



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

The State Voter

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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.



Leadership Development

The League Presidents of Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont (Quad States) are excited about the upcoming Leadership Development Program to be held in Wells, Maine, May 17 and 18. The Quad States Program last year was very successful, and we hope League leaders from throughout these four states will attend again this year. Each of four workshops planned for the day and a half-long meeting will be held twice so that all attendees can go to all sessions. The topics are:

Advocacy and LWVUS Positions: Advocating at the state and national levels based on LWVUS positions; coordination with LWVUS; protocol for contacting Congressional delegation. Leaders: Judy Davis, LWVUS National Board Liaison, and Jara Burnett, LWV Connecticut (invited).

Candidate Debates and Forums: Organizing debates; nonpartisan principles; keeping them both fair and interesting; following the law. Leaders: Hollie Courage, LWV Rhode Island and someone from LWV Massachusetts (invited).

Membership Strategies – What Works: Recruitment; Member and Leadership Development; Member Retention; Best Practices from LWVUS. Leaders: TBA

Conducting a League Study. The nuts and bolts of study at the local and state level; getting organized, developing resources, educating members, reaching out to the community. Leaders: Kate Rader, LWV Vermont, and Marianne D'Angelo, LWV Sudbury MA.

While the boards and officers of state and local Leagues and MAL units are encouraged to attend, any members who are interested in learning more about how the League works are cordially invited.

The Quad States Leagues are grateful to the Ed. Funds of all four of our member states for underwriting this important event. As a result, the registration fee to members is only \$20.00 including Saturday lunch. Register early! Send a check for \$20, payable to LWVNH - Quad States, to LWVNH, 4 Park Street, Concord, NH 03301. Call the Hampton Inn at Wells, Maine 207.646.0555 for room reservations. Don't forget to ask for the "League of Women Voters" rate. Rooms at the League rate are \$89 plus tax, double occupancy. That's only \$44.50 if you share with a friend. While our room rate will hold up until the event, the block of saved rooms will last only until 4/18/08, so be sure to reserve early.

- Ann Luther, Trenton,
LWVME co-President

Sunshine Week begins March 16

The Maine League of Women Voters and the Bangor Public Library are joining forces to raise awareness of the importance of open government with a celebration of Sunshine Week 2008. This year's program, *Government Secrecy: Censoring Your Right to Know*, will be brought to us by OpenTheGovernment.org as a live webcast from the National Press Club. The webcast will be followed by discussion of issues and ideas for local action. You are invited to join us in the Bangor Library's Board Room on Wednesday, March 19, from 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm.

There will be two panels. The first, *The Secret Executive – What Can Congress and the Public Do?*, has confirmed speakers including: Anne Beeson, Director of U.S. Programs at the Open Society Institute and previously Associate Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, Mickey Edwards, Director of the Aspen Institute-Rodel Fellowships in Public Leadership and former Republican member of Congress from Oklahoma for 16 years (1977-92), and John Podesta, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Center for American Progress, Chief of Staff to President Clinton from October 1998 until January 2001, and formerly in senior staff positions in Congress. They will discuss executive branch power and secrecy, congressional rights and responsibilities, and the role of the press in combating government secrecy. Patrice McDermott, Director of OpenTheGovernment.org, will moderate the discussion.

The second panel, *Citizen Self-Help: Finding the Information You Need*, is a conversation with creators of web sites designed to make hard-to-find government information – federal, state and local – easy for the public to find and use and may inspire you to do likewise. The sites include SunlightFoundation.com, Center for Responsive Politics/OpenSecrets.org, OpenCongress.org, FedSpending.org, and EveryBlock.com. Greg Elin, Chief Data Architect of Sunlight Labs at the Sunlight Foundation will moderate this segment.

A quick report will be given, as well, on an initiative to develop a 21st Century Right-to-Know agenda and recommendations for the next President and Congress.

The first national *Sunshine Week: Your Right to Know* was launched in March 2005. Sunshine Week's intent is to raise awareness of the importance of open government to everyone in the community, not just journalists. This national dialogue is brought to you by the American Association of Law Libraries, American Library Association, Association of Research Libraries, League of Women Voters, National Coalition Against Censorship, National Freedom of Information Coalition, National Press Club, OpenTheGovernment.org, Special Libraries Association, Sunshine Week, the Project on Government Oversight (POGO), and the Sunlight Foundation.

