



League of Women Voters
Of La Plata County

VOTER

Volume 8, Issue 6

Sixty-two Years Serving La Plata County
91 members

February, 2009

www.lwv.org

www.lwvlaplata.org

www.lwvcolorado.org

Inside this Issue

Upcoming meetings1

Coordinator’s Message2

Health Care Update2

First Call to State
Convention2

State Program Planning3

Mail-in Ballot Project3

National Popular Vote
Compact Study4

LWVCO Legislative
Conference5

Calendar6

Board of Directors6

Insert:

**Legislative Lowdown
flyer**

**Welcome New
Members:**

**Marsha Porter-Norton
Bev Wells
Karen Zink**

***Congratulations to
Ellen Park on her election
to La Plata Electric Round
Up Foundation Board of
Directors***



Mark your calendars!

February Meetings

- - Legislative Lowdown - -

**Saturday, February 7
9:30 – 11:30 a.m.**

Program Room 2, Durango Public Library

**Senator Jim Isgar and Representative Ellen Roberts
will update us on the business of the 2009 Legislative session
and answer your questions!
Light refreshments will be provided**

* * *

- - Iron-Jawed Angels - -

**Thursday, February 26, 4 – 7 p.m.,
Center for Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College**

The League of Women Voters of the United States celebrates its 89th birthday February 14, 2009. Celebrate by attending a free showing of *Iron-Jawed Angels*, an excellent film highlighting the less well-known raw side of women’s efforts to obtain the vote. The showing, sponsored by the local branch of American Association of University Women (AAUW), stars Hilary Swank and Frances O’Connor.

Our LWV celebrates its 63rd year this year.

Coordinator's Message

February is the month when we hear from our two legislators. We'll be in the new library again, but on the main floor, this month, due to an expectation of a larger audience. This meeting is open to the public; please invite anyone you'd like. We always find the information we get from Sen. Isgar and Rep. Roberts most interesting and valuable. We appreciate their willingness to bring their expertise and openness.

Great Decisions is off and running with strong interest and discussion. And, two of our active LWV committees are at work. Voter Service is planning for the spring City Council election and is gathering information for the Mail-in, Early and Provisional Ballot Process Project. These two activities are LOCALLY oriented. The National Popular Vote Compact Study Committee is hard at work evaluating and compiling the background for the study that came to us from our national LWV. This study and concurrence will be presented at our April meeting.

Save Saturday morning, March 21 for our League meeting: "Building a Community in La Plata County for Children and Youth." Our Vicki Coe is organizing a panel of experts to discuss what is happening. We'll hear about support and developing that support from the schools to the community. It's a meeting open to all who want to learn about our kids.

-Sally Bellerue

First Call to LWVCO Convention

The 2009 state convention is scheduled for May 16-17 at The Golden Hotel in the historic district of Golden, near Denver, from 9:45 a.m. Saturday until 12:45 p.m. Sunday. The Jeffco LWV's invitation to all of us notes that Golden was the territorial capital of CO in 1861, and an important waypoint for miners and western immigrants. The walkable town has creekside pathways, historic neighborhoods as well as the CO School of Mines and the Coors Brewery.

We are allowed five delegates based on our membership. Please consider attending. Some expenses will be paid by our LWV and we will carpool and share rooms at the meeting. Contact me, marilbrown@aol.com, or Sally Bellerue, bellerue@frontier.net if you have an interest in attending.

-Marilyn Brown

Health Care Update

The summaries from our community discussion held in conjunction with the county and other groups on December 29th are available on our website at <http://lwvaplata.org/healthcare.html>. I'm hoping to see a summary of results from around the country some time soon and will report on that if I can.

