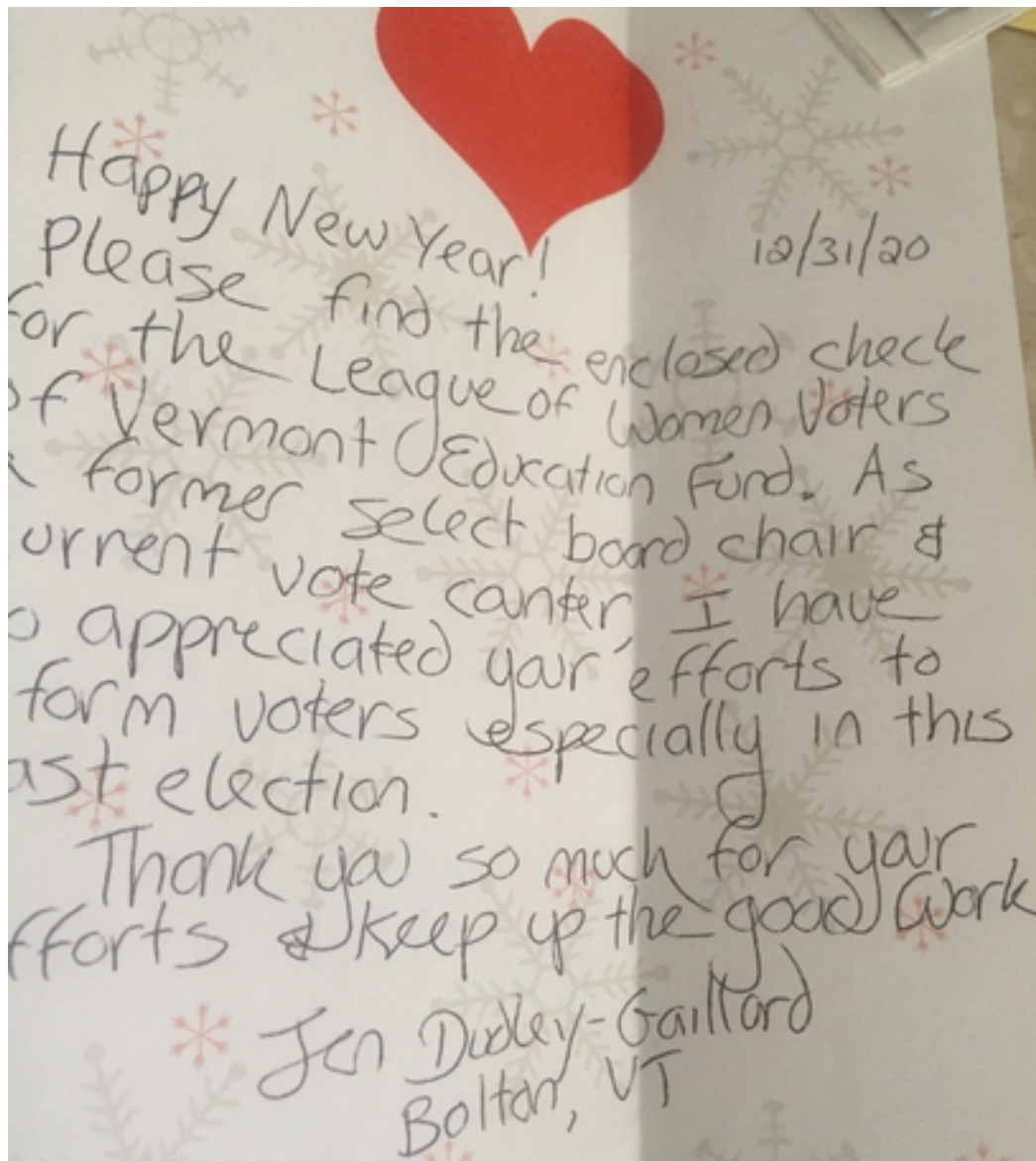


Green Mountain CITIZEN

Spring 2021



Message from the Board Spring 2021

The 2020 election marked a turning point in public awareness of the barriers voters encounter in state electoral systems. In light of the pandemic and media attention on both voter suppression and voting fraud, the board is working in collaboration with other Vermont organizations to maximize voter participation in Vermont. Seventy-five percent of registered voters in the state voted in the November election, partly because mail-in ballots improved voter accessibility. Making mail-in ballots a permanent feature of our system is a top priority. On February 23, the Senate Government Operations Committee approved S.15, a voting reform measure introduced this session. See article on p. 4.

