



TENNESSEE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee

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Fall 2013

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Presidents' Message

The newly elected LWVTN Board met in June for orientation—to League and each other—and to plan the year ahead. New faces, new ideas, big issues to address!

Be on the lookout for the annual Action Committee Survey and please participate. The electronic version via e-mail will take just a minute or two and helps the committee focus on League issues **YOU** want to see addressed (those still snail-mailing will need to post their responses back to the LWVTN PO Box).

The board grappled with the wide variety of topics members will address during the coming year and decided that in-League education with a dose of hands-on take-home and replicate practice was most important. In order to move past research and information and develop priorities and position statements, Leaguers want to understand the steps to effective advocacy. So, we changed this year's **Fall Conference** format—redesigning it as a **League Leaders Workshop**.

This **one-day event** features an information component in the morning with expert dialogue about two topics: charter school authorization and accountability, and Common Core Standards and assessment. Both topics have become volatile throughout Tennessee and integral to local discussions as well as the 2014 Legislative Session. In the afternoon, we'll dissect how Leagues move from information to action through internal and community education, creation of positions, and comfort with one-on-one advocacy at the local and state level as these issues are discussed and debated.

Join fellow League members on October 12 in Nashville—in fact, bring your entire League team! That way, every League member across Tennessee will be ready to answer questions with factual information about a range of issues; especially education issues (see the Fall Conference article for more information).

You inspire the LWVTN Board with your hard work because it furthers the work of the League. Continue to register voters—and make a special effort to acquaint your communities with revised voter ID requirements (downloadable at www.lwvtn.org). Poll watchers learned how important it is that voters notify their election commission when they change addresses. Address changes were one of the biggest headaches noted during the 2012 election. The League can help by encouraging folks to update their addresses at voter registration drives. Speaking of which, **National Voter Registration Day** is September 24—tell us about your event.

Finally, congratulations to us all! August 18 marked the 93rd anniversary of the 19th Amendment, securing women's suffrage and beginning a new era.

In League,

Margie Parsley & Jo Singer, Co-presidents

LWVTN FALL CONFERENCE—October 12 in Nashville

by Special Events Director Michele Brandenburg

Fall Conference 2013 offers a new one-day format and will be held at the Nashville Club Hotel off Briley Parkway. Leaguers will convene on Saturday, **October 12** from 10 am to 5 pm CDT. The LWVTN Board hopes attendees will stay over the night before or afterwards to network—it's a great opportunity for local Leagues to exchange ideas and grow their programs.

The theme of this year's League Leaders Workshop—**Thinking and Moving on Our Feet for Education**—informs the dual role education will play in League activities in the coming year as we refine skills to better understand and communicate our priorities, especially those related to public education. How do Leaguers use a wealth of research and information to develop these priorities and position statements, and then apply them as a basis for action and effective advocacy? The workshop will get us there through a step-by-step process that includes:

- Learning about a public policy issue
- Educating others with appropriate resources
- Reaching consensus at local and state League levels
- Advocating within communities and with government officials

The morning session will develop an information component around two hot-button education policy issues. Dialogue among local experts will be presented on two topics: charter school authorization and accountability, and Common Core Standards and assessment. Both topics have become volatile throughout Tennessee and will be integral to community debate and discussion as well as the 2014 Tennessee Legislative Session.

In the afternoon, sessions will delve into the hard work of translating information into effective educational resources for League members and their larger communities. How do Leaguers move from information to action through internal and community education, create positions, and achieve comfort with one-on-one advocacy at the local and state level as these issues are discussed and debated?

The LWVTN Fall Conference Workshop Committee is chaired by LWVN President **Debby Gould**. Address question to her at debbygould@bellsouth.net.

LWVTN Director **Mary Headrick** invites submission of **posters** about other issues impacting public education that will be displayed at the conference. Pick your subject: charter schools, vouchers, assessment, teacher unions, community schools—the range of issues is as diverse as our schools. E-mail your content to Headrick at mary@maryheadrick.com, send it to her at P.O. Box 218, Maynardville, TN 37807, or simply bring it to the meeting. Even if you are unable to attend Fall Conference, your ideas can attend. If you send Headrick your content by October 8, she will print it and post it at the meeting. Headrick's poster will explore virtual schools and K12-Inc. **What about yours?**

Register **NOW** for **Fall Conference 2013** (<http://lwvtn.org/Conference.html>). Registration is \$30 per person and includes a box lunch.

