



Winnebago Voter

January / February 2010

January / February Calendar

Monday, January 11 6:30 – 8:00
Winnebago LWV Board Meeting
1202 New York Avenue

Wednesday, January 13 Noon
Food for Thought Lunch
Vitale's Italian Cuisine 215 Murdock Ave.
Winnebago County District Attorney, Christian Gossett (See page 3)

Thursday, January 21 6:30 – 8:30
Candidates Forums,
Oshkosh City Hall, Rm 404
Winnebago Circuit Court
Oshkosh City Council

Monday, February 8 6:30 – 8:30
Winnebago LWV Board Meeting
1936 Hazel Street

Wednesday, February 10 Noon
Food for Thought Lunch
Vitale's Italian Cuisine, 215 E. Murdock Ave.
"Options for consideration to balance the 2010-2011 school budget."
Ben Schneider II, Oshkosh Area School Board President

Tuesday, February 16
Spring Primary Election Day
Polls open from 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM

Saturday, February 20 10:00 – 12:00
Lively Issues Brunch Local and US
Coughlin Center (See pages 3 & 4)

Wow! Four Elections in 2010!

Get prepped for the Spring Primary on February 16th

Attend the Candidates' Forums
January 21, 6:30 – 8:30
Oshkosh City Hall, Room 404
Circuit Court Judge Branch 5

The five candidates are
private-practice attorney Caroline Carver
Winnebago County Family Court Commissioner Mark Fremgen
Menasha attorney Edmund Jelinski, a former assistant district attorney
Winnebago County Assistant District Attorney John Jorgensen
Winnebago County court commissioner David W. Keck

Oshkosh City Council Forum
Will follow the Circuit Court Forum

The forums will be broadcast live by Oshkosh Community TV (Channel 10)
Oshkosh Community Radio 101 FM
and by video streaming at
www.oshkoshcommunityvideo.org

Check out these web addresses:

www.lwvwinnebago.org

www.lwvus.org

www.lwv-wi.org

Safe Routes to School Program Highlights November Lunch

Melissa Kraemer Badtke of the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission outlined the safe routes to school (SRTS) of the regional planning commission at the November Food for Thought lunch at Vitales Italian restaurant. Ms. Badtke is the regional coordinator of the program. Of the 57 school districts in the East Central area, only nine districts have completed a SRTS plan or are implementing recommendations made in the plan.



The program has three main purposes:

- 🚲 To enable and encourage children K-8th grade, including those with disabilities, to walk and bike to school
- 🚲 To make bicycling and walking to school safer and more appealing
- 🚲 To facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution within 2 miles of schools.

Much of the funding for these programs comes from the federal transportation bill of 2005 which designated money, circa 3 million, to Wisconsin. Ms. Badtke schedules feasibility meetings with school districts, police, health department, etc. to create a plan for a school district.

The last half of her presentation was the telling of success stories of SRTS programs in area school districts. One cool program was the Omro 8th grade bicycling field trip which includes bicycle safety education in physical education course and a bicycle maintenance shop program for high school students in which they receive community service hours required for graduation.

State LWV Surveys Members and Non-Members on League Operations

Most likely some of you have received the email from the state league about a survey. I hope you have taken the time to complete it. The purpose of the survey is to make the League's work more accessible, and League membership more satisfying. The responses you make will help identify the changes the League will make in 2010.

The League would also like to hear from non-members as well as members. Once you have taken the survey, you will receive an email asking you to forward a survey via a slightly different link to any Wisconsin resident you think would be a great member of the League because of their interest in a strong democracy.

The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. And, of course, the responses will be completely confidential. The League will be keeping a list of email addresses of people who have responded. (That's partly so that you can't go back and take the survey over again! I know that because I tried.)

Here's the link to your survey:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Z7BkeIDIOCMJ4zIDqLBi8w_3d_3d

District Attorney to Speak at League's January Luncheon

Recall that our December Food for Thought lunch was canceled by a blizzard. Our speaker for December, Christian Gossett, Winnebago County District Attorney, has graciously said that he will be our guest at the Wednesday, January 13 Food For Thought lunch. His topic is the new developments in the District Attorney's office.

