



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

The Maine Voter

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Editor: Martha Dickinson

Contributors: Ann Luther, Val Marsh, Barbara McDade, Anne Schink, Jill Ward, and Cathie Whittenburg

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The League of Women Voters of Maine, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major political policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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League of Women Voters of Maine
P. O. Box 863, Augusta, ME 04332-0863

www.lwvme.org

Dear League Members and Friends,

The year 2013 brings with it a new Congress in Washington and a new legislature in Maine. Despite a number of changes in both the state and national political landscape, the prospect doesn't look bright for our elected officials to come together to enact needed changes in our country. We hope that if you are not an active League Member, you will join us and help the League lead the way. The League's voice is listened to and respected. Our voter services are appreciated, our nonpartisan studies are valued, and our grassroots positions are heard.

The Maine League has proposed the following priorities nationally:

- Campaign finance reform and disclosure
- A package of gun control legislation to include an assault weapons ban, a ban on large capacity ammunition magazines, and the requirement that all gun purchases be subject to a criminal background check
- Voting rights
- Global climate change
- Tax reform, wealth & income inequality
- Preserve the social safety net by strengthening Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid

Our **Lobby Corps** is gearing up for the new legislative session. Read more about it in this issue, and if you would like to volunteer, please contact us.

Screening Party: Money, Power, and the American Dream. Join us for lunch and a video on February 9. We'll screen and discuss the latest Alex Gibney documentary, *Money, Power, and the American Dream*. Academy Award-winning filmmaker Gibney presents his take on the gap between rich and poor. We hope you will be able to attend and bring a friend. Check lwvme.org for details.

This is the first call to **LWV Maine's Convention**, to be held **May 24 and 25** in Portland. On Friday evening, members are invited to dine informally and then join for a dessert reception with a guest speaker. Saturday will be a full day, starting at 10:30 AM and ending by 4 PM. The committee is finding first-rate speakers, there will be a board to elect, programs for the coming two years to select, and great fellowship with thoughtful, forward-looking League members from around the state. Our website, www.lwvme.org, will contain updated information and registration information. All members in Maine are invited to attend and vote. Please feel free to invite a friend and/or prospective member to come along.

Our annual **Leadership Development Workshops** will be held in Wells, Maine, **April 27 and 28**. See the next article in this newsletter.

Thank you for your dedication. Because of you, the Maine League continues to do what we do best — encourage informed and active participation in government.

- Barbara McDade, LWVME President

Leadership Development

For the past several springs, we have had leadership development workshops with our neighboring states' Leagues. We call it **Quad States**. Members from the state Leagues of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire and Rhode Island will be attending. This year those workshops will be held **April 27 - 28** at the Hampton Inn, Wells, Maine. The focus will be on leadership and the tools needed to help the League grow and work effectively.

The bulk of the programs at this year's Quad States will concern the Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) program and its continuing growth nationwide. MLD is a national League program. It started as a way for state and local leagues to increase membership. Now a leadership component has been added. This is a way to bring leadership together with tools and training to help in the work of League growth. The last group of national coaches will be trained next spring and all states will be in the program by next year.

We have offered membership growth training at Quad States before, but a refresher course is very important. We can always learn more. The larger vision is growing the League—to have a greater impact and to be more visible. The League helps members be connected. Membership and Leadership Development is our “ground game” all the way from the local level to the national level.

The tentative schedule has people arriving on Friday evening, April 26, in time for an informal dinner together.

Saturday, April 27: There will be a full day of MLD training by Carol Reimers and others on the Support Training Team.

Sunday, April 28: A half-day expected to include two 2-hour workshops talking about League Visibility and Moderating with today's new technology.

Quad States is always interesting, both in the sessions and in the people that you meet.

- Barbara McDade, LWVME President

Agriculture Policy

The League nationally has undertaken a review of our agriculture policy position, and a small group of Portland members decided to get a jump on that national study. We put together a book list and each of us selected one or more of them to read, listen to on CD, or watch as a DVD. And we are having fun learning about issues that most of us have not studied in any serious way. We have the good fortune of having a new member with a PhD in agricultural economics as part of our group. What an unexpected surprise!

