2015 Legislative Session Wrap-Up

A report of the activities of the LWV Minnesota Action Committee for the 2015 Legislative Session
2015 Legislative Session Wrap-Up

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Message from Action Co-Chairs

When did things start to go bad this year at the legislature? The 2015 legislative session started out with a large forecasted budget surplus and general acknowledgement that some compromise would be necessary due to the divided nature of the legislature. But somewhere along the way, the process turned acrimonious and non-transparent, with late night floor sessions, last minute additions to omnibus bills of language not heard in committees, and harsh accusations flying everywhere. The leaders of the House and Senate met privately with either Governor Dayton or Lieutenant Governor Smith and attempted to broker an end-of-session deal out of view of the public, but also without participation of most of our elected representatives!

After the legislature adjourned as required by the constitution, Governor Dayton vetoed three major finance bills, setting the stage for more drama as the parties attempted to reach an agreement on what would be passed in a special session. Senator Barb Yarusso (DFL- Shoreview) and thirty-three other legislators sent a letter to Governor Dayton and legislative leaders urging them to make final special session budget bills available forty-eight hours before members would be asked to vote on them. Her letter pointed to the outrage of many constituents at being deprived of any opportunity to see such important legislation before it is passed.

Finally, to cap it off, we had the State Auditor issue. The State Government Finance bill came out of conference committee with a provision allowing counties to hire private auditors, rather than utilize the State Auditor, if they so choose. This provision, which is seen by many as a means of reducing the authority of the State Auditor’s office, had been heard in the House, but not in the Senate. The conference committee adopted the change at approximately 1:30 AM, prompting current State Auditor Rebecca Otto to tweet “Nothing like being stabbed in the back.” Governor Dayton signed this bill into law, with the hope that the portion relating to the State Auditor could be repealed in special session. He later gave up on that request. As David Schultz, a Hamline University Political Science professor, pointed out in a MinnPost article, because the State Auditor’s office is established in the constitution an amendment to the constitution might be required to eliminate the office or significantly reduce its authority.

We do not want our elected leaders to continue to reduce our ability to participate in the legislative process and reduce our elected representatives’ ability to represent us.

Jeanne LeFevre, Kathy Tomsich, Action Co-Chairs
Election Law  
By Kathy Tomsich

Due to the hard work of the Restore the Vote Coalition, restoration of voting rights gained strong bipartisan support in both chambers this session, an amazing achievement. So it was a great disappointment when a bill restoring voting rights to felons living in the community did not succeed in passing. The Senate included this bill in both the Omnibus Elections and the Public Safety bills but ultimately the coalition was frustrated by the refusal of the House to hold a hearing and also the scramble at the end of session to pass budget bills, leaving no time to debate this provision in conference committees. We will continue to advocate for passage of restoration of voting rights.

This was not our only disappointment. No election reform provisions advocated by LWV Minnesota were included in the bill signed by the governor. The Omnibus Elections Bill passed this session contains numerous and needed changes in election administration and military overseas voting. One change allows an individual to return his or her own absentee ballot on Election Day. Prior to no-excuse absentee voting, a voter was required to use an agent to return an absentee ballot on Election Day. It also establishes the Elections Emergency Planning Task Force which will recommend a statewide elections emergency plan. This bill was a compromise reached by a conference committee in the last hours of the legislative session in the rush to approve budget bills before the end of session. Both House and Senate bills sent to a conference committee included the technical changes.

However, the Senate election bill also included election reform provisions which were not in the House bill: restoration of voting rights, early voting, pre-registration of 16 & 17 year olds, automatic voter registration for citizen who complete an application for a driver’s license, instruction permit or an ID card unless the person declines to be registered. Again, we were frustrated by the refusal of the House to hold hearings; the only election reform bill that received a hearing in the House was preregistration of 17 year olds. The election reform bills are still alive and could be revived next session.

We’ve made it easier to support LWV Minnesota’s advocacy work!
All donations to LWV Minnesota are now tax deductible. In May 2013, delegates to our state convention voted to amend our bylaws, moving all programs and operations to our 501(c) (3) organization. 501(c) (3) organizations are permitted to lobby as long as lobbying is not a substantial part of what they do.

LWV Minnesota is well within the IRS guidelines, with less than 20% of its budget devoted to lobbying. Although we do lobby on some things, a great deal of the work we do is education and not lobbying as defined by the IRS.

