



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] of SOUTH TONKA
Serving Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood, Tonka Bay, Woodland

NEWSLETTER – March 2010

GENERAL MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
THURSDAY, MARCH 11, 7 PM

Gwen Myers, LWVMN Action Chair
Get the inside scoop on what's going on at the Capitol.

Donna Thayer's, 4100 Spring Street, #205
Spring Park Cell: 612/325-6501

Directions: Hwy. 19 to Hwy. 15. Go west on Shoreline Drive (Hwy. 15). Turn right at Sunset (first stoplight). Go left on Spring Street (note even half a block). At the lobby call box, dial 55. Park across from the entrance and along the side.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thank you to Mary Theresa

A huge round of applause to Mary Theresa Downing for all her work as South Tonka's Census 2010 liaison. She not only made sure we had people during the entire month of February at the ICA Food shelf, she made sure Resource West in Hopkins had Census information and handouts as well. Plus she had countless communications with the state League to make sure we had what we needed. A great effort and lots of work!

What to do now?

I wish I could say I *enjoyed* watching the DVD "Flow," at our February meeting, but enjoyed isn't the word—dismayed, discouraged, disheartened is what I felt about how multinational companies are co-opting public water resources all over the world.

We discussed doing more to get the movie shown in other places and are looking into where we can get the DVD. (We watched a copy we borrowed from The Freshwater Society.) If you are interested in your own copy, Patricia Hauser found this address:

http://www.oscilloscope.net/shop/view_film.php?ID=2&r+gallery.

We thought if we had a few copies we could lend them out to our members to show to friends, other groups, at churches, etc. to spread the word. We are also talking with the Freshwater Society about co-sponsoring a public showing of the DVD.

The DVD mentioned that there is a petition to add an Article to the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, approved by the UN in 1948. (Currently the Declaration contains 30 Articles defining basic human rights.) The proposed Article 31 would state that access to clean water is a basic human right (or something to that effect). Patricia Hauser is researching more information about the petition.

Women's History Month

March is Women's History Month. Since 2010 is also the 90th Anniversary of the League of Women Voters and woman suffrage, find out more about the League and the movement in Barbara Stuhler's biography, *Gentle Warriors, Clara Ueland and the Minnesota Struggle for Woman Suffrage*. (Clara Ueland was the first president of the Minnesota League.) Barbara was a professor and Executive Associate Dean of Continuing Education and Extension at the U of M, a staff member of LWVMN and a board member of LWVUS. You could also rent the movies, *Iron Jawed Angels* and *Not for Ourselves Alone* (about Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton).

Happy Birthday to us! League's 90th Birthday Celebration, April 30

Don't miss our birthday party the night before the Council meeting on May 1. Come and enjoy food, drinks, entertainment, stories and mingling with other LWV members. (More information in this newsletter.)

LWVMN Council meeting, Saturday, May 1

LWVMN Council is held in the year the state League doesn't have a convention. In addition to official business, this year workshops will include action, program/briefing papers, leadership, membership initiative, and website discussion. We can send two voting delegates but any member can attend. This year's Council is at the Arboretum from 8:30 to 3:30 p.m. Please let me know if you would like to attend. (Kay Erickson, 952/474-7324, kerickson@visi.com)

Education Briefing Paper

You'll find the last of the state League's Briefing Papers at the end of this newsletter. It explores K-12 and early childhood education funding and includes information on the inequities in the current approach, characteristics of a reliable approach, reform efforts and more.

Exploring a website for South Tonka

We are currently exploring the possibility of having a LWV South Tonka stand-alone website. (Right now we have a website as part of the state League's website that contains very basic information.) Amy Wenner, Woody Love and Donna Thayer will be looking at what to include—subjects, links, etc. Please contact Donna at 612/324-6501 if you have ideas or would like to serve on the committee.

