



TENNESSEE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee

PO Box 158369, Nashville TN 37215-8369 | 615-297-7134 | www.LWVTN.org | LWVTenn@gmail.com

Spring 2015

Officers

Co-presidents **Margie Parsley**, Nashville, & **Jo Singer**, Franklin

1st Vice President—Membership

2nd Vice President—VOTE 411
Judy Raines, Nashville

Secretary **Judy Poulson**, Knoxville

Treasurer **Marian Ott**, Nashville

Directors

Special Events **Michele Brandenburg**, Oak Ridge

Webmaster

Voter Editor **Sue Bredensteiner**, Nashville

Action **Barbara Gay**, Nashville

Amy Greene, Murfreesboro

Kathy Gilbert, Dunlap

Nominating Committee

Chair **Kathy Edwards**, Oak Ridge

Barbara Devaney, Nashville

Lorelei Gould, Gallatin

LWVTN Education Fund Board of Trustees

The Elected Officers

Office Administrator

Karen Fairbend

Presidents' Message

Typing the word “spring” when it was still snowing in Nashville was unreal! We have been under siege from one end of Tennessee to the other but we continue on, chipping away ice and looking for a breakthrough. Kind of like working with League issues and state-elected officials—we persevere.

Thank all of you who took the time to inform fellow citizens about **Insure Tennessee**. LWVTN had a tremendous effort statewide and **Barbara Gay** details it along with future planning in her article. Notice, we said future planning because this cannot be over after one skirmish. It took 65 years for women to get the vote. Good thing our foremothers didn't give up!

Gay and the entire Action Committee have been busy this legislative season, as always. We hope you are receiving the weekly **Legislative Report** prepared by LWVTN Lobbyist **Stewart Clifton**, which outlines movement at the Capitol concerning legislation important to the League. We also hope you are taking advantage of the opportunity to participate in the Action Committee meetings via phone conference or in person.

It has been an honor to serve you as LWVTN co-presidents, and we look forward to seeing all of you at the Spring Convention hosted by the Murfreesboro League on April 25 and 26. We will be electing new officers and directors for LWVTN, establishing our 2015 budget, and setting program. We will hear from distinguished speakers, and learn from and enjoy networking with fellow League members. Our LWVUS Liaison **Barbara Zia** will be with us, too, to help us understand and strengthen the wonderful interconnectedness of LWV. See **Michele Brandenburg's** article for more details, and make your reservations as soon as you can.

We also want to remind everyone in the local Leagues that, even though this is an “off year” for elections, many of you will be having city or county elections. The LWVTN Board again has offered to fund your **Vote411 Voter Guide** as long as your League provides a local chair or point person. In a variant of **Tip O'Neill's** “All politics are local,” we hope you'll be able help your community with insights into your candidates with a local version of the Vote411 Guide.

See you in Murfreesboro!

In League, Co-presidents **Margie Parsley** and **Jo Singer**

LWVTN Spring Convention is Just Around the Corner

April 25-26, 2015 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee at the

DoubleTree by Hilton • 1850 Old Fort Parkway 37129

by Director Michele Brandenburg

Make Carrie Proud—Attend Your Convention! LWV Founder Carrie Chapman Catt would be thrilled to know the organization she started is still **Making Democracy Work**.® Register now for LWVTN's two-day convention agenda and reserve your spot for dinner Saturday evening to celebrate the **95th birthday of LWVUS** and take part in the **Martha Ragland Award** presentation.

Hosted by **League of Women Voters of Murfreesboro**, LWVTN Convention includes League business with presentation of the 2015-2017 Slate of LWVTN officers and directors, their elections and installation, as well as decisions about the 2015 budget, program, studies, and so much more. This is your opportunity to help guide LWVTN programs and studies. You can voice your concerns about League work and action to both incoming and outgoing board members. Your voice is critical to ensuring a vital Tennessee League.

Highlights of the Agenda include: Committed to Health Care for All, **Gordon Bonnyman, Jr.**, Tennessee Justice Center; The American Democracy Project, Dr. **Mary Evins**, associate professor of history, MTSU; Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, **Deborah Fisher**, executive director TCOG; Immigration, Dr. **DeAnn Pendry**, lecturer Department of Anthropology, UTK; and Action Report by Committee Director **Barbara Gay** and LWVTN Lobbyist **Stewart Clifton**.

Registration fees are \$40 for members and \$50 for nonmembers; a one-day registration is available at \$20 for members and \$25 for nonmembers. This fee includes materials, an afternoon snack break Saturday, and continental breakfast before the Sunday session.

