



The North Dakota Voter

The League of Women Voters of North Dakota
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Issue 1

January 2009

President's Message

Wow! What an election cycle! The members of the LWVND were busy and visible everywhere. We had candidates' forums and issues forums. We had members observing the process at the local, state and national level. President Lois Altenburg and local board member Amanda Noce attended the national LWVUS convention in Portland, Oregon in June 2008. Supporters of the creation of a national Department of Peace were the most active with lobbying and parliamentary maneuvers, but in the end the majority of the delegates rejected the concept. The hard work of local LWV members in forming a new national consensus on immigration was present in our new position on immigration. Any member who is interested in using our position for a ND state education or lobbying effort should contact the LWVND state board.

Here in the ND League office, we have worked with national on updating to the current roster system and are becoming acquainted with the many tools available through our national organization. Accessing the online information to aid in our programs has been helpful and organizational strength continues to grow as we network with other state chapters. We are sorting through many boxes of LWVND material and filing them to make them available for the use of

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North Dakota Legislation

An update...

Renee Stromme

The status of women in North Dakota is not where it should be. We have few women in leadership positions in both elected and appointed office as well as higher education. In fact, in the November election we lost ground in the number of women in state office and the legislature. Women's concerns are rarely on the agenda in state policy. Clearly, there is a need for an advisory group to policy makers on the status of women.

The Governor's Commission on the Status of Women

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SAVE THE DATE...

**North Dakota League of Women
Voters State Conference**
Tentative date: Saturday, May 2

We plan to address the redistricting issue and other issues relevant to ND voters. Hotel and agenda information will be available soon on our website...

www.lwwnd.org



WE Rise: Women Empowered on February 11th

The North Dakota Women's Network will provide an unparalleled hands-on learning experience for North Dakota women, right in our state's capitol. For one day, February 11, 2009, we will host women from across the state at the epicenter of our state's legislative activity. *WE Rise: Women Empowered* will offer behind the scenes insights to the legislative process through meetings with local lawmakers and trainings on how to lobby.

As a rural state, challenges of physical distance can easily lead to an environment of detachment and lack of political participation. This is particularly true for women who often have to balance career, family, friends and school. The magnitude of these obstacles was quite evident following the last election cycle, which resulted in a drop in the number of North Dakota congresswomen to a disappointing 15.9%. This underrepresentation of women in our state's legislature creates an atmosphere where women's issues are commonly overlooked.

It is imperative more women step up to leadership positions and guarantee women's concerns are no longer disregarded by decision makers. In an effort to educate women on public policy and to engage more women in the legislative process, women's groups across North Dakota are coming together to host *WE Rise*.

In order to empower women of North Dakota, we must demystify the state legislative process and promote women's political participation. *WE Rise* will achieve

these goals by providing this opportunity to learn, participate, and carry political enthusiasm home. Our hope is to increase women's leadership roles in the legislative process as citizens and potential politicians. The Sheila Wellstone Institute will provide training to participants on leadership development. [Learn more about the Sheila Wellstone Institute at: <http://www.wellstone.org/our-programs/sheila-wellstone-institute>.]

WE Rise is the first North Dakota women's lobby day of its kind, an historic opportunity for women to affect state public policy. And, the Women's Network is honored to host 150 women in our state capitol for a day full of learning and memories while impacting public policy.

For more information, including registration, please visit the event website at www.standupnd.org or call our office at 701-223-6985. We hope you can join us in this effort to make a real and lasting impact in our state.☀

President's Message *continued from page 1*

members or for archiving. At present we have LWVND materials archived in Grand Forks and Bismarck. We have copies of some amazing ND studies on energy, water and land use. LWVND has worked hard to craft our positions on women's rights and election laws. Now is the time for us to study current proposed legislation in relation to our current positions.

The League plays a very important role in educating the public and because of our non partisan stance, can act as a watch dog organization throughout the election process. Thank you for all you have contributed. It is easy to become burned out after this busy election season but remember there is still work to be done. This year we hope to expand our membership, work on the development of new league localities and take on a number of new issue studies.

Lois Altenburg, President
Susan Altenburg, Executive Director
LWVND☀

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

Reflections on Running for Office

By Mitch Vance.