If you decide to come early or stay late, you may make a hotel reservation at Club Hotel-Nashville, 2435 Atrium Way, Nashville, TN 37214, 615-883-0500, on their website (see below). A group rate of \$64.95 a night plus tax is available until Friday, September 20, 2013 to LWVTN Conference attendees for accommodations on Friday or Saturday nights and includes a hot breakfast buffet. Attendees who are not staying at the hotel may purchase breakfast for \$7.95. Directions and other hotel information is available at <http://www.nashvilleclubhotel.com>.

Judy Poulson Receives the 2013 LWVTN Martha Ragland Award

The **Martha Ragland Award** was first presented in 1995 at the LWVTN's 75th Anniversary Gala. It has since been given biennially to a member whose life and contributions demonstrate multi-dimensional service within their local League, community, and the LWVTN, as well as activism in the development of fair, well-researched, and thoughtful legislation at all levels of government following Ragland's dynamic example.

The 2013 recipient—**Judy Poulson**—is a woman who has been a pillar of the League at all levels. She has served on several local League boards, our state board for many years, and on the LWVUS national board. She has represented the League on the Tennessee Advisory Committee on Open Government, served on the Tennessee Help America Vote Act (TN HAVA) Committee, and on the Tennessee Commemorative Woman Suffrage Commission to celebrate



Judy Poulson receives the Ragland Award from Co-president Margie Parsley

the 75th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. She is the person to turn to when in need of information about League facts and process.

After reading an article in *Woman's Day* magazine that described the LWV Voter Service projects, Judy expressed interest in the League to a neighbor. It turned out the neighbor was a League member and naturally she invited Judy to come to the next meeting. Judy joined the LWV of Milwaukee that fall in 1965. She has been active in voter service and other League issues ever since.

Nancy Stewart of Knoxville describes first meeting Judy Poulson in 1988 at the LWVUS Convention in Denver. Nancy had been told that Judy and her husband were considering a move to Tennessee but first Judy wanted to know if there was a League in Knoxville, and then about opportunities to golf. The League came first!

At LWVUS, Judy worked on Voter Service (no surprise there) and a new pilot project called Voters on Line. When she received the assignment she had relatively little experience with computers. She rapidly became known as the LWVUS Board techie. She was a firm advocate for an online Voter Service presence for the League of Women Voters.

Judy is still an active state board member. This term she is continuing as LWVTN Secretary and the member-at-large liaison. We remain grateful for her continued service to the League.

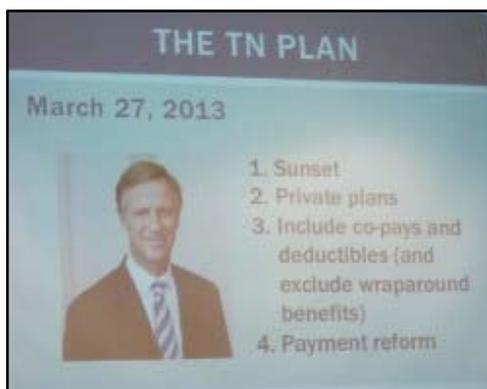
2013 Tennessee Health Care Campaign Conference

by LWVTN Co-president **Jo Singer**

LWVTN co-sponsored the **2013 THCC Conference**, which was marked by record attendance from across Tennessee. Those numbers even necessitated a double lunch session at the Scarritt-Bennett Center! LWVTN Board member **Kathy Gilbert** and I were very pleased to be representing the League and, at the League's table, we made our health care research available along with LWV brochures, the latest voting requirements from Tennessee Secretary of State, and copies of "How to Judge a Candidate." In addition, we provided a sign-up sheet for those who wanted more information about the League. We also connected with a number of people who need to be members-at-large (through the MAL program). Our next step will be to get them more information as we widen our reach across the state.

While implementation of the ACA is complicated, we got a lot out of the presentations and, by the end of the day, felt we had a better handle on it. There were several presentations and breakout sessions centered on how individuals and communities would be able to help register folks on the new exchange marketplaces, which open October 1.

