



# Missouri Voter

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League of Women Voters

November, December 2011

## Fall Conference Marks 20th Anniversary; Numerous Topics Covered in Detail

November 5 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a Fall Conference in Sedalia

- Big thanks to Lael Von Holt and Laura Worstell for devising such a fabulous conference.
- Kudos to Mary Merritt for opening her home for the board meeting on Friday afternoon and providing a delicious meal to all. Mary also made hotel reservations for folks needing over-night accommodations.

### Privatization

Janis McMillen, LWVUS liaison, shared progress on the national privatization study. She noted that content currently under review examine what policies should be in place at any level if consideration is being given to privatizing a service. Because of the redesign of the national website, there has been some difficulty getting background papers posted for member review. As of November 5, five papers were on the national website.

### Petition signing alert

Kathleen Farrell, co-president of the LWV St. Louis, noted that 42 petitions had been approved for circulation as of mid-July 2011.

Petitions are a very important part of our government's process and are especially important when the legislature is not addressing issues. Kathleen distributed copies of a background document St. Louis had developed to help new voters transition to being asked to sign petitions. They noted that new citizens seemed to think it was their duty to sign, so an educational piece was designed. A sample of the piece Carol Portman created is reprinted here:

**As a registered voter you will be urged to sign petitions.**

**Petitions are a way citizens can place proposed laws**

**on the ballot for everyone to vote for or against. To place a proposed item on the ballot, the petition must have approximately 96,000 to approximately 154,000 signatures.**

**Individuals who are collecting signatures are evident by the clipboards they are holding...usually standing outside stores, libraries and at large functions.**

**Before signing a petition make sure you understand the subject of the petition. Is the subject something you want the public to vote on?**

**As of July 10, 2011, 42 petitions have been approved for individuals to start collecting signatures. More are expected.**

Leagues might consider using something like this as a letter to the editor.

### Vote411.org

An on-line voters' guide is what vote411.org is all about. It is cheaper to purchase the rights to this tool as a State instead of having individual Leagues purchase separately. To swing the \$5,000 purchase price for the 2012, local Leagues are asked to raise the equivalent of \$10 per local member. Since this will be a recurring expense, the opportunity to seek grant funding and multi-year gifts is recommended.

League background materials for Vote411.org can be found here:

[http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voters\\_Service\\_Chair&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17656](http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voters_Service_Chair&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17656)

In addition to a variety of webinars, this site also contains a very useful 12-page how-to manual, which is located at the very bottom of the web page.

# President's Column

By Lois Detrick, State LWV President

I, as probably many of you, am watching or keeping track of the political climate that exists today. We see the posturing of potential presidential candidates who often change their tune, depending on what the polls show.

There was a 60 minute program telling how congress persons can enter office with little in the bank but exit a few years later multimillionaires, through insider trading, from which they have exempted themselves from criminal action.

Everyone seems to have their pet gripe about elected officials.

This is when I am so glad to be a part of the League of Women Voters. We are not here to get elected, to get glory, but to help make democracy work in whatever way we can. Anyone can go on our websites to see what we stand for, and we never vary from those standards.

## Legislative Break-Out Session Busy

A large part of the legislative action discussion focused on the palm cards and how to make the most important points stand out to the legislators. It was discussed that we let them know how we feel about certain issues like equal access to a quality public education for all children, especially since it is on the hit list of one of our top republican contenders running for president.

We all believed that the current tax crisis needs to be resolved so that Missouri consumers pay the same sales tax on all purchases wherever they buy them.

We willed that the process of democracy work and the taxes be increased and collected in a fair and equitable manor so that the money is used to create and enhance the best of our resources.

We discussed the continued saga of the voter photo ID bill and our serious opposition to it and its implied segregation. Plus, the number of ballot issues in circulation by the Secretary of State's office seeking to change the tax structure and constitution by gathering signatures.

The League supports close scrutiny of these issues and supports the "Decline to Sign" concept when in doubt.

In spite of the opposite strategies we may take, the one thing we have in common is that we fight hard. We ARE the grassroots who are not jaded by a Washington atmosphere where it is easy to lose sight of how people really live and what effort it may take to register to vote and then be able to get to the polls on limited days or hours.

When I first joined the League and found out how long the suffragettes actually worked to get women the right to vote, I was awed. It may take us that long to preserve that right for all citizens, but with members like Jo Sapp who is leading the charge here in Missouri, we are in this for the long haul.

We don't have the funds of a Sinquefield, but we have the determination and sense of right to keep moving forward. What is your League doing to help in this fight?

