

July / August 2011

"Voting does not fulfill your responsibilities as a citizen. Stop leaving needed change in this country to elected officials."

*Diane Nash  
American Civil Rights Activist  
and Former Freedom Rider*



### League Storybank



#### Needs You!

How have **you** shaped your community as a League member? The LWVUS is working in partnership with state and local Leagues across the country to strengthen League and better serve democracy. Please help by [submitting your personal story](#) to the League Storybank. Tell us how you have improved your community by being a League member. Your story will help demonstrate the value of League membership in a powerful way. Contact [Sara Richman](#) if you have any questions.



#### League's Mission:

*The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

### Message from the President

Redistricting is ongoing, and League is in the thick of it. Our June 21st panel discussion before an SRO lunch crowd featured LWVUS President Deirdre Macnab, former Supervisor of Elections Pat Hollarn, County Info Systems Director Don Vanderhoek and FWB City Council member Dr. Joyce Gillie Gossom.

That evening I presented comments at the public hearing along with two dozen other concerned citizens. The message from our panelists and from the hearing: get involved in

our democracy and make yourself heard! Visit our [website](#) for links to watch the hearings via webcast and submit your comments live, or try your hand at [drawing your own district maps](#). As citizens it is our responsibility to hold our elected officials accountable, so get involved and stay engaged!

The rest of this Voter is devoted to the upcoming Education Study consensus process. Leaguers: Please prepare to be a part of it!

*Mary Blackwell*

### League's Consensus Process

Former LWVUS President Mary Wilson recently commented on the importance of League consensus.

"From its inception the advocacy work of the League of Women Voters has been directed at issues on which action by a branch of government will have an impact on the lives of individuals and on our democracy. We use our advocacy voice to spur government to take action that will have a positive effect on the issues about which we care. In other words, the advocacy work of the League focuses on 'making a difference' on public policymaking.

"At national Convention delegates may select a new issue (or new twist on an old issue) to study further because they think the voice of the League could be useful as the different branches of government develop policies about that issue. But, in order to speak about the issue, we must 'discover' how

League members feel about that issue. The process by which the League makes that discovery is called study and consensus. The first step is vital: STUDY. League members across the country must look at all sides of an issue, study the facts, the ramifications of all approaches to that issue, alternative solutions, the impacts on people, places and things, the costs and benefits. Only after studying the issue do League members come together in their own local Leagues to discuss that issue at a meeting to arrive at the 'consensus' of their League on the issue. The results of all local Leagues discussing the issue are compiled to determine the consensus of the League as a whole. CONSENSUS is not a vote - rather, consensus is a mutual agreement of League members arrived at through civil discourse, the hallmark of the League of Women Voters."

Read the [complete remarks](#).

### Getting ready for Education Study consensus meetings

LWVOC members will soon be participating in the LWVUS study on the federal role in pre-K to grade 12 public education. The study is limited to issues of equity, funding, standards and assessment. Study documents available so far include:

- *Role Of Federal Government In Public Education: Historical Perspectives*, Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins and Margaret Hawkins Hill
- *Common Core Stds & Assessments*, Janelle L. Rivers, PhD
- *Early Childhood Education, Equity*

*and Funding*, Pat Aaron

- *Funding & Equity Issues*, Jean Pierce
- *Legislation and Funding for the Education Of Children Who are Disadvantaged*, Patricia O'Brien Libutti, PhD

Summaries of the first three studies appear on page 2, and the others will be summarized in the next Voter, but please take time to read the [complete study documents](#) to prepare for consensus, and watch the calendar for study meetings.

## Education Study Summaries

### Role of Federal Government in Public Education: Historical Perspectives

The federal government uses the Constitution's "general welfare" clause (Article 1, Section 8) both to initiate and to participate jointly with states, agencies and individuals in educational activities. However, the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment says powers not Constitutionally given to the federal government "are reserved to the states," so public education has historically been delegated to local/state governments.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century federal involvement in education included vocational training, land grants and establishment of the Office of Education in 1867. Passage of Impact Aid laws and the GI bill after WWII significantly expanded federal support for education.