For more information on the nationwide event, see <http://www.openthegovernment.org/>.

*Barbara McDade, Bangor
LWVME co-President*

Downeast League Hosts Radio Series on Democracy

"I didn't realize that topic could be so interesting", commented a local TV producer about the very professionally executed Democracy Forum, the radio interview series produced by LWVDE in conjunction with community radio WERU (89.9 FM). This first program was on campaign financing, with Laura MacCleery, the new Deputy Director of the Democracy Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU, and John Rauh, founder and president of Americans for Campaign Reform – Just \$6, a non-partisan grassroots organization that supports public funding of all federal elections.

The hour-long discussions are expertly moderated by LWVME co-president Ann Luther. If you missed the program—the series is broadcast on the first Saturday of the month on WERU at 3 pm—and want to hear just how interesting this topic can be, listen to the podcast at www.weru.org. The program will also be archived at the League's website at www.lwvme.org.

Future topics will be equally challenging and engaging. They include the two-party system and democracy, all about lobbyists, the legislative process, alternative voting systems, the rule of law, separation of powers vs. the unitary presidency and voting rights. These are some of the options and the committee welcomes suggestions for other topics as well as guest suggestions. The next program topic will be Open Government which will coincide with Sunshine Week in March.

The programs are prerecorded with Ann Luther as moderator and Marge May responsible for logistics at WERU. Marge is working with Pacifica Radio to rebroadcast to a wider audience nationally as these topics, although important to Maine citizens, are not Maine-specific. Additional committee members are Linda Washburn, Bonnie Preston, Pam Person and Linda Hoskins.

*- Linda Hoskins, Blue Hill
Downeast League*

IRV Concurrence Process Begins

Within the past few years, instant run-off voting (IRV) has been successfully used in several municipal elections across the nation. IRV enables the voter to vote for his/her true first choice, while indicating a second and third choice candidate; in the event that the voter's first choice fails to garner a sufficient number of votes, the voter's vote for his/her second choice candidate would be cast and so on. This process avoids sequential run-off elections and enables the voter to cast a "single transferable vote". Legislation to implement IRV was submitted in Maine last year, and the Secretary of the State of Maine has indicated a willingness to support a pilot program which would test run a related type of voting called Ranked Choice Voting (RCV).

Presently, LWVUS does not have a position on alternative voting methods such as IRV. However, eight state Leagues (MN, SC, CA, WA, MA, VT, AZ and FL) have conducted studies or otherwise completed the process so as to develop and implement positions on alternative voting methods, including IRV. In order to allow LWVME to participate in this potential evolution in Maine's voting system, LWVME's State Board has initiated the process required to determine whether it can come to concurrence with one of those state League's position on IRV.

The State Board is currently educating itself on the pros and cons of various alternative voting methods. Supporters claim that IRV guarantees that candidates win by a majority, not a plurality, vote and enables the voter to cast a vote for his/her favorite candidate without concern for whether the vote would be "thrown away" and inadvertently act to bolster the showing of his/her least favorite candidate. Concerns with IRV include the cost and voter education required to change our electoral system. In addition, because Maine's constitution calls for candidates to be elected by a plurality of the vote, there is also a question of whether or not instituting IRV would require an amendment to our state constitution. Legal analysts have weighed in to opine that, by calling for a plurality, our constitution did not mean to disallow electoral systems which would result in majority rule. The State Board will seek the Attorney General's opinion on that matter.

Following this educational process, the State Board will review the positions on alternative voting systems reached by other State Leagues and choose which position, if any, most closely aligns with its own conclusions. The Board will then assemble and distribute materials to the local Leagues to facilitate a

discussion on the local level as to whether or not LWVME can come to concurrence with that state's position.

If you would like to know more, please check out our website at lwvme.org. If this subject excites you, please join in the conversation and participate in the process. Thank you for helping to make our democracy work the best possible way that it can.