We understood through our work with educational forums in 2011 that gathered input across the state toward the formation of a state exchanges that a Tennessee Exchange and Medicaid expansion could not happen without Governor **Bill Haslam's** active support. In December 2012, the governor said no to a Tennessee Exchange. On March 27, 2013 he said no to expanding Medicaid, but he promised that the state could do better for its citizens through his Tennessee Plan.



Gordon Bonnyman's presentation helped attendees reframe the advocacy issue. The Tennessee Plan is now the only plan for Tennessee. In order to cover Tennesseans below poverty level (\$23,000 for a family of 4) and draw down billions of ACA dollars for Tennessee infrastructure and communities, we need to get the Tennessee Plan to yes.

There are two steps to achieving this: 1) by getting a federal waiver, something the federal government has said they will do for a small number of states as long as federal Medicaid money still allows consumer safeguards to remain in place, and 2) by the governor getting the backing of the legislature to provide premium assistance for those people who are at 138 percent of the poverty level or below.

The federal dollars on the table for Tennessee are in the **Billions**. If the Tennessee Plan is not in place starting January 1, 2014, Tennessee will lose **LOTS** of money—\$2.8 million each and every **DAY**—until the state accepts the Tennessee Plan. And there is truly no downside risk, because a state can pull out at any time.

For folks without insurance, however, this is a life and death situation. For the hospitals around the state it is an economic catastrophe in the making because hospitals agreed to expanded coverage of the uninsured and accept fewer federal dollars to help with uncompensated care. If the Tennessee's poorest patients aren't covered, then 30 hospitals across the state are on the precipice of closure.

At the grassroots level, we need to encourage all our legislators to vote for the Tennessee Plan. Why? Because we need insurance for all our folks and our communities need their representatives help to do it—this is **NOT** a political issue, it's a human issue.

Kentucky to the north will have a traditional exchange and Medicaid expansion plan. Arkansas to the west will have a modified plan. Both will add to the negative economic impact in a Tennessee with **NO** plan.

Videos and power points from the conference are available at the THCC website (www.thcc2.org).



A capacity crowd of close to 300 attended.



Beth Uselton of Baptist Healing Trust.

Supreme Court Rules June 25, 2013 Striking Down Key Component of the 1965 VRA

Letter to the Editor at the Tennessean July 2013: **Congress Must Act Quickly to Restore the Voting Rights Act**

As the summer heat began to build in Washington DC, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a much-anticipated decision which gutted key components of the monumental **Voting Rights Act** (VRA) of 1965. The decision in the case of *Shelby County, Alabama v. Holder* erased fundamental protections against racial discrimination in voting that have been effective for more than 40 years and opened the floodgates for a wave of attacks on voters. Only strong action from Congress can fix the Court's mistake.

Before the ink was even dry on the decision, several states rushed to implement racially discriminatory anti-voter laws, including states where the League of Women Voters had previously succeeded in blocking voter restrictions in the courts and state legislatures. Sadly, this is only the beginning. Without a strong VRA, our ability to fight off anti-voter legislation and keep our elections free, fair and accessible is significantly weakened.

As we approach the 48th Anniversary of this historic civil rights legislation, the VRA remains an essential protection against the thinly veiled discrimination that still threatens Americans' right to vote. Congress needs to move swiftly to overcome this decision and restore the effectiveness of the VRA. The *Shelby* decision is a call to action for all who believe all Americans should have fair and equal access to the ballot. Now is the time to contact your member of Congress and tell him or her to repair the VRA before any more damage is done.

Jo Singer
Co-president, League of Women Voters of TENNESSEE

Supporting President Obama on Climate Change

by LWV Nashville Environment Director Jennifer Tlumak

In June, President Obama announced a series of executive orders designed to combat and adapt to climate change. The League of Women Voters of the United States responded by asking its members across the country to “support the president as he moves ahead to fulfill his commitment to people, not polluters.” (If you haven’t already signed on, go to: http://participate.lwv.org/c/10065/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=8188.)

In fact, the LWVUS has called climate change the “greatest environmental challenge of our generation” and urged our leaders to regulate carbon dioxide. So, we welcome President Obama’s strong stance on this issue. Want some details on the President’s initiative? The White House has outlined its plan in an engaging “infographic” format, which can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/share/climate-action-plan>. It’s a step in the right direction, while we continue to agitate for progress at the state and local levels.