Dinner on Saturday evening will be 6:00 pm at **City Center, 15th floor** of the Swanson Building, 100 Vine Street, Murfreesboro 37130. See the menu to be catered by Goodness Gracious Café on the registration form. The keynote is LWVUS Liaison for Tennessee Leagues **Barbara Zia**. Dinner is \$30 per person and **reservations are required**. Dinner reservations are separate from your Convention registration.

Register and make your dinner reservation at: <http://www.lwvtn.org/>

For sleeping room reservations for Friday or Saturday, please contact the Murfreesboro **DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel** **directly** at 615-895-5555 on or before **March 25, 2015**. Ask for a room from the block reserved for LWVTN to receive the rate of \$99 plus tax. Complimentary wireless high-speed Internet, refrigerator and coffee maker are included. More information about the hotel is available at www.murfreesboro.doubletree.com.

And if you can volunteer to help, contact **Michele Brandenburg** at 865-659-5318.

2015-2017 LWVTN Board Slate

OFFICE	NOMINEE
President	Marian Ott - Nashville
1ST VP/ Membership	Jo Ann Garrett - Oak Ridge
2nd VP/ Strategic planning/succession	Kim Lauth - Knoxville
SECRETARY	Judy Poulson - Knoxville
TREASURER	Claudia Lever - Oak Ridge
1. Director (Webmaster)	Katrina Gay - Hendersonville
2. Director (Voter Editor)	Kathy Gilbert - MAL/Chattanooga
3. Director (Action)	Barbara Gay - Nashville
4. Director (Environment)	Joe McCaleb - Hendersonville
5. Director (411)	Jo Singer - Nashville
6. Director (no portfolio)	Freda Player - Nashville
7. Director (no portfolio)	Joan Hamner - Chattanooga
8. Director	
Director (apptd)	
Director (apptd)	

Director (apptd)	
Director (apptd)	
Director (apptd)	
Director (apptd)	
Director (apptd)	
Director (apptd)	
Chair Nominating Committee	Lorelei Gould - Hendersonville
Nominating Committee (elected)	Barbara Devaney - Nashville
Nominating Committee (elected)	Jamie Dobbs - Knoxville
Nominating Committee (appointed from Bd)	
Nominating Committee (appointed from Bd)	

LWVTN Fiscal Year 2014-15 Amended Budget and Proposed 2015-2016 Budget

Category Description	Amended FY 14-15	Proposed FY 15-16
<u>INCOME</u>		
A. MAL Dues	\$ 900	\$ 900
B.1.. Contributions	\$ 2,500	\$ 3,500
B.2. Special Projects		
B.3 Lobbyist Fund	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000
D.1. Fall Conference		\$ 1,200
D.2. Spring Convention-Council	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500
E. Ed Fund Transfers	\$ 750	\$ 750
F. Interest	\$ 185	\$ 550
G. Local League PMP's	\$ 11,025	\$ 9,500
L. Inkind	\$ 700	
<u>TOTAL INCOME</u>	<u>\$ 25,560</u>	<u>\$ 25,900</u>
<u>EXPENSES</u>	Amended FY 14-15 Bud	Proposed FY 15-16
<u>A. Operating</u>		
Corporate Report	\$ 23	\$ 23
Emma service	\$ 350	\$ 350
General Supplies	\$ 250	\$ 550
Insurance	\$ 900	\$ 1,100
Office Administrator	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,500
Office copying	\$ 50	\$ 50
Storage Unit rental	\$ 575	\$ -
Postage	\$ 500	\$ 550
Telephone	\$ 200	\$ 200
<u>TOTAL A. Operating</u>	<u>\$ 6,348</u>	<u>\$ 6,323</u>
<u>B. Board & Administration</u>		
B.1 Board meetings	\$ 1,200	\$ 750
B.10 Internet (website)	\$ 200	\$ 200
B.2 Board tools	\$ 100	\$ 100
B.3 President's expense	\$ 100	\$ 100
B.6.a Service to MALs	\$ 200	\$ 100