At our meeting on January 13th, Missy Rodey, who is a member of the Healthcare Services Steering Committee (HSSC) and on the Board of Directors at Mercy, gave us a very comprehensive update on the local situation. Very exciting news - the HSSC has been awarded a grant from the Colorado Health Foundation of over \$189,000 to hire a Project Coordinator who will develop a plan for the ongoing support of the Health Services Clinic (currently running a deficit which is being picked up by Mercy) and provision of quality, affordable healthcare to our county as a whole. This position will be 3/4 time, paying \$55 per hour. The person hired should have at least some knowledge in the field of providing healthcare, and will need to provide their own workplace. If you know of anyone who might be interested in this position, please email me at jgpatton@frontier.net (phone 385-4061) or Missy Rodey at mrodey@frontier.net (phone 375-9442). The grant is for a period of 18 months.

Missy reported that the Health Services Clinic has applied for Rural Health Clinic status, a process that will probably take another 9 months or so, but would allow the Clinic to receive higher reimbursements for Medicaid and Medicare patients. Pediatric Partners, another local clinic, has also qualified to apply for this status.

-Jill Patton

[Editor's note: At this same meeting, we reaffirmed our desire that the national LWV focus on advocacy on health care and sent our wishes in to the national board, which decides national advocacy priorities at their January board meeting.]



Sally Bellerue introduces health care update at January's LWV meeting at the new library.



Mail-in, Early and Provisional Ballot Research Project

The Colorado State statute passed in 2007, which authorized permanent mail-in ballots to be requested by registered voters, and the growing popularity of early voting, even though it is limited to just two places in the county, resulted in over 50% of votes cast in La Plata County in the November 2008 General Election to be either mail-in or early.

During discussions with various LWV-La Plata members, election judges and others, and a quick look at the state statute governing mail-in ballots, which leaves process definition to county governments, it became clear that none of us was familiar with the process used by local officials to tabulate such ballots. In addition, we had differing views of when, if or how provisional ballots were tabulated. At a Voter Service meeting held in January, and with the agreement of the Administrative Team, we decided to convene a team to examine the processes used for tabulating such votes in La Plata County. The scope of this project covers all Federal, State, County, City and School District Elections held in La Plata County and includes processes used for distribution, collection and counting of ballots other than those voted in-person on Election Day and handed out by an Election Judge at a Precinct. Special District elections are not included at this time.

Our methodology consists of interviews to be conducted with City, County and School district officials, based on a detailed questionnaire developed by the team. Following these interviews we will analyze the results and prepare a report for all our League members to review, and based on our findings decide how to publicize our results and whether we should launch a formal local study later this year.

Further, in 2005-6, LWV La Plata completed a study regarding the use of Vote Centers in La Plata County. The study resulted in a position adopted by the membership that endorsed the application of vote centers providing that certain conditions were met in the coming years. The county is moving on a path that brings it closer to meeting these requirements and the popularity of mail-in and early voting demonstrates that

eliminating many of the existing precincts might not constitute a hardship for rural residents. The economic advantages of Vote Centers may become the tipping point in their favor. Consequently, following this research project, it is recommended that we review the results of the VC Study for current relevance and action.

Committee members are: Nadine Ancel, Susanne Becker, Enid Brodsky, Marilyn Brown, Ann Flatten, Jill Patton, Trish Pegram, Marilyn Sandstrom, Elaine Slade, Jim Irish, Mary Alice Hearn, Julie Ward, Sherri Knight, Maria Baker, Connie Jacobs

-Ellen Park, Project Chair

State Program Planning

Nineteen members briefly reviewed our state positions and decided to recommend a new state study as follows:

'What measures can the state of Colorado undertake on its own or in concert with other states to mitigate the effects of climate change on the citizens of Colorado with emphasis on those projects which strengthen our economy, make our workforce more competitive, capitalize on our renewable energy resources and support the health and wellness of our citizens.'

Amplification:

This study is designed to ferret out the things the state of CO can do without federal approval to take a leadership role in preserving the health of our citizens and our economy, emulating the activist regulation California has undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect/improve the health of its citizens. This study might start by examining the things CA has done to see whether they are feasible for CO. Some items could include an increased mpg rating for vehicles registered in CO, a moratorium on building coal-fired plants, extension of public transit options, state tax credits/subsidies for renewable energy/grid projects, etc

Our recommendation has been sent in to LWVCO program v.p. Alice Ramsey, who will take it to her program committee for discussion along with the recommendations from other LWVs. Their analysis and recommendations will come to the state board at its March 4 meeting and ultimately before the convention in May.

