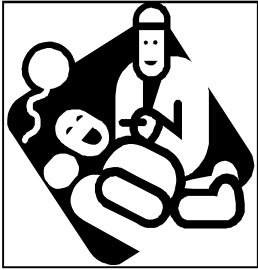
The law will take effect 91 days after the Legislature goes into recess, which is scheduled to take place on June 17 this year. Foes of same-sex marriage have vowed, however, to put a people's veto on the ballot. To do so, opponents of LD

1020 must gather 55,087 valid signatures on a petition and file it with the Secretary of State prior to the 91st day.

According to Deputy Secretary of State Julie Flynn, a people's veto will not appear on the November ballot unless a petition with a sufficient number of valid signatures is filed with her office by mid-August. However, same-sex marriage opponents have until mid-September to gather enough signatures to put the question on the June 2010 ballot.

Deputy Flynn confirmed that her office had received an application for a people's veto on May 8. Her office has until May 22 to write a ballot question and return it to the applicant.

Reverend Robert Emrich of the Jeremiah Project, a member of the coalition seeking to prevent the law from taking effect, described the task of collecting more than 55,000 signatures before mid-August as Herculean. Deputy Flynn remarked that the coalition would not have the advantage of a statewide election in June to gather signatures at polling places.



AT-RISK AMERICANS: THE UNINSURED AND UNDERINSURED

By Janis McMillen

Washington, DC - Data from multiple sources agree that in 2007, 47 million Americans (15.6 percent of the total U.S. population) lacked any kind of health insurance coverage. When these numbers are adjusted for age (excluding those 65 years and older), the uninsured percentage of the population rises to 17.9 percent. Moreover, it is estimated that 25 million adults under age 65 were underinsured during 2007, despite having insurance all year. In total, 42 percent of *all* adults (86.7 million) were either uninsured or underinsured during 2007.

Putting a face on persons who were uninsured or underinsured during 2007 and 2008¹

- **Age:** One of three people under age 65 was uninsured for some or all of 2007 and 2008; of the total uninsured population, 60.1 million were adults (between 19 and 64 years of age).

- **Duration:** Among the underinsured/uninsured, 74.5 percent were uninsured for nine or more months and one-quarter were uninsured the entire 24 months.

- **Employment status:** 80 percent of individuals who were uninsured were in working families and only 16 percent were not in the labor force (due to disabilities, chronic illness, or serving as family caregivers).

- **Income:** Nearly 59 percent of individuals in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL: \$21,200/year for a family of four) and 52 percent of individuals in families with incomes between 100 to 199 percent of FPL went without health insurance during 2007 and 2008. However, almost 18 percent of individuals in families with incomes above 400 percent of FPL or higher also went without health insurance during those years.

- **Racial and Ethnic origin:** 55 percent of Hispanics/Latinos, 40.3 percent of African Americans and 34 percent of other racial or ethnic minorities had health insurance during 2007 and 2008, compared to 25.8 percent of whites. While racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to be uninsured, whites accounted for 49.8 percent of the uninsured.

Age breakdown: The likelihood of being uninsured declines with age; 49.5 percent of those 19 – 24 years old, 36.3 percent of those 25 – 44 years old, 32.5 percent of those 45 – 54 years old and 21.2 percent of those 55 – 64 years old were uninsured over this two-year time period. The 55- to 64-year-old age group consumes more health care on average than younger adults.

For all ethnic and racial groups, lower-income families and individuals were more likely to be uninsured than

lower-income whites. This disparity continues even as incomes rise in all groups. There is a marked increase in the number of adults having difficulty paying medical bills – the most visible consequence of the weakening in insurance coverage. In 2007, 41 percent of adults (72 million people) reported problems paying medical bills, faced bill collectors or were in debt for medical care, up from 34 percent or 58 million in 2005. The majority had insurance at the time these bills were incurred² – well in advance of the economic downturn.

¹ All statistics above and below are from <http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/publications/reports/americans-at-risk-findings.html>

²The statistics in this paragraph are from <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Testimonies/2009/Feb/Testimony-Insurance-Design-Matters-Underinsured-Trends-Health-and-Financial-Risks.aspx>

Janis McMillen (LWVUS Board member and LWVKS) is chair of the LWVUS Health Care Education Task Force.

Recycling Programs for Electronics

Brunswick, ME - Since 2006, the disposal of computer monitors and televisions and their hazardous components has been prohibited in Maine. Each city and town must provide its residents with a means to recycle these electronics or to ship them outside the state for disposal. A municipality is permitted to charge residents a fee for this service.

