

Newsletter

About the Local Election

By Bonnie Carter

The League phone saw a lot of action around the election in November. People called for information and rides to the polls, and, for the first time, people called to offer rides to the polls. This was very gratifying for me. And I would like to say “thank-you” to the following people for providing transportation services: Barbara Balasa, Lisa Hecht, Barbara Herson, Marianne Louderback, Mary May Tanimoto, and Sharyn Roberts.

The ballot for the November election included candidates for Presidential Electors, U. S. Senator, U.S. Congressman, State Senator, and State Representative. In addition, there were eight state-wide ballot questions and two local questions. Of the two local questions, one was Question 9, which appeared on the state ballot; the other was a local referendum on renovations to the two high schools.

Concerns About the Conduct of the Election

1. Question 9 was an advisory question placed on the ballot by the League of Women Voters of Newton. It asked the following: “Should the state representative from this district be instructed to vote in favor of a bill to reduce the size of the Newton Board of Aldermen from 24 to 16 members?” During the summer, League members gathered over 200 signatures from voters in each of Newton’s state representative districts, except for the 32nd Middlesex District which lies mostly in Watertown and includes Ward 1, Precinct 1 in Newton. When the votes were counted, we learned that the question passed by an overwhelming margin—19,087 to 9,265.

Unfortunately, numerous flaws in the voting process occurred. Several people reported that it was missing from the ballot on their voting machine. This was brought to the attention of election officials during the morning of Election Day. They were able to correct the problem by midday, but it was of no help to people who had voted earlier.

2. In addition to the regular state election, there was a special election for Newton conducted by paper ballot. The question on the paper ballot asked the voter to approve of an appropriation passed by the Board of Aldermen in the amount of \$5,750,120 to finance the initial design and project management for renovation at both high schools. Many polling places had appropriate procedures for handling the paper ballots. Election workers sent voters to little booths to mark their X, then placed the ballots in a ballot box with a crank. Unfortunately, at some polling locations the cranks on the ballot boxes did not work, nor were there enough boxes with cranks and/or lids for all polling places. The paper ballots were not handled with appropriate security and voters were not adequately instructed about the special election. The question passed 27,548 to 9,311.

Continued on page 6

New Talk Show on Newton TV

Newton Legislative Roundtable is NewTV’s newest talk show. Produced by the NewTV Municipal Department in cooperation with the Newton League of Women Voters, the program features brief updates from Newton’s legislative delegation: Senator Cynthia Creem and Representatives Ruth Balsler, Rachel Kaprielian, Kay Khan, and Peter Koutoujian. In addition, the half-hour monthly show includes a lively discussion of a current issue moderated by a League member. President Deb Crossley has moderated the first two shows.

After introductions, each legislator takes up to two minutes to review their legislative priorities. The main topic of the current show is the state income tax reduction, passed in November. The reduction back to 5% will take effect incrementally over three years, ultimately reducing state revenue by about 1.2 billion dollars per year.

Legislators respond to the following queries:

- What impacts may lie ahead specific to the programs you care about?
- What impact do you think this state tax reduction may have on local aid?

In this time of Proposition 2-1/2, when communities such as Newton already are taxing to the limit to continue level funding of local programs and services, how will communities cope with these cuts?

Continued on page 7

LWVN Officers and Directors 2000-2001

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| | Linda Morrison | 332-6539 |
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Newsletter

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| Editor | Andrea Kelley | 964-4609 |

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| | |
|----------------|----------|
| Deborah Hirsch | 965-1475 |
| Liz Lieberman | 244-4402 |
| Linda Morrison | 332-6539 |

The LWVN Newsletter is published nine times per year. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization open to all citizens of voting age. For more information about the League of Women Voters, call 964-0014.

