

# The Rhode Island Voter

The newsletter of the  
League of Women Voters of Rhode Island  
172 Taunton Ave., Suite 8,  
East Providence, RI 02914



October 2011

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## Drawing Lines in Rhode Island

### Redistricting—Who Cares? Why Care?

Why is redistricting important to you? Why should you care? Because where district lines are drawn can have a big impact on who wins an election as well as who controls school boards, city councils, state legislatures, Congress, and other governing bodies. Many bodies that make decisions affecting all of us are appointed by our elected officials even if we don't elect their members directly.

Redistricting takes place after every census. If there are no population shifts, then there may be few changes. There is huge variation among the states as to which individuals will redraw the boundaries of voting districts, and what criteria must be met by redistricting. In most states, as in Rhode Island, redistricting is controlled by the state legislature. Some states, however, have independent commissions.

Though the main goal of redistricting is one person, one vote and fairness in representation for all, there are many factors to consider including removing political bias keeping "communities of interest" together, and fostering competition, among others. In Rhode Island, the redistricting commission is asked to keep population substantially equal between districts, to follow the US and RI Constitutions and Federal laws, and—"to the extent practicable"—to draw compact districts with contiguous territory, that reflect "natural, historical, geographical and municipal and other political lines, as well as the right of all Rhode Islanders to fair representation and equal access to the political process." The committee is also asked to try to avoid dividing state representative districts in forming state senate districts and those state districts

in forming US congressional districts in any manner which would create voting districts with fewer than 100 potential voters (RI Public Laws Chapter 106, 2011—H6906). Such a small district occurs when the lines of these various districts overlap so that in a single neighborhood, citizens who live within a few blocks from one another might, for example, share a state Assembly person, but have different state Senators and different U.S. Congressional representatives.

Randal Edgar in an article in the *Providence Journal* on July 21, 2011, described the results for Rhode Island of Columbia Law School Professor Nathaniel Persily's "Redistricting and Gerrymandering" class. His students were asked to draw hypothetical new Congressional Districts for all the states, emphasizing different criteria. The students came up with two maps for Rhode Island, illustrating widely different results depending on the criteria emphasized.

by Susan Escherich

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### Are You Addicted... ...to Oil?

America is addicted to oil, and it's an addiction that is

a threat to our economic, environmental, and homeland security. It is time to find a cure. The League of Women Voters of Rhode Island and the Barrington Public Library will explore the issue at "Addicted to Oil," a workshop on American energy policy on Wednesday, November 16, 7 p.m., in the Barrington Public Library Auditorium, 281 County Road (Rte. 114), Barrington, R.I.

The workshop will explore the treatment options to cure our addiction. Geoffrey Berg, M.D., will conduct the workshop. In a brief PowerPoint presentation he will lay out the problem and a few concrete parameters that would



continued on page 3

### League's Fall Theater Party Set for November!

Join us at 2nd Story Theater at the  
Bristol State House on  
Sunday, November 20 at 3 p.m. for

Racine's *The Suitors*

Turn to page 11 for all the details.

## A Busy Fall For Rhode Island Leaguers

by *Derry Riding LWVRI President's Report*

It's fall, and as usual, there are numerous and exciting opportunities for members to get involved with your League -- from the local to the state and to the national level. Something from each is in this newsletter. As you read the newsletter, we hope that there are activities and committees that appeal to your interests. The Advocacy Committee is following numerous issues and needs your participation. Can you volunteer to attend a public meeting on redistricting? Or search for information at home on your computer? Or perhaps you would like to help implement our new position on Financing Education in Rhode Island after two years of detailed, hard work by the Education Committee.

Redistricting, which occurs every ten years following the U.S. census, is a major issue this fall. The work of the commission needs to be completed and presented to the legislature by January 2012. The regional meetings to receive information and then follow-up meetings to review the proposed districts will occur around the state. These hearings are an excellent opportunity to see how "democracy works!" The articles included in the newsletter offer an excellent background on the topic. If your community has districts or wards for city/town council members, then there should be a local redistricting as well.

The old saying that many hands makes light work is one that League members think about in this era of struggling to maintain memberships and recruit new members. The LWVUS has come up with a major effort to strengthen our membership recruitment and also assist in leadership development. In mid October, a group of Rhode Island League members traveled to Maine for "Quad State," a gathering of Leagues from the small New England states: Rhode Island, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Delegates experienced two days of training by the LWVUS staff, LWVUS board member Judy Davis, and the Shur Fellows who serve as coaches for the Leagues. Detailed notebooks were given to all participants and more work will continue with both the Shur Fellows and our state coaches. We look forward

to participating in this program. It will help strengthen both the League at the local and state levels.

At the National League level, there are two studies "The Role of the Federal Government in Public Education: Equity and Funding" and "Privatization of Government Services" The education study is set for consensus this fall and the privatization study is just beginning. The LWV Newport League is hosting a consensus meeting open to all League members on November 29. (See page 9 for details.)

Princeton University sociologist Paul Starr says that "privatization is a fuzzy concept that evokes sharp political reactions." As we struggle with dwindling budgets, the movement to privatize will come to the fore and we need to be informed about the community impacts of these transfers to the private sector. This is an excellent opportunity to learn about this important policy movement. The LWVUS has posted its first paper relating to the privatization study on its website ([www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)) Leagues are encouraged to assess the impact of privatization on local communities by scheduling meetings to educate our members and the community about the issues. Consensus is scheduled for May 2012. If you are interested in the issue of privatization of government services, please consider reviewing the materials; we would like to have one or more local Leagues or a group from around the state explore this concept.

