



# RRV VOTER

MARCH  
APRIL  
2006

## A look ahead...

GUESTS are always welcome at League meetings!

Thursday, March 2, 9:00 AM-11:00 AM

**ND State University—Memorial Union**  
Women's Studies Resource Fair

First Friday, March 3, 12:00 noon-1:00 PM

**Lunch available beginning at 11:30 AM**  
**Sons of Norway, 722 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave N, Fargo**  
Topic: Affordable Housing

Sunday, March 19, 2:00-4:00 PM

**Concordia College, Moorhead, Olin 124**  
11<sup>th</sup> Annual James E. Leahy Freedom Lecture:  
Inside the Supreme Court  
**Speaker: Eric Wolff, assistant U.S. attorney**  
**Co-sponsored by the LWVRRV**

Saturday, March 25, 9:30 AM-12:00 noon

**Trollwood Café, 3105 Broadway, Fargo**  
League of Women Voters of the RRV  
Annual Meeting

First Friday, April 7, 12:00 noon-1:00 PM

**Lunch available beginning at 11:30 AM**  
**Sons of Norway, 722 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave N, Fargo**  
Topic: Foster Care

### 2005-2006 LWVRRV Officers

President:	Cheryl Bergian
First Vice President	Carol Sawicki
Second Vice President	Lois Altenburg
Secretary	Alberta Dobry
Treasurer	Mary Tintes

### Board of Directors

Margaret Blue, Lynne Olson, Twylla Conner,  
Sherri Seeba and Helen Rudie, Amy Jacobson

## President's Letter

For my President's message for the spring (I think we had two weeks of winter this year!), I'd like to ask all LWV of the Red River Valley to put an event in June on their calendar - the League of Women Voters of the United States 47th National Convention is in Minneapolis on June 10 - 13, 2006. This is a great opportunity for us to join fellow Leaguers from across the nation, and internationally, and it's so close. Registration information is in the February, 2006 National Voter or online at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) (go to the Members section to access the Convention site) - I can mail to anyone the information from the National Voter, too.

Please consider going to the National Convention. Some of the LWVRRV Board will be going, one as a Delegate from our League. We can work on carpooling; just let me know that you've registered for the convention and I'll link up folks. I can be reached at 793-2002 (Fargo cell) or at [cherylbergian@cablone.net](mailto:cherylbergian@cablone.net). And, volunteering opportunities at the National Convention could be available - let me know if you would like to look into that.

One more thing for your calendars - we're planning the LWVRRV Annual Meeting on Saturday, March 25, 2006, from 9:30 a.m. (registration) to 12:00 p.m. We'll have a business meeting and some entertainment with a League focus, and brunch - watch for the registration materials in early March

—Cheryl Bergian, President, LWVRRV

*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.*

*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.*

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## 11th Annual James E. Leahy Freedom Lecture: Inside the Supreme Court

**Speaker: Eric Wolff, assistant U.S. attorney**

**Sunday, March 19, 2-4 p.m., Olin 124, Concordia College** (There is no charge for this presentation, but registration is requested.)

From his role as clerk for Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, 1995 Concordia College graduate Eric Wolff gained a great deal of insight into how the Supreme Court works. He learned how cases are chosen, how arguments are made, the role of clerks and more. Wolff, who now serves as an assistant U.S. attorney in Billings, Montana, has also clerked for U.S. Circuit Court judges.

The focus of this lecture is not on gossipy details about the justices but rather on how the Supreme Court works, what it does best, and what it does not do well. Much of what the Court does is actually rather boring, but very important. The Court is most in the public eye when it takes up controversial issues like abortion, gay marriage, and the death penalty. But are nine mostly elderly, mostly wealthy lawyers the best persons to decide such issues? What is the proper role of the Supreme Court? What are these Justices like? What exactly do they do?

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## Come to the Annual Meeting and bring a friend!

A good way to introduce someone to the League of Women Voters is to have them join you as you attend our 2006 Annual Meeting. It will be held on Saturday March 25<sup>th</sup>, from 9:30 AM to 12:00 PM at Trollwood Cafe, 3105 Broadway, Fargo. This year's program will be People Escaping Poverty Project (PEPP) presenting, in a creative way, on their voter registration activities.

*Watch for RSVP information  
in the mail in early March*

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## Board briefs

Generally, the LWVRRV Board's regular meetings are held on the second Saturday of every month at 8:30 AM at the Fry'n' Pan restaurant, 302 Main Ave. in Fargo. However, in March we will be meeting on Wednesday, March 8 at 5:30 PM, still at the Fry'n' Pan. *All League members are invited to join us.*

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## Volunteers needed for League Forums

Many volunteers are needed to help the Voter Service chairs conduct Candidates' Forums and the Minnesota Legislative Forum this spring.

There are many offices up for election in both Fargo and West Fargo on June 13, 2006, and the LWVRRV is planning on holding Candidates' Forums for all of these races during the month of May.

If you would like to participate in this important League activity, please contact Lois Altenburg (232-2701) or Carol Sawicki (232-5676).

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## Minnesota Legislative Forum planned

The League, along with the Chamber of Commerce and Moorhead Community Education, is planning to hold a legislative meeting about the 2006 Minnesota Legislative session sometime during the month of April. The details of date, time and place will be announced and advertised as soon as they have been finalized.

