

The Bulletin

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September-October, 2011

Important Dates at a Glance:

- Thursday, October 6, 2011 7:00 pm Monthly Board Meeting, Ellen Nore's house
- Saturday, October 15, 2011 8:00 am Roadside Pickup, Watershed Nature Center
- Thursday, October 20, 2011 7:00 pm Education Consensus Meeting, Meg's house
- Thursday, November 3, 2011 7:00 pm Monthly Board Meeting
- Monday, November 20, 2011 7:00 pm Committee Review of Edwardsville's
Comprehensive Plan, Edwardsville Public
Library Conference Room

Gertraude Wittig

It is with sadness the LWVEA learned of the death of long time member Gertraude Wittig. Gertraude had been a member since 1977 and faithfully attended annual meetings and the Christmas holiday events. She was a Professor emeritus of Biological Sciences at SIUE. A native of Glauchau, Germany she came to the US in 1958 on a Fulbright Scholarship and came to SIUE in 1968 after working at U of Cal-Berkeley and the US Department of Agriculture as a research specialist in insect pathology and electron microscopy. In 1969 she was awarded a NSF grant to fund an electron microscopy curriculum and to write a manual for creating an electron microscopy lab. At the time, her class was the only regular electron microscopy course in the region. Gertraude encouraged participation of women in the sciences through affirmative action programs and women's studies. She was a strong believer in women's rights and the right to vote. Per custom we will be purchasing books for the library in her name.



Voting Rights and the Election Process

Voter Protection: National League efforts to protect the voter continue unabated. In Maine, the League is a lead petitioner in a people's veto campaign to reinstate same-day registration. The League in New Hampshire is working hard to uphold the governor's veto of voter ID as the state Senate plans to consider that veto in September. In South Carolina, the League is helping individuals alert the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) about just how onerous the new ID law is and has signed on to a comment letter to the Voting Section Chief of the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ. The letter concerns voting changes that would limit the acceptable forms of ID for in-person voters. As the voter registration season reaches its peak in September in Florida, the League continues its efforts for review of their new election law by the Justice Department. In Ohio, the state League is gathering signatures for a referendum to stop Ohio's new election reform law from going into effect. To learn about each state's voter identification requirements, visit this webpage published by the National Conference of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=16602>

VOTE411.org: The League has updated this invaluable national resource for election information with state-by-state resources that have enfranchised millions of voters. The site now reflects the most current election dates and laws nationwide.

FEDERAL SCHOOL FUNDING PROGRAM

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which includes No Child Left Behind, will be considered for reauthorization next year. Since the League has no position on this, it is time to get informed. We will have a program on October 20 at Meg Oberlag's house to discuss various topics and take consensus. The LWVUS will approve a position in March 2012. Topics to be discussed are: (1) Role of the Federal Government in Public Education; (2) Common Core Standards; (3) Equity and Funding, and much more. This may sound dry, but it is very important and deserves an intelligent discussion. Much good information has come from LWVUS to help guide us to our consensus. If you have never participated in a consensus program this is a good opportunity. This is "grassroots League" at its best.

If you would like to take part in the study committee, **call Meg at 656-4508 immediately!**

School Funding, continued

To provide background for our local efforts to support the national study, we have included a selection from **Education Week** on No Child Left Behind, followed by two selections from Special Issues Briefs published by the Illinois South Suburban Cluster of the League. The full Issues Briefs are available on line at the following addresses:

<http://www.lwvil.org/Issue%20Brief%20no2Aug7.11.pdf>

<http://www.lwvil.org/Issue%20Brief%20no3%20Ed%20Funding.pdf>

More States Asking for NCLB Waivers

As Congress continues to drag its feet in rewriting the No Child Left Behind Act, a growing number of states are getting in line for Education Department relief from provisions of the current law.

Michigan and Tennessee are the latest to formally seek waivers from the NCLB's 2014 deadline for all students to be proficient in math and reading. Other states are waiting for details about U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's promised plan to create a formal waiver process from many of the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, of which NCLB is the latest version.

As that deadline for 100 percent proficiency approaches, more schools are failing to make adequate yearly progress, the main NCLB yardstick. Schools that don't make AYP face an escalating set of sanctions, and states and districts are struggling to deal with that growing number.

While states such as Michigan and Tennessee are asking for permission to ignore parts of the law, other states, including Idaho, are just telling the department they plan to disobey it, with or without approval.

In April, Montana became the first state to inform federal officials that it would not be raising its proficiency targets, which would be for a fourth consecutive year. Mr. Duncan would not grant a waiver and gave state officials until Aug. 15 to come up with a plan to comply with the law or face consequences. South Dakota, which has also told the department it plans to freeze proficiency targets for a third straight year, had not received an official response from federal officials as of last week.

By Michele McNeil Vol. 30, Issue 37, Page 20

WHAT WILL WE BE STUDYING?

We will be getting a general introduction to the role of the federal government in public education in this issue brief. We will also endeavor to help you understand why and how a League study and consensus are done.

In future issues we will zero in on two important

components being studied: **Education Funding & Equity**, and **Common Core Standards**.