B.6.b Service to LL	\$ 50	\$ 50
B.7 Fall Conference		\$ 1,200
B.8 Conv-Council	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500
TOTAL B. Board & Administration	\$ 3,350	\$ 4,000
C. LWVUS co-convention delegates	\$ 3,000	\$ 3,000
D. PMP for MALs to LWVUS	\$ 450	\$ 400
E. LWVTN Voter (mailed copies)	\$ 540	\$ 300
F. Educational Resources		
G. Position Support		
G.3 Affiliations	\$ 700	\$ 700
G.4 Lobbyist registration	\$ 300	\$ 300
G.5 Action Committee exp	\$ 300	\$ 300
G.6 Lobbyist Contract	\$ 15,000	\$ 15,000
TOTAL G. Position Support	\$ 16,300	\$ 16,600
H. Misc		
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 29,988	\$ 30,623
NET TOTAL	\$ (4,428)	\$ (4,723)
Transfers from/to Reserves	\$ (4,428)	\$ (4,723)
Special Projects	Amended FY 14-15 Bud	Proposed FY 15-16
August 2014 judicial retention election	\$ 5,000	
Nov 2014 amendments election	\$ 7,000	
Subtotal (from Bennet Fund)	\$ 12,000	

Access 2015-2017 Proposed Program at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/imm49guio4avv03/AAcnkvfacnEbxUWNkGBxGBCqa?dl=0>

Thank You from the Tennessee Justice Center

by Treasurer Marian Ott

As a result of Board action at its January 10 meeting, LWVTN sent a contribution of \$2000 from the **Bennett Fund** to the Tennessee Justice Center to support litigation related to the expansion of health care for all citizens in Tennessee. The League has partnered with TJC for many years in pursuit of this goal. We received a lovely thank you note:

Tennessee Justice Center is so overwhelmed by the League's extraordinary gift. Our partnership with you has improved our work immeasurably. Your vision, moral clarity and courage inspire us every day. Your investment enables us to play a vital role in the Insure Tennessee battle to close the coverage gap. I am so proud of the creativity and hard work of TJC staff on our campaign. I know that without investments like y'all's this wouldn't be possible.

Thank You! Thank You! Best, Michelle (Johnson)



Executive Director Michelle Johnson smiles as she receives petitions supporting of Insure Tennessee

Bill Creates 'Poll Tax' for Public Records Access

Deborah Fisher 11:05 p.m. CST March 6, 2015

Reprinted Editorial from *The Tennessean*

The fastest way to shut down access to government records is to charge fees people can't afford to pay.

Another way is to simply ignore or delay responding to citizens or media who make requests under the Tennessee Public Records Act.

Yet another, which takes more effort, is to actively confuse or frustrate a citizen or journalist with byzantine policies and practices to make them go away.

All can be powerfully effective. And, unfortunately, all take place in Tennessee.

The Tennessee Coalition for Open Government received nearly 200 calls to its hotline last year from journalists and citizens who faced obstacles in getting public documents from their local government or suspected their local governing bodies were not holding meetings in compliance with the Tennessee Open Meetings Act.

Since TCOG's founding, it has logged more than 1,200 such phone calls.

This year, state lawmakers are working on several bills that would make changes to the Tennessee Public Records Act.

The one seeking the most fundamental change would allow government agencies to charge per-hour labor fees for the time spent retrieving, compiling and copying documents for the public to see.

The bill is among the top legislative priorities of the Tennessee School Boards Association, which says some of its members are getting large public records requests that are costing too much staff time to fulfill.

The school board association wants to "solve" these requests by allowing government to charge hourly fees.

The end result is a sort of "poll tax" for public records. If you can afford to pay what they ask, you get to see public records; if you can't, you don't.

But the problem is not the requests, or the desire by citizens, journalists and public officials for information about how government is operating.

And the solution is not to lock down the ability of citizens to get such information by charging fees they can't afford.

If you can find out what requests are being made, you can invest in the right processes that would make that information more easily available, saving time and money in the long run.

Most local governments and state agencies in Tennessee don't track public records requests and, as such, lack data and understanding of issues in any real depth that could inform improvement. Nothing has been done statewide since an independent TCOG audit in 2004 in each of the state's 95 counties that checked compliance with the Public Records Act.

The Office of Open Records Counsel in Tennessee offers [Best Practices Guidelines](#) on its website. But how widely are these followed, and can more be added?

There are alternatives to simply holding public records hostage and negotiating over the size of the ransom note — which is about \$1.7 million based on estimates from an earlier bill.

And where would that money go? To fund more of the same?

Some examples: Last year, the court ordered the city of Chattanooga to pay \$71,343 to a citizen to reimburse her legal fees after it found officials knowingly and willfully violated the open records act in how they responded to her request. The Rutherford County Board of Education was ordered to pay \$31,000 to a citizen for a similar reason.

This is what's wasteful.

Sumner County Judge Dee David Gay called it "silly" after he took a look at how Sumner County Schools responded to a citizen's request to see its public records policy.

