President’s Column
October, 2013

As I write this month’s column, I am especially mindful of the Civility in Politics event the League co-sponsored with the Ames Chamber of Commerce on October 7. Here’s a quick review of the evening’s information gleaned from Mary Kramer’s presentation and audience comments.

Why are politics so uncivil?

• Only one in eight Americans votes in primary elections. This places an inordinate amount of decision-making power in the hands of relatively few people.
• The quality of public discourse is abysmal – evidenced by describing those we disagree with as the embodiment of evil.
• Today there is no shared vision of a desired future.
• We tend to live among and socialize with only those who think like us.

Can we restore civility in politics? If so, how do we begin?

We can commit ourselves to become change leaders. Some of the simple yet powerful actions available to us are to:

Listen Change begins at the grassroots, and it begins with listening. And listening takes practice.
• Really listen – don’t just wait your turn to speak
• Ask clarifying questions only
• Use phrases like “That’s interesting. I didn’t know that. Tell me more.”
• Fully understand the other person’s position before stating your own
• Do not expect to change the other person’s opinion (“People can understand my position and never agree with me.”)

Focus on the problem
• In every discussion, ask “What problem are we trying to solve?”

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• “When there seems to be no solution, we must seek it lovingly.”
• Seek common ground

Show Respect
• Don’t demean or dehumanize those who disagree with you. If I say to you “All rational people believe . . .” and you don’t agree, where can our conversation go?
• “Trashing” others has become all too common. Point out (civilly) when someone is being uncivil.

Event evaluations showed those in attendance had learned or been reminded of valuable skills and were interested in continuing the discussion. We will use those evaluations in planning next steps.

Thanks to the Leaguers who gave special help, and to so many of you who were among the 80-plus audience members. Special thanks to Mary Kramer for key-noting the event and guiding the audience participation discussion, and to our Ames Chamber co-sponsors.

- Linda

Agriculture Event of Interest

The ISU Sustainable Ag Student Association is pleased to welcome Wenonah Hauter, executive director of the Food & Water Watch and author of Foodopoly, to ISU this fall. She will give a public lecture on October 22nd at 7 pm in Ross Hall, Room 0124, on the ISU campus. Please join us for this important talk!

This lecture will be our official Food Day event. It is free and open to the public.

Parking is available (coins only) at the East Parking Deck at the ISU campus or in the Memorial Union Parking Garage (cash, cards accepted).

Co-sponsors: Women, Food and Agriculture Network, Iowa Environmental Council, and Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement.


WEBSITE PROGRESS

The new website was presented to the Ames League Board at its October meeting, and those who attend the October general meeting will get an introduction as well. Refer to the September VOTER for all the exciting features you can expect to see.
NONPARTISANSHIP:
WHERE THE RUBBER MEETS THE ROAD . . .

In the midst of an election season, it's good that we ask ourselves “What does it mean that the League of Women Voters is nonpartisan?”

The League of Women Voters of the U.S. defines its nonpartisan stance as follows: The League shall not support or oppose any political party or any candidate.” - Article III, Sec.2, LWVUS Bylaws

Why is the League nonpartisan?

The organization’s roots began during the long struggle to get women the right to vote and the League has continued the fight to educate both women and men on the issues impacting their communities. Soon after our founding, the decision was made to take positions on issues but to neither support nor oppose any political party or candidate (appointed or elected) for public office. Today, this policy continues to ensure that the League’s voice is heard above the tumult of party politics.

What does that mean for League members, especially during the time leading up to an election?

There are some very important distinctions to be made between your actions as an individual and as a League member. Here are some things to consider:

Showing your support for a candidate: You may certainly support and even work for a candidate for public office. However, you cannot do so as a League member. You should not identify yourself as a League member when supporting a candidate (either verbally or in writing, such as in a letter to the editor or a signature ad). Nor should you wear a League pin or button while campaigning for that candidate. (Doing so might imply to someone that the League is supporting that candidate.)

You may also display a yard sign for a candidate, but not on the same property as a Vote Tuesday sign, since that sign is identified with the League of Women Voters. If you are displaying a candidate sign, see if you can find a neighbor or a business to display your Vote Tuesday sign. And don’t put the sign out before the Wednesday before the election. (And be sure to take it down the next day!) Signs will be available at the October 17 General Meeting for those who don’t have one.