We have also supported ranked choice voting initiatives. With the leadership of former Governor Howard Dean, a campaign entitled, "Better Ballot Burlington," proposed a referendum to reinstate ranked choice voting for city council members (see p.7), a method used from 2005-2009 but repealed the following year. On Town Meeting Day, 64% of Burlington voters approved the use of ranked choice instead.

LWVVT also supports H. 236, a bill to institute ranked choice voting for statewide primaries, except for President, and for general elections for the U.S. House and Senate. The bill is currently in the House Government Operations Committee.

At the local level, the board developed information about voting at Town Meeting in this unusual year. The legislature allowed towns to decide how to safely hold their town's meeting given the need for social distancing, and many chose different procedures. Working with the SOS office, the board used Front Porch Forum to remind voters how to register, how to request and return a ballot, and how to check the database for information on their town's voting process.

We are continuing to monitor LWVVT legislative priorities, including H.276, a bill to institute public funding for primary care as the first step toward universal healthcare, and Proposal 5, a constitutional amendment approved last session to guarantee personal reproductive liberty for all Vermonters. If approved again in 2021-22, Prop 5 will go before the voters in a referendum in November 2022.

Lyn Blackwell,
Board Member

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FIRST CALL TO CONVENTION 2021

The 57th Convention
of the League of Women Voters of Vermont
will be held by Zoom
on Monday, June 7
Details to follow

Save the Date

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The Green Mountain Citizen

is published four times per year by
The League of Women Voters of Vermont

Kate Rader, Editor

Membership in the League includes a subscription.

If you would like to join the League, go to our website,
<https://my.lwv.org/vermont>, e-mail, or write:

League of Women Voters of Vermont
P.O. Box 1391
Montpelier, VT 05601-1391
e-mail: League@lwvofvt.org

For the People Act Roundtable

U.S. Representative Peter Welch hosted a Roundtable on the For the People Act, HR 1, on March 1st. He wanted to hear about what has been happening here in Vermont to promote voter registration and participation. He invited Sec. of State Jim Condos; VT Rep. Sarah Copeland-Hanzas, Chair of the House Government Operations Committee; Georgette Wolf-Ludwig, Fairlee Town Clerk and President of the VT Clerks and Treasurers Assoc.; Aden Haji, VT New American Advisory Council; Sonja Schuyler, Vermont League of Women Voters; and Paul Burns, VPIRG, to join the Roundtable.

After Welch gave an overview of HR 1, Condos talked about the security and success of the 2020 General Election nationally, contrary to the misinformation that was spread after the election. Vermont had record turnout despite the limitations presented by the COVID pandemic. His office referred three potential instances of voter fraud to the Attorney General and one actionable instance was found. Given that more than 300,000 ballots were cast, this is a minute instance of fraud.

Georgette Wolf-Ludwig said that she thought the mail-in voting was very successful and, with the help from the Secretary of State's office, went very smoothly for the Clerks. She said that Fairlee was using mailed ballots for Town Meeting instead of a floor meeting, and she had already received more ballots than would have been typical for an in-person meeting. She supports continuing the practice.

Rep. Copeland-Hanzas expressed her strong commitment to making sure every eligible voter can vote. She thanked Secretary Condos for all his work to make the 2020 election successful.

Aden Haji, VT New American Advisory Council, said that expanded translation services are sorely needed for new American citizens. He also said that many new Americans need help to understand the voting process and how to participate in a democracy. Condos noted the pilot projects in Burlington and Winooski to provide voter education in many languages for the 2020 election. He said that there is a federal standard for providing translated ballots based on the size

of the population that would use the translations. Vermont does not meet this standard for any language, but he is committed to providing more translation anyway.

Paul Burns described the current legislative proposal to make mailed ballots standard for the General Election and also the right to cure provision. The bill to do this has been voted out of the Senate Government Operations Committee. VPIRG commissioned a poll that found that the majority of Vermonters support mailed ballots and also the right to fix small errors in submitting the mailed ballots. This is called the "right to cure."