Capitol Letter now on the LWVMN website

To find out what issues our lobbyists are following and what's going on at the Legislature, go to <http://www.lwvmn.org/CapitolLetter.asp> for the latest edition of the "Capitol Letter."

Kay Erickson

LWVMN VOTER SERVICE WORKSHOP

MARCH 13, 1 – 4 p.m.

Attend Online or in person at the LWVMN Office in St. Paul

On Saturday, March 13 the state League will hold a workshop for anyone interested in being part of local voter service activities. You'll join other LWV members to learn about organizing, resources, tools, and best practices—everything you need to know about candidates forums and more. Contact Allie Moen, amoen@lwvmn.org (or 651/224-5445)

CMAL MARCH MEETING -- Affordable Housing Mini-Study

Saturday, March 20, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Seward East Tower

9:30 Begin with coffee

10:00 Meeting with presenters from CommonBond

Kelly Matter, V.P. of Advantage Services

Deb Sakry Lande, Dir. of Community Relations

11:00 Tour the facility

What is "Housing with Services"? Everyone is invited to come and learn about a program that combines low-income housing with needed social services.

CommonBond Communities operates apartments for thousands of residents in the metro area. Several facilities have Advantage Centers that offer a range of on-site services. Join us to learn more.

Seward East Tower (formerly Borson)

2910 E. Franklin Ave., Mpls.

Directions: I-94 to Riverside Ave. exit,

South two blocks to Franklin Ave.

Building is on that corner, on the left. (There are three high-rises in the area; go to the one furthest east.)

Go east one block, then north to enter the parking and the building, on the north (back) side. Signs will direct you to the Advantage Center.

Ignore the no-parking signs. They are meant for overnight only.

For more information about this subject, go to www.commonbond.org

<http://www.facebook.com/events.php?ref=sb#/event.php?eid=305089012773&index=1>

SAVE THE DATE

WEST METRO LEAGUES' SPRING MEETING: BUDGETS AND BONDING: ARE THERE ANY SOLUTIONS?

SATURDAY, APRIL 10

Minnetonka City Hall Council Chamber, 14600 Minnetonka Blvd.

Speaker: JOHN GUNYOU

9:00 a.m.

Coffee & Connecting

9:30 – 11:30

Budget and Bonding: Are There Any Solutions?

- Distinguished 40-year career in government
- Currently City Manager of Minnetonka
- Served as first Finance Director for the City of Minneapolis
- MN Finance Commissioner in the Carlson Administration.
- Degrees in Finance and Economics from the US Air Force Academy, UCLA and University of Colorado.

Minnesota's budget woes continue this year due to fewer jobs and lower wages. Our revenues have dropped below previously forecasted levels, leaving us with a current deficit of \$1.2 billion. These deficits are currently estimated to grow to \$5.4 billion over the next biennium.

The 2010 Legislative Session is a bonding year. Along with the deficit, Minnesota has an empty reserve fund and there are constitutional challenges to the governor's unallotments. The legislators will be forced to make difficult decisions on balancing the budget. The current proposal is roughly \$1 billion, and Gov. Pawlenty has indicated he will veto anything over his proposed amount of \$685 million. So....

How do we get back to balance?

How does the state finance system work?

What can we do to improve consistency of forecasts and improve our ability to drive positive results?

We will explore these topics at our April 10th West Metro Program.

Sponsored by the West Metro Alliance

League of Women Voters from Brooklyn Park/Osseo/Maple Grove, Crystal/New Hope/E.
Plymouth,
Golden Valley, Minnetonka/Eden Prairie/Hopkins, St. Louis Park, South Tonka and
Wayzata/Plymouth

Continuing the Legacy!
LWVMN 90th Birthday Celebration



Friday, April 30, 2010, 7:00 – 11:00 p.m. Chanhassen Country Inn and Suites, 591 West 78th Street, Chanhassen, MN (next to the Chanhassen Dinner Theatre)

In conjunction with the 2010 LWVMN Council meeting being held on May 1st, we are throwing an informal party to celebrate our 90th birthday! Come and enjoy food and drinks, visit with other LWV members, and share your favorite stories. Entertainment will be provided! Leaders of Today & Tomorrow (LOTT) will be our special guests!