The scope of the study as adopted by the convention delegates and the national board includes a range of issues that were not even dreamed of in 1986 when the first agriculture study was undertaken. The motion adopted at the 2012 national convention is: *review and update the LWVUS agriculture position, approved in 1988. Such a review would investigate genetic modification, consolidation in the food industry, money in the regulatory process, and the consumer's right to accurate and complete food labeling.*

As we share what we have learned, we have begun to realize the complexity of the issue. Starting at the individual and family level, it is the health and economic issue of meeting basic human needs. It is a natural resource issue in terms of its impact on land, air and water. It is also an economic issue of how the government supports the business of providing food for a hungry nation. It is an international trade issue in terms of the role that United States agriculture policy plays in shaping food quality and supply across the globe. And, without question, one of the thorniest issues is the power of the agricultural industry to influence public policy through unlimited campaign contributions.

Starting with *Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, *Food Inc*, film and book from Participant Media, *Tomatoland* by Barry Estabrook, and *Betting the Farm*, a documentary about dairy farming in Maine, we have begun to see the connections between factory farming, lax federal enforcement of food safety laws, labor standards, agribusiness, and health concerns. While these materials may not qualify as solid, unbiased, research-based publications, they certainly tell the story of what worries so many in our country about what is happening in the agricultural sector. And it should be enough to make you curious to begin your own inquiry into the role that the

League of Women Voters should play in this debate.

Current Agriculture Position: *Statement of Position on Federal Agriculture Policy, as Announced by National Board, October 1988:*

The LWVUS believes that federal agriculture policies should promote adequate supplies of food and fiber at reasonable prices to consumers, farms that are economically viable, farm practices that are environmentally sound and increased reliance on the free market to determine prices.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE. Federal policy should encourage a system of sustainable, regenerative agricultural production that moves toward an environmentally sound agricultural sector. This includes promoting stewardship to preserve and protect the country's human and natural agricultural resources.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. Agricultural research, development and technical assistance should continue to be a major federal function. Resources should be targeted to developing sustainable agricultural practices and addressing the needs of mid-size farms.

AGRICULTURAL PRICES. The LWVUS supports an increasing reliance on the free market to determine the price of agricultural commodities and the production decisions of farmers, in preference to traditional price support mechanisms.

AGRICULTURE AND TRADE. U.S. efforts should be directed toward expanding export markets for our agricultural products while minimizing negative effects on developing nations' economies. Consistent with the League's trade position, multilateral trade negotiations should be used to reduce other countries' barriers and/or subsidies protecting their agricultural products.

FARM CREDIT. Farmers should have access to credit with reasonable terms and conditions. Federally provided farm credit is essential to maintaining the viability of farm operations when the private sector is unable or unwilling to provide the credit farmers need.

Of these policies, the League believes the most essential for the future of agriculture are: encouraging sustainable agriculture; providing research, information and technical assistance to agricultural producers; and increasing reliance on the free market to determine prices.

Anne Schink,
Portland Area LWV and LWV Board

The League and the New Congress

On January 3, the 113th Congress was officially sworn in, welcoming fourteen new U.S. Senators and 82 new Members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The House has 233 Republicans and 200 Democrats, and each party should pick up another seat after two vacancies are filled to complete the total 435 Representatives. Senate Democrats will have a caucus of 55, including two independents, Angus King of Maine and Bernie Sanders of Vermont, and the Republicans will caucus with 45 Senators. And this year there are more women than ever in the new Congress: 79 in the House, an increase of five, and the new Senate includes 20 women, an increase of three.

The 113th Congress will certainly have its hands full in 2013. Although the 112th Congress was able to avert the "fiscal cliff" with a last-minute New Year's Day agreement, there is still much budget work to be done. The fiscal cliff deal addressed taxes and unemployment insurance benefits, but simply delayed scheduled spending cuts and did not extend the debt ceiling to prevent the United States from defaulting on its obligations in late February/early March. The League of Women Voters has and will continue to advocate for federal fiscal policy that recognizes the importance of a fair tax system, provides for social needs, and carefully manages the deficit and the economy. Economic issues are certain to keep the new Congress busy over the first several months of 2013, but there has already been some attention paid to other League issues, including campaign finance reform, gun violence prevention and voting rights issues.

