League of Women Voters of the Rogue Valley
Summer Supplement

The Rogue Valley League of Women Voters does not provide a mailed copy of the newsletter during the summer. However, League members continue to attend local government meetings and monitor issues that affect our communities through June, July, and August. This one-time electronic newsletter will continue to keep members apprised of summer developments and the actions of committees and board members.

League members that would like to contribute to the newsletter are always welcome to submit materials (subject to editorial discretion).

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The purpose of the League’s summer retreat is to plan the programs and projects for the coming year. League leaders at state convention in May had recommended that local chapters model civil discourse in their programs, but did not have a state study ongoing for discussions. Thus we were free to follow member interests. The following list of program choices is still subject to revision, but gives a sense of the group priorities:

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Member Barbara Klein has been reviewing the nonpartisan policy of the Rogue Valley League with intentions to keep it alignment with rules at the state and national level. We will maintain the policy that LWVRV board members not be involved directly in candidate campaigns.

The League has suggested a designated Development Committee that can take advantage of the proposed new tax status as a 501(c)3 non-profit in order to solicit donations and maintain scholarships or other special project spending.

They also recommend a Public Relations committee that could include membership leaders and could coordinate activities utilizing the concepts of civil discourse while involving intergenerational members of the public.

Please let a board member know if you have comments about these recommendations, and thanks to Lorraine Werblow for offering her hospitality.

In further discussions, we introduced the possibility of having the 2019 LWVOR state convention in the Rogue Valley. The state League has not met in southern Oregon since before 2000.

Members continue to debate the advisability of having the monthly newsletter be only an electronic document in order to avoid the expense and time involved in mailing and printing. All members are encouraged to let the newsletter editor know if a mailed copy is unnecessary for them.
Rogue Valley League at OLLI July 26 Wednesday

[OLLI: Oscher Lifelong Learning Institute]. The League will have a membership table at the annual OLLI Open House Wednesday July 26, 1-4 pm on the SOU campus in Ashland. Volunteers should call to register.

The event will be in the Stevenson Union at 1118 Siskiyou Blvd, and parking is available in Lot 36 off S. Mountain. We are looking for more volunteers to help with the event beginning at 12:30. Lorraine Werblow is coordinating the event for the League at 541-245-3641. Website for the event: http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07eeaeto2qff1253fc&llr=n9frqxcab

Transitioning to a 501(c)3

The Rogue Valley League has been classified as a 501(c)4 non-profit regarding its tax status since its inception, as has the state LWVOR. As such, we were able to accept donations, but could not offer a tax credit for those donations, except for those made to the state Education Fund, which required that the state maintain a separate set of books. At the 2017 Annual Meeting the membership approved by-law changes that would allow us to apply for 501(c)3 status, which may then allow our contributors to claim their donations as a tax credit.

This transition may take all year, but may allow members to deduct contributions. It significantly eases the duties of our fundraising team. Rogue Valley LWV Treasurer Rick Bennett is beginning the process of the application with advice from Norman Turrill from LWVOR.

The Annual Meeting was held at Rogue Regency Hotel with speaker Cathy Noah, editor of the Mail Tribune. LWVOR president Norman Turrill also gave a summary of the highlights of the State Convention.
Observer Corps Reports

The Rogue Valley LWV is deeply committed to ensuring transparency, civility, fairness, and clarity to governmental and civic institutions. Members who attend council, commissioner, or board meetings are encouraged to file reports on these public meetings. With the decrease in funding for media coverage, League members sometimes find that they are the only member of the public attending pubic meetings. Please consider joining the Observer Corps covering your area of interest.

Medford City Council Meeting, June 15, 2017

Observed by Rick Bennett

All Council members present.

A lengthy agenda, including several items related to current and upcoming budgets. Agenda item 60.1, a resolution adopting the tenth supplemental budget for the 2015-17 biennium, makes final adjustments to current budget before June 30th year end. (Approved 7-0-1) Item 70.1 adopted of the budget for the City of Medford for the biennium beginning July 1st, 2017. Proposed expenditures for all City departments 2017-19 total $323,772,490. The City’s Budget Committee, a committee that includes all council members and several city residents, developed the proposed budget over several months. The proposed budget was approved 7-0-1.