After weeks of rest and recreation after a long, hard fought campaign as the dem/NPL candidate for State Treasurer, I appreciate this opportunity to share some lessons learned about myself and the political process. First, I will never look at candidates and campaigning the same again. The mental and physical challenges of running for statewide office teach a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices candidates make in the interest of good government.

Second, the obvious challenges of the campaign easily become less significant when I consider the value of challenging the incumbent. Without a vigorous challenge to the incumbent's public performance, every word and deed of it, voters may never know or care about what's really going on in a political office. In my case, I ran for the treasurer's job, where they handle all the state's money. What I found doing the research startled me and gave me issues that I will continue to espouse long after this election fades in memory.

The experience also deepened my commitment to issues I often talked about but never really felt the passion for. I campaigned on transparency; deeper research into audit reports, expense reports, and other details of the office absolutely convinced me that we need to be constantly vigilante of government activities to make sure they know we are watching and we care about what they are doing. The treasurer's office is a small office and for the most part goes unnoticed until election time.

Elections add the other issue that makes transparency effective: accountability. If a candidate vigorously challenges the incumbent, election day may be the only opportunity the public has to hold incumbents accountable for their performance, or lack of it. Without a challenger in every race, this accountability moment wouldn't happen.

Fortunately, you get the training and experience in League to do what it takes to challenge incumbents and influence policy on all levels. My experience in

League over many years in Ohio and North Dakota gave me the analytical and research skills to dig up relevant issues and run with them. All of you in League have shown how much you care about issues and process; now I encourage you to put those assets to work for real change. You'll find it rewarding in ways too numerous to mention. We need you. ☀

Women's Political Blog/Website Launched to Help Women Running for Office

Covington, KY--30-year business veteran and former Kentucky Senate candidate, Kathy Groob launches a new women's political blog/website dedicated to electing women to public office. ElectWomen Magazine is the first independent, comprehensive magazine-style blog/website that offers women running for office a place to obtain resources, links to training, workshops, books and advice, statistics and even the ability to blog or e-mail questions. The site can be accessed at www.ElectWomen.com. Contact: Kathy Groob 859-291-9001 kathy@kathygroob.com☀

Redistricting New Study Topic

Kay Maxwell stated the following on redistricting at the LWV California Council Banquet in 2006:

"Another issue that goes to the heart of the democratic system is the controversy over partisan redistricting, or gerrymandering. This controversy is as old as the Republic. You probably know that the term gerrymander itself comes from Governor Gerry of Massachusetts, who created an election district so long and misshapen that it looked like a salamander – hence the name Gerry – mander. Today, with the advent of modern computers and growing partisanship, it is possible to create legislative districts where the results of an election will be known before any votes are cast or counted. This is just what is happening across the nation. And it threatens our democracy."

The ND League will be looking at how this issue affects our state. The goal is to form a position on how it can be approached as the results of the 2010 Census become available. If you are interested in participating in this study please contact Susan at 701-297-6815 or lwnd@q.com☀

Legislation

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(CSW) was established in the 1970s to ensure that women make progress in the state. The group was tasked with serving as an advisory group to the governor on strategies to better women's status. Unfortunately the CSW has taken a turn away from a broad focus and narrowed significantly. Over the past year and a half, the ND Women's Network has been pushing for more action from the CSW. Currently the focus of the CSW has been primarily economic development for women – mostly small businesses. This is such a small piece of what needs to be addressed regarding the status of women in North Dakota. Additionally, the CSW has not met their statutory obligations for meetings.

Thankfully, there is a bill pending (SB 2194) which can reinvigorate the CSW and broaden the work significantly. Senator JoNell Bakke felt a legislative change was necessary to improve the actions of CSW. The bill would do two key things: 1) broaden the focus of CSW to include domestic violence, child care issues, women's health, education and economic

development; 2) it would adjust the membership of CSW to diversify the appointments.

With these changes we could well see progress for women in ND. Learn more about the SB 2194 at <http://legis.nd.gov/assembly/61-2009/bill-actions/ba2194.html>.

There are numerous bills of significance to women worth following, including protections for breastfeeding women, expansion of family planning availability to low income women, penalties for human trafficking, and much more. The ND Women's Network has a tracking grid available at our website: www.ndwomen.org.

Become a member or renew today.
Call Susan at 701-297-6815 or email
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