



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF IOWA

LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2008



PAPER BALLOTS FOR 2008 FEDERAL ELECTION

LEAGUE SUPPORTS HAVING PAPER BALLOTS FOR 2008 FEDERAL ELECTION

We feel the best choice for Iowa’s elections is to use paper ballots with optical scanners. With paper ballots and optical scanners all ballots would be counted the same way. In case of a recount, this system works better than using a printer roll of thermal paper that has been attached to a voting machine. This system could be outlawed in the near future by the federal government. Iowa should invest in paper ballots and optical scanners now.

ACTION NEEDED: Call Governor Culver’s office at 515-281-5211 and urge him to approve funding.

BUDGET

MAJORITY LEADERS SET BUDGET TARGETS 2% BELOW GOVERNOR’S TARGETS

	FY 2008	FY 2009 Target	Difference
Administration & Regulation	\$96,299,857	\$95,604,847	\$695,000
Agriculture & Natural Resources	\$43,638,037	\$43,403,037	\$235,000
Economic Development	\$42,656,535	\$40,836,535	\$1,820,000
Education	\$1,182,758,943	\$1,242,961,558	+\$60,202,615
Health & Human Services	\$1,169,210,414	\$1,207,615,634	+\$38,405,220
Justice Systems	\$670,688,353	\$669,739,630	\$948,723

Note that the **Justice Systems funding is lower for 2009 year than 2008**. One of Leagues priorities is to have more money for community based corrections and for mental health and substance abuse services.

We have about 8700 offenders in our prisons. Forty per cent are severely mentally ill (37.6% are male prisoners and 65.6% are women prisoners). If mental health services operated effectively in the community, we would have fewer persons in our prisons and there would be no need for building new prisons.

ACTION NEEDED:

Encourage more funding for these areas within the targets and encourage legislators to fully fund counties for mental health services they provide. We know that many people who don’t get proper mental health treatment in the community often self medicate with drugs or alcohol, then commit a crime and are sent to prison.

An approach being considered is (SF2163), which would provide funding for regional mental crisis teams in parts of Iowa that have no weekend and after hours mental health services. While this could work well, county officials have concerns because the state presently does not fully funding them for mental health services they provide.

HOW TO MAKE CONTACT WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS

When you **e-mail** legislators, make sure to include your name and address so the legislator knows you live in her or his district. The generic form of e mail address for legislators is: type the first name, put a period, type the last name of the legislator, then @legis.state.ia.us. Example: Mark.Davitt@legis.state.ia.us
Also, you can link with them through the Legislative Web Site at www.legis.state.ia.us .

Phone calls:

Governor’s Office 515 281 5211 or email at: contact.igov@iowa.gov
Senate Switchboard 515 281 3371
House of Representatives Switchboard 515 281 3221

PAY DAY LOANS

Bills have been introduced in both chambers dealing with pay day loans. A priority of League is to have pay day loans capped at 36% APR. Presently there are few regulations in Iowa. This form of lending has been in the state for 12 years. Many of the former car title loan offices have now become pay day loan offices. Pay day loans get many people in debt very fast. In fact, the federal government found it to be such a problem that loans to military personnel must not be higher than 36% APR.

ACTION NEEDED: Contact your elected officials and urge them to support capping these loans at 36%. Many legislators talk about requiring financial literacy in the schools. While this is important, it should not be used as a reason not to limit interest on pay day loans.

VOTER OWNED ELECTION

There has been no action on this bill so far this session. Remind your elected officials that we want to see something done this session.

BOTTLE BILL

We are getting mixed messages about whether there will be action on the bottle bill this year. Governor Culver is still working on the issue, but leadership in the House and Senate say no action will take place. The following letter was sent to all legislators.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa endorses Governor Culver's proposal to strengthen the container deposit law. The bottle bill legislation was passed in 1978; his proposal will provide a needed update of the law. Iowa consumers redeem 86% of containers sold with a deposit.

Expanding the bottle bill to include sports drinks, tea and water bottles with a deposit will keep our environment cleaner. There are an estimated 235 million non-deposit containers consumed in Iowa each year. Many of these containers didn't exist in 1978. It is time to include non-carbonated beverages with a deposit so the waste can be recycled and not end in our landfills or on our roadways.

The handling fee, the penny the distributors pay the redemption centers and retailers such as the grocers for sorting the containers by brand, has not had an increase since 1978. It's time to increase the handling fee. Many redemption centers have closed in recent years due to the low payment for sorting containers.

Efforts to change the bottle bill have languished in the legislature over the years due to a stalemate on needed changes. It's time for all groups to work together to make Iowa a cleaner place to live.

LEAGUE SUPPORTS CHANGES TO IOWA'S OPEN RECORDS AND OPEN MEETINGS LAW

An interim committee met several times to update Iowa's open records and open meetings law. A major recommendation by the committee is the creation of a new agency, the Iowa Public Information Board, which will receive complaints from citizens alleging violations of the law and will seek resolution of the complaints through mediation and settlement. Citizens could bring complaints at no charge to them.

MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS MAY COME TO IOWA IN THE FUTURE

LWVIA has a position in support of holding elections by mail. Now the Iowa Legislature is looking at the idea. Recently the House State Government Committee brought in County Auditors Dennis Parrott, Ken Kline, and Mary Mosiman to provide information on mail ballot elections. A group of county auditors visited Oregon and Washington to observe and learn about how those states conduct elections by mail.

Oregon's vote by mail system began in 1981 when the Legislature approved a test of all mail elections for some local elections. By 1987, a majority of counties began conducting all mail elections for local races or ballot issues. This was done to reduce costs. In Oregon the auditors mail the ballot to the voter and then the voter must pay for return postage. In Iowa, return postage is paid by the auditor's office.

Washington has been evolving their system since 1983 for special elections if requested by the jurisdiction. In 1993, absentee balloting was expanded making it possible to make a "permanent absentee request" for all elections. By 2004, it was found that approximately 75 percent of their voter turnout was from absentee voting so in 2005 lawmakers allowed each county to decide whether or not to conduct all elections by mail. Thirty eight of Washington's 39 counties will conduct all elections by mail in 2008.

PUBLIC FUNDING OF FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES

LWVIA has joined an Iowa coalition working to encourage the state to increase funding for family planning services. National trends show an increase in unintended pregnancy and abortion among low income women since the mid 1990 's, while unintended pregnancy rates dropped for affluent women over the same period.

- These women are between the ages of 15-44.
- They are at or below 250% of the federal level of poverty.
- Iowa ranks 48th out of the 50 states and D.C. in contraceptive spending.
- Over 100,000 women in Iowa are in need of publicly funded contraceptive services.

Public funding of contraceptive services for low-income women will reduce the rate of unintended pregnancy, and reduce costs to taxpayers.

- Studies have shown that public funding of contraceptive services is effective in reducing unintended pregnancy for those women it reaches.
- It is estimated for every \$1 spent on contraceptive services in the U.S., \$3 are saved in Medicaid and other entitlement services.
- Minnesota has experienced a drop in unintended pregnancy, teen pregnancy, and abortion since the inception of its state funded contraceptive services program. The state estimates that it saves \$4 in Medicaid and other entitlement spending for every \$1 it spends on this program.



WATER PRIORITIES PRESENTED TO COMMITTEE

Director of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Rich Leopold, presented his priorities to the House Environmental Protection Committee. He stated that Iowa needs both a State Water Plan. Elements of the State Water Plan will include water quantity, water quality, anti degradation policies, prioritization of watershed clean up, and contingency planning for floods and droughts.

League is very supportive.