This will be an opportunity for constituents to find out what is happening in St. Paul. State Senator Keith Langseth and Representatives Morrie Lanning and Paul Marquart will report on what they see as the key actions of the Legislature and will then respond to audience questions

## Join the League!

Individual	\$45.00
Household	\$67.50
Student	\$15.00



## Send your check to:

*League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley  
PO Box 295, Fargo, ND 58107*

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

# News From the LWVUS

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## LWVUS Board Sets 2006 Advocacy Priorities

At the end of January, the LWVUS Board convened and set the national advocacy priorities for the year. The Board recommitted to the Democracy Agenda, which includes the priorities of Election Reform, Campaign Finance Reform, Redistricting and Civil Liberties. Lobbying Reform and Ethics, and the Reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act were added to the Democracy Agenda. In addition, LWVUS work on DC Rights, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Clean Air issues will continue as resources permit.

## League and other reform groups call on Congressional ethics committees to investigate lobbying scandals

Washington, D.C.— The Congressional Ethics Coalition was formed in 2004 to promote reasonable reform of the congressional ethics process on Capitol Hill. It is a nonpartisan, ideologically diverse group of leading government reform organizations: the Campaign Legal Center, the Center for Responsive Politics, Common Cause, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Democracy 21, Judicial Watch, League of Women Voters, Public Campaign, Public Citizen and US PIRG.

Today, the Coalition calls on the House and Senate ethics committees to immediately initiate investigations into potential violations of congressional ethics rules by Members of Congress who have received favors and campaign contributions from lobbyist Jack Abramoff. We urge the Committees to investigate whether Members received favors that violate congressional ethics rules and whether Members may have taken official actions on behalf of Mr. Abramoff or of his clients in exchange for campaign contributions, gifts, travel or other favors.

The Abramoff scandal is one of the biggest issues facing the 109th Congress, yet both congressional ethics committees have said they have no plans to investigate. This inaction fails both the institution and the American people.

Those who claim that the committees can take no action while the Department of Justice is investigating potential criminal violations misconstrue the main purpose of the Congressional ethics process. There is a difference between the investigation and prosecution of a criminal violation and upholding the high ethics standards in Congress. Successful ethics committee investigations occurred during past congressional scandals, such as ABSCAM and Koreagate that involved potential criminal conduct being investigated by the Justice Department.

The refusal to act on the Abramoff scandal is yet another example of a congressional ethics process that has ceased to function. In fact, the House ethics committee has come to a dead halt. An ethics “truce” where threats of partisan payback silenced the process was followed by an ethics committee that did not function during the entire year of 2005 in spite of numerous pending cases. Among the matters pending and still requiring urgent attention are:

- an inquiry into former Majority Leader Tom DeLay’s (R-TX) dealings with lobbyist Jack Abramoff;
- an inquiry into Rep. Bob Ney (R OH) and his dealings with Abramoff;
- an inquiry into whether Rep. John Conyers (D MI) and his aides improperly conducted partisan political activities out of his Detroit congressional office;
- an inquiry into allegations that Rep. Jim McDermott (D WA) violated ethics rules and standards in handing over to the press a tape of an illegally intercepted phone conversation;
- an inquiry into whether Rep. Curt Weldon (R PA) improperly used his office to aid his daughter’s public relations firm; and
- an inquiry into whether Rep. William Jefferson (D-LA) misused his public office for personal gain.

For its part the Senate ethics committee has managed to fly below the radar, although it is not without serious fault. To date, for example, the Committee has taken no action to investigate one of the biggest congressional scandals of modern times – the Abramoff affair.

In the short term, these matters merit the committees' immediate attention and action before the end of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Unfortunately, the process that Congress currently uses for investigating possible ethics violations has lost credibility.

It is seriously flawed, marred by inaction and is too vulnerable to partisan winds and cozy confluences of interests.

While the House and Senate ethics committees can and must move forward with investigations of Abramoff and any pending matters, all of the groups represented here believe that significant changes are needed to improve congressional ethics enforcement. We all believe that the House ethics committee should allow individual citizens and outside groups to file ethics complaints, and that there should be openness in the ethics process generally.

Many of us support more fundamental reforms, such as the creation of an independent ethics commission or an Office of Public Integrity as an independent office within the legislative branch. What we know for certain is that without effective enforcement and oversight, even the best rules can be rendered meaningless. Ethics on the Hill is no longer about "what is right" but about "what you can get away with." The way to fix this is through effective enforcement.

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## **League Vision, Beliefs and Intentions:**

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political membership organization which:

- Acts after study and member agreement to achieve solutions in the public interest on key community issues at all government levels.
- Builds citizen participation in the democratic process. Engages communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy.

The League of Women Voters Education Fund is a nonpartisan public policy educational organization which:

- Builds citizen participation in the democratic process.
- Studies key community issues at all governmental levels in an unbiased manner.
- Enables people to seek positive solutions to public policy issues through education and conflict management.

We believe in:

- Respect for individuals.
- The value of diversity.
- The empowerment of the grassroots, both within the League and in communities.

We will:

- Act with trust, integrity and professionalism.
- Operate in an open and effective manner to meet the needs of those we serve, both members and the public.
- Take the initiative in seeking diversity in membership.
- Acknowledge our heritage as we seek our path to the future.