Rep. Welch thanked the League for its continuing efforts to promote voting and participation in government and asked about recent activities. Schuyler reported on our translation of *Voting in Vermont*, the prison voter registration video, and work with young people to get voter information out in social media that they use.

Rep. Welch closed the Roundtable by saying that he wants to expand what we are doing in Vermont to the country as a whole. He thanked the group for providing him with information on successes to share with his colleagues. He and his staff will be working on HR 1 with Rep. Sarbanes of Maryland, the sponsor of the bill.

By way of background, HR 1, called the For the People Act, is an omnibus elections bill that would restore the Voting Rights Act; modernize the voter registration system including on-line registration and same day voter registration; update public financing of campaigns through small donor matching funds for candidates who qualify for public financing; curb partisan gerrymandering through independent redistricting commissions; and make campaign contributions more transparent. A similar bill passed the US House in the last congress, but was not taken up in the Senate due to opposition by then Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell. Welch is hopeful that a bill can pass in this congress. The bill proposes on-line voter registration, same-day voter registration, and automatic voter registration, all practices in place in Vermont.

You can see the video of the Roundtable at https://youtu.be/0z_7JxgS2Wk.

The League in the Virtual State House

Editor's Note: Lila Richardson has been our faithful Observer at the Senate Government Operations Committee as they proposed important changes to our election law. Here is her report.

On February 23, the Senate Government Operations Committee voted out a new bill that includes significant permanent changes to Vermont's election statutes. This election reform bill is S. 15, "An act relating to correcting defective ballots." The Senate Government Operations version of the bill can be found on the Senate Notice Calendar for Tuesday March 9th at page 162

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/CALENDAR/sc210309.pdf>

In 2019, the legislature authorized temporary changes to election procedures designed to make it safer to vote during the pandemic. At the beginning of the current session, the legislature passed a bill designed to give greater flexibility for conducting municipal and school elections, Act 1, An act relating to authorizing alternative procedures for 2021 annual municipal meetings in response to COVID-19. This year the legislature is considering legislation to make many of the changes permanent so they would be in effect for the 2022 municipal and general elections. The legislature and Secretary of State agree that any changes must be passed this year so that everyone will have time to implement changes for 2022.

The League is working with a coalition of organizations called Vermont Voter Choice to advocate for a system with universally mailed ballots. Information about this group is at

<https://www.vermontvoterchoice.org/>

In February, the League presented written testimony to the Senate Government Operations Committee in a statement endorsed by a number of organizations and participated in meetings where the committee reviewed possible election changes.

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/Senate%20Government%20Operations/Elections/W~Paul%20Burns~Coalition%20Recommendations>

[%20on%20Vote%20By%20Mail_1.21.21%20~1-28-2021.pdf](#)

The current version of S.15 includes 17 sections changing different provisions of the election statutes in Title 17. The major changes are those giving greater flexibility for conducting municipal elections and providing for the mailing of general election ballots to all registered voters by the Secretary of State.

An important new feature of the vote by mail system recommended by the League and other advocacy groups is a notice and cure process for ballots that are defective. S.15 requires town clerks to open ballots that have been returned, notify the voter if a ballot is defective (usually because the voter failed to put the ballot in the certificate envelope provided or failed to sign the certificate envelope) and give the voter an opportunity to "cure" the problem by submitting a new ballot.

Other sections of S.15 permit towns to install secure ballot drop boxes that can be used to return early ballots and allow town clerks to process returned early ballots up to 30 days before election day. There is also a section requiring voters who appear at the polling place without a ballot to sign an affidavit that they have not previously cast a ballot.

The bill also includes a section requiring the Secretary of State to provide recommendations about language access after consulting with municipalities and interested parties on "best practices for increasing access to voting for non-English speaking Vermonters and Vermonters with limited English proficiency."

Because the bill will require funding for a new position at the Secretary of State's election division and for the cost of mailing ballots to all voters in general elections, it will be reviewed next by the Senate Appropriations Committee. <https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/ACTS/ACT001/ACT001%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

LWVVT Calls for End of OneCare

Five nonprofit organizations issued a joint statement in December, demanding that the Scott administration end the state's affiliation with OneCare Vermont, the accountable care organization (ACO) that now handles much of the money used to pay for Vermonters' health care. The State has an agreement with the federal government that has put OneCare - a for-profit company - in control of Vermont's health care system. The five groups asked that the state either immediately cancel that agreement, or at the very least, let the agreement expire in 2022 without renewal.