Other agenda items included: the purchase of new police patrol vehicles; contract for software enhancements; a contract for emergency communications; an agreement related to seismic recording equipment; a contract for construction of traffic signals; a contract with Rogue Valley Community Television; and an intergovernmental agreement with Medford Water Commission. All items approved 8-0.

The one agenda item that received considerable discussion was Item 90.1 – Destination Marketing Organization. This item involves Travel Medford, a public-private partnership with Chamber of Commerce, and has been the subject of much debate for the past year or more. Travel Medford receives a portion of the lodging tax for the purpose of promoting Medford (and the Rogue Valley) as a travel destination. The current partnership agreement has been in place for over 40 years, periodically reviewed and renewed. Issues discussed included: a preference for open contract process versus extension of current contract; objective decision-making versus conflicts of interest; organizational structures used by other communities; and the need for performance measures. The initial motion supported an open bidding process for a destination marketing organization – that failed 3-5. The second motion supported renewal of the Travel Medford contract; however, the motion included formation of a council subcommittee that meet with interested parties to develop recommendations for adjustments to the current contract – approved 5-3.

I did not attend the Council’s evening session. However, based on news reports, the Council approved changes to the municipal codes related to mobile food truck vendors. For additional information, go to: http://www.ci.medford.or.us/Agendas.asp?7400.

Update of Local Governance Positions for Jackson & Josephine County

The Rogue Valley League chose to initiate an update of its position on Local Government. The current position includes only Jackson County, and recommends that 1) the Board of Commissioners be elected as non-partisans with or without designated districts, 2) the number of Commissioners should be increased to five, with consideration of other options to full-time paid commissioners, and 3) the role and qualifications for County Administrator should be established by ordinance. There are further recommendations about Department Heads. If this subject is of interest to you, please call Kathleen Donham 541-772-5044 or the action chair Barbara Klein. Meetings TBA for this local study update.
Health Care Action News
Bill Walsh, Health Care Action Coordinator

Health news abounds at the national and local levels. Efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and replace it with the American Health Care Act (AHCA) or Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA) are playing out in the U.S. Senate. If the Senate passes something, the next step would be a House-Senate Reconciliation Committee. The likely results would be drastic for states, people with pre-existing conditions or serious health needs, women, veterans, and low-income people. Then again, perhaps, the deals may fall apart of their own “meanness” problems. Reports of July Town Halls by Republican Senators reveal the depth of disapproval by constituents. Thankfully, the Oregon Legislature came to bipartisan agreement to cover a Medicaid shortfall through a tax on providers and insurers. (However, tax opponents vow to gather enough signatures to put this funding on the ballot in January 2018.) For the time being, Oregonians can expect to care for their families and themselves at a status quo level, but the future remains very uncertain.

The LWV Health Action group has been active. We sent a joint Health Care opinion piece, signed by Jackie Clary for LWVRV, Kim Smith of LWV Deschutes County, and Leslie Lowe of LWV Klamath County to local newspapers. If you missed it, it can be found at http://lwvroguevalley.org/wp/. Basically it relates League history and advocacy since the 1990s to achieve universal national health insurance—funded by general taxes, administered by the government as a “single payer” system without health insurance industry involvement, and empowered to institute strong cost controls. Our earlier three-LL request to Rep. Walden for a health care town hall have not been acknowledged.

We also delivered to the Medford offices of Senators Merkley and Wyden and Rep. Walden the recent LWVUS memo to the U.S. Senate opposing the repeal of the ACA and outlining essential elements for acceptable health care legislation. (See http://lwv.org/content/league-sends-memo-us-senate-regarding-healthcare.)

In July we sent out to members a notice of an opportunity to comment on ACA issues at the CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid) website. These deadline-driven opportunities to comment on proposed regulations are an important part of public policy development for citizens and organizations to make their best case for their points of view. We will try to be selective in what we send out to you, but we encourage your participation at this very grassroots level.

At the June Board retreat, the Health Action group was given the October 12 general meeting to offer a health care educational event. We will also invite the public. There are excellent videos and knowledgeable panelists available. We will look at scheduling so as to allow working people to attend.