School district officials refused to respond because they received the request by email.

Gay called them on it in his courtroom during the resulting lawsuit.

The games played, the ransom notes, the thousands of dollars of taxpayer money spent fighting against transparency — they don't make much sense to citizens either.

Why not invest instead in what we all really want? An open government and a democracy where information flows freely.

Deborah Fisher is executive director of [Tennessee Coalition for Open Government](#), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and improve transparency in government. LWVTN is a coalition partner with TCOG. In addition, Fisher will be speaking on Saturday, April 25 at the 2015 LWVTN Convention in Murfreesboro.

Spotlight on LWV Memphis–Shelby County



Recently members of the LWV Memphis – Shelby County Board met to discuss future plans and League structure. As happens from time to time, Memphis is challenged to find leadership that can assume its 2015 presidency but still has an active commitment to its community. An important project the group wants to continue is its *Red Book*, also known as the Memphis League's Directory of Elected Officials, which lists contact information for Shelby County's local, state and federal elected officials. The publication is a hot item in Memphis; free to members and \$5 to others in the community. Pictured here from the left: **Carol Straughn, Rita Harris, Patricia Suttle, Dick Klenz, Beverly Marrero, Barbara Williams, Judith Davis, Steven Sondheim, and Freda Williams**. LWVTN is proud that these individuals are looking at innovative ways to keep the Memphis League active.

LWVTN Action Committee Update

by Action Director Barbara Gay

The 109th Legislative Session got off to a slow start due to new members, office changes, the special **Insure Tennessee** session, and a major ice storm that all but closed Nashville!

The LWVTN co-sponsored an **Education Day on the Hill** with the United Ways of Tennessee (UWT President Director **Mary Graham** is in the front row in Rep. Fitzhugh's seat) to promote pre-school education. The event was scheduled for Wednesday, February 18 but postponed to Wednesday, February 25. LWVN President and Co-chair of LWVTN Action Committee Education Issue Group **Debby Gould** spoke at the opening session (pictured next to **Hazel Thornton** in the second row).

Louise Clifton and **Diana Page** delivered the **2015 LWVTN Legislative Priorities** to the Senator's offices after the presentation. Others on the Action Committee returned to the Legislature March 2 to deliver priorities to the House members.

This year, there are an overwhelming number of bills that are of concern to League members and related to our priorities. Here are some highlights:

HEALTHCARE: The LWVTN Action Committee continues to work on educating the public and lobbying legislators to pass Governor Bill Haslam's **Insure Tennessee** plan (see <https://news.tn.gov/node/13336>). Special thanks to **Pat Post, Sue Bredensteiner**, and **Rashonda Lewis** for many years' work with the Tennessee Health Care Campaign (THCC), ACA Health Care Coalition, and Tennessee Justice Center endeavoring to chart successful grassroots advocacy in favor of affordable health care access for all Tennessean citizens. Unfortunately, the job isn't finished.

Huge thanks also go to all local Leagues and members who have taken action on behalf of health care reform in Tennessee. Nashville League President **Debby Gould** joined with the Junior League of Nashville and the Women's Political Collaborative of Tennessee to host an **Insure Tennessee** public forum on January 29. LWVN provided fact sheets, contact

information for Davidson and Williamson Counties' state delegations, and stamped post cards designed to be sent to legislators to encourage support of the plan. Thank you to **Stewart** and **Louise Clifton**, who shared additional materials with their church members, and to League members who attended the Insure Tennessee Day on the Hill, February 3, along with other members of the Coalition for a Healthy Tennessee. LWV fact sheets also were available there. The Oak Ridge League shared fact sheets and stamped post cards with members and the public at its monthly luncheon meeting. All state League members received three Action Alerts urging them to contact their legislators, Speaker **Beth Harwell**, and Lt. Governor **Ron Ramsey** to support Insure Tennessee. Many members made phone calls, wrote emails, and mailed post cards.

There is a great deal of frustration about Speaker Ramsey's specially appointed Senate Health and Welfare Committee killing the Insure Tennessee bill before it could be discussed or amended by the full Senate and House. The business community and the Tennessee Hospital Association as well as other members of the Coalition for a Healthy Tennessee are disappointed (CHT's website is currently under revision). The committee's vote is perceived as an insult to Governor Haslam and his administration, which had spent two years working on a Tennessee-specific solution that could provide health care to the working poor and use much-needed federal funds with no cost to the state.