In Nashville, we have a great opportunity to do just that, with Metro government actively planning our city’s 25-year plan. We’ve just entered the Creating the Vision phase of Nashville Next, and several (eight, by my count) of the 34 vision topics, which are guiding the plan’s development, are related to climate and the environment. It’s encouraging that topics like transit, walkable neighborhoods, and green living are on the table and guiding our growth. There are still lots of opportunities to be involved in the Nashville Next process. For opportunities to contribute, stay tuned to the website (<http://www.nashville.gov/Government/NashvilleNext.aspx>),

As concerned citizens and as League members, let us work on this greatest environmental challenge and ensure that our neighbors, friends, family, and, of course, our elected representatives, know how we feel!

Spotlight on LWVTN Board Member Kathy Gilbert



Q: Kathy, please tell us bit about you.

KG: As I write, my hometown, Hemet, California breathes a sigh of relief. A forest fire that had been raging for about a week, between the small brown mountain ridge that defines our valley to the north, and the 13,000-foot snow-capped peak, we call “Greyback,” has been contained.

I graduated from high school a year early, because I felt squashed, and bored. I wanted more information, more dazzling experiences, and more mental stimulation. Simply, I wanted to see the world—the usual wanderlust.

My resume details what I did, over the next few decades: achieving a bachelor’s in French in California, a master’s in journalism and a doctorate in mass communication at UT Austin. I have spent most of my career in journalism. In 2006, I met my husband in 2006 and we married in 2008. He has lived in Dunlap, Tennessee for about 25 years. I moved out here, and, gradually, have adapted, somewhat, to Southern rural life. It’s interesting, as the Chinese say. I have always had a deep love of forests, wild creatures, and native plants in a way shared by botanists, veterinarians, zoologists, plant breeders, and ecologists. So, our bluff-side home on 3.5 acres, with expanses of trees on both sides and vultures, hawks, and songbirds flying over our heads (as well as hang gliders, but that’s another story for another day) suits me well. The cultural isolation, on the other hand, drives me nuts!

Q: So why join the League of Women Voters?

KG: When I first voted, and for decades thereafter, I turned to the LWV voter guide to inform my decisions in every election—great “Cliff Notes” for earnest but distracted voters worked so well! When I moved to Tennessee, I was surprised not to find a LWV guide.

As a newspaper reporter, I got the inside scoop from other reporters. Then, in 2009, I was laid off. During the summer of 2012, concerned about the presidential election, and my current U.S. representative, I joined the online get-out-the-vote drives. It was about all I could do. As I talked with folks in my community I heard several people mention how frustrated they were with the lack of available information about the election. And I remembered those handy LWV voter’s guides.

After the elections, I decided to choose two deep passions I could productively act upon. Passion 1 is helping the stray dogs constantly dropped off in our neighborhood. I now volunteer with Wally’s Friends, a Red Bank (Chattanooga suburb) group.

Passion 2 is reacting to the collapse of quality independent media in our country. Our society is filled with junk-speak. Civic

discussion about vital government issues does not exist. Individuals and communities are bombarded with information designed to manipulate.

I saw the League of Women Voters as a great organization for fighting back. As politics becomes more fragmented, polarized, and unrepresentative, the League remains a commonsense, civic-minded voice for the middle. And, as a practical matter, I wanted my voting guide.

In December, I think, I joined the League as a Member-at-large. There are no other League of Women Voters members where I live. In spring, I signed up for Action Alerts. My interests are health care, the environment, open government, voter registration, and voter education.

Notes from the LWVTN Action Committee

by LWVTN Action Director Barbara Gay

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee **Action Committee** met on July 12 and August 13 to plan and strategize for the next Tennessee Legislative Session beginning in January 2014. Many bills pertaining to League priorities will be reintroduced as well as new legislation that could have profound impact on Tennessean's lives.