Education funding and Equity deals with resources and opportunities available to all students, those from our affluent neighborhoods and those from high poverty neighborhoods.

Common Core Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and stay the same no matter where they live. This will ensure that students are receiving the same high quality education from school to school and from state to state.

Find the Materials

on: www.lwv.org

- click For Members

- click Programs & Projects

- Click Federal Role in Educ.

You can find a description of the study, Leaders Guide, some Executive Summaries, camera ready articles for newsletters, background information, a webinar and more.

The LWVUS Board of Directors will approve the official position of the Role of the Federal Government in Public Education by March of 2012.

TIMELINE FOR THE STUDY

The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education study was first proposed and passed in June of 2010 at the Atlanta, Georgia League of Women Voters Convention.

The LWVUS Board of Directors approved the study in October of 2010 and approved the study materials and consensus questions in April of 2011.

Local Leagues will conduct the study and come to consensus by November of 2011.

Consensus reports are due into the LWVUS website by November 30, 2011.

The LWVUS will analyze all responses and write the position paper. The LWVUS Board of Directors will approve the official position on the Role of the Federal

Government in Public Education by March of 2012.

All local Leagues will then be able to advocate with the LWVUS position on this national issue. And we should all have an excellent grasp of this issue after our study and review of all the background materials. And we will have done our homework!

WHAT IS A CONSENSUS?

Consensus is not a vote. It is a mutual agreement of League members who have arrived at the agreement through discussion. During discussion, everyone has an opportunity to voice their viewpoints, and the issue is examined

from all sides. Consensus questions provide structure for the meeting. Members discuss the pros and cons until it becomes clear that consensus has or has not been reached on each question. Each local League will

have a discussion leader to help keep the group focused on the task at hand. When consensus is reached it must be approved by the local board before being posted on the LWVUS website.



You can invite the public to join you in the study process but only League members can participate in the consensus.

EQUITY

Research tells us that wealthy people earn much of their income from investments and inherited income. Poor people earn all of their income from jobs, and must spend it on food, housing, transportation, etc. Poor people



are not able to save much, if at all. Economists are in agreement that wealth inequity in the United States is currently at an historic high. In the U.S., the wealthiest 20% of the population owns 84% of total wealth, the second wealthiest 20% owns 11%, and so on until you get to the poor-

est 40%, which owns less than 1% of the total wealth. Since poorer students tend to live together in the same neighborhood, they are likely to attend a school with fewer highly qualified teachers, who prefer to work in more affluent districts for higher salaries and better working condi-



tions. This is just one example of inequality of educational opportunities. Schools in poorer neighborhoods in general, have fewer resources.

ADEQUACY

Without a good education, students may ultimately wind up in the prison system or on other government support.

Since 1990, school funding lawsuits have focused on adequacy - whether the state was providing local districts enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education as defined by experts at the time. The cost of an

adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs. When schools are not adequately funded, it causes a long-lasting im-

pact. Students without an adequate educational foundation may wind up in the prison system or dependent on government support because employment is hard to find. A correlation has been found between dropping out and prison.

ACCOUNTABILITY

President George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. The intended purpose was to close the achievement gap, particularly for minority students. However, the National Assessment of Educational Progress

found that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students before NCLB. Sanctions imposed by NCLB have the effect of punishing the low performing schools and teachers, sending the message that they are incompetent and

should not be allowed to make decisions about how to educate their students. Schools that do not improve in five years are subject to severe sanctions that could include loss of federal funding. This call for this type of accountability is viewed by many as

more harmful than helpful. The federal government did not have to account for why they did not fund the Act.



Community Garden Information

To follow up the public discussion we held in April regarding establishing a local community garden, we are including two relevant articles on organic agriculture provided by the Living Lightly On the Earth Committee and by Carol Gipe.

But Is It Organic?

Locally grown.

All natural.

No additives.

Hormone Free.

Farm raised.

Free range.

We see these claims frequently, but does that mean that the product is organic? Maybe yes—or maybe no. Some think that produce from community gardens or locally raised produce is organic. Again—maybe yes, or maybe no. Producers may use **organic methods** such as not using pesticides or chemicals but **the products** may not be truly organic. The products are considered organic if, in addition to the above claims, the product also is labeled “100% organic”, “organic” or “made with organic ingredients.” Any product using these labels must be certified as organic; becoming certified is not an easy process.

All farmers and handlers who wish to become certified must submit specific information, including: the type of operation and history of substances applied to the land for the previous three years, and the organic products being grown, raised or processed. The applicant must submit an organic plan, which includes practices and substances used in production and a description of monitoring practices to be performed to verify that the plan is effectively implemented. In addition, the applicant must detail the recordkeeping system to be used and practices to prevent commingling of organic and non-organic products, and to prevent contact of products with prohibited substances.

Applicants for certification will have to keep accurate post certification records for five years concerning the production, harvesting, and handling of products that are to be sold as organic. Access to these records must be provided to authorized representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture. A qualified inspector will conduct an onsite inspection annually. Complying with these regulations may contribute to the higher cost of organic products.

Which Food to Buy -- Organic or Conventional?

There are pros and cons regarding organically farmed foods versus conventionally raised foods. Here are some of the points that often appear in the literature.