-Marilyn Brown

National Popular Vote Compact Study

In response to the adoption of a new study at the 2008 League Convention, a committee has begun work researching and preparing a presentation for our chapter. The subject of the study, and our committee's work, is "The Advisability of Using the National Popular Vote Compact among the States as a Method for Electing the President".

The League's current position on the presidential election process was set in 1970. In relevant part, the position is: "The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that the direct-popular-vote method for electing the President and Vice-President is essential to representative government. The League of Women Voters believes, therefore, that the Electoral College should be abolished. The League also supports uniform voting qualifications and procedures for presidential elections." (For the full position statement, see the League's web site, www.lwv.org.)

The Electoral College, which the League wishes to see abolished, is the constitutionally mandated body that actually elects our president and vice-president. It was the result of a compromise between direct election by the people, and election by the Congress, and assuaged the fears of some that the people were not capable of deciding independently on these offices. Each state is entitled to a number of presidential electors equal to the total of its Senators and Representatives. The District of Columbia has a number of electors equal to that of the least populous state. Currently, all but two of the states require all the electors of the state to cast all their electoral votes for the presidential candidate who wins the majority of the votes cast in that state. (In Maine and Nebraska the winner of the popular vote in each congressional district wins an elector, and the remaining two electors are chosen based on the statewide vote. This was the method in use immediately after the adoption of the Constitution, but was subsequently changed in most states.) The candidate who wins at least 270 electoral votes is then elected to the presidency. Four times in our history, this has resulted in the candidate who won the most popular votes losing the presidency, the latest being in 2000 when Al Gore won more popular votes than George Bush, but lost in the Electoral College.

This indirect method of presidential election is consistently shown in polls to be unpopular, with up to 70% of the population in favor of eliminating the Electoral College. There have been numerous attempts to get a Constitutional amendment through Congress to effect this, but none of them has been able to even get out of the Congress and have never been presented to the State Legislatures.

The National Popular Vote Compact (NPVC) movement was begun in 1996 in response to these facts. The NPVC would have all the adopting states agree that each of them would bind their Electors to vote for the Presidential and Vice Presidential slate which wins the majority of the national popular vote. It would become effective when states which have at least 270 electoral votes among themselves have adopted the Compact. That would assure that these states would have sufficient electoral votes to elect the president, no matter what the other states did. And these states would have contracted that their electors would vote for the winner of the popular vote, no matter what the vote in their particular state happened to be. The result would be that the winner of the popular vote would still be chosen by the Electoral College.

The legal basis for the NPVC is in the portion of the Constitution which defines the Electoral College and says "Each state shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors..." (Article II, Section 1, Clause 2) and the Compact Clause (Article I, Section 10, Clause 3) which permits states to enter into legally binding contracts with other states to take joint action. The argument is that these clauses allow any state to decide how its electors will be chosen and will act, and to agree with other states to bind themselves to a certain course of action for the electors.

So far, four states have adopted this Compact by legislative action (Hawaii, Maryland, New Jersey and Illinois); California's legislature adopted it, but Gov. Schwarzenegger vetoed it; and it has been introduced in 15 other states where it is in various stages of consideration.

Local leagues across the country are considering whether the League should support the NPVC as a means to implement its position that election of the winner of the presidential popular vote is essential to our representative government, even though it would not abolish the Electoral College. The committee studying this position locally is Marilyn Sandstrom, Ann Flatten, Grace Deltcheff, Julie Ward, Trish Pegram, Mary Barter, Marilyn Brown, Sally Bellerue, Suzanne Becker, and Bev Wells.

The national League has asked that we respond by May 1 to several consensus questions relative to this issue, and we plan to have our April meeting dedicated to discussing and reaching consensus among ourselves on this issue. There are a number of materials at the League web site, www.lwv.org, on this topic, which will give you much more information. Please be thinking, talking and reading about this issue between now and then and let any of the Committee know of any questions you have.

