



Red River Voter

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LWV Web Sites: www.lwvnd.org & www.lwvminn.org

MARCH—MAY 2012

A look ahead...

GUESTS are always welcome at League meetings!

- Friday, March 2** **12:00 noon-1:00 pm**
First Friday, Sons of Norway-Ballroom, 722 2nd Ave. N., Fargo
 (Lunch available beginning at 11:30 AM)
Minnesota: Clarifying Constitutional Confusion
 Panel Discussion. See article, page 3 for more information.

- Wednesday, March 21** **12:00 noon**
Moorhead Area LWVRRV meeting
 Speak Easy Restaurant, 1001 30th Ave. S., Moorhead
Heidi Uecker, Northern Minnesota Legal Services,
will speak on rental issues that she deals with

- Saturday, March 31** **9:30 am-noon**
Annual Meeting- League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley
VIP Room, 624 Main Ave., Fargo

- Friday, April 13** **12:00 noon-1:00 pm**
 (lunch available beginning at 11:30 am)
(note that this is the second Friday in April, because of Good Friday on 4/6)
First Friday, Sons of Norway-Ballroom, 722 2nd Ave. N., Fargo
What it Takes to Run an Election
Presented by DeAnn Buckhouse, Election Coordinator for Cass County & Jill Wenger, Moorhead City Clerk

- Wednesday, April 18** **12:00 noon**
Moorhead Area LWVRRV meeting
 Speak Easy Restaurant, 1001 30th Ave. S., Moorhead
A representative from the local Landlord's Association will speak on his experiences with rental issues

- Thursday, May 3** **6:00-9:00 pm**
Candidate's Forums - for offices on the June 12th ballot
 Fargo City Commission Chambers - 200 3rd St. N., Fargo

- Friday, May 4** **12:00 noon- 1:00 pm**
 (lunch available beginning at 11:30 AM)
First Friday, Sons of Norway-Ballroom, 722 2nd Ave. N., Fargo
Issues Faced by Veterans in our Region
Presented by Diane Hall, Supervisor for Mental Health at the Fargo VA

- Tuesday, May 8** **6:00-9:00 pm**
Candidate's Forums - for offices on the June 12th ballot
 Fargo City Commission Chambers - 200 3rd St. N., Fargo

- Wednesday, May 16** **12:00 noon**
Moorhead Area LWVRRV meeting
 Speak Easy Restaurant, 1001 30th Ave. S., Moorhead
Continuing study of discrimination in renting in Minnesota

President's Letter

I can't stop ranting on government voter ID requirements

Whenever I write one of these "Letters from the President," I start with vague ideas of what to do. I get ideas that fade in and out, then something triggers my writing bug and I am off. This time it was an e-mail from the League of Women Voters of Minnesota. It was entitled "We're a Target." It told how their efforts to spread their video "Democracy for All?" on Voter ID and the training of members on the issues had clearly made a difference. From the e-mail ...

"How do we know we're making a difference? Those who oppose our efforts have ramped up their efforts to intimidate us. Organizations advocating Voter ID at the polls are showing up at and disrupting LWV Minnesota events. We receive harassing messages on the phones at the state office. Some Voter ID proponents have taken pictures of our staff and volunteers at the Voter ID hearing at the Capitol, while ignoring other organizations, and target us specifically in their blog posts."

I was outraged. Here was clear evidence that at least some of proponents of the effort in Minnesota to require all voters to present a government-issued ID with a photo had decided that their arguments would not work. They need to harass and intimidate the most respected voting advocacy group in the nation – the League of Women Voters. I don't like bullies. These are the tactics of bullies and we need to show our support for those trying to tell the truth about this issue.

The truth is simple – there is no voter fraud problem and these laws will disenfranchise anyone without the means to produce all the appropriate paperwork to get the needed photo ID. Despite numerous claims in a variety of states, no investigation in any state has resulted in evidence of an effort to commit voter fraud by having ineligible voters use false identities to vote. Eighteen percent of elderly citizens do not have a photo ID. Fifteen percent of those who make under \$35,000 have no photo ID. Eighteen percent of citizens aged 18-24 do not have a government-issued ID with their current address and name as required by many Voter ID laws. Ten percent of voters with disabilities do not have a photo ID. Twenty-five percent of African-American citizens of voting age do not have a current, government-issued ID. All of that represents millions of American voters.

