



The North Dakota Voter

The League of Women Voters of North Dakota
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Issue 2

July 2009

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.

Does North Dakota Need Redistricting Reform?

Carol Sawicki

League of Women Voters-North Dakota has chosen Redistricting in our State as a study topic. Our goal is to reach a consensus on a position on this topic in time for the decisions that will be made when the 2010 Census results become available.

On this subject, LWVUS has affirmed these three goals that are consistent with League positions and that local Leagues should work to achieve.

1. Congressional districts and government legislative bodies should be apportioned substantially on population ("one person, one vote")
2. Redistricting should not dilute the effective representation of minority citizens
3. Efforts that attempt or result in partisan gerrymandering should be opposed.

Continued Page 4

Bismarck-Mandan League holds panel on Women Running and Holding Office

Carol Russell

On June 9, 2009 the Bismarck Mandan League held a panel discussion on women's experience running for office. The program's three guest speakers were: **Rep. Kari Conrad, District 3, Minot; Kelly Schmidt, ND State Treasurer; and Sandy Tibke, Mandan City Commissioner.**

The three guest speakers discussed the special challenges to women running for and holding public office at the state and local levels and why some women choose to run and others do not. Condescension of women legislators by their male counterparts is an on-going irritation but speakers offered ways they countered such actions. They expressed a need to seek women out to urge and then

Continued Page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Redistricting Reform
- 1 Panel on Women running and holding office held
- 3 State Convention, Reapportionment, Lloyd Omdahl
- 3 Freedom of Information Act
- 4 Women's Network Board of Directors

North Dakota League of Women Voters State Conference Jamestown, ND

Sunday, September 13, 2009

State Board elections, business meeting and speaker Lloyd Omdahl will speak on redistricting. Details are available on our website. If you want to attend let your local League president know that you want to be a delegate. See more information on page 3.

www.lwnd.org

Bismarck-Mandan League Panel

Continued from page 1



Rep. Kari Conrad, District 3



**Kelly Schmidt,
ND State Treasurer**



**Sandy Tibke,
Mandan City Commissioner**

to facilitate their candidacies for office. Blocks or impediments to the legislature's function and progress were also outlined and potential roles for the league to help "modernize" legislative processes and procedures were offered by members and speakers alike. Major issues included:

- Work load – too heavy in the legislative time allowed. Annual sessions would help.
- Access of the public to the legislative process and members/hearings actions.
- Transparency.
- Background intelligence on issues so informed decisions can be made.
- Scheduling of everything.
- Overhauling the Legislative Management Committee for such things as flexibility of process. For example, once a hearing is scheduled, the process is such that it can't be delayed because of a blizzard or flood. In such instances, therefore, the bill or issue for which the hearing was to be held is lost. This is a grossly unfair penalty.

Ideas for how the league can help with the legislative process included:

- Putting together a bill to make needed changes to the Legislative Management Committee

- Evaluating the legislative process taking into account the major issues above.

In a later follow-up communication, Kari Conrad suggested the following activities for the league to improve the legislature:

1. Convene a group of former and present legislators and paid and citizen lobbyists to identify potential process, scheduling, and procedural issues that undermine citizen participation in the legislature, both as advocates for concerns or as potential legislators.
2. Use the information to survey, legislators, lobbyists, elected officials, etc., using www.surveymonkey.com to test significance of and potential solutions for process, scheduling, and procedural issues.
3. Present the information to the Legislative Management Committee and ask that they contact National Conference of State Legislators to review issues and identify ways they have been addressed in other states.
4. Monitor the work of the Management Committee.
5. If appropriate, promote legislation.



ND League State Convention

Below is a peek at the topic that Lloyd Omdahl will be covering for us at the state convention to be held this year in Jamestown on September 13.

Redistricting in our State is a primary study topic for the ND League. For more information see the website or call 701-297-6815.

Reapportionment

Lloyd Omdahl

In 2011, the North Dakota legislature will once again draw new boundaries for legislative districts. Because legislators have a vested interest in the results, the process will be fraught with conflicts of interests. While admitting that a more objective system. But the Legislature does these conflicts exist, the Legislature has been unwilling to pass this task to not belong to the legislators who happen to be seated at the time of apportionment. It belongs to the people and the people have a right to a fair, equitable system of representation.

As North Dakota approaches reapportionment, new answers should be sought to achieve greater fairness. The last apportionment ended up in gerrymandering, as well as interparty and intraparty bitterness. What innovations can be found in other states? What should be the standards for fair representation? Who should actually draw the boundaries – a committee of impartial citizens or a committee of legislators? What options do citizens have for genuine input – an initiated measure taking charge of the process? Legal action? Input through the Governor? These are all questions worth discussing before reapportionment begins. ☼

Freedom of Information Act

Source: LWVUS

This Independence Day marks 43 years since the landmark Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was signed into law – yet Americans still believe that our government is secretive.

FOIA established our right to access government records and to know what our government is doing – both its successes and failures. Exercising our right to know allows us to contribute to our government and hold government accountable. From food and transportation safety to the use and disposal of chemicals, FOIA has enabled the public to not only ensure the health of our democracy, but also ensure our own well-being.

FOIA (and related state and local laws) are only as good as we demand that they be. For decades, members of the League of Women Voters have acted as government watchdogs at the federal, state and local levels -- observing government meetings, conducting document audits and empowering citizens, but more work needs to be done.

The key to a healthy, open government is public participation. On his first day in office, President Obama called for making the federal government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative. The White House is currently soliciting the public for such recommendations. This FOIA anniversary, exercise your right to know by seeking records, attending a government meeting, or adding your voice to the White House discussion. ☼

Become a member or renew today!
Call 701-297-6815 or email lwnvnd@q.com.

LWV of North Dakota Board of Directors 2008-2009

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Carol Reed

Redistricting Reform

Continued from page 1

The current system for redistricting in North Dakota charges the Legislature with the task of redrawing district lines every 10 years. Does this practice allow for the best and most democratic possible results? If not, can a better system be put into place, and how can these changes be made with the best chance of success?

The first step will be to determine if gerrymandering has been in evidence in the past when the State was being divided up into legislative districts. Looking over a map of the current North Dakota boundaries will show some quite oddly shaped districts.

Does it appear that these boundaries were drawn to decrease the number of competitive elections? If that is the case, the result might be that one political party would end up with significantly higher percentage of seats in the Legislature than the percentage of actual votes cast for that party.

If we determine that the current system has resulted in significant gerrymandering in North Dakota, then we will look at how other states have tried to deal with the problem. If we arrive at consensus on a solution that may be workable here, we will adopt a position and work to have that solution implemented.☀

ND Women's Network seeks applications for Board of Directors

The North Dakota Women's Network is a broad-based statewide women's advocacy organization. Consider applying to be part of the positive changes for women in North Dakota.

For job description and to apply contact Renee Stromme at renee@ndwomen.org or 418 E Rosser #100, Bismarck, ND 58501. Application deadline is August 14, 2009.

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