It seems clear that the health of Tennesseans will continue to deteriorate, some will die, and hospitals will close. The loss of jobs and difficulty in recruiting new businesses will harm the state economically. The Coalition for a Healthy Tennessee and other advocates are still engaged and educating more citizens and legislators about our statewide health care problems and encouraging a legislative solution during the current session. *Tennessean* editorials continue to support Insure Tennessee and report individual cases of human suffering. The LWVTN Action Committee and Board are discussing additional ways to support this effort. Senator **Jeff Yarbro** has filed a resolution that would allow Governor Haslam to put Insure Tennessee in place without legislative approval. Another bill would repeal a law passed last session requiring legislative approval to expand any form of Medicaid. A third bill would allow the Governor to simply expand Medicaid. Indeed, the League's work is not done. Continue to contact your legislators—constituent voices are the most powerful. Also contact Speaker Harwell and Lt. Gov. Ramsey, who through their acceptance of leadership roles, represent us all.

OPEN GOVERNMENT: **Debby Gould**, **Hazel Thornton**, **Stewart Clifton**, and **Barbara Gay** attended a meeting with **Deborah Fisher**, director of the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government (TCOG). Fisher is concerned that a bill to allow local government agencies to charge a fee to retrieve documents for public viewing could shut down access to government documents and records (see the reprint of her editorial in *The Tennessean* in this issue). Currently the law allows offices to charge for redacting and copying documents. TCOG would prefer a recently named open government advisory committee look at the whole issue of providing records to the public while reducing government costs, rather than just creating a schedule of fees. In addition, there seem to be many government workers who are unsure about the current law and deny citizens access to records. TCOG recommends use of webinars as well as other training materials. **Vivian Shipe**, open government issue chair will be following this legislation.

ELECTIONS: **Hazel Thornton**, elections issue chair, has been attending the Tennessee Election Commission (TEC) meetings. She has found that draft minutes from the meetings are not available until they are voted upon at the next meeting making it difficult for interested observers to understand commission work. According to current public record law, draft minutes should be available to the public as soon as they are written. Thornton is exploring this misunderstanding. In addition, she is concerned about certified candidates who file too late to appear on a ballot, not being listed on a website. Poll workers have refused to share the list of such candidates, even if they are aware of certified candidate names, because they consider it illegal electioneering. She will work with the TEC to clarify interpretation of the law.

EDUCATION: There are several bills in process that may impact public schools. Some would provide public vouchers for private schools. The Nashville League studied this issue two years ago and took a position against vouchers (see http://lwvnashville.org/files/public_school_vouchers_position.pdf). LWVTN adopted this position last year. Common Core Standards and Pre-K also are under attack. Higher education is becoming more and more costly and is facing budget cuts. There is a bill to allow for profit Charter School management. **Debby Gould** and **Karen Weeks**, education issue chairs, are working to narrow our focus for a manageable lobbying effort.

IMMIGRATION: An immigration bill that would require the state to take over the refugee resettlement program currently administered by the federal government has been introduced. Advocates are concerned this would restrict refugee support. On another front, LWVTN will support bills that would allow in-state tuition for undocumented students brought into the country as children. **Mary Ann Reeves**, immigration issue chair, will keep us informed.

ENVIRONMENT: HB833/SB842 would return the regulation of coal mining to the state from the federal government (see <http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=HB0833>). In addition, **Barbara Devaney** and

Lynda Burman, environment issue chairs, are exploring a vocabulary change denoting mountain top removal as cross ridge mining. The change seems to have been initiated to reassure legislators that destructive, damaging mining practices no longer exist in Tennessee.

REVENUES: LWVTN needs to focus on defeating five bills that would lessen or eliminate revenues from the Hall Tax on investment income from stocks and bonds. The revenue losses are substantial for **both state government and local governments**, which receive 3/8 of the tax revenue generated. In several cases there is no fiscal note for these bills. Tennessee cannot afford to decrease its revenue stream and continue to protect the social service infrastructure, provide adequate funding for schools, and ensure environmental enforcement. Any reduction in revenue must be matched by replacement of another source of revenue. League members should urge lawmakers to vote NO on these bills: SB2, SB32, SB47, SB839, and SB846. Other legislation would reduce the tax on groceries; SB58 would decrease state revenue by \$52.1 million and local revenue by \$1.8 million. LWVTN believes that Tennessee should lessen its dependence on the sales tax but now is not the time especially because of diminished revenue in fiscal year 2015. Tennessee is critically underfunded and the League does not support these cuts unless other sources of revenue are found. **Karen Weeks** and **Diana Page**, revenues issue chairs, will be sending action alerts about these bills.

