

**League of Women Voters
National Convention
Chicago, June 28- July 1**

Being surrounded by over one thousand determined women open for discussion and ready to work is both invigorating and intimidating. I would guess that most of us left feeling rejuvenated, but also wondering if we had the ability to do all that needs to be done to ensure our democratic system of government works for everyone.

The Convention took place at the historic Chicago Hilton which is located on Michigan Avenue across from a public park that encompasses quiet gardens and several massive public performing arts spaces. The interior of the ballroom where all of the plenaries and the banquet took place was about as ostentatious as you can get in a very 20th century way - gold gilt ceilings and painted scenes of leisure. The caucus rooms were utilitarian and much to my surprise, more often than not, not set up for sound projection. These rooms were to located on two other floors besides the ballroom floor which opened up to the marble staircases leading down to the lobby.

Throughout the convention, the message from the speakers and the league leaders was consistent. Although we have every right to be upset and angry with how things are going in the political arena and because most of our positions directly contradict what our leadership is doing and what our President believes, we must not lose hope and we must continue to work together to ensure our “democracy works.” At the same time, and some would say because the stakes seem to be so high, the LWV needs to look inward to maximize our potential. We talked about two general areas in need of work. 1) We need to improve our electronic systems including our messaging and our capacity to collect data and 2) we need to diversify our membership to better reflect our geographic areas and we can start this process by increasing our understanding of diversity, inclusion and equity.

Our National League President was entertaining to watch as she navigated getting the hundreds of us through the plenary sessions. She was direct, slightly impatient, a little bit rude (especially to the male delegate from OR) “Make your point...” “Just read the statement!....” “We don’t need to hear your preamble, just make your motion!!), but very efficient and she knew when to back down and redo vote counts etc. The Parliamentarian’s expertise was used time and time again. The funniest moments centered around a motion to do all that we can to pass “it.” I can’t remember what state the woman came from, but after several minutes of discussion, another delegate pointed out that “it” should be identified. “It” was the ERA!! The next day the motion was presented again, proofed and edited by several English teachers and it was passed

with a lot of cheering and no dissent. I was quite impressed with the sound system and the giant screens which made looking at the speakers and reading the wording of the motions and amendments very easy.

The convention business was broken up by guest speakers and panel discussions on redistricting, diversity, and voting rights. The panelists were engaging and diverse. I was very impressed by how open and honest the women of color were, considering that they were facing a mostly white audience. Most of them acknowledged this dynamic, but all of the speakers encouraged us to do the hard work it takes to be inviting. Their comments made me realize that although we think of ourselves as inviting and open, we do not actually take the time to go to people and get to know them before asking them to be involved. When we are short on volunteers and weighed down by obligations and timetables, I know that spending time reaching out can feel unachievable, but I think if we are to achieve the goal of becoming a more diverse local league then we must make engagement a priority.

Rosie Rios, former US Treasurer during the Obama administration, was about as polished and effective as you can possibly get. As US Treasurer Rios was behind the push to have a new US bill feature a female historical figure. That bill will be revealed and go into circulation in 2020 in honor of the 100th anniversary of the women's vote. Since stepping down she has been working on multiple projects to elevate important historical women including having statues designed and installed in 16 major cities around the country. All of her projects are working towards August 2020. Check out one of her education projects here: <http://teachersrightinghistory.org/>

The Convention concluded with the adoption of the budget, the per member payment, the election of officers and an interview with the new CEO of the LWVUS, Virginia Kase. I took the following description from Chris Carson's latest email: *"Since 2011 Virginia has been a leader at CASA, an organization at the forefront of the immigrant rights movement representing nearly 100,000 members. CASA is also the largest human service and civil rights organization fighting for social, economic, and racial justice in the mid-Atlantic region. Virginia has more than 20 years' experience working in the non-profit sector and is a passionate activist and advocate for social justice. She starts in the national office on July 25."* Case seems like she will be a good addition to the organization, but of course it is hard to tell from prepared speech she gave and the nice chat she had with Carson at the very end of the convention. So, after four full days of caucusing, learning, debating, making amendments, asking questions and feeling inspired, the convention ended with the bang of a gavel. People cheered and streamed out of the banquet hall, ready to explore the city or go home, ready to take a short rest and then get to work for democracy. The twenty or so Massachusetts leaguers said

their goodbyes and promised each other to be in touch via a group zoom meeting. The looming question is, “How can we take what we’ve learned and help our local leagues grow and become even more effective!?”

To be continued...

Caucuses I attended:

Thursday night:

Transformation Roadmap - It was clear from the start that many leaguers are angry with what they read in the Transformation Roadmap. In the session I attended on the first night of the conference I was appalled by the way league members were addressing representatives of the board. I think we like to think league members are above using uncivil dialogue, but the COO who was leading the session kept repeating, “I am going to assume your best intentions.” It rankled me that one of the men in the room stood up and announced he would be happy to work with anyone to show them how a good website, including a payment option and data collection can be done. I felt like asking him if there was someone in his league who could take over if he was no longer able to do it. I think what bothered most people was that the national board was not transparent about the data collection which informed their vision and operating budget. It is also frustrating that the plans for the IT upgrades are less than specific. Board members repeated over and over that local leagues will be asked to voluntarily try out the new membership data and money collection systems and that the full roll out will probably take a few years. The younger national board members strongly believe that we have no choice but to hone our message and simplify our operations, but again the plan is vague right now and they were unable to articulate exactly what they are hoping to develop.

Friday morning:

Kids Climate Change Lawsuit - the LWVUS/OR have been working to provide amicus briefs and positions for the lawyers working out of Oregon on these lawsuits. Very inspiring and at the same time incredibly depressing that our children need to tackle climate change through the court system to argue that the atmosphere is part of the public trust.

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

Saturday morning:

Youth Voter Registration: Learn Winning Tactics! - the short of it is that I am determined to get voter registration into ARHS on a regular basis. The Leagues that presented do voter drives in school systems with thousands of kids. We should be able to handle a hundred in Amherst! My husband doesn't know this, but I want him to help me. Liz and I registered over fifteen by sitting in the cafeteria, but in other places the leagues actually have permanent displays in guidance and also regular presentations as part of class time.

Saturday night:

The keynote at the banquet was Elaine Weiss, the author of *The Woman's Hour*. She was very good. Perhaps we can suggest that the library buy the book with our donation money. The food was pretty good. Most of the MA delegates ate together.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/18/books/review/womans-hour-elaine-weiss.html>

Sunday morning:

The Critical Role of Healthcare in a Democracy - co-sponsored by several local leagues including Amherst! The presentation was well attended in part due to our Barbara Pearson's enthusiastic distribution of fliers. Dr. Claudia Fagen, from the Chicago Cook County Hospital (<http://www.cookcountyhhs.org/physicians/claudia-fegan-md/>) was a powerful speaker. She made it clear that lack of healthcare drives inequality in America and we all need to work to make good health care available to everyone, everywhere.