CMAL May Annual Meeting --- Saturday, May 15

The time and location are to be determined, but we are looking at a morning meeting in the north west part of the metro area. Watch for more details next month.

The Convention Workbook will be emailed to cmal-share and will be posted on the internet, but we will have printed copies available for each delegate at the Annual Meeting so you will not need to print them yourselves.

At that meeting, we will discuss the results of your conversations with local officials on our Affordable Housing Mini-Study. Be sure to invite everyone in your LWV who participated.

At the business meeting we will determine what CMAL should focus on for the next year. Do we want to continue looking at housing or should we do something else? We will not make the decision until after our discussion since that may be a factor in whether we want to learn more or not. Come with your ideas in case we want to move on to another topic.

We will also vote on next year's budget, discuss and vote on proposed bylaw changes, and elect new officers.

March Citizenship Ceremonies

Volunteers are needed to help register new voters at the following Citizenship Ceremonies:

Wednesday, March 10th, 11 & 2 - Minneapolis

Wednesday, March 17th, 11 & 2 - St. Paul

Thursday, March 18th, 1:00 PM - St. Thomas School of Law

Wednesday, March 24th, 11 & 2 - Minneapolis

We don't have any Leagues at the following locations, but there will also be ceremonies:

March 25th, Thursday, Fergus Falls at 10:30 AM

March 25th (also) Worthington, 1 PM

Please let Judy Stuthman know if you will be able to help!

Judy Stuthman

jastuthman@aol.com

651-644-8588

CALENDAR

LWV South Tonka meetings on 2nd Thursday at 7:00 p.m. (except for our April 17 meeting)

March 11 (Thurs., 7 p.m.)	Legislative Update, Gwen Myers, LWVMN Action Chair
March 20	CMAL Meeting
April 10	West Metro Leagues meeting: Budgets and Bonding
April 17**	LWV South Tonka Water Study Report
May 1	League of Women Voters of Minnesota Council meeting
May 13	ANNUAL MEETING
May 15	CMAL Annual Meeting
June 10	Salad Supper, JoAnn Schaub, hostess

**Note that the date of the April meeting has changed from April 8 to Saturday, April 17.

To contact LWV South Tonka call 952/474-7324 or check out our web page:

www.lwvmn.org/localleagues/southtonka

The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. Visit <http://www.lwvmn.org> to help keep our community safe, strong and vibrant.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS MINNESOTA BRIEFING PAPER, JANUARY 2010

EDUCATION FUNDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AND K-12

The League of Women Voters Minnesota (LWVMN) position on financing of education is: "All Minnesota children should have equal access to a good public education. State funding for education should be at a level that makes programs of comparable substance and quality available to all. A student's access to a good education should not depend on the wealth of his or her school district."

Public education is a unique priority in Minnesota; public education and public highways are the only full funding obligations created by the Minnesota Constitution. The state's responsibilities are outlined in Article XIII, Section 1, which says: "...it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state."¹

The Minnesota Constitution does not define what is meant by "a general and uniform system of public schools," one that is "thorough and efficient." Many individuals and groups have debated the topic. Even the courts have weighed in on the subject, and in recent years the Minnesota Legislature and the Department of Education have established subject and graduation standards. Much of the recent standards work has been driven by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which established the broad expectation that all students will become proficient in reading and math by 2014.