On the first day of the new Congress, Maryland Representative Chris Van Hollen reintroduced legislation (H.R. 148), commonly known as the DISCLOSE Act, to address the influence that unlimited, secret corporate and union money has on our elections and our elected officials. The bill is identical to the measure Van Hollen introduced last Congress and would require all corporations, unions, and super PACs to report campaign expenditures of \$10,000 or more. It would also require reporting of transfers by those groups to others making such expenditures in order to expose the source of huge campaign contributions.

Last year, League President Elisabeth MacNamara submitted testimony to the Senate Rules Committee in support of the DISCLOSE

Act and worked with national coalition partners to put pressure on Congress to take up this important bill. In July, an attempt to take up a version of the DISCLOSE Act was defeated on a party-line vote of 53-45. Senators Snowe and Collins did not support the effort to bring the bill to the floor. However, newly-elected Senator Angus King has stated his support for the bill and other policies to shine greater light on political spending and reduce the influence of money in politics. We will continue to work with LWVUS to encourage the new Congress to take up and pass the DISCLOSE bill this year and to consider other measures to improve our electoral system for all Americans.

In the wake of the tragic shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, there has also been a renewed conversation about violence in our society and what can be done to keep our communities safe. Policies that limit the access of firearms and ammunition have come back into focus and are expected to receive attention this year. Led by Vice President Joe Biden, the Administration has established a task force on gun violence and charged it with formulating recommendations to help reduce gun violence in our communities. (See the following article on Gun Laws.)

It promises to be a busy year for the new Congress with many opportunities for League priorities to be discussed and advanced. To keep updated on the issues and actions at the national level, we encourage you to sign up to become an e-Activist at the LWVUS website: <http://www.lwv.org>.

– Jill Ward, LWVME Board and Portland Area LWV

The League Supports Strong Gun Laws

There are no words to express our sorrow and outrage over the tragedy that took place in Newtown, Connecticut, on December 14th. Twenty families woke up that Friday morning, got their kids dressed and sent them off to school, not knowing it would be the last time they would see their children alive.

As Connecticut Governor Malloy put it, “Evil visited this community.” A lone gunman, 20-year-old Adam Lanza, entered the elementary school armed with a Bushmaster military-style assault

rifle and multiple high capacity ammunition magazines and in a matter of minutes killed twenty children, most of them 6 and 7 years old and most of them shot multiple times, and six adults. And while the crime Lanza committed was horrific it must be noted that the gun did exactly what it was designed to do – kill a large number of people in a short amount of time.

Since 1990 the League of Women Voters has been a strong proponent of strong gun laws. In 1991, the League joined with other organizations in support of an assault weapons ban and worked hard to see the legislation passed by Congress in 1994. Unfortunately, Congress allowed the assault weapons ban to lapse in 2004. In addition to banning assault weapons, the legislation also included a ban on high capacity ammunition magazines and when the ban on assault weapons lapsed, so did the ban on these high capacity ammunition magazines.

Since 2004 this country has seen an explosion in the manufacturing of military-style assault weapons. Ammunition magazines, for both assault weapons and handguns, have grown in size. Magazines holding 30, 50, even 100 rounds of ammunition are readily available. Mass shootings now occur with frightening regularity. 2012 saw a record number of these shootings with a record number of casualties.

It is time for the League of Women Voters to once again step up and demand strong gun laws. The position adopted in 1990 is all too relevant today: *The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the proliferation of handguns and semi-automatic assault weapons in the United States is a major health and safety threat to its citizens.*

President Obama has launched a gun task force headed by Vice President Biden. The task force is preparing a comprehensive plan that includes a renewed assault weapons ban, a ban on high capacity magazines, universal background checks for firearm buyers and strengthened mental health checks in the background system. Legislation will also be introduced in Augusta that will address similar issues. It will not be easy to pass this legislation, at either the state or the federal level. That is why it is absolutely vital that you contact your legislators and tell them you support strong gun laws. As President Obama said, “We’re not going to get this done unless the American people decide it’s important.”