The five organizations are Justice for All, VT; Physicians for a National Health Program, Vermont Chapter; Vermont Healthcare for All; The Vermont Workers' Center and the League of Women Voters of VT.

The joint statement is as follows:

"We ask the State to cancel or let expire its All Payer Agreement with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which allows Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial insurance funds to pass through OneCare Vermont before being paid out to providers. We urge that the State concentrate instead on strategies to address the growing problem of health care access."

Points for not renewing OneCare:

The for-profit OneCare ACO, by design, does nothing to improve access to care

The ACO was supposed to reduce costs. Instead, spending continues to rise even faster than established targets

There is little evidence of improvement in quality of care

The cost of ACO dues and administrative overhead often take away from essential health care services

OneCare's ACO cost overruns total \$90 million since 2014, with all three payers (Medicare, Medicaid, Blue Cross/Blue Shield)

The ACO's administrative costs have exceeded \$40 million over the last 3 years (2018-2020), money that could be used to reinstate essential health care services that have recently been eliminated

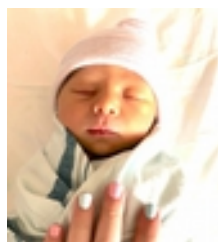
The CEO of OneCare earns over \$400,000 per year. The 2019 annual salaries of the top five OneCare administrators add up to nearly \$1.5 million

OneCare promised it would strengthen primary care; however, the ACO has reduced upfront payments to primary care physicians for 2021

To date, the Green Mountain Care Board has no reliable method for determining if the ACO effort is cost effective

The state's contract with OneCare expires in 2022, with negotiations between the state's Green Mountain Care Board, OneCare, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services beginning soon.

In February, we joined with allies again to ask Senator Lyons and Representative Lippert, chairs of the health committees in their respective chambers, to take public testimony, including from the signers of the letter. If you wish to give testimony, please coordinate with members of the LWV of VT Health Care Committee (p.6) or VT Healthcare for All, so we can try to make sure we cover more points in the limited amount of time we are likely to each have. We can help you educate yourself on this topic, if you, like others, find it maddeningly convoluted.



We are pleased to introduce future member Charlotte Rose Anderson, daughter of Erika.

Erika has taken over the Twitter postings and worked with the committee and

Andrea Olson on our Get Out the Vote efforts. She works for Cabot Cheese and does social media marketing for them. She came up with the contest on National Voter Registration Day. Welcome, Charlotte Rose!

LWV/KHL Wrap Fourth Season

The LWVCEN and Kellogg-Hubbard Library wrapped up its 2020/21 series on moving from policing to public safety on March 10. In this program we addressed how we might move away from police response based on an expectation of violence to emergency response based on a more humane approach.

The panelists were:

Dr. Etan Nasreddin-Longo, co-director of Fair & Impartial Policing and Community Affairs for the Vermont State Police and head of Vermont's Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Advisory Panel.

Jay Diaz, senior staff attorney with ACLU of Vermont, which is promoting its Ten-Part Plan for Police Reform to the Vermont legislature.

Robyn Freedner-Maguire, parent volunteer with Mental Health First for BTV (Burlington, VT), a grassroots organization seeking changes in how we serve children and young adults with mental health issues and disabilities.

Tom McKone, former executive director of the Kellogg-Hubbard Library, was moderator.

Video recordings of all four programs are available on the KHL website, <https://www.kellogghubbard.org/adult-programs> under past programs.

“How the U.S. Police Got Militarized”
(November 2020)
“Policing and Mental Health” (January 2021)
“Racial Disparities in Policing & Juvenile Justice”
(February 2021)
“Changing Policing to Improve Public Safety”
(March 2021)

Support the Ed Fund!

Amazon shoppers can sign up at

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/03-0355685>

to have Amazon donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to the Ed Fund.

Seeking Health Care Reform Volunteers

If the pandemic has gotten you fired up about the need for a Universal Single Payer Health Care system, ensuring access to affordable health care for all of us, the League of Women Voters of Vermont Health Care Committee can help you figure out how you can make a difference.

