

THE BULLETIN

League of Women Voters Kalamazoo Area

October 2015 • Vol. 61 № 2

President's Column

By Denise Hartsough

If you have been waiting for the right moment to **engage with the League locally**, now is the time! If you missed the candidate forums in September, please check them online or when they are broadcast on Public Media Network. If you missed voter registration on the area campuses and Bronson Park on National Voter Registration Day, **volunteer to help out for Project Connect on October 14th**. If you missed the LWVKA Social Hour at Arcadia Brewing, watch for announcements of upcoming socials. We had fun!

Have you felt that your vote in a November election did not count because the primary in your district essentially decided the election? Participate in the October Redistricting town hall meeting to learn about possible solutions.

“If you missed our Social Hour at Arcadia Brewing, watch for announcements of upcoming socials. We had fun! ☺”

Have you wondered what role large contributions play in campaigns in the wake of the Citizens United court decision? Attend the November presentation on “dark money” by Michigan’s expert, **Rich Robinson**. Both events are at the Kalamazoo Public Library’s downtown branch

at 6:30pm—**Redistricting town hall meeting on Monday, Oct. 5**, and **Money in Politics presentation on Thursday, November 19**. Please come and bring your friends and neighbors to these two outstanding opportunities to learn and take action on issues crucial to Making Democracy Work.

Excited about the League’s work? I am! We updated our strategic plan for the next three years and are implementing it. To keep this work going, we have undertaken a major fund drive. The portion of our dues that remains local does not cover operating costs, nor does it allow for special efforts like the Young Adult Voting Project. Soon you will hear more about how you can add your contribution to the funds already pledged by Board members so that LWVKA can thrive for the next three years!

P.S. Welcome to our new Bulletin editor, Karen Thomas!

New Member Spotlight:

Please welcome a new member to LWVKA

JANE WALDECK
7908 Cater Glen Ct
Kalamazoo, MI 49009
269-870-7786
waldeckjane14@gmail.com

Jane is a veteran member of the League and was active in the Alpena County LWV for 15 years. She and her husband have just moved here from Hubbard Lake in northern Michigan. Jane worked as Director of Human Resources in the health and education fields for 29 years and is currently retired. She is a trained moderator for candidate forums interested in voter outreach and education. Her hobbies include golf and bridge.

Calendar

OCTOBER

- 4 Voter Registration**
Hicks Student Center, Kalamazoo College
- 5 Redistricting Town Hall**
Kalamazoo Public Library —6:30pm
- 6 LWVKA Board Meeting**
The Park Club, 219 W. South St.
5:30 pm Food available for purchase
6:00 pm Meeting
269-599-1801 and denise.hartsough@gmail.com
- 13 Redistricting Presentation
Kalamazoo Westside Kiwanis**
The Fountains of Bronson Place, 12 noon
- 14 Voter Registration, Project Connect**
- 21 Consensus meeting—**
Constitutional Amendment Study (LWVUS)
565 E. Brenda Lane Parchment —7pm

NOVEMBER

- 3 General Election**
Polls Open from 7am–8pm
- 3 LWVKA Board Meeting**
The Park Club, 219 W. South St.
5:30 pm Food available for purchase
6:00 pm Meeting
269-599-1801 and denise.hartsough@gmail.com
- 9 Redistricting Presentation**
Rotary
- 19 “Money in Politics” program**
by Rich Robinson
Kalamazoo Public Library —6:30pm
- TBD Study on
Constitutional Amendment**

Note: Board meets on 1st Tuesday. Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings.

★ Voter Outreach & Education ★

More Than 100 Voters Registered in September

By MerriKay Oleen-Burkey

Voter registration volunteers were very busy in September! They registered 17 at the Cougar Connection at KVCC's Texas Township campus, 10 at the semester kick-off at KVCC's Arcadia Commons campus, and 84 at WMU's Bronco Bash!!

On September 22nd, four volunteers staffed our voter registration booth at Bronson Park on National Voter Registration Day. In addition to registering a voter, they had opportunities to interact with potential voters while sharing Voter Guides. Those were a big hit!! Check our Facebook page for pictures by **Paula Manley** at this event.

Thank you to our September voter registration volunteers, many of whom worked more than one event: **Carol Payne Smith, Karen Thomas, Sue Nelmes, MerriKay Oleen-Burkey, Jen Richardson, Vicki Perry, Karen Eddy, Jim Stafford, Sara Wick, Fiona Pott, Shombe Palm, Jr., and Connie Ferguson.** We would not have had such outstanding success without your efforts.

“Thank you to our voter registration volunteers! We couldn't have done it without you!”

October Voter Registration Events

On Friday, October 2nd we will be hosting a voter registration table in Hicks Student Center at Kalamazoo College during the lunch and dinner hours.

On Wednesday, October 14th, voter registration volunteers will be hosting a table at Project Connect in the Expo Center on the Kalamazoo County Fairgrounds. We still need a volunteer for the first shift (noon to 2PM). Please call me (269-270-3302) or send an email message (moburkey30@gmail.com), if you can help with this event.