Please give today at www.lwvmn.org
Guest Speaker
Dane Smith, President of Growth & Justice

Dane Smith has been president of the research and advocacy organization Growth & Justice since 2007. Prior to that, he was the political reporter for over 30 years first at the Pioneer Press and later the Star Tribune. The goal of Growth & Justice is to make Minnesota’s economy more prosperous and fairer. While Mr. Smith was enthusiastic about the successes Minnesota has already had in reducing economic, racial and social inequalities, without a significant enlargement of state and local government relative to the economy, he did acknowledge that Minnesota still has work to do in this area. Specifically, Mr. Smith focused on Growth & Justice’s goals for the 2015 legislative session:

- Early Childhood Full Funding and Cradle-to-Career Investment - $200 million per year additional appropriation
- Infrastructure – Transportation Package (transit and roads) and Broadband - supports a $600 million transportation package
- Workforce Equity – Supports updated job training programs with a focus on providing the skills that businesses need
- Economic Security – Supports paid sick and family leave and affordable housing
- Health Care – Supports continued improvement of the MNSure and MinnesotaCare programs with the goal of achieving universal health care coverage.

- Green and Clean Economy – Stimulate renewable energy, green jobs and improvement of impaired water.

Mr. Smith’s message to groups across the political continuum is that inequality damages the growth curve, and that this is not good for either businesses or the people at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Study...Consensus...Action

Over time, LWV members have studied many policy issues and arrived at positions through our consensus process. Through the Action Committee, we seek to turn our positions into public policy. We do this by tracking legislation, testifying, working in coalition with allied organizations, meeting with legislators, and keeping you informed through our Capitol Letter™ and Action Alerts.

These positions are detailed in LWV Minnesota’s Program for Action and LWVUS’s Impact on Issues. These documents can be found on the LWV Minnesota website at www.lwvmn.org.
Campaign Finance
By Joan Sullivan

Campaign finance reform is a priority for LWV Minnesota, and we continued to lobby for reform at the Legislature this session.

Again this year, the most important bill could not make its way to the floor for a vote in either legislative body. The bill would have required disclosure – that is, more transparency – of electioneering communications’ funding sources, and also would have loosened the definition of “express advocacy” for a specific candidate. (Electioneering communications are, for example, the mailings, leaflets, papers hanging from our doorknobs, which we all receive close to an election date. Often we cannot identify their true source. These communications are made by people or groups independent of the candidate…they often do not have the consent or cooperation of the candidate.) The Senate bill to close this big gap in Minnesota disclosure requirements would probably have passed, but its sponsors did not bother bringing it to the floor for a vote, since the House bill was a non-starter. We will try again next session.

As George Beck of the MN Campaign Finance Board stated in a letter to the editor of the Star Tribune of May 26th, “At the very least we should know who is influencing our government, but in Minnesota, secret contributions are still permitted. The Republican-led Legislature in Montana recently passed a comprehensive disclosure law. Why is this so hard to accomplish in Minnesota, when the public overwhelmingly supports disclosure?”

There was some good news: a minor bill which slightly enhances the power of the Campaign Finance Board through an increase in the penalties for late filings, etc., had some bipartisan support in both chambers, passed and was signed by Governor Dayton. Also, an alarmingly bad bill in the House which proposed the weakening of many of Minnesota’s campaign finance statutes failed to get a hearing and died. The Governor had threatened to veto it.

Finally, LWV Minnesota is sorry to learn that Rep. Ryan Winkler (DFL – Golden Valley) will be resigning after the upcoming Special Session, due to a move out of state. He has been a passionate advocate for campaign finance reform, voting rights and other progressive causes.

Guest Speaker
Rich Gehrman, Executive Director of Safe Passage for Children

Rich Gehrman is the executive director of Safe Passage for Children and a member of the Governor’s Task Force on child protection. Safe Passage is a Minnesota nonprofit corporation created to protect and improve the well-being of children in child protection, foster care, and public adoption programs. They recruit and train citizen volunteers to be advocates of effective practices in these programs with policy makers. They also seek to engage civic and business leaders in a campaign that compliments the grass roots efforts. Mr. Gehrman pointed out that Minnesota opens files on only 28% of children referred due to abuse and neglect, a percentage far below the national average. Further, in Minnesota, counties run child protection systems and the state contributes only 16% of the cost, among the lowest in the country. Finally, the present Minnesota model in child protection cases emphasizes that the most important goal of the process is to keep the family together whenever possible.