Committee members are part of a national League network helping advocates across the country figure out the best way to promote accessible, affordable, equitable health care in each of their states. Some people get inspired at monthly Zoom meetings - usually the 4th Sunday at 8:00 pm ET - hearing about what others are doing, while others may prefer to skim through the minutes, chat with other Vermont members, and individualize their plan for activism. If you send your name and email contact to our own Jean Hopkins at seaheidi@earthlink.net, she can add you to the email list.

There is another national group forming to address the specific needs of rural areas. All of VT is considered rural except for Chittenden County. Members are being surveyed about specific issues dealing with rural needs including lack of broad-band internet service to deliver telemedicine, scarcity of healthcare providers, hospital closures and lack of other direct services including transportation. The survey is being conducted by a group of LWV members in NY state which we have been asked to join if we wish.

Locally, the League is supporting Vermont House Bill H.276 (<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/Docs/BILLS/H-0276/H-0276%20As%20Introduced.pdf>) which starts with Universal Primary Care in year one and over 10 years phases in Act 48, passed in 2011.

The loss of primary care practitioners (partially due to very low reimbursement, closure of clinics and hospitals and Vermont's hugely bureaucratic ACO, OneCare), points to healthcare reform as being right up there with the Climate Crisis as a primary need right here in Vermont. We are all beginning to realize how important it is to detach healthcare from private or corporate insurance policies whose chief aim is to increase profits.

LWV at Ranked Choice Voting Press Conference

Town Meeting Day in Burlington saw a victory for proponents of ranked-choice voting (RCV) as voters passed the measure by a landslide, 64 to 36 percent, reinstating ranked-choice voting for City Council candidates in 2022, upon approval of the charter change by the state Legislature. Burlington had RCV for mayoral candidates from 2005 to 2009, however voters repealed it in 2010.

Under ranked-choice voting, voters rank candidates in order of personal preference. Instead of voting for a single candidate, their ballot lists their first, second, third choice, and so on. When the votes are tabulated, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate as 'number 1' will have their votes count for their next choice. This process continues until a majority winner emerges, that is, a candidate with more than half of all the votes.

At a virtual news conference held January 22 in support of ranked-choice voting, Dr. Betty Keller (St. Johnsbury) represented the League. Organized by Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG) to announce the launch of the Better Ballot Burlington Campaign, speakers included Honorary Co-Chairs, former Governor Howard Dean and Burlington City Councilor Zoraya

Hightower, as well as Executive Directors James Haslam of Rights & Democracy and Paul Burns of VPIRG.

Dr. Keller stated that ranked choice voting gave voters more choices, resulted in better turnout, and the candidate who wins most closely reflects who the people actually want. Governor Dean believed RCV was a fair and thoughtful way of bringing people together; voters are winners, and the tone of campaigns change dramatically for the better. Councilor Hightower noted it allows us to elect leaders more reflective of our constituency. Mr. Haslam thought RCV reduces polarization as it creates a dynamic where candidates have to talk to their opponents' supporters in a different way. And Mr. Burns was of the opinion that RCV is what democratic reform looks like today as it moves us towards having majority winners. You can listen to their comments at

www.facebook.com/VPIRG/videos/2126784022.

The League of Women Voters has supported ranked-choice voting since 1999 because it is a fair and representative elections system giving voters a larger voice throughout election campaigns, achieving the best voter participation, and an outcome most reflective of the voters' wishes.

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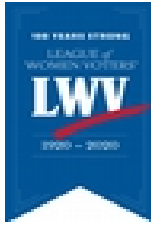
We Remember Jean Norton



Jean Norton

Long-time League member, Jean Norton, 87, passed away December 25th, 2020. Jean lived in Essex, Vermont, and was a member of the Champlain Valley League of Women Voters. Jean was a very active member, and she served on local and state Boards, often as Secretary. When the League of Women Voters Education Fund was started, she also served on its Board of Directors. Jean was an ardent worker for voter education and participation. Her professional experience at UVM Medical Center as a Manager in the Insurance Claims Department was particularly helpful when we studied health care in Vermont.

Her calm presence, thoughtfulness, and engaging personality made working with her a pleasure. In addition to the League, Jean was an active volunteer with Meals on Wheels, and Girl Scouts. She also was active in local government. Her family requested memorial contributions to the League of Women Voters. A memorial service will be held later this year when people can gather safely.



GREEN MOUNTAIN CITIZEN

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