The summary of the last Rhode Island legislative session, as far as League positions, is more a story of bills that did not pass with one notable exception—the Voter ID bill which did pass, in spite of much opposition by the League and others. Efforts to update access to open records were not successful and were left undone when the legislature went home. There's always this year and the League will be there!! Efforts by the League, in coalition with Common Cause and others, helped in moving the legislature toward more open committee meetings and the publication of members' votes on-line. Although a good start, there's more to be done. Our lobbyist, Linda Jean Briggs, did an excellent job in her first year at the State House.

I'm honored and overwhelmed to be the President of the Rhode Island League of Women Voters. The League needs and appreciates your support and values your membership; it is vital to the continuation of the League. The annual appeal letter will be forthcoming later this fall; we ask for whatever support you can offer. If you know of others who might support the League, please contact any of us.

In closing, the League isn't all work: join us for our Fall Theater Party on November 20th. I'll be there and look forward to seeing many of you for the play and the lunch/brunch ahead.

### **The League of Women Voters of Rhode Island**

172 Taunton Ave., Suite 8, East Providence, RI 02914

[www.LWVRI.org](http://www.LWVRI.org) 401-434-6440

Derwent Riding, President

Patty MacLeish, *Voter* Editor Jane Marchi, Copy Reader

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Membership in the League is open to any citizen of the United States. Non-citizens may become associate members. Annual dues of \$45 include automatic membership in local, state and national Leagues; join at [www.LWVRI.org](http://www.LWVRI.org) or call 401-434-6440 and help promote informed citizen involvement in government.

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# Teachers from Three Schools Receive Susan B. Wilson Award

For the past four years, the League of Women Voters of South Kingstown/Narragansett, with funding from the LWVRI Education Fund, has honored teachers in the state who have enriched their students' understanding of civic rights and responsibilities, encouraged their students' civic participation, and brought context and relevance to crucial events affecting governments within the United States. This year's winners were Jay Fusco, Jeri Muccio, Amanda Murphy and Matt Nichols, from Westerly High School; Colleen Kiernan Hermes, Stephen Ferris, Marylou Butterfield, John Heino, Jim Silva and Mike Kuriscak, from Rogers High school, Newport; and Mark Manzo, from E-Cubed Academy in Providence.

The awards were presented at a ceremony in the Governor's Reception Room at the State House on June 14 with RI Education Commissioner Deborah Gist as the keynote speaker. The West Bay Guitar Ensemble under the direction of Joseph Smith entertained the honorees and guests. The judges for the award were Lise M. Iwon, Esq., president of the Rhode Island Bar Association and a partner with the law firm of Laurence & Iwon in Wakefield; Arlene Hawkins, the executive director of the New England Reading Association; and David DiMarzio, clerk of the court for the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island.

The Westerly High School teachers, who received the Grand Prize of \$800, developed a new program called "Citizenship In A Democracy." This program, designed especially for seniors, gave students who were about to cross the threshold into full-fledged citizenship an intense immersion

experience in being an active member of a democratic society. Their program was found by the judges to be multifaceted, well designed and highly successful.

The Rogers High School teachers were awarded the Jury Prize of \$500. Their students studied the Constitution and Bill of Rights with particular focus on the letter that President Washington wrote to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport in which he confirmed his belief in tolerance and religious freedom. Students were required to write an essay on "How well has America upheld the principles of religious tolerance as expressed by Washington in his letter?" The judges were impressed with the historical underpinnings of this program, as well as the creativity involved.

Mark Manzo of E-Cubed Academy received the Honorable Mention prize of \$200. Mr. Manzo has been involved in numerous programs that support civic education, including the use of the "We the People" program in his classroom, the creation of a student government, and the development of thematic units that promote the importance of what it means to be an American. Mr. Manzo believes in getting his students to become better citizens and participate in the political process.

The award was established to honor Susan B. Wilson. The League believes that the education of every child should include civics education. Its purpose is to both encourage teachers engaged in this endeavor and to honor exceptional work. To that end, the LWVSK/N sponsors the Susan B. Wilson Civic Education Merit Award with funding from the LWVRI Education Fund.

## IN MEMORIAM JOYCE MORGENTHALER

Joyce H. Morgenthaler, former President of the LWVRI and the LWV Newport County died on June 11, 2011, in Washington, D.C. at the age of 79 from heart complications. She had recently relocated from Middletown, R.I. to Knollwood Retirement Community in Washington D.C. to be closer to her children. Born in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1932, Joyce attended Gettysburg College, leaving to marry Wendell P.C. Morgenthaler, a newly commissioned Marine, who was soon sent to fight in the Korean War. Years later, Joyce resumed her studies at Salve Regina College and graduated in 1978.

As the wife of Colonel Morgenthaler, Joyce raised four children in California, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Virginia, and finally Rhode Island. She also volunteered at Newport's Women's Resource Center, the Newport Music Festival, the Newport Art Museum, and was a member of Salve Regina's Circle of Scholas. Most recently she served on the Board of Trustees of the Middletown Library. Her Children Col. Jill Morgenthaler, Terry Morgenthaler, Jeffrey Morgenthaler and Sharon Morgenthaler survive. Donations in her honor may be made to the Newport Art Museum, 76 Bellevue Ave., Newport, RI 02840.

