

Conference Report

The 11th Annual New England League Leadership Development Conference (formerly called Quad States) was held in Wells ME, April 7-9. Thirteen LWVNH members joined attendees from ME, VT, MA and RI. The theme this year mirrored the national League theme: **Making Democracy Work.**

Our keynote speaker was Toni Zimmer, Secretary of LWVUS board and State Liaison to our New England Region. She described the new National Board's goal to make LWV the go-to organization on political issues. They will use Podcasts, YouTube, Facebook and Facebook Live to focus on us and our positions. A new website will improve sharing information and finances between local, state and nationally recruited members.

Integrity of Journalism. John Christie and Naomi Schalit, founders of the Maine Center for Public Interest Reporting, addressed the changing face of news. Journalistic fact-based values are being replaced by 24/7 Breaking News reports filled with reporter opinion and anonymous sources. 99% of anonymous sources advance their own purposes. Sadly, Opinions outsell Facts.

Civic Education. Tom Kerr-Vanderslice, RI Executive Director for Generation Citizen, laid out the need for teaching civic knowledge and civic skills across all grade levels. Civic projects can teach how to look at local and far-reaching effects, how to compromise and how to win gracefully, how to take action and then reflect. He encouraged us to ask local schools if and how they teach civics and to reward those teaching participation, not merely citizen tests.

Distrust of American Institutions. Dan Shea, Professor of Government at Colby College and Director of the Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, says confidence in Congress and trust in media are dropping. Americans feel government is not run for the benefit of all and politicians do not care. He attributes this, at least in part, to a decline in associational life – when we come together we feel better – but now we see declines in church attendance and union membership, increased polarization and narrowing of perspectives. Majorities dislike other parties, no longer disagree respectfully and do not compromise, increasing inequality.

Hillbilly Elegy, by J.D.Vance, was the subject of Sunday morning's book discussion led by Barbara McDade, past president LWVME, and director Bangor Public Library. Vance describes the struggles of a large segment of poor white working class young men. Several conference members described these same struggles in their families.

Wrap-up – State League activities and priorities were summarized:

NH – Election Law bills >40, providing other groups with Activist Training, Fake News Panels

VT – Civic Engagement Luncheon, two new members at large groups, candidates forums, new citizen registration

RI – Online voter registration, early voting, abortion legislation, Good Citizen and Merit Awards, civic awards

ME - 4 active Leagues, strategic planning, Making Democracy Work, rank choice voting (passed, but facing a court challenge)

MA – Election reform, League in larger urban governments, civics contest for HS students.

The League thanks the LWVNH Education Fund for their generosity in helping with expenses.

Mary Perry for LWVNH