LWVTN Lobbyist **Stewart Clifton** compiles the weekly LWVTN Legislative Reports; Karen Fairbend, LWVTN administrative assistant emails the weekly Emma-formatted reports. If you are not receiving the reports, please contact barbara.b.gay@gmail.com. Clifton has begun organizing legislative information by topic so members can follow their interests more easily. Of course, we are happy for everyone to learn about all our issues. League members are invited to join the Action Committee, which meets biweekly during the legislative session. Please contact **Barbara Gay**, 615-297-4145 or barbara.b.gay@gmail.com, if you would like to participate.



Reprinted from **THE NASHVILLE VOTER**

The League of Women Voters of Nashville
PO Box 158369, Nashville TN 37215 | 615-297-7134
www.LWVnashville.org

Health Care Reform and Medicaid Expansion in Tennessee (December 2014)

by **Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis**

On Saturday, the LWVTN **Action Committee** sent a statewide Action Alert that asked League members across the state to rally and contact their state senators and representatives in support of Governor Haslam's Tennessee Plan to expand TennCare (Medicaid in Tennessee). Medicaid and TennCare expansion have become rhetorical flash points in some quarters, so we advised you to frame your ask carefully and also let the Governor know contact had been made and statewide support was there.

On Monday, December 15, Governor **Bill Haslam** announced his administration's support for "Insure Tennessee"—a uniquely Tennessee plan "to provide health care coverage to more than 200,000 uninsured Tennesseans who earn less than 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) without creating new taxes for Tennesseans." In addition, he said that he has received verbal approval from the federal government for his Insure Tennessee Plan. (See LWVN website at <http://lwvnashville.org/> for descriptions of "Insure Tennessee" from the governor's announcement.)

What does this mean for working Tennesseans still in the GAP?

It means that the Governor has opened the door and used some of his immense political capital to lead Tennessee government. We are gratified by the Governor's announcement. But the Legislature still needs to be convinced before those in the **GAP** begin to get the help they need. **We still have important work to do!**

What does that work look like?

League members have done the studying, achieved consensus and developed positions calling for health care access and services for all our citizens. And LWVN has kept you informed of progress and pitfalls along the way. Now the Governor is ready to make "Insure Tennessee" a reality and he **continues to Need Our Help**.

Take 30 minutes between now and January 5 to contact your state representatives at <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/house/members/> and senators at <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/senate/members/>, before the January Special Session begins so that they understand you are supporting the Governor and “Insure Tennessee.” Then let the Governor know with a follow up call to his office at **615-741-2001** and tell him you support his plan and you’ve talked to your legislators (mention them by name) and they know how **IMPORTANT** the **“Insure Tennessee” plan IS TO ALL OF US.**

Here’s the straightforward and **SIMPLE** message for Tennessee representatives and senators:

- Our communities need Governor Haslam’s “Insure Tennessee” plan so the state can keep federal tax dollars at home and working for Tennesseans
- Our citizens need Tennesseans’ federal tax dollars through the “Insure Tennessee” plan to cover working families and provide them financial peace of mind as well as support our Tennessee health care system.
- We are gratified that Governor Haslam has brought us a plan he feels will work for Tennessee.
- We want our legislators’ help to make “Insure Tennessee” happen for Tennesseans.

The time will be well spent as you help family, friends, neighbors, and others **STILL** in the **GAP** without access to health care insurance. Don’t debate or argue—just stick to the simple message above. **Closing the GAP for Tennesseans will make this season of reflection, thanksgiving, and new year especially memorable!**

League members know why this is important to all of us:

- We need to keep Tennesseans’ federal tax dollars at home to cover our working families, give them financial peace of mind, and support Tennessee’s health care system on which **WE ALL DEPEND.**
- Using allocated federal dollars helps working families whose jobs don’t provide health insurance—they’re stuck, through no fault of their own, in a “Coverage Gap” and closing that **GAP** is the fair thing to do for our neighbors. Only disabled people, pregnant women, and adults who are parents of dependent children are currently eligible for TennCare coverage.
- Health care is very expensive; without health coverage, all but the wealthiest families are just one accident or illness away from **financial ruin.**
- Our hospitals need Tennesseans’ federal funds to remain viable, especially in rural areas. When a community’s hospital closes that community loses one of its largest employers along with its ability to recruit and retain doctors and other health care professionals. **Without those health resources, how can a community hope to recruit new industry?**

Our message and mission remains unchanged: We support “Insure Tennessee.”