## Clean Air Promise Update

Sue Brockett, Environmental Director

Thanks to the many of you that have taken the Clean Air Promise at on the web site: <http://www.peoplenotpolluters.org>. The EPA continues to be under attack in Congress and yet scientific data shows that we need more enforcement with tighter regulated levels to keep our air and water clean. Let your voice be heard. There is still time to take the promise and it takes only a few minutes.

As part of the grant that LWVMO received, we are collecting stories from people that have been affected by asthma or other lung impairments. If you have such a story that you would be willing to share, please contact me at [brockettes@starband.net](mailto:brockettes@starband.net) or call Anna at the state office: 314-961-6869.

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Missouri Voter, LWVMO 8706 Manchester Road, Suite 104, St. Louis, MO 63144

All other correspondence to Lois Detrick at the same address.

Voice: 314-961-6869 FAX: 314-961-8393

Email: [league@lwvmissouri.org](mailto:league@lwvmissouri.org)

# Secretary of State's Office Approves Petition and Language To Increase State Sales Tax; Eliminate State Income Tax

An initiative petition for an amendment to the Missouri Constitution to eliminate the state's individual income tax and replace it with a sales tax has received approval from the Secretary of State for signature collection.

If passed, this amendment will expand state sales tax to almost all sales and services including food and such things as car repairs and emergency room visits.

The sales tax will rise to 5 ½ % on food and 7 % on other sales and services, with certain exceptions. The total cumulative local and state sales tax rate is not to exceed 10%. Local sales tax is not to exceed 3 % which is less revenue than many communities now collect. The amount of revenue generated by this new tax, according to the proponents, will be tax neutral in relation to revenue collected between 2008 and 2012. Studies by the Missouri Budget Project say otherwise. Tying future income to tax revenue that has decreased in the last five years is bad fiscal policy. It projects that by 2016 there will be a tax shortfall of \$3.2 billion on top of today's budget problems.

The League has a comprehensive tax position developed over a period of years. It calls for an adequate, balanced, and progressive tax system to finance necessary governmental services, which emphasizes equity and fair sharing of the tax burden.

The League opposes total reliance on state sales taxes, especially on food and drugs and other necessities as ways to reduce the regressive nature of the general sales tax. To make the total state revenue almost entirely depended on the most regressive tax is to make the financial burden for low income, disabled, and seniors who pay little income tax virtually unbearable. It likely would increase the tax burden for most people in the middle income bracket and decrease the tax burden for the wealthy.

A change as radical as eliminating the state income tax and totally replacing it with a sales tax leaves many unknowns. The state does not know the impact on annual state government revenue from this proposal.

Estimates range from a \$300 million increase or up to a \$1.5 billion decrease. It is estimated, however, that the proposal will increase the state operating costs by at least \$15 million.

The League believes that financial stability should be one of the goals of fiscal policy. This proposal does not meet that criterion.

Changes in state tax structure should be in state statutes, not the constitution. Revenue requirements to run state government vary from time to time. Placing fiscal policy in the constitution makes it very difficult for the state to react to a changing fiscal climate. And in this case, the state may be so short of funds that it will not be able to support the requirements of state government.

The proponents of this proposed tax policy call it the "Missouri Taxpayer Relief Act. Opponents, including the League, call it the "Everything Tax". You may recall that the League worked successfully to oppose the so called "mega tax" in the last legislature. It was essentially the same tax law proposed in this constitutional amendment.

This constitutional amendment initiative is financed primarily by Rex Sinqfield who financed the earnings tax initiative which the League also opposed in 2012.

The Missouri League is a member of the broad-based "Coalition for Missouri's Future" which is directing the advocacy efforts against the "Everything Tax".

League members have the opportunity to influence citizen reaction to this proposed amendment with what we do well, EDUCATION. It is easy for uninformed citizens to buy the idea of eliminating the income tax without realizing the dire consequences to their pocketbooks.

For more information go to the Coalition website. In the meantime, decline to sign the initiative petition when it becomes available. And if it does make it to the ballot in November, 2012, be sure to convince everyone you know to vote against it.

## Empowering Young Voters

During the summer, League of Women Voters Education Fund announced a 2012 Youth Voter Registration project with an opportunity to receive pass-through grants to state and local Leagues.

Three Missouri local leagues submitted separate applications; Kansas City/Jackson/Clay/Platte and South East Missouri received the grants. These leagues will use Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow materials in addition to local information and will target six area high schools or technology centers.

The manual constitutes a comprehensive game plan for executing and evaluating a high school registration drive, including tips for conducting the follow-up with young registrants that is critical to transforming them into life-long voters.

Although only two leagues received grant resources, all training information will be made available to other local leagues as they become available. We will report back our findings via future Voter articles.

LWV MO-Director; Peg Prendergast

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Not sure what to get for the hard-to-buy-for folks on your gift list?