Lunch will be held at Vitale's Restaurant, 215 W. Murdock, beginning at noon. No reservation is needed. The public is invited to attend.



Oshkosh Area School Board President to Speak at League's February Lunch

Ben Schneider II will address the League's February Food for Thought Lunch. His topic, "Options for Consideration to Balance the 2010-2011 School Budget," will present possibilities for the school district which is again facing deep deficits. One source of the deficits is the change in the state's formula for reimbursing school districts.

In January the school district held two open meetings to learn from community members what they would like to see the school district do to address this problem. At the time I write this (January 5) the proposal includes closing one or two middle schools among other things.

Mr. Schneider is a lifelong resident of Oshkosh. He is married and has three children. He graduated from UW Oshkosh with a double major in finance and marketing. He is a financial advisor and has been providing financial advice to clients for over 14 years. He was first elected to the school board in 2002 and is serving the first year of his third term.

Bring Ideas for Local Program and a Dish to Pass to Issues Briefing

The Winnebago LWV has chosen the Coughlin Center again this year for its Issues Briefing Brunch. Currently our local study is the revenue sharing/tax levy (see article on Steve Hintz page). Just last summer we reached consensus on our parks study and have since issued a Parks Book (see page about obtaining a copy).

In addition, this year the LWV-US asks local and state leagues to propose topics for study, consensus and eventually action. As of the start of 2010, three proposals have been made. Our local League can lend its voice and support to one or all of these proposals or propose a topic of our own. By March we will file our local proposals for study and voiced our opinion on National LWV topics. Here is a brief outline of the three proposals that have crossed my computer screen:

1) From the LWV of Boulder County and the LWV of Colorado: A request to **support the Fair Elections Now (FEN) Act** as a top advocacy priority in 2010 at the January LWVUS Board Meeting.

The Fair Elections Now Act was introduced in the House and Senate on March 31, 2009 and has the potential to fundamentally change congressional campaigns and the way Washington works....

The Fair Elections Now Act (H.R.1826, S.752) will enable qualified candidates for the House and Senate to have the option of running campaigns using a combination of public funding and small donations from supporters. If the Act passes, qualified candidates who are not independently wealthy and who do not want to accept money from special interests will be able to run competitive campaigns. The FEN Act is different from previous campaign finance legislation

in that its goal is not to restrict campaign spending, but to allow public money to be used to pay for candidates' campaigns.

2) The LWV Columbia-Boone County (MO) proposes that the LWVUS 2010 National Convention adopt a study on **the establishment of a cabinet level Department of Peace**. The League has at least 15 positions in 7 topical areas dealing with domestic and international peace. The federal government also has a number of peace related programs scattered through several departments and poorly funded. A Department of Peace would increase the influence of peace on policy decisions by having a cabinet level, proactive advocate for peace. There have been proposals over the last 70 years to create a Department of Peace and at this time the political situation is perhaps as good as it has ever been for passage.

A major emphasis would be on violence reduction in the U.S. The Department would evaluate and disseminate programs which will reduce violence.... A Peace Academy modeled on military academies would train students in peace and require 5 years national or international service after graduation....

International peace is also extremely important and the U.S. expenditure of \$700 billion annually on military activity might be reduced with a more proactive approach to conflate prevention....

A Department of Peace would bring together all of this activity in a coordinated effort with significant funding to have a real impact and save the U.S. many times over the cost of the program. There is a proposal in Congress, H.R.808, with more than 230 cosponsors to create a Department of Peace and the League could help advance and mold the legislation.

3) From the Palo Alto LWV of California, PROPOSAL: **To study the role of the federal government in public education**, with a focus on (1) the basic goals of public education, (2) the role of the federal government in education policy-making, (3) the relationship between national, state, and local levels of education governance, including funding, and (4) the development of common standards.

