

LWVWA 2010 Council Notes

These notes summarize the LWVWA Council in Bellingham from 5/21-23/10. Karen Verrill introduced me to the Thurston County liaison with the State League, Bonnie Rimawi, but she is leaving the State Board and did not know if she would be replaced. I also met the National League liaison, Norm Turrill, from Portland.

Roll Call. The first order of business was roll-call during which each League introduced its attendees and reviewed at least one setback and one success that occurred this year. I introduced Karen Verrill, Pat Dickason, Mary Moore and Cynthia Stewart from our League and said one set back was the failure to recruit a local leader for the Civic Engagement Project. I reported our successes as our 2009 candidate forums, our expanded recruitment effort, our study on local government that resulted from the 2009 retreat, hosting Lobby Day, and our Olympia Comprehensive Plan water comments. Some good ideas from other Leagues: meeting raffles to raise general funds, and hosting a judicial forum (since the court system consumes much of the county budget). There was a big discussion about the difference between advocacy (based on positions, but not addressing specific legislation) and lobbying (supporting specific legislation).

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. This was a panel about how to handle contentious issues. Spokane did an Initiative/Referendum project on whether its City requirements were consistent with State law. Ultimately, the League provided its comments to the City Attorney to draft some clarifications to the City Code. Kitsap County held a Candidate Forum which was televised by the local access TV program but which was also filmed by a citizen and then edited and used by that person on behalf of a candidate for political purposes. That filming was not agreed to by the participants.

This generated discussion also about whether people can film a League event and/or use public access television footage on behalf of a candidate, with or without citing the League of Women Voters as a source. While use of public access television coverage in a campaign is legal, if there is no copyright, the League can lose credibility. The lesson learned was to ask that filming not be done without permission at the beginning of the program and also to ask that the public access TV station copyright its production of the League Forum.

Another issue was a case in which a forum regarding health care could have been disrupted by anti-health care sign-waving. The speaker recommended that if people try to disrupt a meeting by waving signs, they should be allowed to show their signs at the beginning of the meeting, then asked to keep them on the floor until the meeting is over, so that all participants can be seen. Another option is to collect all signs at the door, citing ground rules for the meeting, and asking that all participants collect them at the end of the Forum.

That speaker also recommended taking only written questions to keep people from giving a speech instead of asking a question. Whidbey Island shared their experience with a health care reform forum. The speaker advised League Forum facilitators keep their cool

in the heat of controversy by preparing for disruption in advance. This can be done by notifying law enforcement in advance and seeing if a deputy would appear in uniform; knowing the maximum capacity of the meeting room, based on the fire code; and enforcing the fire code regulations. Also mentioned was not opening the doors too early, to help avoid packing the front rows with demonstrators; having written procedures, like our non-partisan policy; having speaker time limits; leaving signs at the door, and enforcing ground rules by stopping violations. Meetings can be broadcast outside if you have an overflow situation. Empower the audience by asking them to stand up if they want to hear a speaker, or to leave if they don't. Follow-up by thanking sponsors, law enforcement, and media for coverage in writing.

Seminar I – Facebook and Blogging. Cynthia attended this one and had the following to report.

Some League units have found Facebook to be a valuable tool, actually increasing their membership as a result of using it. Twitter is also a useful tool for getting information out. These are primarily used to inform people of events and to broadcast to an ever-widening circle of “friends”, via friends of friends.

Many League units are not using the web site, so there was a “how-to” demonstration of the easy-web system that we already use. The Bellingham/Whatcom County League produced and provided to each other county a CD explaining how to implement these tools.

Seminar II – Civic Engagement.

- A. The State We're In.** Karen Verrill gave this presentation. 2000 copies of this publication have been sold to-date. She provided talking points to help promote the book and the associated teacher's guide (the writer of the teacher's guide tested it in her own 8th grade classroom). The soon to be released Tribal Sovereignty Curriculum can be satisfied by our book. Although the book is reasonable priced (\$18 including tax), it is still too expensive from some school districts. Some private gifts have funded distributions in smaller districts. Although there is some grant money available, more funding is needed. The LWVWA web site lists the districts who have purchased the book, and each League was given a free copy of the book and teacher's guide. Karen suggested that we pitch the book to our local libraries as a resource for home schooling.
- B. Civic Engagement Project.** The Spokane chapter provided a good hand-out on this project which is focused on our state tax system and its shortcomings for funding our state budget. As noted above, the Thurston County League was unable to recruit a chair for our participation in the first year of this initiative.
- C. Conservation Districts.** Pat Dickason referred to a May 19, 2010 status report. This state study needs more local participation, including the provision of information on how local conservation districts are structured, by September 2010. The study needs a state co-chair, too.
- D. Membership Builders.** This panel was comprised of Mason County, Clallam County and Bellingham/Whatcom County. They recommended contacting all

people who attended meetings about joining and all people who don't renew, having membership information available at all meetings (Dawn Brooks does this for us), and wearing your buttons when observing meetings of others. Have all Board members write letters on invitation to potential members they know. A Facebook page can help recruit members and increase attendance at meetings. Keep a spreadsheet on prospective members.

Civil Discussions Workshop. Professional facilitators conducted this 3.5 hour workshop which helped participants develop a basic understanding of the biology of conflict, how to develop and practice communication strategies to manage escalation, and how to develop and use open questions and issue frames to support productive discussions.

The meeting concluded with a nice dinner overlooking Bellingham's harbor and our speaker was Bellingham's State Representative. While she seemed to support Initiative 1098, she did not consider it to be the broad kind of tax reform that Washington needs.

--Clydia Cuykendall
5/24/10