Addicted to Oil *continued from page 1*

define the results of a successful solution. Discussion will follow the presentation, and it is hoped by the end of the evening, participants may come up with a workable solution to this vexing and intractable problem that plagues our nation.

Due to his abiding interest in the subject of energy independence, Dr. Berg has done extensive research in this area for more than a decade.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. This workshop promotes the League's position on energy, summarized as, "Support environmentally sound policies that reduce energy growth rates, emphasize energy conservation and encourage use of renewable sources."

The Barrington Public Library is a place for enrichment, enjoyment and education. All of the library's programming is free and open to the public. It is fully handicapped accessible.

For more information, contact Joanne DeVoe, joanned@qis.net, 401-247-3004.

# NEW PRESIDENT, NEW POSITION, NEW INITIATIVE

**A**t the League of Women Voters of Rhode Island's biennial meeting in June, delegates elected Derry Riding as president. Other officers elected were Jill Kassis, First Vice President and Susan Escherich, Secretary. Joanne DeVoe, Patty MacLeish, and Susan Wells were elected to two-year terms. Hollie Courage and Caroline Stouffer were elected to one-year terms to fill unfinished terms.

Delegates approved the position on Financing Education in Rhode Island (published in the last issue of the Voter). Delegates also approved a change to the LWVRI position on Initiative and Referendum. This position sets out conditions, procedures and safeguards wherein the League would support the direct power to amend the constitution and initiate legislation. Paragraph 5 of the position now reads, "The League believes any measure dealing with an individual person, town, city or corporation should be excluded from the initiative process, as should any question, which conflicts with the United State Constitution (such as: religion, religious practices, or religious institutions including civil rights of individuals)."

The Advocacy Committee also recommended, and the delegates approved, a review of the four LWVRI positions related to elections. There are four League positions related to elections, and the delegates gave approval to the advocacy committee review for the purpose of consolidating them into one position and further to authorize the LWVRI Board to approve a consolidation if there are no significant changes made to the positions. Doing so will allow the League to use the position in the 2012 Legislative session.

The meeting was adjourned at noon and following lunch, Linda Jean Briggs, LWVRI Lobbyist, reported on the past year. Linda reported that 128 bills were proposed, but at the time of the annual meeting only two made it to the governor for signing. Bills are "held for further study"; some never are brought up again. The League's partnership for open government with Common Cause resulted in votes being posted online within 24 hours. Linda also reported RI Secretary of State had said that a proposed voter ID bill (which was subsequently passed and was signed into law by the governor) would cost \$300,000. But the bill could cost \$1.6 million to educate poll workers, based on costs of implementation in other states.

The afternoon ended with presentations by LWVUS Board member Judy Davis who spoke to delegates on communicating in today's environment and on the recent advertisements run by the League in Massachusetts on Sen. Scott Brown's vote on the Clean Air Act (he voted against it). Lottie Fox, Rhode Island's Membership Recruitment Initiative coach, spoke about the initiative. Lottie is an LWVUS Shur Fellow and will be working closely with state leaders on an ongoing basis to strengthen membership recruitment efforts and leadership development.



*LWVRI Treasurer Jane Koster (left) shares a joke with LWVUS's Judy Davis at the annual meeting in June. Judy and Shur Fellow Lottie Fox attended the LWVRI Convention to help promote the LWVUS membership initiative.*

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CLIP AND SAVE

CLIP AND SAVE

# Quad States Training Weekend Launches LWV Membership & Leadership Development Initiative

by Jill Kassis, LWVRI State Coach

LWVUS staff and Shur Fellow volunteers organized and conducted an intensive training program for LWV Quad States members in Wells, Maine, October 14-16. League representatives from Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont gathered to receive information, training and concrete guidance through a program developed by LWVUS staff and funded by a generous grant from the Shur family in memory of Ruth Shur, a longtime League member from New York. Quad States training meetings have been held annually for several years and have become a model for other regional efforts within the LWVUS. Eleven members of the LWVRI represented Rhode Island including state board members, local League presidents and members—**Pam Ancheta**, LWVRI board member and LWV Naragansett/South Kingstown president; **Mickie Bonneau**, LWV West Bay; **Hollie Courage**, LWV Providence and LWVRI board member; **Joanne DeVoe**, member at large and LWV board member; **Susan Escherich**, member at large and LWV board member; **Marie Henedy**, LWV West Bay president **Jill Kassis**, LWV Newport and LWVRI board and State Coach; **Jane Rankin**, LWV West Bay; **Dorothy Read**, LWV Naragansett/South Kingston; **Derry Riding**, LWVRI president; and **Caroline Stouffer**, LWV West Bay.