As the goals of a public education in Minnesota have been more clearly defined, programming needs have also become clearer. Identifying those needs has paved the way for determining the true cost of Minnesota's public education system. Dr. Van Mueller, Professor Emeritus from the University of Minnesota, works as an education finance expert and national consultant. His mission is "just" funding. In 2007, Dr. Mueller outlined the following framework for state leaders:

- 1) The State needs to define in operational terms what is an adequate education that meets constitutional muster ("general and uniform, thorough and efficient,") and that should be provided to all Minnesota students;
- 2) The program should be costed out; and
- 3) A fair and just revenue stream should be designed to provide a stable source of state and local support.²

Minnesota in the Bigger Picture

According to Minnesota 2020, "Minnesota—the 'brain power' state, the bright Star of the North—spends less on public elementary and secondary education than the U.S. average. Over the last decade, Minnesota's spending on public schools has gone from significantly above the U.S. average to modestly below."³ Minnesota 2020 also noted:

In FY 1997, Minnesota's current spending was \$9,078 per pupil in constant FY 2007 dollars. Over the next six years, real per pupil education spending increased at an annual average rate of 1.3 percent, reaching \$9,835 in FY 2003...[R]eal per pupil spending declined at an annual average rate of 0.8 percent over the next four

years, hitting \$9,539 in FY 2007. Since 2003, large school property tax increases have not been sufficient to offset real per pupil state aid cuts; thus, the total dollars available to fund school districts declined.⁴

Other research done by Minnesota 2020 shows that 80% of Minnesota school districts saw a decline in per pupil income between 2003 and 2008 when adjusted for inflation. Property tax levies for education have risen an average of \$649 per student since 2003, while the state cut school aid an average of \$1,071 per student.⁵

In spite of funding reductions, Minnesota's standardized test scores have remained high in both national and international comparisons. For the fifth year in a row, average composite scores for Minnesota students on the ACT (a common college entrance exam) were the best in the nation (22.7 out of a perfect score of 36) among states where more than half of high school graduates take the exam. In October 2009, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) noted that Minnesota's fourth and eighth graders ranked in the top scoring tier of states according to NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), which is widely considered the best assessment of how students across the nation perform in a number of subject areas. This test placed Minnesota's eighth graders in second place, behind only Massachusetts, and fourth graders in third place, behind only Massachusetts and New Hampshire.⁶

At the same time, it is important to note that Minnesota has a large and persistent achievement gap between the performance of minority students and white students.⁷ Specifically, Hispanic, Native American and especially African American students are not performing at the same levels as white and Asian students.⁸ While this is a national problem, Minnesota's achievement gap is particularly wide, and there is no agreement as to its cause. There is, though, some agreement that one place to begin addressing the problem is with early childhood education.⁹

Early Childhood Education

Minnesota organizations such as Ready 4 K and Growth and Justice cite research showing that young children's access to quality early childhood education and care programs makes good economic sense.¹⁰ A longitudinal study in Michigan showed that a quality learning experience for at-risk children correlated with higher rates of high school graduation, higher annual earnings, higher rates of home ownership, lower rates of single motherhood, lower rates of arrest for drug-related offenses, and lower rates of receiving welfare or social services, in comparison to a similar cohort of at-risk youngsters without exposure to early learning experiences.¹¹

Arthur J. Rolnick, an economist and Senior Vice President of the Federal Reserve Bank, Minneapolis, has become a national leader in support of high quality early childhood education and care. He reports that the Michigan early intervention study, referred to above, yielded a 16% annual return on investment, adjusted for inflation.¹² Rolnick and the board of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF), comprised of business leaders and some educators, have established a privately funded pilot program that provides funds for high quality child care for five hundred at-risk families of young children in St. Paul. Results of this ongoing pilot are positive.¹³

State funding for early childhood education and child care, comprising 1% of the state budget, comes from Education funds and Health and Human Services funds. State Education funds

support a “universal” program, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), which is available to all children on a sliding fee scale. Minnesota also funds “targeted” programs, including School Readiness which serves children with identified needs. There is no reliable statewide information on the extent of unmet needs for these programs.¹⁴ In addition, Minnesota operates two federally funded “targeted” programs: Head Start, serving low income children, and Interagency Early Intervention (Part C), serving young children with disabilities. Children who participate in these programs show good results. However, many children who are eligible lack access to these programs due to insufficient funding.¹⁵