PO Box 610207
Newton, MA 02461

We Need Election Reform

*So what have we learned from
the 2000 election,
and what can we do about it?*

Last November, citizens became painfully aware of the extensive mechanical shortcomings of our election system nationwide. From Florida to Newton, we can see the real and serious problems that are in the way our elections are run and counted. It should not be difficult to collect the data, write the performance standard, legislate and fund reform to provide communities throughout the nation with proper equipment to record and safeguard our votes. We must do this as a nation.

Perhaps the failure of our national election system in a close race does not come as a surprise. Here in Newton, however, where we turned out over 80% of registered voters, (compared to the nation's 50.7%), did we expect the mismanagement we observed in many of our own precincts? Many who witnessed irregularities on election day contacted the League with their observations, and/or reported their concerns at the November meetings of the Election Commission or the Alderman's Programs & Services Committee. The Newton Election Commission acknowledged their errors, citing the need for consistent standards and training and quality control, and reaching out to the community to encourage citizen participation as poll workers. We will maintain a close watch to see what measures will be taken to ensure competent and secure elections in Newton.

Both our state and national Leagues have organized to collect data on the 2000 election experience from Leagues in communities around the country. We are preparing a report to contribute to their efforts, which we hope will be useful as fuel to help the League bring this issue to the top of the pile and the focus of media attention.

LWVUS President Jefferson-Jenkins wrote the *Washington Post* asking Congress to provide financial support to help states implement 'best practices' voting systems, to bring our national system into the new millennium. While studies of alternate election systems may require much debate, Congress has the power and the means now to ensure that elections are administered fairly across the country.

LWVUS tells us that lobbyists who have been on capitol hill promoting campaign finance reform are now working with legislators to assist in fact-finding and legislative initiatives to push election reform (see pages 3 and 7 for related articles from LWVUS).

If you have information to share, please contact me, Beth Wilkinson, or the Newton League phone.

Don't let them forget this election.



Deb Crossley,
President

Nominating Committee Seeks Input

The Nominating Committee for the Board of the Newton League is about to begin its work, and we want to hear from you. If you have suggestions about the formation of the board and/or specific people you would like to recommend to the board, please let us know. Call any of the members listed below:

Andrea Kelley, Chair 964-4609
Deb Hirsch 965-1476
Barbara Lietzke 332-8630
Linda Morrison 332-6539
Sheila Shulman 965-5331

ELECTION REFORM NEEDED

The National League is working on some tools to help you reach out to the public and involve them in this historic opportunity to reform the election systems. There is new information on the LWV national website - including an Online Election Reform

Petition, which is now live on www.lwv.org. On the homepage, click on "Add Your Voice to Citizens Demanding Election Reform."

The League urges you to forward the petition to your members, friends, coalition partners, etc.

Promoting Democracy in America, Election Reform, WE NEED ELECTION REFORM!

*A Statement from Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins,
President of the League of Women Voters December 14, 2000*

We've heard all the appeals for healing and unity. These appeals have to be bolstered by appeals for election reform. True healing comes best when we learn from experience — and act to solve the problems that caused the divisions in the first place. The League is moving to solve those problems. We call on elected officials and citizens across the country to join with us in that effort.

We watched in frustration as Election 2000 revealed the disastrously outdated voting procedures used all across the country. The League believes that every vote should count, and count the same. Our organization was founded in 1920 as an outgrowth of the woman suffrage movement. One of our bedrock principles is that of one person, one vote.

We have:

- antiquated voting machines,
- a crazy quilt of voting systems that vary from state to state and county to county,
- ballot systems that confuse rather than clarify,
- overcrowded polling places that keep voters in line for hours,
- so-called "ballot security" measures that are used to intimidate voters,
- incomplete registration lists and absentee ballot procedures that disenfranchise voters, a federal government that doesn't pay for administering federal elections, and
- an Electoral College that is archaic and unnecessary.

These are problems for which there are identifiable solutions. Congress should pass, and the new President should sign, legislation to help states implement "best practices" voting systems. We need a Constitutional Amendment to abolish the Electoral College and provide for direct election of the President. Beyond this, we also need meaningful campaign finance reform.