PURPOSE: To establish national League positions that would enable the League of Women Voters to

- review, consider, evaluate and advocate for or against federal education legislation; to
- advocate on issues related to what the federal role in public education should be; and to
- join in coalition with other national organizations that speak out on issues of public education. (*Editor's Note: These proposals are much longer than printed here. Complete copies of them will be available at the brunch. Or, if you want yours earlier, send me an email request: frankiemengeling@sbcglobal.net.*)

Winnebago League Takes Action on Parks and Schools

Statement before the Oshkosh Budget Public Hearing November 10, 2009

I am Anne Hintz, representing the Winnebago County League of Women Voters, and I am here this evening to urge you not to cut the parks budget. The park department is already underfunded. Deeper cuts put the city in a position where recovery and improvement to parks will not be possible.

The local league recently updated its parks position after a two year study that included visits to each of the city's 47 parks and recreational areas and some in the surrounding township, as well as interviews with park district and planning department personnel. This book which we are giving to you contains our study's findings, position, recommendations, and action plans.

Statement Read before School District Open Meeting, January 6, 2010

Hello, I am Frankie Mengeling, vice-president of the Winnebago County League of Women Voters.

The League has long been a supporter of quality education in the County. Our education position states: “The goal of the public education system should be to produce well-rounded individuals who are prepared to live in a global and rapidly changing technological society and who have career plans and life style which will ensure that they can be productive citizens.” It also addresses school closings... and/or boundary changes stating, “School closings... or boundary changes should not decrease educational opportunity for any child in school.”

In the event of closings, the League lists seven items to keep in mind:

- Opportunities for community participation through public hearings,
- Enrollment factors,
- Relocation factors,
- Physical plant factors,
- Adoption of a timetable outlining the process,
- Community impact, and,
- Provision for acclimation of students, parents and teachers.

Steve Hintz Leads League Members through the Maze of Revenue Sharing and Tax Levies.

“It’s complicated,” Steve Hintz said repeatedly while explaining the state’s revenue sharing and local communities’ tax levies. Hintz, retired professor of public affairs at UWO, explained local and state sources of revenue for municipal governments and the complex financial relationship between the state and local governments. Since this topic is the Winnebago County League’s local study, his information was timely and valuable in providing us with the background we need to continue our work in this area.

The meeting, open to the public, was held on Monday, November 30 at the Oshkosh Public Library. (*John Nichols and Steve Hintz confer with Mark Harris.*)

State involvement in funding local governments dates back to the introduction of a state income tax in 1911. The state collected the income tax by unit of government and then returned 70% of this revenue to the municipality and 20% to the county, while retaining 10%. This method was used until 1971 when a more complex revenue sharing formula was introduced that distributed part of the money on the basis of municipal ability to pay for services. Municipalities with lower property values received more money in state aides.

Hintz focuses on three major topics

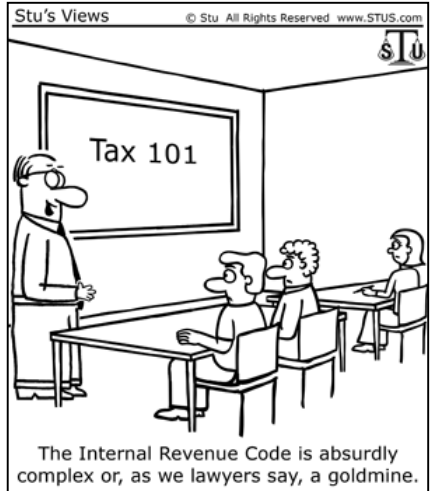
- Characteristics of municipal budgeting
- Impact of state action on local finance and
- Several alternatives to current methods of financing local government.

He defined terms on the city budget handouts: Municipal budgets consist of revenues that will be received and expenditures that will be paid out during the course of the fiscal year between January 1 and December 31. Normal revenue sources include fees, fines, charges of services, interest on investments, state aids and shared revenues, and interdepartmental charges



primarily from the water and wastewater utilities. Since expenditures will exceed these revenues, the municipality will obtain the rest of the money by levying a tax on real and some personal property. This amount is called the levy. The actual amount that residents, businesses, and manufacturers will pay in property taxes is determined by multiplying a mill rate (for example, \$10.50 per \$1,000 in assessed valuation of property) times the assessed property valuation.