The purpose of the meeting was to introduce and launch a multi-year membership recruitment and leadership development initiative. This is an unprecedented opportunity to take advantage of generous funding to support local, state and national League growth and vitality. A wealth of useful materials aimed at helping local Leagues streamline operations, create opportunities for reaching new members and develop new leaders was presented in workshops throughout the weekend. Best practices were discussed and demonstrated aimed at developing new approaches to League activity and growth. A key goal is to strengthen rela-

tionships among all levels of League leadership. A carefully structured network of support to local Leagues has been developed through the training and development of state coaches for local Leagues, Shur Fellows as national coaches, and LWVUS staff and board support. Quad States coaches, including Rhode Island, initially were identified several months ago and received training in the spring, 2011. Through monthly conference calls, Shur Fellows have been mentoring and directing the state coaches in preparation for the launch of the program. As the program commences additional coaches may be identified and recruited. Each state coach will work directly with assigned local League boards and membership chairs to support their recruitment and leadership development initiatives.

Local League development and grassroots initiatives are the focus of the program. State boards will also receive guidance in becoming more effective representatives and supporters for local Leagues, while advancing advocacy on national and state adopted positions.

Questions? Contact me at [jhkassis@gmail.com](mailto:jhkassis@gmail.com) or 401-619-0377.



Some of the League members from Rhode Island at the Quad State meeting in Wells, Maine. From left are Hollie Courage, Susan Escherich, Joanne DeVoe, Dorothy Read, Jill Kassis, Pam Anchetta, and Caroline Stouffer.

# Redistricting in Rhode Island—Nuts and Bolts

by Susan Escherich

There are eighteen people (two more than in 2001) on Rhode Island's redistricting commission, which is chaired by Rep. Stephen Ucci, D-Johnston, and Sen. Michael McCaffrey, D-Warwick. The RI House and Senate leaders each named four legislators and three others, and the minority leaders each named two legislators to oversee the process in Rhode Island. As a result, there are six members from Providence, two from Pawtucket, two from Warwick, and one each from Narragansett, Johnston, West Warwick, Cranston, Portsmouth, Middletown, Barrington and Exeter. While the commission appears ethnically diverse, there are only four women members. The commission is subject to Rhode Island's Open Meetings (Chapter 42-46) and Open Records (Chapter 38-2) Acts and will hold public hearings prior to issuing its findings and recommendations. Also, members of the public can sign up to use the technical software used for district mapping to come up with their own suggested plans.

## What can you do to become involved?

First, brush up on the League's position. The LWVUS signed on to the Pocantico Redistricting Conference in July 2009, agreeing to these basic principles:

1. An accurate and complete count in Census 2010 is an essential building block for all redistricting efforts.
2. The process used for redistricting must be transparent to the public.
3. The redistricting process, at all levels of government, must provide data, tools and opportunities for the public to have direct input into the specific plans under consideration by the redistricting body.
4. In order to achieve representative democracy, redistricting plans must be drawn in a manner that allows elected bodies to reflect the diversity of the populace, especially racial and ethnic diversity.

The LWVRI redistricting position in brief states that the League supports:

“...a state redistricting process and standards that promote fair and effective representation in the state legislature and in the U.S. House of Representatives with maximum



## REDISTRICTING RHODE ISLAND

presented by the

League of Women Voters and Common Cause

November 3, 7:00 p.m.,

First Unitarian Church, 1 Benevolent Street, Providence

Decisions on new electoral districts will affect

YOUR future. Be informed and speak up!

Free. Bring your neighbors.

opportunity for public scrutiny.

“...an independent, non-partisan commission with broad-based community, civic, and minority representation as the preferred redistricting body.”

Next, plan to attend the meetings of the redistricting commission at the State House (See below). If you go to a meeting, wear your League button. (Only twenty people attended the first commission meeting; four were League members. We made an impression!)

At this time, the League is looking for people to act as observers who will attend commission meetings and hearings and write brief reports that will be shared with our membership via e-mail. A summary of public comments will be posted on our Web site at the conclusion of each round of public hearings.

Finally, plan to attend the meeting “Redistricting in Rhode Island” on November 3 at 7 P.M. (see box at left).

If you can help with this meeting or if you would like to be put on our list of observers who are monitoring the commissions meetings and public hearings, please call (433-4896) or e-mail ([sescherich@cox.net](mailto:sescherich@cox.net)) Susan Escherich. Updates on commission action, and the data and maps they are using, are being added to its website at [www.riredistricting.com](http://www.riredistricting.com). There you can ask to be put on an e-mail list for notification of action. You can also find the schedule and agenda of each meeting at the RI legislature site, [http://status.rilin.state.ri.us/commission\\_board\\_calendar.aspx](http://status.rilin.state.ri.us/commission_board_calendar.aspx). Under Rhode Island's Open Government laws, meetings must be posted 48 hours in advance.

## Reapportionment Commission Schedule

The preliminary hearings for Kent, Washington, and Providence Counties have been held as Voter goes to press. The remaining sessions are listed below; all the meetings are at 7 P.M.

Bristol County, 10/24, Barrington High School

Washington County, 11/30, South Kingston High School

Newport County, 12/1, CCRI Newport campus

Providence County, 12/5, Johnston High School

Kent County, 12/6, Warwick City Hall

Bristol County, 12/8, Barrington High School

Meetings in October will present the census data to the public and hear comments; at the remaining meetings, the commission will present will present the preliminary plan and receive comments.

