



LWVCO Legislative Conference

After several days of inch an hour snowfall in Durango, Stephanie Huss and Ellen Park caught a flight to Denver (streets were dry, no snow) to attend the annual LWVCO Legislative Conference on January 25, meeting up with Marilyn Brown, who was already up in the Front Range. For the first time in years we were bumped out of our usual venue in the Old Supreme Court Chambers, convening instead in the Colorado History Museum, getting off to a shaky (literally) start when the organizers realized that as a result of the last minute change they forgot to order coffee for the 130 League members in attendance at 8:30 in the morning. Several resourceful Leaguers made a mad dash to a local coffee shop and then away we went to five agenda topics and a flood of information.

I. **Views of a Legislator:** State Representative Carole Murray (r-Castle Rock)

- Proud to say that there are now 7 Republican women in the State House, and that Colorado is second in the nation for number of women in the state Legislature
- As an ex-County Clerk, very much in favor of Electronic Voting Machines- DREs, and believes that there is more potential for fraud with paper ballots
- Strong supporter of Mail-in Ballots, and would like to see statistics regarding % of down ballot voting (that is, voting on candidates and questions all the way to the end of the ballot) in mail-in vs polling place ballots, because of the additional time voters have to study issues with their mail-in ballot at home <EP note: we should try to look into this>
- Sponsoring a bill (HB1047) to simplify ballot language and clarify yes/no meaning
- Biggest issues this year? Marijuana, Budget, [PERA](#) (and [Pinnacol](#))
- End to Partisanship? Hyper partisanship will only go away of voters get tired of it – it is created to sell a product, be it a TV or radio show, or candidate; government is complex today, and term limits prevent depth of understanding, hard to bring everyone to the table
- Single Payer Health Care if reintroduced in Colorado? A partisan issue and she would not support it, believing instead in the freedom of the market

II. **Where Colorado is Going with the Census and Future Planning:** Elizabeth Garner, CO State Demographer

- Very informative and even humorous presentation on an otherwise dry subject, with some surprising statistics - click on [State Demography Office](#) (in the Department of Local Affairs) for 2010 Census and general demographic info and on Ms Garner's [Presentation](#)
- Some highlights
 - Census is critical for funding - \$400B in federal funds allocated to states, \$890 per person in Colorado
 - Colorado not at risk for gaining or losing seats in this census, biggest winners will be Texas and some southern states, biggest losers upper mid-west
 - CO population correlates highest to net migration in and out of state
 - Biggest impact going forward is aging of baby boomers, which changes everything from housing to buying habits, and consequently occupational structure of the state; by 2030 65+ population will be 3 times current level

III. *Education and the Colorado Budget:* John Karakoulakis CO Dept of Higher Ed; Tracie Rainey CO School Finance Project; Nora Flood CO League of Charter Schools

- JK, Higher Ed
 - Higher Ed being hit with the greatest burden in state budget cuts since it is not protected by the constitution or the federal government
 - Bill approved by the Long-Term Fiscal Stability Commission to grant more flexibility to Higher Ed institutions in giving out student aid, allowing more international students, and going through with some construction projects without getting approval from the state.
 - “Colorado Paradox” is that we are the 4th highest state in adult post-secondary education but only 23% of those with bachelor’s and 1/3 of those with associate degrees were born in CO. That is, the state does a poor job of preparing its own students for college and getting them through.
 - Higher Ed Strategic Plan Steering Committee established to prepare a comprehensive roadmap for Colorado’s 27 public colleges and universities, to be presented to Legislature in 1 year
- TR, School Finance Project
 - History: In early 1980’s Colorado was in the top third of school funding, but the subsequent combination of the Gallagher Amendment, Tabor, Bird-Arveschoug and the School Finance Act led to huge erosion in revenue, and precipitated Amendment 23, which caused further problems
 - Cuts in the K-12 budget from last year to this is devastating to all 178 CO school Districts, will lead to layoffs and larger class sizes
 - Cuts amount to \$450 per child
- NF, League of Charter Schools
 - 16th year of Charter Schools, 160 schools with 62,000 students, 30% minority (vs 39% in public schools)
 - Funded by state, and up to 5% of admin costs charged back to school district
 - Offered to come back to the League to talk about the good, the bad and the ugly of Charter Schools