Mr. Gehrman explained that one unfortunate result of that priority is that children who may have been abused are in a room with their possible abusers when they are asked to describe their situation. Safe Passage for Children would change the top priority to the protection of the child from harm.
2015 Legislative Session Wrap-Up

Education
By Kay Kessel

Prior to this legislative session, the LWV Minneapolis and LWV Minnesota co-sponsored a forum titled Advancing Health/Race Equity for Prenatal to K Children, which was inspired by Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges. Her primary goal is to improve race/health equity in all facets of Minneapolis children's lives. There are wide disparities not only in our urban school districts, but in communities all across the state. Governor Dayton and Commissioner Cassellius advocated for early childhood with scholarships and Universal Pre-K for four year olds. All of the Governor's education proposals address the large numbers of public school children living in poverty.

With a $19 billion surplus, it was disillusioning that the three parties had set drastically different spending targets for early childhood and K to 12 education: the Governor $750 million, the Senate, $350 and the House $157. After extensive debate and negotiations during closing hours of the session, the omnibus education bill sent to the governor excluded his proposal for universal Pre-K and included only $400 million in increased funding over the next two years. The governor vetoed this bill and demanded more funding, especially for pre-school education and students at risk.

During the Special Session held on Friday, June 12th, the House and Senate voted overwhelmingly for a bill that increased funding for early childhood and K to 12 education by $525 million, a significant improvement over the vetoed bill. It also addressed the governor's concern for students living in poverty. The Governor signed this bill. Most of the spending would increase the per-pupil formula by 2 percent in each of the next two years. Family and early childhood education also benefited with $100.5 million in additional spending, $48.25 million of that increase going into early learning scholarships – a $17 million increase over the vetoed bill. The School Readiness Program, Head Start, American Indian students, the Bureau of Indian Education schools, the Northside Achievement Zone and the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood were all provided funding increases that exceeded those in the vetoed bill.

Numerous policy provisions were also included in this massive bill. Several were directed at teachers to address shortages in some subject areas. The Board of Teaching must adopt rules to license out-of-state teacher candidates and develop procedures to allow certified teachers from adjoining states to transfer their certification to Minnesota under certain conditions.
Environment
By Gwen Myers, Gretchen Sabel

The 2014 election results raised serious concerns among environmental lobbyists with whom LWVMN is allied through its membership in Minnesota Environmental Partnership. The fear was that there could be a cabal on environmental issues between the new House Republican majority and the powerful Senate DFL Iron Range members who oppose regulations that might affect mining. BINGO! That is just the way it went.

The 2016 legislative session was disastrous for our environment, beginning with a 24% cut in general fund spending for the care of our lakes, rivers, streams, forests, prairies and wildlife – and our health. There was some hope when Gov. Dayton vetoed the Omnibus Environment and Agriculture Finance bill. LWV Minnesota testified against portions of this bill in the House and opposed almost the entire 200+ page bill, with the exception of a truncated version of the Governor’s buffer proposal. Unfortunately, S.F. 5, passed by the Special Session about 2:00 A.M. on June 12, was little better than the original.

Roll-backs in Environmental Protections
An unfortunate trend in recent years has been for the Legislature to include significant policy provisions in the omnibus funding bills. While the Governor has line-item veto authority in budget bills, he cannot veto policy provisions individually; he must veto the entire bill. LWV MN lobbied against provisions that roll back hard-won environmental protections and significantly reduce the citizen’s voice in environmental policy decisions. These provisions would not pass as stand-alone bills, but when included in a big funding bill that includes several positive measures, like funding for buffers and funding for farmers affected by avian influenza, it is hard for some legislators to vote against them.

As noted above, at the urging of concerned citizens and organizations, including LWV MN, Governor Dayton vetoed House File 846, the Omnibus Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources funding bill. In his veto letter, the Governor said: "The bill contains vitally important statutory changes and funding for the avian influenza outbreak and buffer zones. I am deeply disappointed that these provisions are part of a larger bill that undermines decades of environmental protections…"

After negotiations and significant last-minute drama, the legislature sent Governor Dayton a bill with most of the same problem provisions. The Governor signed the bill into law despite the problems. One major problem with the bill is that it dissolved the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s Citizen’s Board, a key component of public input into environmental decisions. Action will continue to push to get this group reinstated. Some other provisions were amended to make them less onerous, but all in all, the environment was the looser in this year’s Environment and Agriculture funding bill.