The subcommittee working sessions, all in room 313 of the State House, are as follows:

11/2, 6:00 P.M., Review/digest public hearing comments

11/6, 6:00 P.M., Preliminary Plan Concepts presented by consultant

11/21, 4:00 P.M., Redistricting Subcommittee House Workshop

11/22, 4:00 P.M., Redistricting Subcommittee Senate Workshop

11/28, 6:00 P.M., Receive reports of the subcommittees

12/12, 6:00 P.M. Review/digest reports from second public hearings

12/19, 6:00 P.M. Final meeting of Commission

To confirm commission meetings, visit [www.RIredistricting.com](http://www.RIredistricting.com). The Reapportionment Commission will present its plan to the General Assembly January 15, 2012. The Legislature will review the plan and can amend it before voting on the final version. The Governor can veto the plan, but new districts must be in place for the 2012 primaries.

In one scenario, a student emphasized compact districts, adhering to existing municipal and county lines. This would result in a huge change, putting all of Providence and Cranston into Congressional District Two. A second scenario, involving the least possible change to existing Congressional districts, resulted in the map shown in Figure 3. For further information on this student project and more statistics and detailed maps, visit [www.law.columbia.edu/redistricting](http://www.law.columbia.edu/redistricting). In each of these scenarios the population is almost equally divided between the districts (aprox. 526,284 in each Congressional district), but as the chart below shows, the makeup of the populations is different.

League members should follow the current redistricting process closely and speak out to avoid another disaster such as occurred in Rhode Island in the 1980s; at that time, the proposed new districts were challenged in court, and

“On August 11, 1982 the U.S. District Court, D. Rhode Island decided that the 1974 lines could not be used, and on February 11, 1983 the court decided that ‘defendants’ proposed Providence district lines constituted political ‘gerrymandering.’”

### How Redistricting Can Make a Difference? A Hypothetical Illustration

Columbia University Law Schools students in Nathaniel Persily’s “Redistricting and Gerrymandering” class were each assigned different scenarios for determining new district lines in various states. One student set lines that emphasized “compactness,” adhering to existing county and municipal lines (Fig. 2), while the other redrew the lines to have as few changes as possible (Figures 3 a and b). Randal Edgar reported in the October 5 issue of the Providence Journal that “...some 7,200 people need to be shifted from the 1st District [represented by David Cicilline] to the 2nd District [represented by James Langevin] to balance the populations. Cicilline, the former Providence mayor, is on record as supporting a shift in the capital city, which is roughly divided by the two districts and has traditionally been the place where the line moves.” If the shift occurs elsewhere in the state, it could result in more competitive race in District 1.

HYPOTHETICAL % OF POPULATION BY ETHNICITY			
COMPACTNESS SCENARIO			
	White	Black	Hispanic Origin
District 1	75.97	6.27	11.48
District 2	76.74	5.54	9.30
LEAST CHANGE SCENARIO			
	White	Black	Hispanic Origin
District 1	79.56	5.54	9.3
District 2	79.94	4.72	11.15

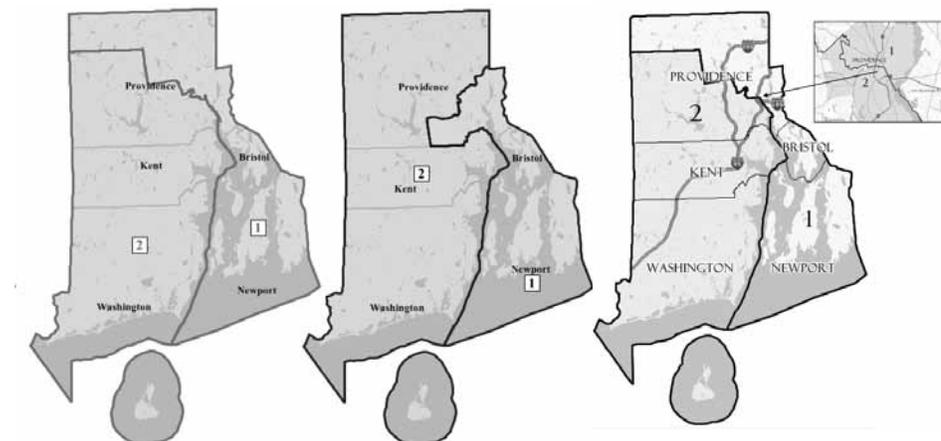
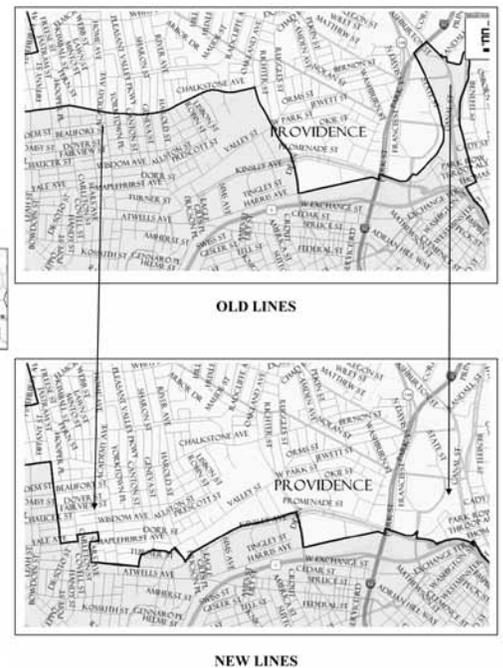


Figure 1 (above, left). Existing lines.  
 Figure 2 (above, right). A scenario emphasizing “compactness.”  
 COURTESY, PAUL SMITH, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL



Figures 3 a (above left) and b (detail, above). A scenario with the least amount of change which would occur in Providence (detail, above).  
 COURTESY, SARAH COLOMBO, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

The state senatorial elections were finally held on June 21, 1983—more than seven months after elections should have been held. Until then ‘lame duck’ legislators continued to serve, and make decisions on budget and other business. Between court costs and the costs of a special senate primary and election, Rhode Island taxpayers paid approximately \$1.5 million to straighten everything out.” (To read the whole article, go to <http://www.lwvri.org/redistrictingdisaster1980s.htm>).