Health Care Reform and Medicaid Expansion in Tennessee (January 2015)

by Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Governor Haslam Announces INSURE TENNESSEE

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation report in December 2014, twenty-seven states have opted to accept federal funding to increase health coverage for the uninsured either through a Medicaid expansion program or an alternative health benefits package. For Tennesseans, however, Governor **Bill Haslam** decided in March 2013 that rather than expand Medicaid, he would seek an alternative plan to make health coverage more affordable. After almost two years of talks between the Governor and U.S. Health and Human Services, on December 15, 2014, the governor announced INSURE TENNESSEE, a two-year pilot program that will leverage Affordable Care Act matching dollars to provide health coverage to uninsured Tennesseans with low-incomes. Insure Tennessee will target individuals ages 19 to 64, who are not otherwise eligible for Medicaid, and with incomes that do not exceed 138 percent of federal poverty level. That level of income amounts to about \$16,000 for an individual and \$32,000 for a family of four.

There are three parts to Insure Tennessee as proposed. One part of the plan is tailored for 19 and 20 year olds who are considered children under Medicaid. These enrollees will receive traditional child Medicaid benefits. The second part includes two distinct plans for people ages 19 to 64.

- The **Volunteer Plan** is a premium assistance plan that would help working people pay premiums for insurance offered through their employers.
- The **Healthy Incentives Plan** would be offered through Medicaid managed care organizations. Healthy Incentives enrollees will pay a small premium and co-pays that can be offset by certain healthy behaviors.

According to a recent study commissioned by Coalition for a Healthy Tennessee and conducted by the University of Tennessee Center for Business and Economic Research, Insure Tennessee will provide coverage to more than 200,000 uninsured Tennesseans, create 15,000 jobs, and bring in over \$1 billion in new spending to the state. The Governor's plan also includes safeguards to protect the state budget. Insure Tennessee creates no new taxes and adds no costs to the state budget. Once the federal matching level drops below 100 percent, which will happen at the end of 2016, Tennessee hospitals have agreed to cover the state's portion of the cost. In the event federal funding drops from 100 percent and hospitals fail to finance the state's share of costs, Insure Tennessee automatically terminates.

For more details about Insure Tennessee, visit the state's newsroom and media center at:

<https://news.tn.gov/node/13336>.

Health Forum Sets the Stage

Tennessee has long held a position as one of the nation's unhealthiest states. According to the 2014 America's Health Rankings, Tennessee ranks near the bottom of list for conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking and physical inactivity. On January 14, 2015, leaders in health care, business, and civics held a Nashville Community Health Forum that focused on the state's chronically poor health status and the ways in which poor population health affect the state's economic soundness. Forum presenters provided a snapshot of the health status of Tennesseans, discussed the link between population health and economic potential, analyzed the recently unveiled "Insure Tennessee" as a vehicle to improve access to care for the working poor, and examined other ways to improve the state's health profile.

Given the wide spread support for Insure Tennessee, there will likely be many more events held throughout the state to get the word out and cultivate support in all communities as well as in the Legislature. A statewide organization consisting of some 80 business, health care, and civic groups—the League of Women Voters of Tennessee among them—has formed the **Coalition for a Healthy Tennessee** to generate support of Insure Tennessee. If you belong to or know of a business or organization that has not done so already, the coalition has issued an invitation for businesses and organizations to stand with Governor Haslam in support of Insure Tennessee. To join, visit the Coalition's website at www.coalitionforahealthytennessee.com.

Next Steps—Legislature and the Feds

Now that Governor Haslam has unveiled Insure Tennessee, the legislature must approve the plan. Governor Haslam has called a special session at the Capitol beginning on Monday, February 2 at 4 pm. The General Assembly will consider a joint resolution authorizing the governor to implement the plan. Legislative buy-in is a must. The measure will need 50 votes in the House and 17 in the Senate. **Now is the time for all LWVN and LWVTN members to act! Please reach out to your legislators and ask them to support Insure Tennessee.**



Health Care Reform in Tennessee (February 2015)

by LWVN Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Special Session Defeat of Governor Haslam's INSURE TENNESSEE

The quick defeat of Governor **Bill Haslam**'s Insure Tennessee plan to provide health insurance to the working poor left LWVN members momentarily speechless. As LWVN President **Debby Gould** said in her opening

letter: “For all of us who have advocated so passionately in favor of **Insure Tennessee**, it has been a difficult few weeks. . . . The state Senate Health and Welfare Committee of 11 members created especially for the session by Lt. Gov. **Ron Ramsey** voted it down. Perhaps most disturbing two of the seven senators who halted approval of Insure Tennessee have made public statements explaining their rationale. These statements include serious and fundamental misunderstandings of the program.”