Process and citizen input were also overturned this session when the conference committee for the Environment and Agriculture funding bill actually included significant policy changes that were neither heard in committees nor passed by either house. They were created in the conference committee. This, too, has been an unfortunate trend, one that absolutely cuts citizens out of the process. LWV MN’s Action Committee will continue to bring this issue to the forefront so that voters know how their elected officials have been creating laws in the dark of night (literally).

Buffers to Protect our Water
A version of Governor Dayton’s buffer proposal, which established 50’ buffers to protect all our waters from runoff pollution, stabilize shores and banks, and provided habitat for wildlife, was
part of the omnibus bill, Article 3, Sect. 79. He insisted that it remain in the special session bill. The new buffer language requires a 50' perennial buffer average along public waters and a 16.5' buffer along public ditches. Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) must assist landowners in implementing these requirements. Enforcement, ultimately the responsibility of the Board of Soil and Water Resources, begins with a SWCD “correction letter” and assistance to comply, and, if necessary, allows state funds to be withheld from the SWCD for non-compliance. The SWCD will assist landowners in applying for local, state, or federal financial assistance. Buffers on public waters must be in place by November, 2017, on public ditches by November 2018.

This is a shadow of what the Governor proposed, originally, but far better than what we have. LWV MN supports the measure.

Energy
By Lynn Gitelis

We began this session knowing that it would be challenging given the focus on outstate Minnesota policies, but we introduced legislation we believed would have support throughout the state. We had two goals:

- increase the percentage of electricity produced by renewable sources to 40% by 2030
- increase Xcel's energy efficiency resource standard (EERS) from 1.5% to 2%

The EERS drives Minnesota’s utilities to reduce energy costs by this percentage each year.

Unfortunately, neither of these provisions survived this very difficult session and instead in the Omnibus Jobs and Economic Development bill there were last minute changes made to "net metering". Net metering is a financial program that credits solar energy system owners for the electricity they add to the grid. These changes were never debated or discussed in either chamber and effectively weakened this consumer advantage. The change that was passed allowed municipal systems and co-ops to apply a fixed charge to net metering clients. This would have a substantial negative impact on those clients, and would result in a disincentive to invest in wind or solar power.

The Governor vetoed this bill and specifically cited the changes to net metering as one reason for that veto. Prior to the Special Session, extensive negotiations were held by the governor and legislative leaders and an agreement was reached resulting in a bill passed in the Special Session and signed by the Governor. Despite all the maneuvering up to the Special Session, only minor tweaks were made to the original bill. Basically the net metering provision ended up the same as where it started...bad. The changes to net metering will result in a discriminatory new tax on property owners who choose to generate their own electricity using wind and solar. The language is limited to rural co-ops and municipal utilities, but that still impacts roughly a third of all customers in the state. This sets a precedent that allows these mostly rural organizations to get a rate that is lower than individual customers; in essence, "we the people" are subsidizing the rural utilities.
Early Intervention for Children at Risk
By Phyllis Skinner

The 2015 Minnesota Legislative session ended with lawmakers passing major reforms in law, policy and practice in the area of Child Protection. These reforms were based on recommendations made by the Governor's Task Force for Child Protection. This task force was formed after a Star Tribune series in 2014 revealed systemic failures in our child protection system. The legislature also provided funding for these reforms. The Health and Human Services Omnibus Budget Bill included $52.5 million in new money for the biennium.

Budget Amounts
On an annual basis, the funding broke down as follows:
- $22 million to counties to use either to replace staffing cuts or expand support services; $3 million for grants to develop new approaches to reduce racial disparities in the system; $1.25 million for DHS staff to strengthen training, Quality Assurance, and child fatality reviews.

Changes in Policies and Practices Addressed in Legislation
The recommendations of the Governor's Task Force that required changes in law were spread among several policy bills and the budget bill.