What can you do? Follow the issue! Join us on November 3 at the First Unitarian Church, One Benevolent St., Providence a 7 p.m. for a meeting the League is cosponsoring with Common Cause on redistricting. Public hearings are being held throughout the state, and we would like to have as many League members as possible at each hearing to underscore League interest in the issue—wear your League pins! Before you go, read the League position on redistricting ([www.lwvri.org](http://www.lwvri.org)) and ask questions at the meeting. Local Leagues are sending observers who will report back to me and I will share the reports with our membership via e-mail. (See schedule on page 4.)

# Make a Difference Join the Advocacy Committee

**W**hat public policy issues are you most interested in? You can join the advocacy committee and work on one of the issues below, or suggest other areas to work on. Public Education and Advocacy are at the heart of what the League of Women Voters does. We need you to get involved!

This year the Advocacy Committee plans to concentrate on four areas that are of vital importance to Rhode Islanders:

- **REDISTRICTING**, which will affect who makes the laws we live by and who makes governmental decisions at state, local and national levels for at least the next decade. Information: Jane Koster 423-1465; to volunteer to observe the redistricting commission meetings or help set up a public information meeting this fall, please call Maureen Romans 351-4180.
- **OPEN GOVERNMENT**, so we can know what our legislators are actually doing. One goal is to have individual legislator's votes available to the public on-line. We are partnering with Citizens for an

## Help Put our Financing Education Position to Work!

**R**hode Island has a new formula for financing public education, and the LWVRI has a new consensus position on financing public education that we can use to evaluate this formula and to advocate on behalf of Rhode Island students and taxpayers. LWVRI has expressed tentative support for the formula because it should provide more equity than the previous financing system. The former system was based on enrollment figures and community taxable wealth data that were over a decade old.

The League has concerns about certain aspects of the formula and will need to monitor those areas. The Advocacy Committee has established an Education Subcommittee to review the new formula. That committee has already met and set both long-term and short-term goals. Under long-term goals, the committee will be following the use of free and reduced price lunch qualifications as the best method for determining the number of students who need additional aid. The group will also review other state formulas and their success and failures. Short term, we are planning to produce fact sheets about the formula. In addition, the League is planning a community forum in early 2012 to help people understand the formula and its ramifications for students and taxpayers. If you would like to work on this issue, please get in touch with Joanne DeVoe, 247-3004, joanned@qis.net.

Accountable Legislature in this effort. Contact: Derry Riding, 222-3949.

- **VOTER ID**, to educate the public on the effects and cost of this new legislation. Information: Hollie Courage 274-6173.
- **Financing Education**, so we can take action using our new position on equity in school finance in Rhode Island: Information: Joanne DeVoe 247-3004.

The Committee not only monitors these areas, but also works to inform our legislators and the public of League positions on these and other topics. League positions are reached after intensive study, education and discussion by all our members, who then reach consensus. In addition, the Advocacy Committee also helps to guide the work of our lobbyist when the legislature is in session.

## Are You a Fully Engaged League Member?

**W**ant to know how you can get the most out of your membership in the League? Want to find others who share your passion on an issue? Want to learn more about League issues so you can take action? You can do all that easily in two places—the LWVRI Web site and the LWVUS site.

To learn more about the LWV of Rhode Island, simply log on to [www.lwvri.org](http://www.lwvri.org). There you will find an update of all our activities and a listing of our positions. There are also outside links to government agencies. The links, for instance, can take you to the RI state legislature site where you can find how your senator and representative voted on issues.

The League of Women Voters of the United States' website is also a treasure trove of information. Take a few minutes to explore around the site. Choose an issue from the list under "Our Priorities" and learn more about the League's various positions on issues. Many areas of the site are open to the general public, but some are open to members only. It's easy to access those sections. First you need to register. Go to the "Members Only" section (<https://member.lwv.org/Login.asp>). Look under the heading "Register (for new members)," use your name as you wrote it on your membership form and include your e-mail address. (If there is not an e-mail address in your record, enter 12345.) Click on the "Register" button, and when prompted, create your own personal password: Once you are registered you can update all of your own information in the League database—a new mailing address or e-mail, for example. (If you have questions, contact Jill Kassis [619-0377; [jhkassis@gmail.com](mailto:jhkassis@gmail.com)], and she will try to help you out.)

Once you are registered you can sign up for the League-Voice newsletter or one of the many League listservs. You can also let the League know which action areas most interest you, from children's issues, election reform, and global climate change to natural resources and No Child Left Behind.

# The Role Of The Federal Government In Public Education: Equity And Funding

Public school funding comes from many sources—federal, state and local taxes as well as grants provided by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The federal government adds less than 10 percent to local education budgets, yet it contributes significantly to the rules for how the funding is used. Additionally, the United States invests 5 percent of the GDP in public education. Nearly half of the K-12 education funding in the United States is intended to come from the states, drawn from a combination of income taxes, fees and other taxes. However, some states resemble Illinois, where the state's share is only 27 percent. The remainder usually comes from local property taxes.