Special thanks to all League members and their families, colleagues, and friends who emailed, called, and sent letters and postcards to their legislators and organized public information meetings. **Don’t stop now—stay engaged! Constituent advocacy is our most important tool.**

Remember and continue to share with families, colleagues, and friends that **Insure Tennessee** is a Tennessee-specific plan designed by smart health administrators to thread a needle that:

- Leverages federal dollars to pay between 90 percent and 100 percent of the cost
- Brings in the 10 percent cost when federal match decreases from the Tennessee Hospital Association
- Covers working folks we all know in our statewide community who are caught in the GAP between TennCare coverage and ACA exchange coverage
- Protects Tennessee hospitals from uncompensated care costs
- Enhances Tennessee’s local and statewide economies

The short circuit to a much needed discussion about how to solve the dire health care problem in Tennessee that was recognized and addressed by Governor Haslam’s Insure Tennessee plan has been a blow to democracy in our state. While we have become accustomed to the disrespect and absence of problem solving within our federal government, the level of misinformation and money spent from outside Tennessee to stir emotions against this legislation was unprecedented. And it missed the point. **Insure Tennessee was specifically designed by and for Tennesseans so that all of us would benefit, knowing those in the GAP could finally be covered—the moral and right thing to do—and the state’s economy and individual communities would be protected. Insure Tennessee is good public policy that needs to be heard, discussed, understood, and enacted.** It is good for Tennesseans and Tennessee and has support from U.S. Senators Alexander and Corker, former Senator Frist, former Governor Bredesen, the business community and Chambers of Commerce across the state, health care advocates, the LWVN and LWVTN, and, of course, Governor Haslam.

What You Can Do

As we go forward in the 109th General Assembly, please continue to advocate for this issue and discuss why it is so important for all Tennesseans with your lawmakers. Continue to let the leadership know you want Insure Tennessee too: contact House Speaker **Beth Harwell** at 615-741-0709 or speaker.beth.harwell@capitol.tn.gov, and Senate Lt. Governor **Ron Ramsey** at 615.741.4524 or Toll-Free at 800.449.8366 x14524. In their leadership positions, they represent you too.

In addition, **please thank the six legislators who had the courage to support Insure Tennessee.** Sen. Richard Briggs - (615) 741-1766; Sen. Ed Jackson - (615) 741-1810; Sen. Becky Massey - (615) 741-1648; Sen. Jeff Yarbrow - (615) 741-3291; Sen. Doug Overby-(615-741-0981), who carried the bill in the Senate, and Rep. Gerald McCormick-(615-741-2548, who carried the bill in the House.

Continue to check out and share the **Coalition for a Healthy Tennessee** website at <http://www.coalitionforahealthytennessee.com/> for facts about **Insure Tennessee** (see <https://news.tn.gov/node/13336>). Also see [LWVTN Insure Tennessee Action Toolbox](#) and the [Tennessee Justice Center Insure Tennessee Webinar Slides](#).

As you advocate for the best policy decisions in Tennessee government, bear in mind that many across our state are furious about the Senate Special Health Committee Vote. There are multiple components in each piece of legislation. **Insure Tennessee addressed:**

- **The Moral Issue.** In the Volunteer State where Tennesseans take helping their neighbors in need very seriously, the majority understand that all our citizens need access to health care insurance. **Insure Tennessee solves the problem.**
- **The Health Issue.** Tennessee ranks 45th out of 50 states in health outcomes. **Insure Tennessee helps change that dismal picture by getting people preventive care and teaching healthy lifestyles.**
- **The Economic Issue.** Hospitals are stretched to their limits and some have closed. A rural community without a hospital often has lost its largest employer, will lose health care workers, and will become a less and less desirable place to live. **Insure Tennessee makes sure hospitals have more customers who are able to pay for care.**
- **The Public Policy Issue.** The point of good government is helping citizens—providing for the common good. Somehow ensuring the safety net has gotten lost from the civic discussion here. **Insure Tennessee is good public policy.**
- **The Ideological Issue.** Currently, \$2.6 million of Tennessean’s federal tax dollars are lost every day because some say we should not depend on federal money. Recently some of the same legislators who don’t want to depend on federal dollars for health care said it would be alright if the money came without restrictions in block grants. It would appear that the money’s OK—as long as there aren’t any regulations on how it’s spent. Of course, Tennessee receives federal dollars for lots of programs. When it’s money for highways there haven’t been objections.