History shows that the United States of America is a resilient nation. Let Election 2000 be a clarion for reform. Join with the League in making election reform a priority for the 107th Congress.

Add your voice to the citizens demanding election reform now.

Sign the League's online petition.

www.lwv.org

Time for State Program Planning

by Beth Wilkinson

At the state convention on May 18 and 19, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts will adopt their program, which will be the basis of both education and action efforts during the following two years. The League program includes the adopted positions upon which action will be taken and the governmental issues that will be studied in order to formulate positions.

To help develop the program on which the delegates will vote, members of each local league meet in January or February to discuss and choose the positions, studies, and action priorities that they wish to support. The results of the local meetings are summarized and sent to the state office; they must be postmarked by February 28. The State Program Planning Committee meets to review the recommendations from the local leagues, and they prepare a tentative state program by March 8. The LWVM Board votes on the proposed program on March 27, in time for it to be included in the convention mailing.

Our Newton League has scheduled our local meeting for:
10:30 AM Saturday, January 27.

The place has not yet been determined, but for that information and other details, please call Beth Wilkinson, Legislative Chair, at 969-4443.

Please take advantage of this opportunity to make your voice heard on the state level! ■

MESSING WITH MOTHER NATURE

Monday, March 26, 2001, 7 p.m.

Sheldon Krinsky

Newton Public Library

Sponsored by the Green Decade Coalition/Newton
and the Newton Free Library

Information: Green Decade Coalition/Newton 617.965.1995
GreenCAP, Ellie Goldberg 617.965-9637

GreenCAP, the Committee for Alternatives to Pesticides of the Green Decade Coalition/Newton is pleased to announce that Sheldon Krinsky, author of the new book, *Hormonal Chaos*, will be our featured speaker on March 26 for the Green Decade Coalition's Speakers Series at the Newton Free Library.

Krinsky's appearance will be the highlight of Newton's annual Alternatives to Pesticide Awareness Month. Krinsky, Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy, Tufts University, writes books examining breaking issues in science and technology and their moral and social implications.

In *Hormonal Chaos: The Scientific and Social Origins of the Environmental Endocrine Hypothesis*, Krinsky discusses the evidence that pesticides, plastics, and industrial chemicals may mimic or obstruct hormonal activity with devastating long-term effects - cancer, reproductive abnormalities, learning disabilities and behavior disorders. His account combines the best qualities of a gripping and important historical narrative, a careful analysis of scientific issues, and a case study for how scientific hypotheses originate, achieve legitimacy, influence policy, and affect public consciousness. He also addresses the resulting dilemma for governments: how do policy-makers act to ensure public safety? ■

Public Invited
Bring your own mug!

Membership News

We welcome the following new members:

Sharman Andersen
250 Hammond Park Pkwy
#1011 South
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Linda P. Greenberg
61 Sevlard Road
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Ruth Neiberg
72 Dalton Road
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Mary B. Remensnyder
321 Hammond Street
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Sharyn L. Roberts
21 Royce Road
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Susan Stahler
29 Royce Road
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Katharine Stover
72 St. Mary Street
Newton Lower Falls, MA 02462

Benjamin Weisbuch
123 Mount Vernon Street
West Newton, MA 02465

Potential Member Referrals

If you have any referrals for potential members that you would like to receive League materials or talk to Membership about joining the League, call Elaine Reisman at 244-6439 and she will be in touch with them. ■

Committees - in - Action

E d u c a t i o n

Focus Increasing high school enrollments,
school financing, testing & standards

Members Nancy Crowley Anne Larner
Deborah Hirsch Robin Maltz
Andrea Kelley Beth Wilkinson
Andrea Kozinetz

Contact Beverly Spencer 965-6365
Board Liaison

H u m a n R i g h t s

Focus League outreach, relevance and
support for the human rights of
Newton's diverse populations