Every day in this country 1,000 people are directly impacted by gun violence. They are killed by firearms; shot and injured; victims of armed robbery and aggravated assault with a gun. One thousand people a day, every day. Please, call your legislators and tell them as Americans we deserve the right to be safe and free from gun violence. It's important.

- Cathie Wittenburg, Portland

Join the League Lobby Corps

The First Regular Session of the 126th Maine Legislature convened on Wednesday, December 5, 2013, at 10:00 a.m., and has a Statutory Adjournment date of Wednesday, June 19, 2013. Over these short 28 weeks of the first session, the Legislature will deal with hundreds of bills, many of them in the League's priority areas. The deadline by which legislators must submit bills for consideration is 4 pm on January 18. The new majority is already setting new priorities. It's time to ramp up the efforts of the League Lobby Corps.

The LWVME Board has adopted the following advocacy **priorities**. These five areas will be the focus of the League Lobby Corps activities and testimony:

- o Voting Rights
- o Clean Elections & Campaign Finance Reform
- o Election Administration
- o Ethics & Disclosure
- o Freedom of Information

We are especially alert for activity regarding student voting rights, the Maine Clean Election Act, voter ID requirements, ranked-choice voting, and early voting.

The following issues will be taken up if a special opportunity presents itself: Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, Gun Control, Health Care, Energy & the Environment, Reproductive Choice, Women & Families, Citizenship Education.

League members from around the state help in the League's advocacy efforts by joining the League Lobby Corps. Lobby Corps members analyze relevant bills and regulations, help choose those where the League can make a real difference, apply established League positions to the issue, write testimony, attend

committee and agency hearings and work sessions, contact legislators and help publicize our work. These activities are coordinated by the League's Advocacy Committee: Polly Ferguson, Ann Luther, Val Marsh, and Jill Ward.

This is an **all-volunteer** effort so the larger our Lobby Corps team, the greater difference we can make in Augusta! Even if you have only an hour or two a month that you can spare, you can be a valuable member of our team! Most of this work can be done from your home or office, but we especially need people who can attend public hearings and work sessions in Augusta. If you are interested in helping out in this vital endeavor, let us know! Contact Ann Luther at ann.m.luther@gmail.com.

- Ann Luther, Trenton

Val Marsh joins the LWVME Board

New to the LWVME Board is Val Marsh. Val is a longtime community organizer who has spent many years advocating for social justice in a variety of settings. A career social worker in planning, administration and policy, Val spent ten years advocating for mental health consumers and their families in the Virginia legislature. She has lived in Maine since 2008, and currently works at the University of Maine at Augusta as the Coordinator of Civic Engagement, where she creates enriched opportunities for participatory democracy and service to the community. Since last summer, Val has been part of LWVME's team following the public hearings and work of the Commission to Study the Conduct of Elections in Maine. Val will be actively involved in the Lobby Corps during the upcoming session. Welcome, Val!

Status of Women and Girls

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women advises the Governor and members of the Legislature about policy and social issues affecting women and girls in Maine. The Commission has recently published its initial report, which is intended to initiate a conversation among policy makers and the general public about the opportunities and challenges that exist for women and girls in Maine. The focus is on five dimensions

that contribute to the quality of life and opportunity for women and girls: Education; Economic Security; Health; Safety and Well-being; Leadership and Public Life. The report provides an overview of where women and girls in Maine stand relative to their male counterparts, peers in neighboring states and the nation. Reference is made to more in-depth studies on specific topics within each dimension. For more information about the Commission and its work, please visit: <http://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm.htm>.

Climate Change Is Not a Hoax

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently published their State of the Climate Report for 2012. (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/>) Here is a quote from the Summary: "2012 was a historic year for extreme weather that included drought, wildfires, hurricanes and storms; however, tornado activity was below average. 2012 marked the warmest year on record for the contiguous United States with the year consisting of a record warm spring, second warmest summer, fourth warmest winter and a warmer-than-average autumn. The average temperature for 2012 was 55.3°F, 3.2°F above the 20th century average, and 1.0°F above 1998, the previous warmest year."

Now is a good time to **write President Obama** urging him to use the powers of the Presidency to control deadly industrial carbon pollution. Below is the text of a letter on climate change to President Barack Obama from LWV President Elizabeth MacNamara, written on December 20, 2012.