IV. *What is Happening in the Legislature:* Christine Watson, LWVCO Lobbyist

- Only 2 weeks into the session and the election year follies have begun!
 - Actions in legislature past 2 weeks include: motion to honor relief in Haiti (those donating more than \$50 can wear jeans on Friday); signs thanking Gov Ritter for Stimulus money will remain; speaker broke gavel (no one injured)
- Non-Partisan Comprehensive Tax Study (not done since 1958) resolution adopted, to be conducted by the Universities of Denver and Colorado, funded by private-sector (\$750K) and will include considerations of whether changes in tax policy or laws might be advisable
- Budget is most significant issue: 1.5B in hole, 12 bills being carried to fill the gap, from decrease in tax credits to increase in sales taxes
- PERA is underfunded due to recent stock market crash, and increase in benefits enacted during stock market heyday of the 90s; SB1 being carried to fix the problem, if not, benefits could disappear; fixes include decrease in benefits, combined with increase in contributions, increase in years of contributions
- Pinnacle (insurer of last resort for high risk businesses) being debated- should it become a private entity?
- Campaign Finance Cleanup- Colorado constitution affected by recent Supreme Court hearing

- Health Care
 - HB10-04: Standardize health care information to improve efficiency in Doctors' offices
 - HB10-05: Home health Care paid by Medicaid
- Medical Marijuana- debate as to whether a state-wide consistent policy is needed, or if rules should be under local control
- Propositions (change to statute) and Amendments (change to Constitution) so far
 - Proposition 101: bring TABOR back, essentially roll back Referendum C, cost to state of \$1.3B in revenue
 - Amendment 60: Undo property tax freeze
 - Amendment 61: Eliminate all debt and borrowing by all government entities (state, local, special districts) unless specifically approved in a November election
 - Authors of these are not yet known, Bell Policy Center has lodged a complaint and may go to litigation to disclose (Silver lining to Supreme Court ruling on campaign finance-disclosure is required!)

V. *How to Deal with the Colorado Budget:* Senator Rollie Heath (D-Boulder), Chair, Interim Committee on Fiscal Stability

- State is facing a \$1.5 Billion budget gap for the upcoming fiscal year 2010-2011, general (discretionary) fund is decreasing by \$2.1M)
 - CO is 7th wealthiest state (measured in median income)
 - Pays lower taxes than all but 3 states
 - Ranks 50th in Higher Ed funding, 50th in Medical School Funding, somewhere between 40th and 47th (depending on what is measured) on K-12 spending, 50th on mental health spending
 - Our infrastructure is in constant danger of crumbling.
- Do nothing means that K-12, Corrections and Medicaid will consume 90% of state budget
- Recommends a Constitutional Revision Commission- 6 Senate, 6 House, 6 Governor appointments, completely bi-partisan
- Single subject rule means that legislature can't address all issues together, and addressing one but not others would make things worse
- Referred to Colorado's Future www.coloradosfuture.org a bi-partisan organization whose mission is to build public trust and improve the processes of public policy decision-making in a way that will build a better Colorado – partners include Club 20, Progressive 15 and others
- Citizens of this state must have a debate around the following two questions:
 1. What kind of state do we want to have?
If the current situation works for the majority of Coloradans, then we are where we are.
 2. But if it does not, how do we pay for what we want?
In other words, what should our tax structure look like to create the state we want?

Senator Heath: “We need to invest in human capital and infrastructure in our state”

Final note: Marilyn, Stephanie and I went over to the Capital to check in on what was happening with regard to HB 1067, the bill that recommended changing reimbursement rates for Native American students at Fort Lewis College. By the time we got there the bill was Postponed Indefinitely (PI'd)...that is, *withdrawn*.

Ellen Park, LWV LPC Legislative Action Chair