Members Joan Bates Ruth Nemzoff
Marion Cowan Wand Persimmon
Holly Gunner Dorothy Reece
Lilly Jefferson Jeanne White
Anne Larner

Contact Holly Gunner, Chair (964-0767)

L a n d U s e / T r a n s p o r t a t i o n

Focus Interrelationship between land use
and transportation and its effects on
Newton & surrounding communities

Members AnnaMaria Abernathy
Anita Capeless
Carol Ann Shea
Susie Heyman

Contact Anita Capeless 969-9483

L o c a l A c t i o n

Focus Reducing the size of the
Board of Aldermen

Members in formation - all welcome

Contact Carol Ann Shea 969-2121

N e w s l e t t e r

Members Jane Leighton Liz Lieberman
Deb Hirsch Linda Morrison

Contact Andrea Kelley 964-4609

E d u c a t i o n R e f o r m

Focus LWVMA study on ED Reform

Members Deborah Hirsch
Andrea Kelley
Anne Larner
Leslie Lockhart
Robin Maltz

Contact Leslie Lockhart 527-5046

You may call committee contact or a Board officer or director to learn more about current committee work. All are welcome to participate.

Trivia question for the month:

How many signatures are required on the nomination papers to place the name of a candidate for mayor on the ballot? For alderman-at-large? For ward alderman? For school committee member?

For the answer, see page 6.

Next month:

- Why are Newton's municipal elections non-partisan?
- Why does Newton have term limits for School Committee and not for the Board of Aldermen?

Letter to Election Commission

November 12, 2000

James P.D. Waters, Chair
Newton Election Commission
61 Stearns Street
Newton Centre, MA 02459

cc: Mayor David B. Cohen
cc: Alan Licarie, Executive Secretary
cc: Members of the Election Commission



Dear Mr. Waters:

The election of 2000 was a long, busy and confusing event for both poll workers and voters in Newton. Although the handling of local questions was fraught with irregularities, the outcome of the balloting was decisive. Newton voters overwhelmingly voted to reduce the Board of Aldermen and renovate the high schools.

The Newton League is concerned about numerous, serious irregularities reported at various polling places throughout the city. Question 9 did not appear on the ballot in at least five precincts, and election workers did not uniformly administer and keep secure the paper ballots used for the local referendum. The League is calling for a full investigation and written report on these matters in order that such problems will be avoided in future elections.

The Election Commission needs to answer the following questions: How was it that some machines were not set up properly? Who checks the voting machines for proper functioning and set up at each polling place, before the election begins? How many machines lacked question 9, and in which precincts? When and how did the Election Department come to learn of this discrepancy? When and how was this situation remedied? What is the proper procedure for fixing a voting machine during an election? What training was given to which poll workers? Why was there not a uniform message delivered to voters as paper ballots were distributed? Why were the wooden ballot boxes, or other secure containers, not used in some polling places? How were the precincts checked and coordinated throughout the day? When are election results by ward and precinct available to citizens, and what are the rules that govern making such information available?

A prompt and thorough investigation must be made so that these questions can be answered to citizens' satisfaction. The League would be pleased to contribute information about instances which came to our attention.

League members will attend the meeting of the Election Commission that you have announced for November 21 at 5pm. The League would like to speak, and for the commission to begin to address the above concerns at this meeting.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Deborah Crossley
President

Carol Ann Shea
Local Action Chair

Florence R. Rubin
Local Action Committee

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

- I would like to join the League of Women voters of Newton. Enclosed is my check for \$50 payable to LWVN.
- I would like to receive materials about the League.
- I would like to be contacted by a League member to talk about LWVN.