(Continued, page 3)

Bridging the political gender gap

Last September, I joined a group of about thirty women from around the state who came together in Bismarck for NDWN's Ready to Run. The day-long seminar brought together women who have run for office, women who are in office, campaign experts, and others who are interested in running for office. It was a day of practical information and inspiring stories.

Sounds like fun, you might be thinking. But *why* would we need a seminar specifically for women who might be interested in running for office? Aren't there avenues open out there for anyone who might be interested? Technically, yes - In theory there shouldn't be anything holding women back from running for office. As we all know, most forms of discrimination, in elected politics and other places, are illegal.

The reality of the situation suggests something else, though. As a nation, the US has made strides when it comes to women running for and occupying elected office. In recent decades, however, the proportion of women has leveled off, and in some cases, dropped. Seventeen percent of the current Congress is female - better than it has been in the past, but nowhere near mirroring the general population.

Statistics for North Dakota are even worse. The state legislature is 14.6 %

female, making us forty-sixth - *that's forty-six out of fifty* - in the nation.

That places us well out-of-league with our neighbors. Minnesota ranks 5th in the nation with 31%, Montana is 23rd in the nation with 24%, and South Dakota is 37th with 20%. We currently have only one woman in statewide elected office (State Treasurer Kelly Schmidt), and she joins a small group of only 15 women in the state's history that have held statewide office. Moreover, North Dakota voters have never elected a woman to federal office (although Jocelyn Birch Burdick did fill her husband's seat for a short time after his death).

Why might this matter to us, as citizens and as women? Someone could argue that the gender of a candidate shouldn't matter, that it's about the individual person who is filling the role. Certainly, in a perfect world, that would be the case. But despite years of progress for women's place in society, the fact remains that different socialization tends, on average, to give men and women very different perspectives on consequential things: things like how people interact, what leadership should and does look like, what problems are most important to society, and what are some of the best solutions to these problems. For instance, political scientist Michele Swers found that Democratic women and moderate

Republican women are more likely to introduce legislation on issues like domestic violence, reproductive rights, and child care. We tend to call these "women's issues," but in reality, these are issues that impact our families - male and female members alike - and our daily lives. In the words of Congresswoman Barbara Kennelly (CT), "Women have a different perspective and you need women in the room to be sure it is heard."

With all this bad news, where is the good news? The good news is in opportunities like Ready to Run, which was held again on February 3 in Bismarck and is slated to return to North Dakota in the near future. Sign up for that program or another similar one. Invite a friend - research shows that one of the main reasons women don't run for office is because no one asks us. The tools received at these trainings also help address the other reason women don't run - we don't think we're qualified. With the information and friendships available, North Dakota women are one step closer to closing the state's representation gap.

*-Kjersten Nelson, Assistant Professor
Political Science at NDSU*

*(Reprinted with permission from the
winter 2012 issue of the ND Women's
Voice newsletter of the North Dakota
Women's Network)*

LWRRV Annual Meeting March 31

Saturday, March 31st, at the VIP Room, 624 Main Ave, Fargo

Registration is at 9:30, brunch at 10 am, Brunch \$15 each.

Reservations by March 23, PO Box 295, Fargo, ND 58107-0295

Dr. Paul Kramer, Professor and Chair of the Political Science Dept. at MSUM, will be our guest speaker on "Issues before the US Supreme Court."

Since our membership year begins on April 1st, annual membership dues are payable at this time.

An official announcement of this meeting will be mailed shortly to all current LWRRV members.



Notes of interest

■ Third Wednesday discussion group, noon at the Speak Easy in Moorhead

In January we began studying *Homelessness in the Fargo/Moorhead Area*; noting the failure of the area's 10-year plan to end homelessness.

This has led to a detailed study of this issue, including speakers from Churches United for the Homeless, and Fargo/Moorhead Homeless Coalition. We plan to present a report to the community when we have enough information.