- Colleen Tucker, Portland
Portland Area League

Book Group to meet in Brunswick

On Thursday, February 28, the League of Women Voters of the Brunswick Area will meet to discuss the 1999 memoir, *Catfish and Mandala*, by Vietnamese refugee Andrew X. Pham. The meeting will take place in the second floor conference room of Curtis Memorial Library, 23 Pleasant Street, Brunswick. Hot drinks are available in the Library's lobby. No food is allowed.

When he was ten, Pham fled with his family from Vietnam to Louisiana and then to California, where he led a mostly assimilated life. After a disappointing engineering career and the suicide of his older sister, however, he began bicycling through Mexico, the Northwestern United States and Japan, finally returning to his homeland, where he spent five months on his bicycle following his family's past and reflecting on racial identity. The book is an exploration of the meaning of home, a descriptive travelogue, and an intimate look at the Vietnamese immigrant experience.

Catfish and Mandala is available at Brunswick's Curtis Memorial Library, via interlibrary loan and from amazon.com. Check to see if Brunswick Bookland or Gulf of Maine Books can order a copy. The ISBN is 9780312267179. Check bookfinder4u.com for the prices of both new and used copies.

Please come to the book group whether or not you have had time to finish the book. As you are reading, think of one question that you would like the group to discuss. Consider how this book relates to the Immigration Study that the League of Women Voters is in the midst of completing.

- Michelle Small, Brunswick
Brunswick Area League

Portland Area League Participates in Naturalization Ceremonies

For several years, the Portland Area League has participated in naturalization ceremonies held every March and September in the U. S. District Court in Portland. New citizens who change their legal names are sworn in by one of two presiding judges, both of whom are naturalized Americans. Typically, 50-60 applicants are granted citizenship at these events.

As the new citizens leave the courtroom, two or three League members pass out voter registration cards and, at the Court's request, applications for new passports. Representatives of The Mayflower Society and the DAR also appear at these festive occasions, which are often covered by the press.

Last October the League was invited by the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office in South Portland to play a similar role in its administrative naturalization ceremonies. Held about every two weeks, these events are smaller, more intimate and less formal. New citizens sworn in at administrative naturalization ceremonies do not change their names, hence require no court appearance.

Up to three sessions (8:45am, 10:00am and 11:15am) are scheduled at each event with a maximum of 16 applicants in each session. Occasionally, these ceremonies are held at area schools, which are somewhat larger in scope. Since October we have introduced over 300 new citizens to the voting process in Maine.

Initially, negotiating our rightful position in the program proved somewhat problematical. Despite being invited to participate, the League's early appearances were marginalized: no introductions, no statement about our organization, our representatives sat in the back rather than stand at the front with the others. At the first session on November 9, we made our move by staking out a position at the front, a gentle stand required to perform our important work. We were as pleasant and professional as we were insistent. Though the other representatives were allowed to pass out flags and copies of the Mayflower Compact as the new citizens got their certificates, nothing was said about the League. We gave out voter registration cards anyway as the new citizens left the room. It slowed the departure pace, which was a bit awkward, but we had a job to do.

Afterwards, the CIS official who officiated apologized about the way it was handled. Then we worked it out that we would stand along with the other two representatives and hand out our cards as part of the ceremony for the second session that day. When we gave the card to the very first person in that session, she said in a loud voice: "Thank you

very much for this; it's why I wanted to become a citizen." Several more enthusiastic comments and a few hugs confirmed the huge difference our participation made. After this second session ended, the CIS official suggested (before we could) that we prepare a statement about the League and send it to her before the next event. Our statement makes a subtle contrast between the League and the other two groups; in neither of the other two organizations will any of these new citizens ever qualify for membership.

The League statement prepared for the CIS reads, "*The League of Women Voters was organized in 1920 six months before ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote after a 72-year struggle. The League is nonpartisan and neither supports nor opposes candidates or parties but is political in its work to influence policy through education and advocacy. It remains committed to its basic purpose of making democracy work for all citizens and encourages voting as the most important act of citizenship. Membership is open to all citizens, both men and women, of voting age.*"

It is clear that the League's participation in these ceremonies is a highly positive factor. Every session brings warm, enthusiastic comments to us about voting. We are available for more discussions (where to take the cards, etc.) after the ceremony is over; many want their pictures taken with us. Occasionally, we recruit new voters among other Mainers. The USCIS officials have become supportive partners in this important project, say nice things about our work and always insist that we attend every event.