The national League position and current traumatic uncertainty surrounding health care argue for efforts to implement a Single Payer system for Oregon or even among adjoining states. I’d like to see us cooperate with allied groups to promote Single Payer to the public and advocate for its passage with the Legislature.
Natural Resources Action News
Shirley Weathers, Natural Resources/Climate Action Coordinator

2017 Oregon General Session Ends

This has been a tough year. The daunting tasks of addressing a significant budget shortfall and passing a transportation bill limited energy to consider scores of other important issues. Here are a few highlights in the natural resources arena.

Clean Energy Jobs Bill (Cap & Trade): The LWVOR has been working with other groups over the past year to fashion a bill that would take significant action on greenhouse gas emissions while generating an estimated $700 million in revenue to boost local economies and create jobs. The Rogue Valley League participated in local action to the same end. The result this session was HB 2135, the Clean Energy Jobs Bill. Although support for this kind of bill has been building and a lot of hard work kept it alive until these final days, it became clear the bill would not pass, in part due to resistance by those who resist focus on the concept of climate change. Senator Michael Dembrow, Representative Ken Helm and 31 other legislators introduced SB 1070, also called the Clean Energy Jobs Bill, and committed to work through the interim towards passage in the 2018 Session. Senator Dembrow ended the press release
about the move with, “The administration in Washington, D.C. has made no secret of a purposeful shift in policy to prop up fossil fuels and abdicate American’s leadership in a 21st-Century economy. That’s the wrong approach. In Oregon, we see the huge opportunity before us, both economically and in a leadership role. We’re going to take it.” The LWVRV Natural Resources Action Group will continue to make work on this bill a priority in the coming year.

Keeping Elliot Forest in State Hands: After an up and down struggle, on July 3 the Capital Construction Subcommittee of the Joint Ways and Means Committee unanimously advanced $100 million in state bonding revenue, moving one step closer to protecting the forest from an earlier proposal to privatize it for revenue purposes. The solution, passed unanimously by the State Land Board in May, is expected to be fully accomplished by the end of the Session. The LWVOR has been working hard to protect the forest, along with many other groups and individuals.

HB 2020, Focus on Climate Change: This bill would make changes within the Oregon Department of Energy to get serious about climate change. Among changes are renaming the department to the Department of Energy and Climate and establishing an Oregon Energy and Climate Board within the Department with oversight and advisory capacity. It faces opposition by those who resist attention on climate change and at this writing is in the Joint Committee on Ways and Means with an unknown fate.

Climate Components of the Transportation Bill: HB 2017A is on its way to the Governor. This complex bill uses a mix of fees and taxes to fund several priorities related to transportation. The LWVOR pushed hard for increases in public transit, bicycle and pedestrian investments, and other components that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Thankfully, the Clean Fuels Program was not eliminated in the process.

Our Children’s Trust Federal Lawsuit

Procedurally, the last few months were to have been devoted to Discovery in preparation for trial, but instead, the Defendants have gone through a series of legal maneuvers to try to reduce required evidence and delay the court date or avoid going to trial altogether. To get a sense of the legal mechanisms the Trump Administration has employed to accomplish those goals, you can go to www.ourchildrenstrust.org/press-releases/. The Department of Justice is also employing “executive privilege” to avoid answers to questions of policy. In the meantime, The National Association of Manufacturers, American Petroleum Institute, and American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, representatives of almost the entire fossil fuel industry that filed as Intervenors when the case was first filed, have now requested to withdraw.

But while attorneys for the kids continue to face an uphill battle, the team is upbeat and progress is occurring in this “trial of the century.” On June 28, U.S. Magistrate Judge Thomas Coffin set the trial date for February 5, 2018 before U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken. I’m marking my calendar and planning a trip to Eugene.
July 10 was the deadline to participate in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s (FERC) “scoping” process for the Jordan Cove Pacific Connector Pipeline Project. The new one—the third iteration of this disruptive proposal to build a 235-mile 36-inch natural gas pipeline across southern Oregon. This begins the 12th year of this project designed by a private, for-profit Canadian corporation to facilitate the production and sale of gas fracked in Canada or the Rocky Mountain states to Pacific Rim countries. The Trump Administration has specifically named this project—denied last year by FERC because it lacked sufficient public benefit in the face of extensive use of eminent domain and other aspects of public detriment—as a priority in its infrastructure and fossil fuel development plan. The LWVRV has opposed the pipeline project in the past and we’re in it again as Round Three begins.