-Trish Pegram

Read this excellent article in The New Yorker, January 26, 2009:

GETTING THERE FROM HERE: *How should Obama reform health care?* by Atul Gawande on our web page www.lwvaplata.org - under "What's New", scroll down to Healthcare, the New Yorker article

Notes from 2009 Legislative Conference

Forget what you've been hearing about CO being protected from economic downturn by the new energy economy and oil and gas production. While CO has not been affected as much as other state, we face a \$604 million budget shortfall and this problem is eclipsing everything else the Legislature had hoped to consider. The overriding message of all speakers at the LWVCO 2009 Legislative Conference, held January 5 at the State Capitol, was that no bills that cost money will succeed this year. Déjà vu 2002.

Senator Peter Groff, president of the Senate, and Representative Terrance Carroll, speaker of the House, offered greetings and summarized the bad news. Unemployment will increase. The only area of the budget that can be cut is human services, including health care, and higher ed is just now back to where its budget was five years ago. We have 126 structurally deficient bridges. Rep. Carroll emphasized the role of transportation infrastructure in a healthy economy; each billion dollars invested in transportation infrastructure supports 47,000 jobs.

CO Election Reform Commission

Their report is due February 1. The three sub-committees are technical and auditing ('checkbox' issues, authority to use specific equipment), uniformity and simplicity (mail ballots, primary elections), and registration and database issues (ID issues, etc.). Carol Snyder, former state legislator and Adams County Clerk, concluded that machines, with a paper trail, can work appropriately and can be trusted; however, they must have adequate testing by outsiders. Poll watchers were one of the most difficult aspects of November elections. The real issues now are voter education and voter responsibility (making the effort to educate themselves about the issues and candidates).

Russ Coolidge, Secretary of State's office, discussed the state wide electronic database and their goal of real time transfer of voter registration when voters move within the state. Q/A: is there adequate training for county clerks? Now, yes. Same day registration? Lots of issues, Coffman didn't support. Doesn't know how new SOS feels yet. Possibility of a federal law standardizing voting processes? Not practical, too difficult to sell, a step back for CO.

Transportation Infrastructure Issues

Russell George, head of CDOT, former legislator, gave a very interesting history of transportation infrastructure financing. Up to 1992 when TABOR passed, all funding came from gas tax. When more was needed, legislature upped the gas tax a cent or two. Legislature has gone to the public with gas tax increases unsuccessfully twice since. Legislature has looked to user fees, not subject to TABOR restrictions, since.

Colorado has 10,000 miles of roads and 3500 bridges. Of the 3500 CDOT employees, most are maintenance. CDOT does no construction, all of which is contracted out. Transit is not included in CDOT's mandate and George looks to Legislature to change that.

He noted that construction inflation has been twice consumer inflation, partly due to growing economies of China and India.

We must move away from our dependence on gas tax as source of revenue: hybrids, greenhouse gas emissions, less driving due to high cost of gas. Options: Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), technology is there. Public acceptance may be a challenge. Congestion pricing could be conducted with VMT technology.

George referred frequently to the report of the Blue Ribbon Transportation Panel, which is available on the internet. <http://www.colorado.gov/governor/blue-ribbon-transportation-panel.html> and click on either executive summary or full report 'A Report to Colorado' towards the bottom.

Two new legislators gave their thoughts: Dickey Lee Hullinghorst, D-Boulder, and Mark Waller, R-CO Springs, Doug Bruce's replacement!

Betty Boyd, Senate president pro tem., brought a message about health care, emphasizing that although there is no funding, other types of legislation are needed and possible, for example, assuring a place at the table for representatives of behavioral health and who has the authority to provide what kinds of care, i.e., expanding the services non-doctors can provide. She mentioned that, at Governor Ritter's suggestion hospitals are exploring a per-patient fee that hospitals would pay to the state. This fee would increase federal matching funds and be used to expand eligibility for publicly funded health insurance programs without requiring more money from the general fund.