The League members who have agreed to participate in naturalization ceremonies are Connie Baskett, Jean Childs, Kitty Coughlin, Polly Ferguson, Evelyn Hedges, Marion Holshouser, Patricia Morin, and Colleen Sanders. This is a year-round project, and we need more volunteers. If you are interested, please contact me for a copy of our participation guidelines. It is among the most satisfying work any League member can ever do.

*Colleen Sanders, Freeport
Portland Area League*

Editor's note: Since this article was written, DHS has put under review the policy that voter registration cards may be handed out during the ceremony.

Maine Freedom of Information Coalition, a Report

The Maine Freedom of Information Coalition (MFOIC) has been very busy this past year and has accomplished much thanks to the support and encouragement of our members. Some highlights include:

✓Advocating: Dozens of Mainers have sought information on state laws, and we have helped many with advice. For the first time, the MFOIC has gone to court by supporting an amicus brief filed by the Maine Civil Liberties Union in an effort to assure records of an advisory group to the Attorney General are public.

✓Awards: The MFOIC board has voted to create our first formal award for supporting open meetings and access to public records. The first of what is planned to be an annual award will be announced during Sunshine Week (March 16-22) at a State House news conference.

✓Education: MFOIC has long maintained that most FOIA (Freedom of Access Act) problems are from a lack of understanding of the public records and public access laws. MFOIC has sponsored or participated in several training programs for police, public officials and reporters across the state. More training needs to be done, and MFOIC is committed to improving the understanding of the law. Our website, www.mfoic.org, is being updated and improved.

✓Legislation: Legislation creating a permanent advisory committee on open meetings and public records has been implemented. The panel has recommended legislation that would create an ombudsman's office to help the public with FOIA complaints and is working to implement the new law that mandates all elected officials receive training.

With your support, MFOIC has had some successes over the past year. Still, more must be done, and we hope that you'll give a little extra, time or money, towards the cause of open government and the good work of the Coalition.

- Mal Leary
President, MFOIC

Update on the LWVME Study on Candidate PACs

The LWVME PAC Study Committee has begun serious work on our campaign finance study regarding political action committees (PACs) in Maine candidate races. This project is funded by the League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund. This LWVME study focuses on how PACs are funded, how they influence candidate elections, and what changes, if any, should be proposed to limit the influence of private money on elected officials. Over the next few months, the Committee will publish five briefing papers to help educate League members and the general public about this important topic:

- I. PAC Background
- II. ME State Law & Enforcement
- III. History/Constitutional Background
- IV. Follow the Money
- V. Insiders' View – the Real World

Local Leagues are encouraged to form local study groups to review and discuss these papers and to conduct public forums for the interest of the general public. Study Committee members are available to join local study groups to answer questions.

Here is a general timeline for Study activities:

Publish briefing papers (Feb-July 2008)

Publish consensus questions (Aug 2008)

Members meet in study groups in local Leagues

(Through Fall 2008)

Local Leagues hold consensus meetings (Sept 2008 –

Jan 2009)

Final consensus (Feb 2009)

LWV State Convention (May 2009)

The PAC Study Committee is comprised of League members Nan Amstutz, Ed Benedikt, Ruth Benedikt, Martha Dickinson, Polly Ferguson, Ann Luther, Susan Mayer, and Sarah Walton. We welcome others interested in working on this important project to join the Committee. Meeting times and locations are posted at www.lwvme.org. Call or e-mail LWVME for further details, lwvme@gwi.net and 622-0256.

- Ann Luther, Trenton
co-President, LWVME

Ruth Benedikt Remembers Ruth Irwin

Ruth Irwin, a long-time member of the Brunswick Area League of Women Voters, died on November 15, 2007. I had known her since we moved to Maine in 1989, because I knew from the start that the best way of learning about the state and local government in Maine was to join the League, and Ruth was the mail and telephone contact for the local branch. The Brunswick Area League Board generally met in her Harpswell home, and her outspoken and vehement opinions and unshaken liberal convictions often carried the day.