Consider donating to the League in someone's name or purchasing one of the items available at

[http://www.lwvmissouri.org/shop\\_online.html](http://www.lwvmissouri.org/shop_online.html)

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## *LWV Missouri hires Interns - PAVP*

Public Advocacy for Voter Protection (PAVP) is a national LWV program of state-based advocacy that aims to prevent disenfranchisement of citizens. Part of the PAVP grant that LWV Missouri received allowed for hiring two Interns.

These individuals; Lauren Gepford and Caleb Michael Files will help LWV MO coordinated efforts to achieve the goals of the project.

Lauren attends the University of Missouri-KC and is working toward a political science major and economics and communications minors and will graduate in July. In addition to her busy academic work-load, Lauren currently works two days a week at the US department of homeland security. Lauren continues her internship for a second year with LWV MO.

Last year Lauren created a Salsa," How To" Guide for members as well as creating and issuing action alerts regarding voter protection issues as directed by the PAVP director. This legislative year Lauren will continue creating and distributing action alerts and answering questions regarding Salsa and assist LWV MO Executive Director, Anna Mennerick, utilizing Salsa. Salsa is a database that hosts email addresses which can be used for, but not limited to, email blasts, invites and sending action alerts.

Caleb also attends the University of Missouri-KC and is working toward dual majors in political science and communications. He currently interns with Sporting Kansas City in their Public Relations department.

Caleb will utilize his communication skills and help LWV MO in creating messaging regarding Constitutional Amendment of Voter Suppression, (a Nov. 2012 ballot item) for public meetings and Voter Education. He will also work with the LWV MO Legislative Committee and create legislative bulletins for 2012 legislative session and assist LWV MO with Vote 411.

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The National Convention will be held June 8-12 at the Washington Hilton, in Washington DC. Watch for more information.

## WHAT ABOUT EDUCATION?

*By Marty Ott, LWVMO Director and State Education Chair*

The Education Committees of the local Leagues have been busy the past two months preparing for the national study, "Role of the Federal Government in Public Education", presenting the information and taking consensus (or lack of) on the General Questions, Common Core Standards, and Funding and Equity. Members may have asked, "What happens next?"

Each League presented their consensus report to their local board. After approval by their local board, their results were sent to the LWVUS for the national study committee to analyze the data from consensus and write the position paper for the "Role of the Federal Government in Public Education". Please keep in mind that this is a national study, and many Leagues in the United States will be submitting their results.

In March, 2012 the LWVUS Board of Directors will review the consensus results for comment and approval of the position for the "Role of the Federal Government in Public Education". When the LWVUS Board of Directors approves the position for "the role of the federal government in public education," it immediately becomes the League's position and is the basis for action on the issue. This type of member involvement in the consensus process tends to ensure member commitment to the resulting positions. In addition, members have the opportunity at each Convention to decide whether or not to re-adopt these positions or update them.

Please watch for Education bills of interest, filed in Missouri General Assembly, and an update on the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently debated in Congress, in the next Missouri Voter.

***Save the date:  
Missouri's Spring  
Council will be held  
May 5 in St. Louis.***

## ***Education Breakout Session***

Marty Ott, LWVMO Education Chair, led the discussion and explained her role was as providing leadership for the local education committees in keeping with League positions.

Marty provided handouts from the Missouri Guide to State Action on Education and led a brief review of current positions, which are mainly funding issues and the foundation formula. Special attention was given to the Charter School Study, 2007, and the current League's position, especially that charter schools should not be extended beyond those permitted in Missouri State Statutes as of December, 2006.

She will track education legislation pertaining to the league's position and that we need to closely monitor bills relating to the expansion of charter school in the upcoming Legislative session.

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## **"Bring Back the Day" Drive Successful!**

**WE DID IT!!!**

A big, Big, BIG THANK YOU to everyone who contributed to the BRING BACK THE DAY! campaign. Effective October 1, 2011 Anna is back to her full work schedule.

LEAGUE MEMBERS ARE AWESOME!! We even received monies during the Fall Conference which was added to our BRING BACK THE DAY! numbers.

And speaking of the Fall Conference, if you did not attend, you missed a great time. It is such a joy to meet with people from across the state and see how similar we all are with the same problems, concerns, joys, triumphs and everyone looking forward to the election year coming up.

Have a wonderful holiday season and a fantastic New Year. And in February be looking in your mailbox for an exciting League opportunity!!

Yours in League

A Proud League Member

Janie Riley, LWVMO Treasurer



## Thanks to the Organizers!!

Our thanks to Laura Worstell (left) and Lael Von Holt, who worked so hard to put together a wonderful State Conference in Sedalia last month.