If asked if the League is supporting a candidate or a ballot initiative: Reiterate that the League is nonpartisan and explain what this means – i.e. “The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.” If asked if the League has a position on a certain issue, be sure to distinguish between the League’s adopted position and any personal opinion you might have that goes further than or is not consistent with the League’s position. If you don’t know if the League has a position on an issue, ask or go to these websites for local, state and national positions respectively:

http://www.ameslwv.org/AboutLWV/LocalPositions/tabid/876/Default.aspx


http://www lwv org/content/impact-issues-online-edition

If asked why, if the League is non-partisan, we are so involved in political issues: Explain that we work for free, fair and accessible elections, and protecting every eligible voter’s right to vote. We also believe that voters should be educated on the issues facing our democracy, so we work to educate and inform voters in a factual and

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nonpartisan way, through our general meetings and publications. We also study selected issues and take positions based on the results of those studies.

Being nonpartisan toward candidates and political parties is critical to the effectiveness of the League's unique voters' service/citizen information work. Our nonpartisan stance provides a strong foundation for the work done in support of issues. Action on legislation and ballot proposals is more effective when the public and the legislators know for certain that the League's conclusions are based on merit rather than playing politics.

**Just an FYI - Additional restrictions apply to some officers:** Because of the visibility of their positions to the public and their work with candidates and elected officials, the President, Voter Services Chairs, and Legislative Chairs may not (1) accept a position as a precinct committee member or ward leader, (2) work as a block worker at an election, (3) host a coffee or informational meeting for a candidate, (4) attend a party convention as a delegate or alternate, (5) display partisan yard signs, (6) fill a visible role in a candidate's campaign or (7) contribute to a ballot issue campaign opposed by the League. - LWV of Ames IA Job Descriptions revised May 2006.

We all represent the League to the Ames/Story County community. The League has a strong reputation as being fair, objective and nonpartisan – please do your part in maintaining it. The work we are doing is too important to be otherwise!

*Editor's note: This article was drawn in large part from materials prepared by LWVUS.*

*Unless otherwise noted, all photos by Jim Noland*

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**Two Successful Candidate Forums**

The Ames League has conducted well-attended forums for School Board candidates and Ames City Council candidates this fall. Here's a compliment we received after one forum: “The event was extremely well put together and allowed the Ames community to get an excellent view of the candidates, their beliefs and motivations. These are the kind of events that keep democracy alive!”

And some photos from the council event:
Keep an eye on democracy—be part of the Observer Corps.

The Observer Corps needs YOU, either regularly, or once or twice a month, or as an occasional substitute, to sit in on one of these meetings: Story County Board of Supervisors; Ames School Board, or Ames City Council.

League observers cannot participate in the meetings they are observing. Contact Nancy Marks for more information: nancy.marks@me.com, 515-233-6953

October General Meeting

7 p.m. Thursday, October 17, Northminster Presbyterian Church

Topic: “Free, Fair, and Accessible Elections”
Is Iowa becoming less “voter friendly”? This is a hot topic that is central to League’s goal of wide participation by an informed electorate.

Speakers:
- Myrna Loehrlein, former LWVIA president from Cedar Rapids
- Lucy Martin, Story County Auditor

Stay after to visit with the speakers and your fellow Leaguers.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Our league is officially the “League of Women Voters of Ames.” Five local leagues in Iowa now identify themselves by a county name (Blackhawk/Bremer, Hamilton, Jasper, Johnson and Linn). Four have stayed with a city name: Sioux City, Grinnell, Ottumwa and Metro Des Moines. Two didn’t have to decide: Dubuque and Muscatine are in counties with the same name.

Although the vast majority of our 125 members live in Ames, we do have five members from Nevada and two from Gilbert. In addition, Nevada is the county seat.

Is it time for our League to officially go county-wide? Or are there advantages to keeping a name that people are familiar with? The board is having a discussion on this and would like your thoughts. Please email ameslwv@gmail.com with your thoughts.

Any name change would need to be approved by the membership at our next annual meeting, which will be held on April 19, 2014 at the Gateway Hotel. Mark your calendars!
Book Club Schedule

October 23 -

*EcoMind: Changing the Way We Think, to Create the World We Want*, by Frances Moore Lappé (2013)

Leader: Cheryl Binzen  
Hostess, Jan Beran, 1802 20th St. A 11

*Please notify hostess if you are coming.*

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No November or December meeting

*If you want to read ahead, the January book is*  
*The Federalist Papers*  
*by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay*