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League of Women Voters of the Huntington Area

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LWW LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] OF THE HUNTINGTON AREA

May 2021 E-mail Bulletin

Martha Woodward, 1st VP, woodward@marshall.edu
Wendy Thomas, 2nd VP, wxtomas@frontier.com



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EMPOWERING VOTERS. ACHIEVING DEMOCRACY by Helen Gibbins

Empowering Voters. Achieving Democracy is the mission statement of the League of Women Voters. We are part of an organization whose purpose is two - fold --- Promote participation in government and advocate on selected issues that our members have agreed to through study and consensus. Many of the selected issues need to be coordinated at the national or state level. All of this costs more money at the national level than at local levels where more of the work is achieved by volunteers. Here are ways we work to achieve that goal.

We are connected to the LWWUS so that we provide Voters Service and advocacy on issues in a consolidated and professional way throughout the country. Likewise, we work with the LWWVW on advocacy and Voters Service. So that we can be more effective, we cooperate with other organizations with similar objectives such as on environmental quality, health care, good government, and election laws. All advocacy and Voters Service take funding, especially at the national level.

We recognize that the membership dues are high for a number of persons, but can explain the costs. Our budget includes per member payments to the national and state levels of the League. The costs for running the national office in DC are high because of rental costs and salaries. The directors work to keep costs down, but the office must be located in DC for its advocacy work. The salaries for the staff are lower than at many non-profits, but the directors recognize that competent staff is essential for the work of our organization. Likewise, the per member payment to the state level of the League makes it possible for us to be involved in statewide issues.

At the local level some of our board members fund their League expenses rather than asking the treasurer to send them a check. Our budget should include the actual costs of projects for those who cannot afford to pay for the costs of their League work. See "Year in Review" published in the April bulletin.

I compliment the Huntington Board of Directors for implementing the many projects during the past year even though we experienced a pandemic. They research the issues and are enthusiastic, innovative, and cooperative. If you would like to help with any of the projects, please contact a member of the Board of Directors. Wendy Thomas, wxtthomas@frontier.com, chairs the membership committee.

FUNDING FOR WV FROM THE 'AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN' IS ON THE WAY! By Nyoka Chapman

You may do a double take when you see the amounts of money coming to West Virginia following the passage of the 'American Rescue Plan' (Covid-19 stimulus package). You can see the full breakdown of the \$4 billion dollars headed to WV at Joe Manchin's website: <https://www.manchin.senate.gov/arp>. Itemizations of specific amounts designated for cities, counties and municipalities as well as health care systems & more are listed.

As you can see, many of these disbursements are coming to the aid of LWVWV platform issues!

- **INDIVIDUAL AID:** \$1,400 stimulus checks to most West Virginians; child tax credits; Earned Income Tax Credit; health insurance assistance; student loan assistance; and unemployment through Sept. 6
- **SMALL BUSINESS AID:** Reauthorization of PPP, EIDL, shuttered venue and restaurant assistance Previously, WV small businesses received over \$1 billion in direct aid
- **BROADBAND:** \$138 million in funding for broadband and \$2 million for hotspots
- **LOCAL:** \$677 million in funding for cities and 55 counties, to be administered by local governments
- **STATE:** \$1.25 billion in funding for WV state government, to be administered by the Governor and legislature
- **VACCINES:** \$11 million to WV in supplemental vaccine funding and on increasing vaccine doses
- **EDUCATION:** \$800 million for WV pre-K through 12th grade; \$190 million for WV colleges and universities
- **CHILD CARE:** \$260 million for WV child care and \$10 million for WV Head Start
- **SENIORS:** \$9 million for WV senior programs
- **HOUSING:** \$152 million for emergency rental assistance in WV and \$38.5 million for LIHEAP
- **TRANSPORTATION:** \$8 million for WV airports; \$24 million for WV transit systems
- **VETERANS:** Approximately \$2.2 million for Veteran's nursing homes

- **HOSPITALS AND RURAL HEALTH:** Millions in direct funding to help WV hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, health departments, home health, and long-term care
- **DRUG PREVENTION:** Millions in direct funding to WV through the Substance Abuse Prevention and Health Service Administration
- **FOOD ASSISTANCE:** Direct funding to our most vulnerable West Virginians through federal programs
- **FIREFIGHTERS AND FIRST RESPONDERS:** The Assistance to Firefighters and SAFER grant programs will receive additional allocations of \$100 million and \$200 million respectively; Firefighters and First Responders are also eligible for support under state and local government funds

HEALTH CARE LEGISLATIVE REPORT 2021 by Betty Barrett

To say the recent West Virginia Legislature's session was interesting is an understatement. Underlying the whole 60 days was the Republican effort to reduce or eliminate WV personal income tax. Not specifically a health-related bill, if it had passed, all services funded in the state's budget for 2021-22, including health care, would have been impacted, and most would be substantially reduced. The bill did not pass after the House emphatically rejected it 100-0, a rare occurrence.

The issue is not dead but will be studied. A good resource for studying it is the WV Center on Budget and Policy, wvpolicy.org. You may want to get on their email list for their excellent materials on many subjects, including health care.

Two excellent bills passed, supported by the League. HB 2266, approved with broad bipartisan support, extends post-partum Medicaid coverage to a full year, up from 60 days (which had been a recent improvement). Lead sponsor was Dr. Matt Rohrbach, joined by Evan Worrell, both Cabell County. The other one was HB 2263, also sponsored by Rohrbach and Worrell. It will lower the cost of prescription drugs for individuals on commercial insurance plans. It requires insurance companies and Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) to share rebates on drugs with customers.

Delegate Chad Lovejoy of Cabell was successful seeing HB 3107 approved, after five tries, providing Workers Comp for PTSD in first responders, such as fire fighters, police and emergency service staff, as a pilot project.

HB 2918 passed, allowing expansion of Drug Courts, if there is funding available. Cabell's drug court has been highly successful. We will follow the expansion and report on funding.

Broadband expansion (HB 2002) in West Virginia will improve the use of telehealth, which is hoped will increase access to health care in the state. It will improve statewide access to computer use.

A bad bill that did not pass was HB 2598, reducing inspection of above ground storage tanks. Perhaps our legislators learned a lesson from the contamination of the drinking water supply to Kanawha and other counties from a leaking chemical storage tank.

Another bill the League opposed that passed allows some previously excluded chemicals from drinking water to be allowed. This bill will most likely be explained under the environmental bills in this newsletter. It is not directly health care related but impacts public health.

A bad bill that did pass, SB 334, requires increased regulations for harm reduction programs, which include needle exchanges, such as the successful program of the Cabell-Huntington Health Department. Despite research showing their value to public health, more and complicated requirements added are likely to prevent establishment and result in closure of these programs.

Another successful bill, HB 2982, requires doctors to give information that some medication – driven abortions may be reversible, though credible research disagrees, and shows dangerous results.

HB 2368 makes visitation to a health care facility a patient right even during a pandemic, allowed at least once every five days, despite the risk of spreading disease. Visitors would be required to follow federal guidelines. Lack of visitation to such facilities as nursing homes or assisted living had been protested.

As this is written, not all the bills have been signed by the Governor, and efforts are ongoing to request several vetoes. As always in legislative sessions, the League wins some and loses some. We will have another opportunity next year.

HEARING CORPORATE VOICES by Nyoka Baker Chapman

To the shock of some politicians, corporate consciousness has evolved and taken on a life of its own. Not only are there recent individual corporate rumblings, but there is also a *coalition* of corporations speaking out in support of Voting Rights. The Civic Alliance <https://www.civicalliance.com/> has a growing membership of over a thousand companies that are making a stand to protect voter access. Many participating members do business in our own neighborhoods and many are familiar brands.

A recent political call for corporations to keep their opinions to themselves with regard to voting rights would seem to be a slap in the face of free speech, based on their 14th amendment right to ‘personhood.’ Numerous decisions have determined that corporations can participate in actions as individuals. Though *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company*, 118 U.S. 394 (1886) did not have an effect on the Tillman Act of 1907 (*which though unenforceable, banned corporate contributions to federal candidates*), future cases spotlighted the connection between the 14th Amendment acknowledgement of corporations as individuals with First Amendment rights; most notably *Citizens United v. FEC (Federal Election Commission)*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010), and *McCutcheon et al. v. Federal Election Commission*, 572 U.S. 185 (2014).

Of course, Supreme Court Decisions will interpret law through argued perspectives. Per a recent article in the news site VOX, a case that could affect disclosure of corporate participation as it relates to charities and advocacy groups. The Thomas More Law center is now a consolidated petitioner in the case of Americans for Prosperity vs. Rodriquez (acting *Attorney General of California*). The case is scheduled to be heard on 4/26. Americans for Prosperity is a conservative advocacy group founded by Charles and David Koch and receives donations from major corporate sources. This is one to follow. *“Issues: (1) Whether exacting scrutiny or strict scrutiny applies to disclosure requirements that burden nonelectoral, expressive association rights; and (2) whether California’s disclosure requirement violates charities and their donors’ freedom of association and speech facially or as applied to the Thomas More Law Center.”* source: <https://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/americans-for-prosperity-foundation-v-becerra/>

Considering the fact that cities, towns and municipalities are incorporated entities, one wonders if there are unacknowledged rights that are being violated in some cases when lines are drawn that dissect city limits to crack and pack voting districts, not for fairer maps but for political advantage. Without the oversight of independent commissions, many states will remain challenged to determine if their ‘one person, one vote’ really counts.

As HR1 now S1 hangs in the balance, influences from many sources are weighing in on the future of American Civil Rights. Hearing corporate voices speak up in support of a perfected democracy certainly gives one hope.

Research guide for this article

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MEMBERSHIP IN THE LEAGUE

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization that neither supports nor opposes candidates or parties. Membership is open to anyone of voting age. Dues are free for full-time students, \$50 for an individual, and \$75 for two persons in a household. Send your check to Patricia Scarr, 16 Nancy Lane, Barboursville, WV 25504.