Several computer manufacturers have Web sites that permit computer owners to donate, sell or return electronics for recycling via the Internet. Some stores, such as Best

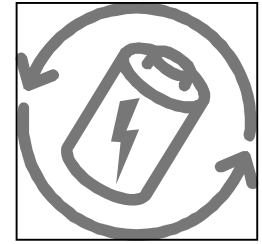
Buy and Staples, accept used electronics for recycling either for free or for a small fee.

Since 2008, the disposal of cellular telephones and their hazardous components has been prohibited in Maine. Any store that sells cell phones must accept them for recycling at no cost to the consumer.

Since 1994, the disposal of rechargeable batteries and their mercury components has been prohibited in Maine. Manufacturers are required to establish and maintain a collection system in the state.

Most manufacturers use the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Program Corporation program, which has expanded to include Ni-Cd, Lithium, metal hydride and small sealed lead acid rechargeable batteries.

City and town recycling centers, Bath Industrial Sales, Best Buy, Downeast Building Supply, Fastenal, Home Depot, Lowe's, RadioShack, Rite Aide, Rogers Ace Hardware, Sears, Target and Wal-Mart all collect rechargeable batteries. For more sites, check www.rbrc.org.



What's Happening at Home?

Bath - The **Bath** City Council is mulling over a \$15.3 million budget for fiscal year 2010, which is projected to increase taxes by 1.86 percent.

In **RSU 1**, which consists of Arrowsic, Bath, Phippsburg, West Bath and Woolwich, the Board of Directors has given preliminary approval to a \$25.22 million budget, which will affect each municipality's education spending differently, ranging from a 0.89 percent decrease in Phippsburg to an 11.48 percent increase in Arrowsic. Voters in all five communities will go to the polls to vote on the final budget on June 9.

On May 6, representatives of **Harpwell** and **Brunswick** attended a hearing before the Legislature's State and Local Government Committee on LD 1410, An Act To Restore the Historical Boundary between Harpswell and Brunswick. The two sides dispute ownership of clam flats near the border of the two municipalities.

The **Brunswick** Town Council is now considering a \$54 million budget for fiscal year 2010, which is expected to increase taxes by 1.6 percent. Education spending accounts for \$33.6 of the budget, a 0.16 percent increase from last year. Brunswick voters will

have an opportunity to approve the School Department Budget on June 9.

Less than six months after the formation of **RSU 5**, which consists of Durham, Freeport and Pownal, residents of Pownal want to withdraw. Upset by a projected 36 percent tax increase, 172 voters signed a citizen's initiative petition to put the question on the ballot for the June 9 Town Meeting.

However, the outcome of the vote will only be symbolic. Under Maine's school reorganization law, there is no provision for a municipality to withdraw from an RSU.



League of Women Voters of the
Brunswick Area
PO Box 142
Brunswick, ME 04011

Please deliver to:

***The League of Women Voters is where
hands-on work to safeguard democracy
leads to civic improvement.***

Join the League of Women Voters! Dues are
\$45 for one or \$65 for a household of two.

Register for Quad States!

Quad States Conference in Wells on May 30 and 31

Wells, ME - On Saturday and Sunday, May 30 and 31, the Leagues of Women Voters of Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont will meet at the Hampton Inn and Suites in Wells for their annual Leadership Conference. Last year's conference was well received, and this one should be, too.

Arn Pierson, the Campaign Reform Director at Common Cause in Washington, DC, has been invited to give the keynote address. Common Cause seeks to bring a halt to the current "pay to play" political system in which access and

influence are bought and sold. The organization proposes a voluntary system of public campaign finance funded by a combination of small contributions and limited public money.

The conference will focus on public financing of election campaigns. It will include three workshops on the topics of organizing a public issue campaign, fundraising and LWVUS advocacy priorities.

The keynote address will take place on Saturday morning. Then, lunch will be served to all conference registrants. There will be two workshops

on Saturday afternoon, followed by dinner at a choice of restaurants. Finally, there will be a workshop on Sunday morning.

To reserve a hotel room with two queen beds at the rate of \$89 plus seven percent tax (\$95.23) for Saturday night, call 646-0555 and ask for the League rate. Breakfast on Sunday morning is free for all guests of the hotel.

To register for the conference, mail your name, address, telephone number, email address and check for \$20 to Jane Armstrong, LWVNH, 4 Park Street, Concord, NH 03301.