Mail this form (and your check, if joining) to:
Judy Jaffe at 158 Moffat Road, Waban 02468

Continued from page one

About the Local Election

Subsequently, the LWVN wrote a letter to the Chair of the Election Commission (see page 5) raising questions about our concerns and asking to attend the next meeting of the Commission which was held on Tuesday, November 28. Ten League members were there, along with members of the press and some disgruntled voters. Members of the Commission recognized that there were some training, management and quality control problems that they will try to fix. They complained that they have great difficulty finding enough election workers to staff the polling places. Constructive suggestions were made by citizens about how to publicize this need.

The Election Commission consists of four people, two from each of the two major parties, who are appointed by the mayor. They hire the Executive Secretary (Alan Licarie) who runs the department which is responsible for administering elections and the annual city census.

How Question 9 was left off the ballot in at least five polling locations became apparent to me during the discussion at the meeting of the Election Commission. The Secretary of State's office sends an excessive number of the strips for the voting machines. The people responsible for installing them and programming the machines were very careful to install the appropriate strips for the state representatives in the right polling locations. However, they were not aware that Question 9 was on the ballot in all precincts except Ward 1, Precinct 1.

It seems to me that the strips for the ballot questions were installed in a random fashion. Election personnel realized late the day before the election that Question 9 should not be on the ballot in Ward 1, Precinct 1. At that time a decision was made that it was "too late" to go back and check all 189 machines throughout the city to insure that ballots had been correctly distributed.

The League requested that the Election Commission write a letter to the Secretary of State explaining that Question 9 was omitted from at least 29 machines in five precincts for a good part of the day, accounting for numerous blanks on the question. The Election Commission consented to do this and certified the vote.

Question 9 Legislative Action

Following the overwhelming support for question 9, an advisory question to reduce the size of the Board of Aldermen, legislation was filed on our behalf by Representative Ruth Balsler. In addition, to Rep. Balsler, Reps. Koutoujian and Khan and Senator Creem signed the bill. We will watch with interest the progress of this legislation. ■

How to Run for Office

In the fall Newton will hold a Municipal Election. All city elective offices will be on the ballot- the mayor, 24 aldermen, and 8 school committee members. The League would like to provide information for potential candidates and campaign managers about how to run for office. We hope to hold a workshop in the late winter or early spring when the nomination papers will be available. Think about it. Would you run for local office? Do you know somebody who would? Or somebody you would like to see run and are willing to help? Or would you like to help with this project? Please call the League phone at 964-0014 and leave a message. ■

Answers to trivia question.

(From Page 5)

Mayor - 400 signatures
Alderman-at-large - 150 signatures
Ward Alderman - 50 signatures from the ward in which the election is to be held
School Committee - 150 signatures

LWVUS PRESIDENT'S LETTER TO THE EDITOR



This is a letter to the editor from Dr. Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins. It appeared in the Washington Post on December 12, 2000. It and the original David Broder column appear on the LWV website.

David Broder [op-ed, Dec. 6] is correct that we need to examine and improve our election procedures. He is correct that imposition of mandatory federal standards could undermine state and local administration in ways that might be counterproductive, and that state and local officials must be part of the reform effort. Finally, he is correct that the federal government is not paying its fair share of the administration of federal elections.

He does not go far enough, however, in recognizing what can be done now to significantly improve our elections system. Congress should pass and the new president should sign legislation for a substantial federal grants program to assist states in implementing "best practices" for voting systems. Those practices should be determined on a nonpartisan basis, and they should not be prescriptive.

Antiquated voting machines, ballot systems that confuse the voter and insufficient numbers of machines so that voters have to wait hours in line—each of these and other administrative problems can and should be dealt with expeditiously.

A "blue ribbon" study commission makes sense for other issues, such as Internet or mail-in voting, where real policy issues are in play. But the mechanics of our election system need action now, and a study commission should not delay Congress in stepping forward to help states make the investment in modern election administration that is so clearly needed.