## EQUITY

States that rely heavily on property taxes to fund education tend to have large inequities in school funding, which mirror the inequity of wealth in society-at-large. Hurst (2007) noted that inequities in wealth stem from the fact that wealthy people earn much of their income from investments and/or in-



herited funds, while the poor earn all of their income from jobs and they spend it on food, shelter, transportation, etc. In the United States, the wealthiest 20 percent own 84 percent of the total wealth.

Inequities in school funding reflect housing patterns. During the past 50 years since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, schools have become re-segregated (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Currently, three-fourths of the Black and Latino/a students attend schools that are predominately non-white.

## ADEQUACY

Since 1990, rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy—whether a state is provid-

ing local districts with just enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education.

Odden and Picus (2008) developed a model calculating the cost of an adequate edu-

cation. They defined

an adequate education as one that includes factors such as a full-day kindergarten, core class sizes of 15 for grades K-3, 25 for grades 4-6 and specialist teachers. The cost of an adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

## FUNDING PRIORITIES

When schools are not funded adequately, this has a long-lasting impact. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2010) noted that dropouts cost the country at least \$200 billion a year in lost wages and taxes, costs for social services and crime. Since the 1980s, national investments have spent three times more on the prison system than on education. Data show that the national average for educating a child is \$9500, while it costs \$43,000 per year to keep a person incarcerated. With 5 percent of the world's population in the United States, we house 25 percent of the world criminals (Kang & Hong, 2008).

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND (NCLB)

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, "No Child Left Behind," which was intended to close achievement gaps, particularly for minority children. However, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students

### *Interested in Education? Come to Consensus*

The LWV of Newport County will hold a consensus meeting on the Role of the Federal Government in Financing Education on Tuesday, November 29, from 5-7 p.m. at the home of Susan Wells (229 Gibbs Street, Newport).

**What is Consensus?** Consensus is not a vote; rather, consensus is mutual agreement of League members arrived at through discussion. During discussion, everyone has an opportunity to express their viewpoints, and the issue is examined from all sides. Consensus questions, created by the appropriate study committee and approved by the Board, provide structure for the meeting. Members discuss the pros and cons until it becomes apparent that consensus has/has not been reached on each question. The study committee analyzes the consensus responses and, using this information, creates a position statement.

**Who can attend?** Any member of the League of Women Voters can attend the consensus meeting. All we ask is that you read all the study materials. One article is here on this page and the others are on the LWVUS Web site ([www.lvv.org](http://www.lvv.org)); if you have difficulty accessing the articles, contact Patty MacLeish ([pmacluish@verizon.net](mailto:pmacluish@verizon.net) or 846-7542).

**RSVP** Please contact Susan Wells (846-9537; [swells229@yahoo.com](mailto:swells229@yahoo.com)) if you plan to attend, so we can prepare sufficient materials for the meeting.

before NCLB. One provision of NCLB permitted parents to remove a student from a low-performing school and transfer to another, better performing school. They would receive a voucher which would pay some of the cost of attending another school – public or private. Additionally, courts and education agencies stepped in to “remediate.” The sanctions imposed by NCLB had the effect of punishing or threatening punishment to low-performing schools and teachers, sending them the message that they were incompetent and that they should not have the right to make decisions about how to educate students. Studies (Reeve, 2009) showed that threatening public schools and teachers with punishment had harmful effects on students who remained in the public schools.

Supporters of NCLB appreciate the increase in accountability for schools and teachers as well as the focus on low scoring sub-groups. Critics of NCLB decry the lack of federal funding for many of the Act’s mandates, the emphasis on penalties, the reliance on standardized tests, and the lack of attention to gifted students as well as to subjects such as science, social studies and the arts. One goal of NCLB has been to offer choice to parents whose children attend poorly performing schools.

However, large-scale studies of voucher school students have revealed little difference in their performance compared to public school students with similar backgrounds, and having vouchers has not raised the performance of the most needy students (Rouse & Barrows, 2009). Furthermore, many (Holland, 2011) argue that the NCLB goal of 95 percent of students meeting state standards in reading and math by 2014 is unrealistic.

### RACE TO THE TOP (RttT)

Race to the Top was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. This program shifted the basis of awarding funds to emphasize competition. Competitive grants reward

reform planned in the winning states. Funding is flexible as long as states demonstrate grant dollars are aligned with the agenda outlined in their winning applications. Only twelve states received funding through RttT.

Two of the requirements met by states that received RttT funding were (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and (2) lifting the cap on the number of charter schools that could be created.

While both these funding requirements can be effective, neither is foolproof, and each addresses only one part of the problems schools face. For instance, research studies show that promising increased pay based on teacher effectiveness is not an effective incentive. Furthermore, research showed there is a problem when teacher performance evaluation is based only on student scores in standardized tests (Springer et. al., 2010).

Although there is no question that some charter schools are effective, they have not been the panacea many expected. They were originally proposed as an opportunity for educators to test research-supported methods for reaching hard-to-educate children, and some have done quite well. However, a large-scale research study funded by pro-charter advocates revealed that only 17 percent of the 2403 charter schools had significantly more growth in test scores compared to traditional public schools, and, in fact, 37 percent showed significantly less growth (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009). Furthermore, many charter schools do not admit and/or retain students who need increased support, e.g., students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

The progress of the U.S. Department of Education’s Equity and Excellence commissions can be tracked through <http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/eec/index.html>.