“ We still need volunteers for this event! ”

Money in Politics Presentations

By Fran Eckenrode

Town Hall Meeting: “Redistricting in Michigan: Should Politicians Choose Their Voters?”

October 5, 2015, Kalamazoo Public Library, 6:30 pm

The League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area is hosting an educational Town Hall on redistricting, **October 5, 2015 at the Kalamazoo Public Library Main Branch at 6:30 pm.** The presentation will explore how legislative lines are drawn in Michigan, who draws them and why it is a critically important issue regarding fair representation. In Michigan, the district lines are drawn by elected officials in the legislature, thereby allowing politicians to choose their voters and giving the political party in power at the time a tremendous advantage.

“ Please join us for these very important presentations. ”

What are the ramifications of partisan drawn districts favoring one party over another? Is there a better and fairer way to do this? What are the alternatives?

Additionally, MaryKay Oleen-Burkey has shared the following on redistricting in Michigan:

Westside Kiwanis invites anyone who is interested in “**Michigan Redistricting**” to attend a Speaker Program on Tuesday, **October 13** from **12pm to 12:30pm** at the Fountains of Bronson Place Auditorium, 1700 Bronson Way, Kalamazoo, MI. The speaker will be **Elizabeth (Liz) Ennis**, a representative of the **League of Women Voters of Michigan.**

A Program “**Money in Politics**” has been scheduled featuring **Rich Robinson**, Executive Director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network. **November 19, Kalamazoo Public Library, 6:30 pm.**

Spending in state and federal election campaigns has been increasing rapidly over the past several election cycles, and a handful of extraordinarily wealthy individuals are responsible for progressively increasing spending. At the same time, accountability for campaign spending is being obscured by the use of political nonprofit corporations, non-disclosing party committees and super-PACs. In most competitive elections, the candidates are outspent by independent committees. Rich Robinson will discuss the numerous records that were set in Michigan's 2014 elections, the trends developing for the 2016 presidential election and what it means for American democracy.

★ Issue Study & Advocacy ★

Position on the Local Housing Ballot Initiative

The League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area supports the Kalamazoo County Local Housing Assistance Fund Millage on the November 3, 2015 election ballot. This millage will provide funds for safe and stable homes and services needed to support children and their families. This endorsement is consistent with the League’s local position on Housing: “The LWVKA supports measures to establish safe, affordable, and permanent housing for residents of Kalamazoo County, providing for services needed to support housing stability.”

Constitutional Amendment Consensus Meeting

The Consensus meeting to discuss the LWVUS Constitutional Amendment consensus questions will be **Wednesday October 21, 2015** at 7:00 pm at Ken and Paula Manley’s home 5652 E. Brenda Lane.

The Consensus Questions begin below. You may bring the questions to the meeting on the 21st or complete them and mail to Paula Manley at the above address or email your responses to pjmanley@hotmail.com. Background articles and the study guide are available at the following link: <http://forum.lwv.org/member-rewsources/article/constitutional-amendment-study-guide>. Please add your voice to the discussion either by attending the meeting on the 21st or submitting your responses.

Constitutional Amendment Consensus Questions

This study is in three parts. **Part I** asks for guidelines to evaluate constitutional amendment proposals. **Part II** asks about aspects of an Article V Constitutional Convention that may be important in conducting such a convention. **Part III** asks two overall balancing questions between process and positions.

Answer each question, regardless of your answers to other questions.

Part I — Considerations for Evaluating Constitutional Amendment Proposals

1. Which of these should or should not be a consideration in identifying an appropriate and well-crafted amendment?

- a) Whether the public policy objective addresses matters of such acute and abiding importance that the fundamental charter of our nation must be changed.

PRO: *Amendments are changes to a document that provide stability to our system and should be undertaken to address extreme problems or long-term needs.*

CON: *When public sentiment is overwhelmingly in favor of change, restraint based on veneration of the document is misplaced.*

Should Should not No consensus

- b) Whether the amendment as written would be effective in achieving its policy objective.

PRO: *Amendments that may be unenforceable, miss the objective or have unintended consequences will not work to achieve the policy objective.*

CON: *It’s all right to deliberately put something in the Constitution that will need to be interpreted by courts and legislatures over time.*

Should Should not No consensus

- c) Whether the amendment would either make our political system more democratic or protect individual rights.

PRO: *Most amendments have sought to make our system more democratic by extending voting rights, for example, or to protect the rights of minorities from powerful interests.*

CON: *What has been typical in the past is not a good measure of what’s appropriate or necessary today or in the future, especially since there have been relatively few amendments.*

Should Should not No consensus

- (d) Whether the policy objective can be achieved by a legislative or political approach that is less difficult than a constitutional amendment.

PRO: *Due to the difficulty of amending the Constitution, it is important to consider whether legislation or political action is more likely to succeed than an amendment, in order to achieve the objective and to expend resources wisely.*

CON: *Important policy objectives should sometimes be pursued through a constitutional amendment even though it may be difficult for it to be enacted and even when other options are available.*

Should Should not No consensus

- e) Whether the public policy objective is more suited to a constitutional and general approach than to a statutory and detailed approach.