The following are some of the most significant elements of the reform package that were passed into law:
- The safety and well-being of children is now the paramount responsibility of child protection rather than making the Family Assessment program the ‘preferred option’.
- Counties and tribes are required to follow the same guidelines for evaluating child maltreatment reports.
- Counties must share maltreatment reports consistently with local law enforcement agencies.
- The 2014 legislation prohibiting workers from considering previous reports when evaluating a current maltreatment report was repealed.
- Workers are encouraged to make collateral contacts rather than being discouraged from doing so, which was the Family Assessment preferred practice.
- Workers will be required to interview children separately and whenever possible prior to interviewing adults in the household.

The state will have a number of additional duties and projects including to:
- Develop guidelines for counties to put together Multi-Disciplinary Teams
- Revise screening guidelines to reflect the Task Force recommendations
- Increase quality reviews of screening decisions
- Redesign and strengthen the child fatality review process
- Develop a competitive grants process to solicit projects designed to address racial disparities
Minimum Wage  
By Judy Stuthman

The 2014 state Legislature passed a minimum wage bill that moved our state from one of the lowest minimum wage states to one of the highest. Indexing would keep the workers receiving minimum wage from immediately falling back into poverty as the cost of living goes up. Minnesota had and continues to have an economy and unemployment rate better than most states. Supporters of the bill said it would help individuals and families move out of poverty, recognize the value of work and help move people off public assistance. The bill did not have what is referred to as a “tip penalty” for servers.

So it was a surprise when HF 1027, authored by Rep. Pat Garofalo (R-Farmington) was introduced in the 2015 session. It would modify the minimum wage for employees receiving gratuities by allowing employers to pay tipped workers a lower base wage and cap it at $8 if the employee received a minimum of $12, over a two week pay period, when tips were included. According to the Star Tribune, the bill was crafted and supported by the MN Restaurant Association, as a reasonable way to protect table servers so the restaurants didn’t go to electronic ordering. Last year’s bill will increase the minimum wage to $9 an hour on Aug. 1. Employees whose tips amount to less than $4 an hour would make the higher wage of $9.

At the committee hearing, restaurant owners and the MN Restaurant Association spoke for the bill while servers and labor leaders spoke against. The bill was never expected to become law as it was unlikely to find support from the Senate or Governor Dayton. The bill passed on the floor of the House but did not make it to the floor of the Senate.

Another bill opposed by LWV Minnesota sought to preempt local governments from enacting employment wage standards higher than the state requires. This was a bill based on model legislation from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). It did not pass out of committee.

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<th>LWV Minnesota Lobbyists</th>
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| **Campaign Finance Reform**  
Joan Sullivan, LWV White Bear Lake Area | **Environment and Energy**  
Lynn Gitelis, LWV Golden Valley  
Gwen Myers, LWV Minneapolis  
Gretchen Sabel, LWV ABC |
| **Child Protection**  
Phyllis Skinner, LWV South Tonka | **Immigration**  
Judy Stuthman, LWV ROMAFH |
| **Election Law**  
Kathy Tomsich, LWV White Bear Lake Area | **Minimum Wage**  
Judy Stuthman, LWV ROMAFH |
| **Pre K-12 Education**  
Kay Kessel, LWV Minneapolis  
Lonni Skrentner, LWV Edina  
Linda Rodgers, LWV ABC | **State Government Finance**  
Jeanne LeFevre, LWV White Bear Lake Area |
Charles Nauen, an attorney in the law firm Lockridge Grindal Nauen, gave an informative presentation focused on his analysis of contested judicial elections in Minnesota, an interest that was prompted by his involvement in Supreme Court Judge David Lillehaug’s campaign for election to the state Supreme Court in the 2014 election. Usually incumbent judges achieve a strong victory but Lillihaug’s opponent Michelle McDonald earned nearly 47% of the vote in spite of extensive bad publicity during the campaign. Mr. Nauen wondered if her large showing was a fluke and decided to do a statistical analysis of contested judicial races in Minnesota dating back to before 2000.

He first reviewed the process that is followed when an opening occurs in a district or higher level court in Minnesota. Lawyers who apply for the position are vetted by a Judicial Nominating Committee which forwards a list of qualified candidates to the governor. In most cases, the governor appoints a judge from that list. An appointed judge serves until the next election when he/she must seek election. In any contested judicial race, there is no requirement that the opponent of an incumbent judge be vetted in any manner and he/she could lack knowledge of the law or experience with the judicial system.