Residential and commercial property is assessed by local assessors. Manufacturing property is assessed by the state



State monies distributed to municipalities fall into three categories: categorical aids, State Shared Aids, and the Expenditure Restraint Program. The state has many categorical aids such as aid for maintenance of state highways running through municipalities, services provided to state-owned institutions such as UW Oshkosh, the Oshkosh Corrections Institution, and the Winnebago Mental Health Institution, and other aids.

A major change in allocation of funds occurred in 1972. An equalization formula called the “aidable revenue formula,” granted money on (1) a per capita basis and (2) on the amount of equalized assessed property valuation per capita. The latter formula provided more money per capita to municipalities that lacked a strong property tax base. However,

by 2004 the state had effectively abandoned the revenue sharing formula, instead using the allocation percentages established in 2003.

A third category of money from the state is Expenditures Restraint Program, which provides extra state revenues to municipalities that limit the annual growth of their expenditures.

The state has imposed a series of restrictions on municipal revenue and expenditures. First, there are limits on the growth of the municipal tax levy, that is, the amount of money that can be raised by property taxes. This year, municipal governments are guaranteed a minimum 3% increase in the levy or if greater the percentage increase of net new construction. A municipality needing more money than the 3% allows can ask for a higher levy through a local referendum.

Wisconsin also puts real limits on revenue sources a city can use. It will not permit local sales or local income taxes; however, counties can levy a .05% sales tax. Only about ten of Wisconsin’s 72 counties do not have this sales tax.

Lastly Hintz turned to alternatives to consider.

- Introduction of a local option sales or income tax.
- Raising the state sales tax by one cent and using it to finance state shared revenues
- Raising the state sales tax by one cent and rebating the money generated in districts throughout the state back to governments in those districts. Third was to take a portion of sales tax dedicated to local governments
- State incentives to encourage greater productivity and, probably, more local government consolidation.

In considering options, there are several tax criteria to be considered.

Will the tax or fee raise enough money (sufficiency)?

Will the tax provide a constant stream of money (stability)?

Is the tax equal for all people in the same financial situations (horizontal equity)?

Is the tax fair for people in different financial situations (vertical equity)?

League Celebrates the Holiday Season

League members toasted in the New Year at the League's Holiday Party at Dorry Wilner's. Guests enjoyed lots of talk about upcoming events and tasty food and drink.



State League Action Attracts Statewide Attention

The LWV Wisconsin's petition for new rules for the State Supreme Court was rejected by the Court in a 4 to 3 verdict on October 28. The petition would have prohibited judges and justices from deciding cases involving major campaign contributors. Instead the Court granted verbatim the proposals of the Wisconsin Realtors Association and Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, stating that judges need not withdraw from cases involving major campaign contributors or endorsers.

The issue received a lot of press coverage especially since months ago a West Virginia Supreme Court Justice did not recuse himself from a coal company litigation suit even though the coal company had contributed heavily to his campaign.

In other advocacy action, the League reports the following on League supported legislation:

- ☆ Legislation to restore the right to vote for non-incarcerated felons has had committee hearings in the Assembly and Senate, but has not come up for a vote in either house
- ☆ The Impartial Justice bill, which guarantees public funding for Supreme Court elections, has been signed into law.
- ☆ A bill that holds dishwashing detergents to the same phosphate standards as other household cleaning products was signed into law by Governor Doyle.

The Oshkosh Voter

1936 Hazel St.

Oshkosh WI 54901

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS MISSION

The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization of men and women, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Visit <http://www.lwv.org>, <http://www.lwvwi.org>, <http://www.oshkosh.wi.lwvnet.org>

Members receive the bi-monthly *Oshkosh Voter, Forward* from LWV-WI Meetings are open to the public. Those interested in government and public policy issues will find their intellectual home here.

League Membership: \$45 (\$70 for two in household), \$10 for students

Winnebago County Voter Subscription only: \$10.00.

Dues payable to: LWV-Oshkosh, 1202 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh, WI 54901.

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