## Join Us! Become Part of Making Democracy Work

I want to help Democracy Work! Enclosed is \$45 for my membership in the LWVRI.

I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ payable to the LWVRI. Or, join on line at [www.LWVRI.org](http://www.LWVRI.org)



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

I do not wish to join at this time, but I would like to make a donation to the LWVRI. I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ payable to the LWVRI.

I do not wish to join at this time, but please add my name to your mailing list.

Tell us your interest:

- ADVOCACY    EDUCATION    VOTER ID    VOTERS SERVICE    MEMBERSHIP    RI SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA  
 OBSERVER CORPS    GOVERNMENT PRIVATIZATION

**Please make checks payable to LWVRI  
and mail form to LWVRI, 172 Taunton Ave, Suite 8, E. Providence, RI 02914**

Join the League as the 2nd Story Theater presents

## Jean Racine's *The Suitors*

at the Bristol Statehouse

Sunday, November 20, 2011

Reservations Due November 7

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

YES! Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ ticket(s) to *The Suitors* at \$30 each for a total of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

YES, I'm coming to Leo's! Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ places at Leo's Ristorante, 365 Hope St.

I can't come, but I would like to support the League and have enclosed a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support the League.

Make checks payable to LWVRI Total enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail with this form with your check to LWVRI, 172 Taunton Ave, Suite 8, East Providence, RI 02914

**Questions?** Call Joanne DeVoe, 247-3004 or joanned@qis.net.

## Join Us at the Theater

The fall theater party fund-raiser has become a LWVRI tradition. Please join us for the 2011 event on Sunday, November 20 at 3 P.M. when 2nd Story Theater presents "The Suitors," at the Bristol Statehouse. The Theater says "Jean Racine's riotous rhyming verse romp provides ample opportunity for disorder in the court, ambling iambically from the sacred to the profane. Few escape the writer's comic wrath as translator Richard Wilbur aids in hazing both the legal profession and the lawsuit-happy litigants who keep the judges well bribed, the lawyers well heeled, and the audience, well, in stitches. *C'est un tort meringue!*" Tickets are \$30 each and reservations are due Monday, November 7.

League members will be gathering beforehand for lunch/brunch at 1 p.m. at Leo's Ristorante, 365 Hope St, Bristol, at the corner of Hope (Rte 114) and Church Streets. Leo's is two blocks from the Bristol Statehouse. Parking is in a free lot on Court St. between the Statehouse on High St. and the restaurant on Hope St. Leo's has everything from soups, pizzas, salads, sandwiches to entrees (visit [www.leosristoranti.com](http://www.leosristoranti.com) for details). We will make reservations for all who wish to join us; everyone will order from the menu. Use the form above for restaurant and play reservations.

For more information, contact LWVRI board member Joanne DeVoe, 247-3004 or joanned@qis.net.



### Harvesting What We've Sown

by Elisabeth Head, President LWVRI Education Fund

The Education Fund continues to be busy! Check the Education Fund page at the LWVRI Web site ([www.LWVRI.org](http://www.LWVRI.org)) for a list of our accomplishments. We will soon have more on the exciting projects we have funded.

Hopefully the League is in your future planning and we will be still going strong making grants from our resources in 2020 when the League is one hundred years young!

If you have already included the League Ed Fund in your will, THANK YOU! If not, and you need assistance, call me at (401) 351-2269. You may also make a tax deductible contribution to the Ed Fund anytime. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

We will continue to function only as long as we are funded. We are hoping our fall harvest is abundant.

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## Coming Up—League Events

Tuesday, November 1, 7 p.m.

**A Providence Conversation: “Public Safety: What We Can Pay For, What We Need”** with Steven M. Pare, Providence’s Commissioner of Public Safety. 7:00 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. 133 Dexterdale Rd, Providence. Coffee and dessert will be served. Contact Joan Retsinas <joan.retsinas@gmail.com>

Thursday, November 3, 2011, 7 p.m.

**“Redistricting Rhode Island”** presented by the League of Women Voters and Common Cause at the First Unitarian Church, 1 Benevolent Street, Providence. Free. Bring your neighbors.

November 7

Reservations due for *The Suitors* (see page 11 for details).

November 14, 10 a.m.

**LWVRI Board Meeting.** East Providence Library.

November 16, 7 p.m.

**Addicted To Oil.** The LWVRI/Barrington Library discussion of solutions to our national addiction with Geoffrey Berg M.D. Details on page 2.

Sunday, November 20, 3 p.m.

**Annual 2nd Story Theater Party,** 3 p.m. at the Bristol Statehouse, Hope St. Optional dinner at Leo’s Ristorante. Story on page 1; reservation form on page 11.

Tuesday, November 29, 5 p.m.

**Consensus meeting** on the Role of the Federal Government in Financing Education on Tuesday, November 29, from 5-7 p.m., at the home of Susan Wells, 229 Gibbs Ave., Newport, R.I.

### REDISTRICTING RHODE ISLAND

Please see page 6 for the complete schedule for local hearings throughout the state and subcommittee hearings at the State House.