



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF IOWA
LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY 2009**



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LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION MAY BE SHORTENED

The session is scheduled to last 110 days, but it looks like it might be shortened to save money. The Legislature is anticipating hearing from the Revenue Estimating Committee by March 20 and then legislators will be able to move forward to make needed budget decisions before bringing the session to a close.

GOVERNOR CULVER SUPPORTS UPDATING FLOOD MAPS

In his State of the State speech, Gov. Culver said that Iowa needs to update our outdated flood plain maps to help prevent future flood damage. This is very positive, but money is tight so we must work hard to see that this gets accomplished. This is one of the LWVIA's priorities.

ACTION NEEDED

Legislators have spent a great deal of time trying to help communities that have been affected by the floods of last summer, but they need to be encouraged to take more proactive steps to reduce flooding in the future. Remind legislators that we have learned many lessons from the floods, and now we must work to prevent future flood damage. Updating maps is not inexpensive, but cities and counties need to know where to direct future growth. Iowa needs to focus on preventing future devastation.

LWVIA SUPPORTS GENDER BALANCE ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Good bills have come out of State Government Committee in both the House and Senate to require gender balance on city and county boards. Gender balance has been required on state boards since 1987. There was an attempt to require the same for cities and counties a number of years ago, and the response was that it would happen without legislative action. It hasn't. Women still make up a very small proportion of appointees on local boards and commissions.

The League strongly supports SF 133 and HF 243. These companion bills provide exceptions for cities and counties with low populations and for professional boards that may encounter difficulties finding suitable candidates. Also, if after making a good faith effort for three months, cities and counties cannot find a suitable candidate to provide balance, an exception can be made. This bill would go into effect Jan.1, 2012.

Another bill was introduced in the Senate Local Government Committee that would set goals and would require collecting data to see if progress is being made. We already know that very little progress has been made since the late 1980s. **League prefers SF 133 and HF 243.**

CONSUMER RIGHT OF ACTION BILL MOVES FORWARD

League has worked to pass legislation to allow Iowans to sue for damages after fraud has been committed by a business. Iowa is the only state that does not allow its citizens to easily get recourse when fraud occurs. There are many reasons why this bill should pass but it is especially important in Iowa where there are many elderly persons who are often targets of fraudulent businesses.

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LEAGUE SUPPORTS BILL TO PROTECT AGAINST WAGE DISCRIMINATION

MENTAL HEALTH PARITY BILL INCLUDES SUBSTANCE ABUSE COVERAGE

Senate File 137 and SSB 73 give persons discriminated against in pay for equal work the ability to sue for back pay with penalties. It covers discrimination based on categories such as sex, age, race, color and disability. Statistics gathered by the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women show Iowa ranks 37th among all states for pay equity for women. The disparity for Iowa women in higher paid jobs is even greater where they have the 8th largest pay gap among the states.

HF 234 is ready for debate in the House. Iowa has partial mental health parity. The piece missing is coverage for substance abuse. Under this legislation, more people could receive needed services. League supports mental health being treated on a par with physical health. Because Iowa already has partial mental health coverage, the increased cost for adding substance abuse will not be too great. According to the Iowa Insurance Division proposed increases would be from .3% - 1%.

NATIONAL PUBLIC VOTE

A National Popular Vote Bill is making its way through committees in the Iowa House and Senate. LWVUS voted last summer to study this issue. The National Popular Vote bill would guarantee the Presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states (and the District of Columbia). The New Mexico House of Representatives has just become the 23rd state legislative chamber in the U.S. to approve the National Popular Vote bill.

DID YOU KNOW?

CAP WIZ IS A NEW TOOL FOR THE LEAGUE

New this year is "cap wiz", an easy way to contact your legislators on League priorities. We have sent out two messages so far this year. The first was on mental health parity and the second was on pay day loans. Please make contact via this easy method. The state League gets a tally of the number of persons who respond in this manner and the more members who respond, the more effective we can be.. If you haven't done this yet, it is not too late.

LWVIA IS PROUD TO HAVE SEVEN LEAGUE MEMBERS IN THE 2009 IOWA LEGISLATURE

We are pleased to have two senators and four representatives in the new legislature that are League members. Three are from Ames. They are Senator Herman Quirnbach, Representative Lisa Heddens and Representative Beth Wessel-Kroeschell. Rep. McKinley Bailey is from Webster City and Rep. Mary Gaskill is from Ottumwa. Newly elected Rep. Renee Schulte is from Cedar Rapids and Senator Pam Jochum from Dubuque moved from the House to the Senate this year.

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

LWVIA LOBBYIST SOUGHT FOR 2010 SESSION

After serving for more than 20 years as the LWVIA lobbyist, Judie Hoffman will retire this summer. The Board is looking for a replacement.

The League of Women Voters of Iowa is seeking to hire a lobbyist, preferably one with not-for-profit experience. The individual must have excellent interpersonal, writing and verbal communications skills.

For more information and an application go to www.lwvia.org

The lobbyist for League of Women Voters of Iowa reports to the state board of the LWVIA. The contract for services runs from July 1 to June 30th. In addition to lobbying during the session the lobbyist for the LWVIA writes legislative newsletters to inform membership of progress on LWVIA positions at the state legislature. The LWVIA holds an annual Lobby Day with speakers arranged and background materials prepared by the LWVIA lobbyist. After the state board of the LWVIA determines annual priorities, the lobbyist arranges speakers for an issues briefing in the fall.

LWVIA PRIORITIES FOR 2009

PRIMARY PRIORITIES

PREVENT FUTURE FLOODING BY BETTER LAND MANAGEMENT

LWVIA supports the promotion, enforcement, and funding of conservation policies that control erosion, improve water quality and help prevent flooding.

PROTECT IOWANS FROM PREDATORY LENDING and CONSUMER FRAUD

LWVIA encourages the Iowa Legislature to pass legislation to cap interest rates on payday loans (can be over 400% on a 14 day loan) and to allow Iowa consumers to sue when they think they have been scammed or defrauded. Iowa is the only state in the country where an individual cannot sue under the state's Consumer Fraud Act.

IMPLEMENT IMMIGRATION REFORM

LWVIA urges the Iowa Legislature to support legislation that provides:

- Penalties for employers who hire unauthorized workers
- Due process for all persons including the right to a fair hearing, right to counsel, right of appeal, and right to humane treatment
- Increased funding for English language classes.

REFORM SENTENCING AND CORRECTION

LWVIA encourages the Iowa Legislative to:

- Consider recommendations from the Criminal Code Reorganization Committee report, especially those that address proportionality in sentences,
- Fund more community based correction programs and programs that facilitate prisoner reentry into the community,
- Fund more programs that provide treatment for the special needs offender.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES

RETURNABLE BEVERAGE CONTAINER LEGISLATION (BOTTLE BILL)

LWVIA supports expanding deposits on beverage containers to promote recycling, reuse and litter reduction. We also support expanding the handling fee paid to redemption centers from 1 cent to 2 cents.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

LWVIA will work for improved methods of financing political campaigns in Iowa in order to ensure the public's right to know, to combat undue influence, and to promote citizen participation in the political process.



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