In the past incumbents have won strong victories in contested judicial races, but Nauen’s data revealed that opponents have been gaining larger and larger shares of the votes. The reasons for this trend are not known. However, it is not unusual to hear voters complain that they know very little or nothing about judicial candidates.

You could speculate that some voters might not want to vote for an incumbent; all incumbents are labelled on the ballot. If this trend continues, incumbent judges will no longer have the advantage over opponents that they have had in the past. We could start to see elected judges who lack knowledge of the law or do not have the temperament or experience to be a judge.

Mr. Nauen supports LWV Minnesota’s position on selection of judges and his presentation provided compelling reasons to strengthen our advocacy efforts to change the state constitution to require merit selection of judges and retention elections.

Follow the Legislature Online

The Minnesota Legislature has excellent resources on its website allowing citizens to closely track legislation. Bill introductions, schedules, and committee information are all on the bill status website at www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legis.asp. Video and audio archives of floor sessions and committee meetings are also available.

Legislative information offices have daily and weekly publications to keep you informed. You can subscribe via mail or email. For information, see the above website or call House Information at 800-657-3550 or Senate Information at 888-234-1112.
Immigration
By Judy Stuthman

The 2015 Minnesota Legislative Session missed opportunities to pass several bills that would improve circumstances for many in our immigrant community.

First and foremost were bills that would have changed the documentation required to obtain a MN Driver’s License, returning to the requirements necessary before then Governor Tim Pawlenty changed the requirements by executive decision in 2003. This would allow undocumented to drive legally. A similar bill passed out of the Senate in 2013, but not in the House. In 2014, it passed out of the House committee but not in time to be brought up on the House floor. Of the 2015 bills, the final version of the House Transportation Bill did not include the needed provision, but the Senate Transportation Bill did, so it moved into discussion in Conference Committee, as part of HF 4 Transportation Omnibus Bill. Unfortunately, the “driver’s license for all” provision was not included in the final Transportation bill sent to the governor which he signed.

This was done in spite of the fact that it has bipartisan support in both the House and Senate and Governor Dayton has indicated that he will support it as it has law enforcement support. Support has also come from civic groups (including LWV Minnesota), faith groups, business groups and the Chamber of Commerce. They support it because (1) it increases safety on the road allowing the undocumented to take a driver’s test and buy insurance (2) the licenses will provide accurate identity (3) legal licenses provide the means for needed labor to get to their jobs, particularly in rural communities where public transportation is not available and food and agriculture related businesses need workers. We will continue to advocate for “driver’s license for all.”

A provision in the Senate’s Health & Human Services Omnibus bill provides $100,000 to fund mental health services for Hmong and Lao veterans born before 1965.

Several immigration related bills were sent to committee but did not pass to floor votes. One bill would have required high school graduates to have a knowledge of civics, passing a test similar to the naturalization test taken by all new citizens. Another would have provided funding for the Dept. of Education to create outreach programs that help immigrant and refugee families better access early childhood care and education resources, developmental screening and early reading assessments.

Issue Resources
LWV Minnesota has briefing papers and studies on numerous issues such as Campaign Finance, Judicial Selection, Redistricting, Alternative Voting Systems and Immigration. This information and much more can be found on lwvmn.org.
2015 Legislative Session Wrap-Up

Guest Speaker
Kim LaBo, Program Organizer for Clean Water Action

Ms. LaBo’s organization, Clean Water Action, co-leads the Health Coalition that promotes the production and use of everyday products without toxic chemicals. The Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 has never been updated. There are over 100,000 chemicals in consumer products, of which 60,000 are not covered by the act. An additional 17,000 are not required to be disclosed because they are considered confidential trade secrets.

Ms. LaBo discussed the prevalence of chemicals in our bloodstreams. As an example, she said that umbilical cord blood contains an average of 287 chemicals. Indoor pollution from upholstery, carpets, paint, and other consumer products also has a huge impact on children’s health. The price of pollution is estimated to be approximately $1.56 billion annually and the current law is not protecting the public.

Flame retardants are a particular problem. They are in 97% of people and 70% of children have five times the flame retardant level of adults. The documented harm from flame retardants includes decreased IQs, developmental delays, and hindered neurological development. The law in the European Union already requires disclosure of chemicals in consumer products.