■ March 2nd First Friday Meeting—Minnesota: Clarifying Constitutional Confusion

Minnesota's Senate Majority Leader, David Senjem, expects at least three, and possibly five Constitutional Amendments on the ballot this November. This will be a significant increase. Minnesota has had a total of 2 Constitutional Amendments in the last ten years

With the legislature still in session, this is a great time to learn about those that will be on the ballot and some that may be there. They range from 'one man, one woman' Marriage Amendment to Voter ID to Super Majority and other budgetary amendments to "Right to Work." We will have a panel that includes Diane Wray Williams, former MN legislator and Moorhead City Councilwoman, Heidi Durand, current City Councilwoman, and Becky Johnson, Lakes & Prairie Community Action. Moderated by Del Rae Williams, LWVRR Board member, our discussion will begin with general questions, and give time for the audience to ask their own.



Why I belong to the LWV

I've had the privilege of serving on the Board of the RRV League of Women Voters since 2009. The area of energy policy is what has drawn me to become more involved in the political process. My former work in education and health care also spurred my interest in the League. It's very clear to me that in this politically polarized time there a need, more than ever, for non-partisan organizations such as the League to be a voice for civil discourse.

I came across an interesting interview with Bill Moyers and Jonathan Haidt, a psychology professor at the University of Virginia, who has developed a theory on the psychology of morality. According to Haidt, the current polarization has its roots in our human tendency to descend into tribalism which leads us to demonize the "other side" as evil. The end result is that both sides feel that they are right on moral grounds to the extent that the other side must then be evil. This leads to seeking only information that confirms what is already believed. The age of Google makes this extremely easy to do. It's as George Carlin once said, "The reason I talk to myself is that I'm the only one whose answers I accept." According to Haidt, his book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, due out in March 2012, offers his recommendations for addressing this situation. One that he offered in the interview is that we must all be alert to our own tendencies to sanctify our own positions and demonize those of the other side.

I have to admit that one of my reactions as I was listening to the interview was, "But, HOW can THEY think....X,Y,Z?!?!?!" Ah, yes. As Haidt points out, our passion is not the problem. Our problem is how we have come to view the passion of others.

For a look at the entire interview go to: <http://vimeo.com/36128360>. For more info on the League's work in the areas of energy and health care go to <http://www.lwv.org/our-work#otherpolicy>

—Jocie Iszler-LWVRRV Director

Voter ID Requirements (continued from page 1)

What can/should we do? Watch the video "Democracy for All?" at www.lwvmn.org. Show it to others in any way you can. Send a little monetary support to the League of Women Voters of Minnesota. And for those of you in Minnesota, send an e-mail, letter or make a phone call to your state legislators to oppose the proposed constitutional amendment require a government issued photo ID to vote. Talk to your friends and spread the word to all who will listen. Get the truth into their minds before they see whatever ads may run before the election in the fall over this amendment.

This is about the core principal of the League of Women Voters – the right to vote. Don't let the progress of the last 100 years be lost to an effort by bullies afraid of having **more** people voting. In a country where 60% turnout is a good year, lack of voting is a real problem. Voter fraud is an illusion being used to create more barriers to voting.

If anyone wants more information on this issue beyond what you find at www.lwvmn.org, send me an e-mail. I know lots of sources I would be happy to share.

League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley
P.O. Box 295
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TIME TO JOIN THE LEAGUE!

Membership Dues:

Individual: \$50, students: \$15

Send your check to:

LWV RRV, PO Box 295,
Fargo, ND 58107-0295

**Include your name, address, telephone number,
and e-mail address.**

2011-2012 LWVRRV Officers

Co-Presidents: *Lois Altenburg, Barbara Headrick*

Vice President: *DelRae Williams*

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Portia Smith, Mary Tintes*

◆ This issue of the Voter, along with archived issues dating back to 2000, is available online on the lwvnd.org/rrv.html website

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages an 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 League of Women Voters values diversity in its members. In principle and in practice, the League knows no barriers on the basis of age, creed, disability, gender, national origin, race or sexual orientation, and encourages full participation in and contribution to the organization by all its members.