Pros

Organic foods must be produced without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, antibiotics, growth hormones, feed made from animal parts, genetically engineered ingredients and seeds.

Organic farmers must use organic methods through the entire growing process: produce -- from seed, germination, cultivation, harvest, processing to market; meat and poultry -- from birth, feeding procedures, food content, living conditions, processing to market. Dairy products and eggs must follow similar organic guidelines.

Organic farm procedures respond to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources and promote ecological balance. This can result in less soil erosion and less ground water pollution.

Organic farmers often sell their products through local markets and business establishments. Buying from these farmers provides the consumer with fresher food, reduces the distance food is shipped and supports the local economy.

When organic methods are applied in the production of food, fewer chemicals are released into the environment, and fewer chemicals are ingested into the body. It is advised that young children, pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding eat organically produced foods to avoid early exposure to these chemicals.

As food choices expand at local markets, the question is whether to buy organic or conventional products. Consider these pros and cons when filling the grocery cart.

Cons:

Organic farm products are more expensive than conventional farm products -- sometimes up to 50% or greater. These prices are out of reach for many household budgets.

Organic farm practices do not lend themselves to large volume production. It is difficult to provide enough food for the world demand using organic methods.

Organic produce is not available out of season. This is changing as more organic produce is shipped from other parts of the United States, Mexico, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Argentina. Not all grocery stores carry organic foods, but availability is improving as demand increases.

Organic foods must be labeled "Certified Organic", which means a certain percentage of the plant and animal ingredients must be organic. Third party inspectors are required to spot test for pesticides and conduct overall monitoring to enforce regulations. There can be gaps in federal oversight of the organic food industry.

When conventional methods are used in the production of food, there is more food available at affordable prices. These foods contain higher levels of potentially harmful chemicals, and the farming practices are not as environmentally friendly.

Forum on Recycling

LWVEA sponsored a public forum on recycling at the Edwardsville Public Library on Monday, September 26th: **Local Efforts to Recycle Waste: How Successful?** Over twenty people were present, and guest speakers discussed current practices in residential, commercial, and construction material recycling. Thanks to our presenters and to Rachel Tompkins for organizing the event.

DISTRICT 7 BOARD OF EDUCATION

Observed by Meg Oberlag

August 8, 2011 - In a rather brief Board meeting, Supt. Hightower gave an update on the Drug Education and Enforcement Campaign which begins this school year. Several committees have been working to produce materials which will be shown at a public meeting in mid-September. There are brochures for students, teachers and parents as well as some powerful videos which show the result of drug use. The Canine Search Committee is working with local officials to get this started.

Hightower thanked Tom and Vickie Maxwell for the \$154,000 gift to install lights at the Winston Brown Track Field. Other business donations have made improvements at the sports fields. He also thanked Dave Lipe and Joe Gugger for their work in holding the tennis tournament which drew players from the U.S. and around the world.

August 22, 2011 – Supt. Hightower said that there are 310 students new to District 7 and this does not include Kindergarten or those coming in from parochial schools. This figure speaks well for the quality of our schools. Enrollment at EHS remained the same (2409) as last year while the middle schools increased by 63 and elementary decreased by 31. The Kindergarten increased by 31 pupils.

The District's cut of 17 buses saved \$736,000 but 3 buses had to be added because of over crowding.. The State of Illinois (now 18 million in debt) said they will reduce the 21st payment and eliminate the 22nd, thus causing us to make another round of cuts. Therefore, our budget is not ready yet. Last year, local taxpayers funded 73% of the budget while State provided 19% (constitutionally should be 51%) and U.S. paid just 8%. [Come to our Oct. 20 League meeting and find out what that covers.] Supt. H. said that the next two years will be tough but the Board is committed to not raising property taxes. Mr. Courtney said that the higher income tax may help the State catch up by 2014 but that is the year the tax increase is scheduled to end.

Summer Fund Raisers

We raised \$683.00 in earnings from the summer yard sale! Thank you to everyone who contributed items or worked at this event.

Profit from the Band Concert concessions in June was \$80.00. Again, thank you to everyone who donated baked goods or beverages for the concession table.

Highlights of the LWVEA Board Meeting

August 4, 2011

The treasurer's report included \$653.32 earned from the yard sale and \$90.00 earned from the band concert.

A project with a Cub Scout pack to illustrate the voting process was discussed. More information will be obtained from the pack and the project will be discussed at the September board meeting.

It was decided to show the movie, "Iron Jawed Angels" during Women's History Month in March 2012. Possible venues are the Wildey, the Edwardsville Public Library and the religious center at SIUE.

The national education study consensus results are due to the LWVUS by November 30, 2011. We will try to reserve a meeting space sometime between October 17th and the 24th.

Discussion of the state pension study was postponed until more information is received from LWVIL.

A September general meeting on residential and commercial recycling is being planned.

Submitted by

Carol Reinking, Secretary

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide. Membership is open to any U.S. Citizen who is at least 18 years of age. Dues of \$50.00 include membership in our local, state and national organization. Send your check to Treasurer, LWVEA, P.O. Box 841, Edwardsville, IL 62025-0841