Chris Watson, LWVCO lobbyist

After lunch Chris discussed her expectations for the 2009 Legislative session. She emphasized the increasing importance of our Legislative Letter, as the media trims its coverage. She reiterated that no bills costing money will pass; however, enabling legislation will be possible. She expects pressure to postpone implementation of the new rules for oil and gas production. She thinks we'll see reproductive rights proposals and severance tax review, because the latter is a potential source for transportation funding. She indicated that the CO Guaranteed Health Care Act, initiated by Health Care for All CO, due to be introduced, will go nowhere. Separation of University of CO from the state system has been talked about but Chris doesn't think legislators will support it.

-Marilyn Brown

Calendar



LWV La Plata County
www.lwvlaplata.org
 296 Highland Hill Drive
 Durango, CO 81301

February	
3 Tues*	Great Decisions: Afghanistan/Pakistan
5 Thu*	Great Decisions: Afghanistan/Pakistan
Sat 7	Legislative Lowdown, Rm 2, Durango Library, 9:30-11:30 a.m.
Tue 10	NPVC Committee Mtg. 2-4 p.m., CSCafe
Wed 11	Voter Service Committee Mtg. 2 p.m., CSCafe
Sat 14	89th Birthday of League of Women Voters
Tue 17*	Great Decisions: Energy/Global Economy
Thu 19*	Great Decisions: Energy/Global Economy
Sat 21	U.N. Seminar: U.N. and U.S. - Restoring International Credibility, U. Denver, 8:30-5
Thu 26	Iron-Jawed Angels, 4-7 p.m., Center for SW Studies, FLC, sponsored by AAUW, free
March	
Tue 3*	Great Decisions: The Arctic Age
Thu 5*	Great Decisions: The Arctic Age
Mon 9	Team Meeting, 1-4 p.m. Venue: TBD
Tue 17*	Great Decisions: Egypt
Thu 19*	Great Decisions: Egypt
Thu 19	City Council Candidate Forum, Council Chambers, 6-8 p.m.
Sat 21	Building a Community for Children and Youth, 9:30-11:30, Library Program Rm. 1
April	
Thu 2	Empowerment – One Heart at a Time, Life Long Learning, 7 p.m., 130 Noble Hall, FLC
Tue 14*	Great Decisions: Cuba After Castro
Thu 16*	Great Decisions: Cuba After Castro
Wed 22	National Popular Vote Compact Consensus, 9-11, venue: TBD
Tue 28*	Great Decisions: Universal Human Rights?
Thu 30*	Great Decisions: Universal Human Rights?

*All Great Decisions programs are held in Program Rm. 1, Durango Public Library; Tuesdays: 11:45-1:45, Thursdays: 12:30-2:30. Bring a brown bag lunch.

League Mission Statement: The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Join the League! Anyone of voting age may join the League of Women Voters. Others may be associate members. Discounted household memberships are available. Call Sue Herbst at 382-9446 for more information.

Team Members

Spokesperson/Newsletter Marilyn Brown, 259-3593 marilbrown@aol.com	Team Coordinator Sally Bellerue, 385-0848 bellerue@frontier.net
Director-at-large Grace Deltscheff, 259-3040 holgnd@frontier.net	Treasurer Nadine Ancel, 259-3675 ancelnm@yahoo.com
Suzanne Becker, 375-1533 srahmberg@aol.com	Voter Service Marilyn Sandstrom, 764-4596 mjschilli@bresnan.net
Director-at-large Jill Patton, 385-4061 jgpatton@frontier.net	Director-at-large Ellen Park, 247-8116 gellenpark@aol.com
Natural Resources Co-chair Deanna Collins, 259-7845 dcdurango@msn.com	Speakers Bureau/NR Co-chair Stephanie Huss, 259-7263 Stephanie@frontier.net
Publicity Ross Park, 247-8116 lwvlpc@aol.com	Membership Sue Herbst, 382-9446 sue_herbst@frontier.net
Great Decisions Pat Chatfield, 247-1692 patchwork@gobrainstorm.net	