Inequities in the Current Approach to School Funding

Presently, per pupil funding varies significantly among Minnesota’s school districts, resulting in substantial differences in the funds available to each school and in the education experience of each child. Some funding variation is expected. Local costs differ among districts. In addition, districts vary in their need to program for students with special needs—such as English Language Learners. Unfortunately, much of the current difference is the result of a funding system that relies on local voter-approved referendum levies and on local allowances that have become part of a complicated funding formula. “The school funding formula we have in place today is a patchwork quilt of political compromises,” according to Greg Vandal, P. S. Minnesota.¹⁶

Schools for Equity in Education (SEE) is an organization of more than 50 Minnesota public school districts representing 30% of Minnesota’s K-12 students. Its mission is to work together for greater equity and adequacy in public education funding. Its vision is that all children will have equal educational opportunities regardless of where they live in Minnesota. Revenue rankings for the 2008-2009 school year show a total per student revenue range among districts from \$5,999 to \$12,211. SEE data also illustrates the different challenges that school districts encounter when asking voters to pass local referendums. The cost to homeowners in 2008-09 to raise the same referendum amount ranged from \$124 to \$464 per \$100,000 of assessed home value, depending on the property wealth of the school district.¹⁷

Despite the “No Child Left Behind” law, Minnesota’s children still experience many qualitative differences in their schools. Class sizes vary dramatically from district to district. Early childhood programming varies among districts, as do opportunities for all-day kindergarten. Physical education, world languages, and arts are not consistently offered. The availability and use of technology varies substantially. Participation in co-curricular athletics and activities has become cost prohibitive to many families as more districts now fund these programs through sizable student fees. No longer are all students bused to school free of charge.

Characteristics of a Reliable and Comprehensive Funding Approach

Over the years in Minnesota, the formula for figuring the basic state aid granted to schools per student has grown more and more complex. The formula has been complicated by trying to consider many factors: Pre-K/Early Childhood Education in addition to K-12; declining enrollment in many places and rapidly increasing enrollment in others; the increasing demands of standardized testing; the possible need for longer school days or an extended school year; and increasing demand for up-to-the-minute technology.¹⁸

According to P.S. Minnesota, a comprehensive, fair, and stable funding approach would include:

- A clear link among the desired outcomes of a public education in Minnesota (early childhood through post-secondary), the program costs to achieve those outcomes with all students, and the funds that are provided to schools;

- Recognition of cost differences to schools and to taxpayers related to geographic locations;
- Reduced dependence on voter approved local referendum levies for basic operating costs;
- Provisions for capital intense requirements such as instructional resources, technology, buildings and grounds maintenance, and transportation system operations;
- Availability of funds when circumstances necessitate remodeling or building of schools;
- Support for sustainable education reform efforts intended to eliminate the socioeconomic and ethnic based achievement gaps while raising the achievement of all learners;
- Full funding for all state and federal mandates, including special education;
- Some local discretion for funding special projects unique to a specific community's needs;
- Yearly funding adjustments to reflect increased expenses resulting from inflation;
- A commitment to a fair and reliable revenue stream dedicated to fully funding schools.¹⁹

Efforts to Reform School Funding in Minnesota

Education funding battles have become routine in the Minnesota Legislature. First, public education must compete with all other budget areas for a slice of the funding pie. In the 2010-2011 budget, about 46% of the general fund goes to education. Within that allocation, there is competition among the various levels of public education—early childhood, K-12, and post-secondary. There is also competition among rural, suburban, and urban districts.²⁰

Prior to the 1970 “Minnesota Miracle,” more than half of all school funding was based on local property taxes.²¹ The Minnesota Miracle left that local funding mechanism in place and placed a new cap on local levy authority. It added state money aimed at reducing statewide disparities in property tax rates caused by taxes collected for schools. Unfortunately, Minnesota’s Miracle did not achieve equity among districts in terms of per pupil dollars going to schools.