*Brown v. Board of Education* struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine in 1954, and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 improved teaching of science, math and foreign languages. The anti-poverty and civil rights laws of the 60s-70s dramatically increased the federal role in public education by prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex and disability. The 1965 *Elementary & Secondary Education Act* provided federal aid to the disadvantaged and barred establishment of a national curriculum.

The Department of Education was established in 1980 and every subsequent administration has made education a priority, shifting education from primarily local control to state and national control. National debate centers on school choice, accountability, teacher quality, goals, standards and federal funding, which now averages ~10% of local school budgets.

### Common Core Standards and Assessments

Academic curricula and student performance standards vary widely by state, because local control produced inconsistent requirements.

To improve college and career readiness, several non-federal groups with state representation (AK and TX did not participate) started the Common Core Standards Initiative to bring more consistency and rigor to state curricula. CCSI's purpose is to ensure students a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state, and to allow schools to pool resources and share best practices for efficiency.

Arguments against adopting the Common Core Standards include the cost and difficulty of changing existing curricula and assessments; sovereignty of states in education-related matters; and the possibility that standards may be too narrow or could be misused.

Design of new assessment systems aligned to the Common Core Standards is underway, and will enable cross-state test result comparisons by 2014-15. Most states have adopted the Common Core, but few teachers or administrators have been exposed to the standards, and proper test score interpretation is key to implementation.

The Common Core has created an opportunity to achieve consistency and raise standards, but has also raised concerns about local say in determining curricula and setting standards. Many questions about how the new assessment scores might be used – e.g., for teacher evaluation and accountability – also remain unanswered. In the meantime, the federal government's role could be redefined in many ways.

### Early Childhood Education, Equity and Funding

The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) authorized early education (Head Start) for low-income and at-risk children. Title I of ESEA also funds state preschool programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) addresses the educational needs of children with specific disabilities, from birth to age 21.

Poverty is the key issue impacting readiness for school and learning. Evidence shows that effective preschool education reduces socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps. High quality Pre-K alleviates grade repetition, dropouts and special education placement, and better kindergarten quality increases earnings and college attendance rates 20 years later. Findings also suggest improving the quality of early childhood schools with disadvantaged students reduces poverty, raises earnings and increases tax revenue in the long run.

Quality early childhood education levels the playing field, provides equal opportunity for success, increases the likelihood of healthier lifestyles and lowers the crime rate and overall social costs. Every dollar invested in early childhood education returns 10¢ on the dollar annually for the life of a child, a 10% per year return on investment.

## 2011-12 Calendar

### Back to League

**Sep 17th:** Pam Smith will discuss US Dept of Education's *Blueprint for Reform*. (Time/location TBD)

### Education Study

Several study and consensus meetings will be held in Sep-Oct. Watch the calendar for details.

### Redistricting: An Historical Perspective

**Oct 22nd:** Former State Senator Robert McKnight will share his experiences during redistricting in 1980. (Time/location TBD)

### Fair & Proportionate Sentencing Laws

**Nov 19th:** Greg Newburn of Families Against Mandatory Minimums will discuss individualized, humane sentencing guidelines. (Time/location TBD)

### Holiday Party

**Dec:** Details TBD



### "Making Democracy Run" 5K set for 2012

The LWVF is organizing a state-wide day of 5K runs and 1K walks in 2012 to encourage voter participation. Multiple runs will be held across the state on the first day of early voting, with the route ending at an early voting location so runners can cast their ballots at the finish line.

The event will spotlight voting **and** raise funds for League. While this would be a great opportunity to raise League's profile in our community, the Okaloosa League Board does not believe LWVOC has sufficient resources to support such a large event. **Is your Board wrong?** If you think so, [contact Mary](#) to volunteer for an event-organizing committee.



### LWVF's 2012 Council of Leaders

is tentatively scheduled for the weekend of May 11-12, 2012, in Tampa. [Contact Mary](#) if you have an issue you would like addressed, or if you would like to attend.