Ruth had been an aeronautical engineer and worked for many years at what is now the Lockheed Martin Corporation. This was then a pioneer field for women, but Ruth was never worried about being ahead of her time. Her experiences in the workplace, while she retained her enthusiasm for the airplane industry, helped her identify with other aspects of discrimination. When she felt she was right about something, she immediately enrolled in the struggle. She was one of the founding members of the area chapter of NOW, and she was a fierce activist for reproductive choice, for gay and lesbian rights and for peace.

Ruth had a sharp tongue, a good sense of humor and an inventive mind. She enjoyed making up nicknames for people, and once she did, they tended to stick. Her loyalty to her friends was unstinting – as was her memory for anyone she felt had slighted a friend. When the state League still had its office in Augusta, pinned to its inner door was a photo of Ruth with a newspaper interview that had been printed years earlier. Small in stature and fiercely combative when called to defend the causes in which she believed, she could be a challenge to reckon with. To those League members who never had the opportunity to know her, I say, "you really missed someone special".

*-Ruth Benedikt, Bath
Brunswick Area League*

First Call to LWVME Council 2008

This year, LWVME State Council will be held over lunch on May 18 in Wells, ME. Save the date! Look for details in the next issue of the State Voter and on our website at lwvme.org. Council is the League's annual meeting required under our bylaws in the even-numbered years – the years between Convention. In 2008, we will hold Council at the conclusion of Quad States Leadership Development Program (see page 1). We hope many League members will take advantage of the opportunity to attend both! See you there.

*- Ann Luther, Trenton
Barbara McDade, Bangor
Co-presidents
LWVME*

LWVME Online

You can keep current with ongoing projects, issues and actions of the LWV in Maine by visiting our website at www.lwvme.org. Prospective members can join online at the LWV national website at www.lwv.org or by sending in a form available at lwvme.org. If you do not currently receive our email updates, send a message to lwvme@gwi.net to let us know how to reach you by email.

Help Wanted

The LWVME PAC Study Committee is looking for a few more good men and women to join our team. We have opportunities to help on research topics, briefing papers, and interview teams. Learn from the experts, the insiders, and each other about how campaign finance works in Maine! Call Ann Luther, 664-0696 for more information.

Thank You!

Donors Top \$8,900

Our thanks to the friends and members of the League who contributed to our annual fund drive. Donations ranged in amount from \$10 to \$1,000. Every single contribution, no matter how large or small, supports the work of the League and is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Contributions to the **League of Women Voters of Maine** general fund totaled to **\$3,860**.

Nan Amstutz	Betsey Holtzmann	Patricia Ryan & David Westphal
Bonnie Anderson	Linda Hoskins	Anne Schink
Marie Barlow	Judy Kimball	Esther Shay
Dauna Binder	Gloria & Lincoln Ladd	Judy Simonds
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Suzanne & Don Carmichael	Jana Lapoint	Alison Smith
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Beverly & Charles Cunningham	Ann Luther & Alan Vlach	Julia & Joseph Stevens
Mary Dethier	Nancy Masterton	Patricia Stowell
Martha Dickinson	Barbara McDade	Marlee Turner
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Roger & Elizabeth Gilmore	Carol O'Donnell	Betty & George Willhoite
Anonymous	Anne Parkman	Elise & David Wilson
Martha Harmon	Eileen Robert	
Marion Holshouser	Elizabeth Ruff	

Contributions to the **League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund** totaled **\$5,121**.

Nancy & Jonathan Aldrich	Jana Lapoint	Richard Stevens
Nan Amstutz	Edith Lord	Patricia Stowell
Connie Baskett	Ann Luther & Alan Vlach	Colleen Tucker & Bill
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Winter – Spring 2008 Calendar

Brunswick Book Group, Brunswick	Thursday, February 28
LWV-Downeast Book Group, Ellsworth	Wednesday, March 12
LWVME State Board Meeting, Augusta	Thursday, March 13
Sunshine Week Event, Bangor	Wednesday, March 19
Tax Day – Check “Yes” for Clean Elections	Tuesday, April 15
Quad States Training, Wells	Friday - Sat., May 17, 18
LWVME State Council, Wells	Saturday, May 18
LWVUS Convention, Portland, OR	Friday – Tues., June 13 - 17