"Climate change is not a hoax. More drought and floods and hurricanes and wildfires are not a joke. They're a threat to our children's future. And we can do something about it." These are your words, Mr. President, and we couldn't agree more. People are dying because of climate change. Our families, our communities and our planet are all threatened by it.

The League of Women Voters calls on you, Mr. President, to take the historically necessary step of controlling industrial carbon pollution from new and existing power plants. Use your existing regulatory authority to make this happen.

The world has known about climate change for decades, yet little has been done to address the issue. The U.S. came close to enacting a comprehensive climate change bill in the early years of your administration when a good bill passed the House, but it was blocked by special interests in the Senate. With the current gridlock in Congress, it seems impossible that any legislative action will be taken to protect our health and our planet.

But you, Mr. President, have the power to put controls on new and existing power plants and make the world a safer place for our children to live and breathe. You can

establish the U.S. as a world leader in fighting climate change. President Obama, you can do this by yourself, without a second guessing Congress or a nay-saying Supreme Court. In fact, the Supreme Court has already said that **the Administration can move forward under the Clean Air Act to cut this life-threatening pollution.**

We need you to lead the U.S. and the world through the greatest environmental challenge of our generation. Continue to raise your voice to call special attention to this issue. Use your authority as President to save our kids and seniors from the formation of lung damaging and asthma-attack inducing smog. Save us all from deadly heat waves, droughts and killer storms like Hurricane Sandy.

President Obama, if you don't do it, it won't get done. If the United States doesn't lead, the rest of the world cannot follow.

Saving the world is a legacy worth fighting for.

*- Elisabeth MacNamara, President
League of Women Voters of the United States*

Social Media and our Elected Officials in DC

Maine's newly elected Independent Senator Angus King has announced his social media policy. He not only has an official website and a Facebook page, but also a twitter feed and a YouTube channel.

The links are:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SenatorAngusSKingJr>

Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/SenAngusKing>

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/senatorangusking>

Official Senate Website: www.king.senate.gov

The website addresses and Facebook pages for Maine's other federally elected officials are:

Senator Susan Collins: <http://www.collins.senate.gov/>

and <https://www.facebook.com/susancollins>

Representative Chellie Pingree:

<http://pingree.house.gov/> and

<https://www.facebook.com/ChelliePingree>

Representative Mike Michaud:

<http://michaud.house.gov/> and

<https://www.facebook.com/RepMikeMichaud>

President Barak Obama: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

and <https://www.facebook.com/barackobama>

If you do not have a computer at home, you can use a computer at a public library to maintain contact with your elected officials, find phone numbers and addresses, and email them through their websites.

LOOK FOR US ON FACEBOOK – SEARCH FOR LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

Stay in Touch with LWVME -- Make sure you receive our timely communications about important action alerts and current issues. If you are not receiving our e-mail messages, make sure we have your current email address. Send a message to us at lwvme@gwi.net.

Join the League!

If you are not yet a member of the League, we need your help now in carrying out our mission of reform. You may become a member of the League of Women Voters of Maine and the United States by mailing us your contact information with a check for \$55 for one membership, or \$82.50 for two members at the same household. Our Mailing Address is: **League of Women Voters of Maine, PO Box 863, Augusta, ME 04332-0863**. Please provide us with the following information. Thank you very much!

Membership Application Form

Name _____

Name(s) of additional member(s) in household _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone (home) _____ Phone (work/day) _____

Cell phone (optional) _____ Email address _____

Amount enclosed \$ _____

(\$55 for one member or \$82.50 for two from the same household)

Please make the check out to: League of Women Voters of Maine.

Dues are not tax deductible.

Comments (e.g. interests, how you heard about the League):

League of Women Voters of Maine
P.O. Box 863
Augusta, ME 04332-0863

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Calendar for 2013

LWVME Board Meeting, Augusta	Thurs, Jan 31 10 am – 2 pm
LWV-PA on Charter Schools, Portland	Wed, Jan 16, 5:45 – 7:30 pm
Money, Power, and the American Dream	Sat, Feb 9, noon – 2:30 pm
Quad States Leadership Workshops, Wells	April 27 - 28
LWVME Convention, Portland	May 24 - 25