The scoping process is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) whenever FERC sets out to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a proposed project. The purpose of scoping is to provide the agency with a comprehensive sense of the significant issues about the project. Of stated importance under NEPA are the issues deemed essential for evaluation by the public and especially those who have serious concerns about the project. Despite that requirement, FERC staff a) bypassed Jackson County (one of four counties the pipeline will pass through) in scheduling scoping hearings, b) provided less than 30 days for the entire comment period, and c) scheduled scoping before all of the required resource reports about the project were available for review. They structured hearings so that testifiers faced two FERC staffers in a separate room and spoke into a tape recorder, rather than in a typical public hearing format.

The Rogue Valley LWV responded in two ways. First, we wrote to Governor Brown, urging her to write to FERC and object to the problematic process (posted at the LWVRV website). We cc’d Oregon’s Congressional Delegation and the Jackson County Commission. We are pleased to say that all of the above indeed took that action. Second, we developed a scoping statement (also posted) and traveled to the scoping hearing in Klamath Falls to read it into the record. (Thanks to Olena Black who arrived early and saved us early slots, we didn’t have to wait for hours and drive back in the dark!) Hurray for all Rogue Valley League members who submitted individual scoping comments by the deadline. More to come. The November General Session will provide more information on this issue.
Dear Vice Chair Kobach,

When I was elected last November, I committed to all Oregonians that my office would be transparent, and I would work to ensure that all eligible citizens were registered to vote. Through our vote by mail system and automatic voter registration, we have implemented tools and processes to establish and maintain very clean voter rolls.

Elections are, and should remain, governed and administered by the states. We encourage our sister states to look to the Oregon model of vote by mail with automatic voter registration. It works well for us and provides greater access for Oregonians, is easy and convenient for our voters, enables us to have cleaner voter rolls, is more secure, and is less costly to administer than traditional polling place elections. Our automatic voter registration system has enabled us, for the first time, to validate citizenship data of those that are registered through this method.

In April of this year, I launched a major expansion of voter access through a new Administrative Rule that protects the rights of an estimated 60,000 Oregonians. These individuals would have been removed from the active roles and not received ballots. This included those serving our country in the military, students attending schools out-of-state, and voters frustrated with the political system who may not have voted in a while. I highly recommend other states follow Oregon's example.

I do not believe the federal government should be involved in dictating how states conduct their elections. To that end, on January 27, I sent the President a letter requesting that he rescind former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson's designation of state election systems as "critical infrastructure."

The Commission can support state and local election administrators by making sure we receive prompt notice of known threats and can facilitate a greater partnership of information sharing among all levels of government. The commission can also be an advocate for increased funding of election security so that we can stay ahead of the bad actors and continue to improve the security of our systems. Election security should be a priority rather than waiting for an intrusion to have us react. What hinders elections officials' ability to ensure election integrity, is a lack of state enforcement funding and the federal designation of state election systems as "critical infrastructure."

We have very little evidence of voter fraud or registration fraud in Oregon. Most of the cases we have involve a spouse signing the other's ballot or a parent obtaining permission from a college-aged child and then signing the student's ballot. We have procedures in place that prevent these ballots from being counted. There have been 15 individuals indicted or convicted of voter fraud since 2000.

We believe the best way to prevent voter intimidation or disenfranchisement is to follow the Oregon model of trying to get every eligible voter on the registration rolls through automatic registration and outreach efforts, and then, sending every registered voter a ballot.

Other issues the Commission may want to consider include how to educate the public so that they can have confidence in our elections whether their preferred candidates win or lose. There have been significant improvements in the administration of elections in the last 15 years, and our systems and processes are better than they have ever been.

Oregon policy prohibits disclosure of some of the information that you requested, such as social security numbers and drivers' license numbers. Please see ORS 247.945(4) and ORS 247.955. It is my duty to follow these statutes. Oregon law provides that any person may receive a statewide list of electors upon payment of $500. It is a violation of Oregon law for voter registration data to be used for commercial purposes.

Sincerely   Dennis Richardson