A huge **Thank You** to LWV members who have agreed to chair issue subcommittees this season:

- Elections—Amy Greene
- Education—Debby Gould, Mary Headrick, and Karen Weeks
- Open Government—Hazel Thornton
- Health Care Reform—Pat Post
- Environment—Barbara Devaney
- Judicial Selection—Diane DiIanni
- Revenues—Karen Weeks
- Immigration—Jo Singer

We still need a member to lead the Responsible Budget or Appropriations subcommittee. Relevant to this very important issue, Tennesseans may be facing severe cuts to education, health care, and our social safety net. Issue subcommittee chairs are responsible for following legislation and committee hearings with the help of our lobbyists, **Stewart Clifton** and **Sarah Cooper**. They also need to inform their committee members through e-mails about important developments and help draft LWVTN Action Alerts. Those interested in following the Tennessee budget process, should contact **Barbara Gay** at 615-297-4145 or barbara.b.gay@gmail.com.

The **LWVTN Action Committee's 2013 Survey** will be sent out on September 9. We are asking members to indicate those issues on which you want to receive information and those issues on which you are willing to take action. The Committee is open to your suggestions, which will help make our action meetings and lobbying efforts more effective. We need to have a representative from each League across the state as well as Members-at-large participating in our Monday meetings at 11:30 a.m. (Central Time). The next LWVTN Action Committee meeting will be Monday, September 16. Contact Barbara Gay if you would like to participate in the calls.

TAKING LEAGUE ACTION—What Can We Say?

To answer League questions as they come up, we refer to "**League Basics**," our guide to all things League ([click here](#)).

On the issue of how a League goes about advocating or lobbying for League positions, it has this to say:

Advocacy versus Lobbying

Advocacy is a broader concept than lobbying. While lobbying can be part of an advocacy strategy, advocacy does not necessarily include lobbying. **Lobbying** is defined as an attempt to influence specific legislation, both legislation that has already been introduced in a legislative body and specific legislative proposals that the League or others may either oppose or support. Lobbying includes action that transmits a point of view on a specific piece of legislation to elected officials or their staffs, as well as action urging the public to contact their legislators about a specific piece of legislation. Lobbying activities must be funded through general operating funds (501(c)4).

Advocacy activities, on the other hand, can sometimes be funded with tax-deductible monies. This is the case even when only one side of an issue is presented, as long as no call to action on a particular piece of legislation is issued. Such activities can include: (1) developing public policy briefs that analyze issues and provide detailed information and recommendations for addressing them through specific reforms and (2) providing forums for discussing issues and educating policymakers and the public.

LWVUS Lobbying

The LWVUS Bylaws provide that Leagues may act on national legislative issues **only** in conformity with positions taken by the LWVUS (see [Impact on Issues](#)). This helps to ensure that the League speaks with one voice, which is essential for our effectiveness as an advocacy organization. A League board may choose not to respond to a particular call to action, but it may not take action in opposition to a position articulated by the LWVUS. Similarly, state Leagues are responsible for determining action policies and strategies on state issues and ensuring that the League's message is consistent throughout the state.

It sometimes happens that a local or state League may want to take action at the federal level on an issue that is not currently an LWVUS priority. In this case, consultation with the LWVUS staff is required via a Request Form available on the LWVUS website (<http://www.lwv.org/content/state-and-local-league-request-form-federal-issues>). After consulting with the LWVUS, a League may only lobby their own Members of Congress—and Senators, in the case of a state League. It is never appropriate for a League to lobby another League's Members of Congress.

Taking Action in the Community

Interpretation of a League position is the responsibility of the board that oversees that position. Local League boards are responsible for interpreting their own positions before taking action. Similarly, the LWVUS Board interprets national positions, and state League boards interpret their own state positions. Uniform interpretation is essential for the League's effectiveness. A local League contemplating action on a community issue should consider the following:

- Does the League have a position that supports the proposed action?
- Do members understand and would they agree with the proposed action?
- Is it a priority for the League?
- Does the League have a unique role to play or would the League's assets (time and money) be better spent on other activities?
- Does it have some chance of success or make an important statement for the League?
- Are other organizations or a coalition already working on the issue?
- What action techniques would be most effective?
- How will the League deal with controversy?
- How can members be involved in the proposed action?
- What kind of community involvement would best support the League's efforts?

A local or state League may want to take action by using a national League position at the local or state level (i.e., not lobbying members of Congress or the state legislature). If the local or state League board judges that its members are knowledgeable and support the action to be taken, it can act without clearance from the LWVUS board. Leagues may wish to consult with the LWVUS Board or staff for background on action previously taken at all levels of the League based on a particular position. LWVTN does **not** require clearance for state positions to be used locally.