PRO: *It is important to consider whether the goal can best be achieved by an overall value statement, which will be interpreted by the courts, or with specific statutory detail to resolve important issues and reduce ambiguity.*

CON: *Getting action on an issue is more important than how a policy objective can best be achieved.*

Should Should not No consensus

Part II — Aspects of an Article V Constitutional Convention

2. What conditions should or should not be in place for an Article V Constitutional Convention initiated by the states?

a) The Convention must be transparent and not conducted in secret.

PRO: *The public has a right to know what is being debated and voted on.*

CON: *The lack of public scrutiny and the ability to negotiate in private may enable delegates to more easily reach agreement.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

b) Representation at the Convention must be based on population rather than one state, one vote.

PRO: *The delegates represent citizens and should be distributed by U.S. population.*

CON: *The U.S. is really a federation of states that must agree by state to any change in the Constitution.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

c) State delegates must be elected rather than appointed.

PRO: *Delegates represent citizens and therefore need to be elected by them.*

CON: *Appointment allows for experts who wouldn't run in an election.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

d) Voting at the Convention must be by delegate, not by state.

PRO: *As at the Articles of Confederation Convention, delegates from one state can have varying views and should be able to express them by individual votes.*

CON: *Because any amendment proposal will go to the states for ratification, voting by state blocs—however the delegates are originally chosen—reflects the probability of eventual ratification.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

e) The Convention must be limited to a specific topic.

PRO: *It is important to guard against a “runaway convention”.*

CON: *The convention alternative was provided for a time when Congress was not listening, so the delegates should not be constrained.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

f) Only state resolutions on a single topic count when determining if a Convention must be called.

PRO: *Counting state requests by topic ensures that there is sufficient interest in a particular subject to call a convention, and enhances citizen interest and participation in the process.*

CON: *There is no requirement for Congress to count state requests by topic and when enough states are unhappy enough to ask for a convention, it should happen.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

g) The validity of state “calls” for an Article V Constitutional Convention must be determined by the most recent action of the state. If a state has enacted a rescission of its call, that rescission should be respected by Congress.

PRO: *A state legislature should be free to determine its position in regard to an Article V Constitutional Convention. A rescission should be equally acceptable to Congress as a state's call for a convention.*

CON: *A state legislature's call for a Convention can not be overturned because the process may never end.*

Agree Disagree No consensus

3. Should the League oppose an Article V Constitutional Convention to propose amendments to the U.S. Constitution because of unresolved questions about the powers and processes of such a convention?

PRO: *The Constitution is too important to trust an unknown or uncontrollable process. It is unclear whether conditions or safeguards regarding powers and processes for a convention can be successfully put in place.*

CON: *A convention is intended to be an unrestrained process to propose amendments to the Constitution.*

Should Should not No consensus



Returned Service Requested

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK!

Book Notes

By Karen Thomas

In his book *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, **Ari Berman** traces the 50-year history of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) signed into legislation in 1965. The VRA gave African-Americans and other long-disenfranchised minorities the right to vote eliminating literacy tests and poll taxes. Within a decade after President Johnson signed the VRA, black voter registration went from 31 percent to 73 percent in the South, and the number of African-American elected officials nationwide expanded from less than 500 to 10,500. However, Berman in this thoroughly-researched history, claims that after the passage and enforcement of VRA, counterrevolutionaries have attempted to undo gains made under the voting rights legislation. These counter-revolutionaries involve: gerrymandering; shutting down voter registration drives; eliminating same-day voter registration; cutting early voting; cutting back hours and days for early voting; purging voting rolls; and requiring a government-issued ID to vote. Further, Berman then shows how the power to define voting rights has shifted from Congress to the courts. Berman asserts that politics and partisanship trump democracy. Of great importance to the mission of the LWV, Berman points to the facts that the VRA has never been totally accepted and that the battle for voting rights is far from over.

LWVKA Board for 2015-2016

Officers:

Denise Hartsough,
President
denise.hartsough@gmail.com

Sabrina Pritchett-Evans,
VP Organization
Sabrina.pritchett-evans.ghk@statefarm.com

Fran Eckenrode,
VP Program
feckenr@gmail.com

Susan Atkinson, *Treasurer*
sls.atkinson@gmail.com

Janet Jones, *Secretary*
janetmjones848@gmail.com

Chris Kuthe,
Membership Chair
ckuthe57@yahoo.com

Paula Manley,
Past President
pjmanley@hotmail.com

Board Members:

Ruth Caputo
ruth1281@att.net

Jennie Hill
Jahill1231@yahoo.com

Terry Hluchyj
hluchyberg@aol.com

Ken Manley
Kenmanley@hotmail.com

Georgiann McWilliams
georgiann@charter.net

KC Miller
aakcmiller@yahoo.com

Merrickay Oleen-Burkey
moburkey30@gmail.com

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