In 2001, Governor Jesse Ventura proposed that the state take over the majority of funding for all school districts. The goal was to provide equitable funding throughout the state and to lower local property taxes, which had risen markedly in many districts. Initially, there was a surplus in the state budget to fund this new state commitment. Governor Ventura proposed a sales tax on services to pay for future years. However, the legislature rejected that proposal and did not define a consistent revenue source to continue the state funding. Consequently, funding and quality disparities among school districts have increased.

Governor Tim Pawlenty has endorsed some education funding reforms. He has proposed additional funds to schools through expansion of the Quality Compensation (Q Comp) program, an alternative approach basing teacher pay on performance.²² In addition, he recommends rewarding schools with additional funding based upon student achievement, as measured by progress on MCA II tests, Minnesota’s current standardized tests that fulfill NCLB requirements.

The governor’s Q Comp program was evaluated last year by the Minnesota Department of Education,²³ the *Star Tribune*²⁴ and the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA)²⁵ with differing results.²⁶ LWVMN does not support Q Comp in its present form, believing it may work contrary to LWVMN’s position supporting “equal access.”²⁷

Others have proposed funding reform ideas as well. Education Commissioner Alice Seagren, in a Minnesota Public Radio interview, spoke highly of the work done by Growth and Justice and its *Smart InvestmentsSM in Minnesota's Students* research about cost-effectiveness and education spending. She reported that “[t]hey have looked at particular strategies—from class size reduction, to instructional strategies, to after school programs—and they have actually brought in experts and said that some are not as cost-benefit rich as others.”²⁸

Funding Reform and the “New Minnesota Miracle”

In 2006 P.S. Minnesota funded the completion of the work begun by Governor Tim Pawlenty’s 2003 Task Force on Education Funding²⁹ by employing John Myers, Justin Silverstein and Doug Rose of Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA) to develop estimates of the true cost of an adequate public education—as defined by federal and state performance expectations.³⁰

In 2007 an improved education funding formula, dubbed the “New Minnesota Miracle,” was developed by a bipartisan legislative task force created to study Minnesota’s school finance system and to build on the recommendations of P. S. Minnesota. The New Minnesota Miracle would increase the per pupil formula with the goal of covering the basic instructional costs for all students in all districts. It would allocate additional funds to provide for specific individual and district needs. Included are most of the desired characteristics identified by P.S. Minnesota above.

This funding model attempts to simplify the current funding system while making the critical links between desired outcomes, costs, and funding. It identifies the resources necessary to support districts’ efforts to meet the NCLB requirements and other state and local standards. It also attempts to provide a more equitable and stable funding stream to all of Minnesota’s public schools so that high quality programming can be sustained.

The New Minnesota Miracle was initially introduced in the Minnesota Legislature in 2008 (House File 4178).³¹ It was revised and reintroduced in 2009 as part of House File 2 (HF2).³² However, the Senate and House could not reach agreement and HF2 was passed without the Minnesota Miracle language.³³

The New Minnesota Miracle was designed so that it could be phased in over time, an important feature, given current economic and budget challenges. Many advocates of this bill are suggesting that the process of phasing-in begin in 2014, indicating that it is important to get something into law, even if improved education funding will not be immediately available. At the same time, waiting until 2014 to begin the phase-in process of important funding reform is a concern to those who believe the need to reform Minnesota’s education financing approach is urgent—even with the state’s current economic and budget challenges, which include a forecasted \$1.2 billion deficit for the 2010-2011 biennium.

The P.S. Minnesota APA study referred to above states: “It is clear from our research that if Minnesota is to continue to progress toward ensuring that all students meet federal and state performance expectations, it must significantly increase its investment in education. As importantly, any resultant funding formula must be rationally linked to student needs. This research can provide a foundation for that formula.”³⁴

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