CAROLYN JEFFERSON-JENKINS

President, The League of Women Voters of the United States, Washington DC

Continued from page one

New Show on Newton TV

Topics under discussion for future shows include MCAS, education reform, health care initiatives, implementation of the Community Preservation Act, prison reform. *Newton Legislative Roundtable* airs on Channel 10 on AT&T Broadband (formerly MediaOne):

Mondays 1:30 pm, 5:30 pm, 10:30 pm

Tuesdays 3 am, 5:30 am, 9 am, 1:30 pm, 5:30 pm, 10:30 pm

Wednesdays 3 am, 5:30 am, 9 am

So tune in and turn on.

Members are encouraged to call with ideas,
and participate in the production of a show.

Bonnie Carter 969-0686

Deb Crossley 244-7597

PRISCILLA M. LEITH, MBA

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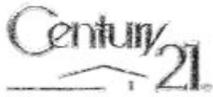
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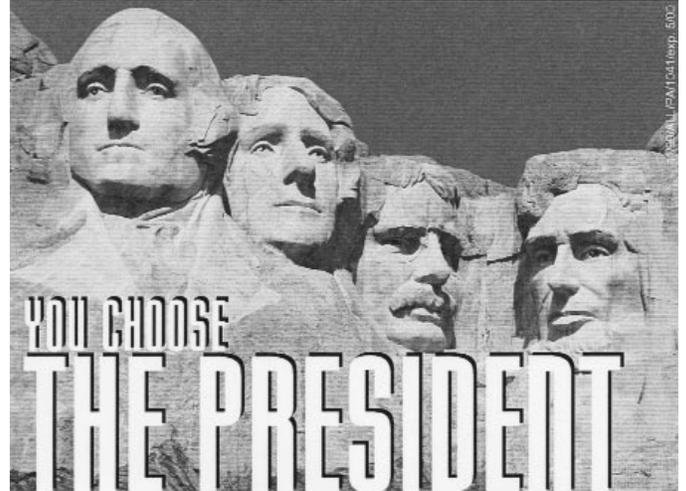


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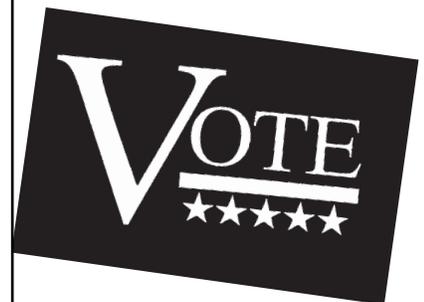


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LWVN CALENDAR

January

- 3 LWVN Board meeting at Capeless, 19 Saxon Road
- 16 7:30 pm, Working Board meeting
- 22 Legislative Roundtable, taping at NewTV studio
- 22 Monday Environmental Speaker Series, Diana Muir, Reflections in Bulloughs Pond, Newton Free Library, 7-9 pm
- 27 Saturday 10:30 am, State Program Planning, location tba

February

- 7 Wed. LWVN Board meeting at Reisman, 28 Fairway Drive, West Newton
- 26 Monday, Environmental Legislation, cosponsored by the League and Green Decade, Newton Free Library, 7-9pm
- 27 *Legislative Roundtable*, taping at NewTV studio

March

- 7 LWVN Board meeting at Koch, 117 High Street, Newton Upper Falls

- 21 Wednesday, Local Program Planning, time and place tba
- 26 Monday 7 pm "Messing with Mother Nature": Environmental Endocrine Hypothesis, speaker Sheldon Krinsky, Environmental Speaker Series by Green Decade, Pesticide Month, Newton Free Library

April

- 4 LWVN Board meeting
- 25 Tentative date for Day on the Hill

The **Newton Free Library**, the **Newton LWV** and the **Green Decade Coalition** will cosponsor our third annual environmental legislation update. Mayor David Cohen will welcome invited speakers State Senator Cynthia Creem, and State Representatives Ruth Balsar, Kay Khan and Peter Koutoujian. The evening will update citizens about current environmental bills and initiatives. Special attention will be paid to the recently passed Community Preservation Act and what its implementation could do for Newton.

League of Women Voters of Newton

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