In Minnesota, the Toxic Free Kids Act of 2009 required the Department of Health to create a list of chemicals with persistent health impacts. That list is now complete, and Ms. LaBo’s organization is working to pass legislation requiring public disclosure.
State Government Finance
By Jeanne LeFevre

Because other volunteer lobbyists have covered the special session “finale” on other budget bills, I will address the capital investment bill in this report. Despite the fact that the first year of a biennium is not traditionally a bonding year, Governor Dayton proposed an ambitious $842 million dollar capital investment bill in April. But a bonding bill must originate in the House, and Speaker Daubt showed little interest in passing a borrowing bill off the House floor this year.

However, a bonding bill can be a wonderful mechanism for garnering votes needed to pass other legislation as the end of session draws near, or (as in this case) to reach agreement in a special session. HF 2 (1st Special Session 2015), authored by Rep. Paul Torkelson (R-Hanska) and Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (DFL-Plummer), was a $373.4 bonding bill passed by both houses of the legislature during the Special Session and signed into law by Governor Dayton.

The projects included in the bill offered something to most areas of the state, and included:
- $33 million for additional costs of Capitol restoration
- $32.8 million for local road and bridge projects
- $23.6 million for flood hazard mitigation
- $31.9 million for Minnesota State College and University projects
- $21 million for disaster relief for 2014 flooding
- $8.5 million for a University of Minnesota poultry testing facility
- $1.2 million for a food processing facility at the Northeast Regional Correctional Center

In addition, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency is authorized to issue $10 million in housing infrastructure bonds, and the bill authorizes $19 million in state appropriation bonds to pay for the next phase of the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System project.
LWV Minnesota Action Committee

The LWV Action Committee is a lively, interactive group that follows what’s happening at the Minnesota State Capitol and advocates for state policies and legislation. Our advocacy work is consistent with the positions in LWV Minnesota’s Program for Action and LWV US’s Impact on Issues.

Volunteers Make the Difference

The committee is made up of members from all walks of life. No prior experience is necessary!

Each volunteer lobbyist does what she or he has time to do and feels comfortable doing. This may be simply following legislation and committee hearings on-line. Some members choose to take part in an advocacy coalition to work with others who care about an issue. Still others visit the State Capitol to meet with legislators or testify on legislation.

Interested in joining us? We’ll help you get on board. We’ll help you learn about the Minnesota legislature and how bills proceed through it. We can connect you with other resources in the community and pair you with a more experienced committee member to act as a mentor. And we are always available for questions.

If you have any questions about the committee and its work, please contact Kathy Tomsich, ktomsich@comcast.net or Jeanne LeFevre, jilefevre@comcast.net.

Political, yet Nonpartisan

In keeping with LWV’s strong nonpartisan stance, Action Committee members advocate for LWV Minnesota positions in a strictly nonpartisan manner. We advocate for issues on which LWV Minnesota has taken a position, but we never support or oppose a specific elected official or political party.

Join the Action Committee

The Action Committee meets bi-weekly during the legislative session on Fridays from 11 am to 1 pm. Teleconferencing is available, so you can join us from anywhere in the state!

We particularly need new lobbyists on election law, transportation, health care, higher education, poverty issues (such as housing), and the environment. Or, if there is an issue you are particularly interested in, let us know.

Award Winning Source

MinnPost – An excellent source for interesting and up-to-date articles on politics and policy, health, education, the environment, arts and culture.

MinnPost was named best website by the Minnesota chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists at the organization's annual Page One Awards banquet Tuesday, June 9, 2015.

www.Minnpost.com
Join LWV Minnesota

Our Mission

LWV, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences policy through education and advocacy.

How to Join LWV Minnesota

Members of LWV Minnesota make a difference in their communities in a variety of ways. LWV Minnesota welcomes both women and men. Membership information is available on our website at www.lwvmn.org.

Our History

Established in 1920, LWV is one of the nation’s most respected grassroots organizations. We explore issues from many points of view and take action on issues affecting our families and communities.

Membership forms are also available by calling LWV Minnesota’s office at 651-224-5445 or on our website at www.lwvmn.org.

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LWV Minnesota’s advocacy work is made possible by the generosity of our members who contribute time, energy and dollars. Please visit our website or contact our office to make a donation. www.lwvmn.org Thank you!

Have a Question About the Action Committee? Want to Learn?

We’d love to talk to you about the Action Committee and how you and your local league can be more involved.

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Contact Action Committee Co-Chairs:
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