

LEAGUE MADE A DIFFERENCE

PAST - PRESIDENTS

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LEAGUE MADE A DIFFERENCE . . .

Roberta Bradbury, 1970–73:

I became president by appointment in the Spring of 1970 when my predecessor, Sue Joshel, was elected to the national LWV Board. In 1971, I was elected for a two-year term.

The League was undergoing some startling changes. At the National Convention in Washington, DC, it was decided that the age required for membership would be reduced from 21 to 18 years since Amendment 26 extended the right to vote to citizens age 18 and older. At that period in time, there was considerable unrest in the land with anti-Vietnam demonstrations in the streets. The League saw a role for itself in putting to use its techniques for presenting public forums and influencing decision makers through education and debate.

We were addressing the manner in which the state government was prepared to deal with environmental problems such as clean air and water and solving land use dilemmas. We in Colorado had long studied the issue of water-sharing and realized that practical conservation methods were essential. We were able to adapt many of our National League studies and positions to Colorado and make statements to our state and local governments on those issues.

Another change that came about in those years was the matter of men becoming members of the League. Ultimately, they were admitted as voting members but the decision was made not to take out the word "women" in our title.

We struggled with the Per-Member Payment dues problem in order to assure support for all levels of the League. It became important that efforts be made internally to help members at our "grassroots" to understand and appreciate the reasons for maintaining the three levels of membership. These efforts may not have succeeded entirely during these three years but efforts on the part of the National Boards and State Boards to relieve some of the burdens at the local level were made. For instance, a policy of adopting a national position on an issue that had been studied by a large number of local and state Leagues was implemented. This did not preclude the local Leagues from making a study of the issue and the League stand as it applied in their own communities if they chose to take action on a particular issue.

The matter of reaching all corners of Colorado with a League voice was an on-going challenge. The approach of Member-at-Large Units under the State Board was worked on and developed to some extent. Also, efforts were made to make the State Board more accessible to the out-lying Leagues around the state.

This was a time of great challenge and change in our society in general and there were times when one despaired that the League could remain viable and relevant. It is satisfying to note that indeed it remains so with a new dynamism resulting from the ever-increasing realization of equal opportunity for ALL citizens. Think how please those suffragists would be if they could see women in our state governors mansions, in the Congress, state legislatures and Presidential cabinets!

Joyce Tavrow, 1979–81:

After an instructive few hours rereading some of the president's messages in the Colorado Voter during my term at the helm of this inspiring organization, and also my report to the delegates at the May 1981 state convention, I found that most of my remarks addressed the need for a group such as ours to

justify its existence. After a high of 157,000 members in 1970, our national membership had declined to 117,000 by 1980.

There were similarities then to our political situation now. To quote from the May 1981 President's Report:

And so I say to you, Who are we? What are we about? Is there a need for a citizen's group such as ours in today's world? Are the studies we've done and the consensus we've reached valid or should we be abandoning them and jumping on the current "dump on the poor and disadvantaged" bandwagon? We had the opportunity to reexamine our human resources positions this year. Sure, we felt refinements could be made in some areas but I did not detect a "let's throw the baby out with the bath water" response. We may find that our efforts to retain much of what we believe is falling on deaf ears, but that doesn't mean we forgo our basic principles, does it? Rather, do we remind our members that if it weren't for League, who would care about income assistance, fair housing, D.C. representation? Do we tell the world that our recommendations are the result of our independent research and agreement and not because of a vested interest in our proposed solutions? What other group do you know of that are member-directed, that act for the perceived good of the country, that are better at getting their messages across than we are? I don't know of any that meet those qualifications. Do you?

In 1979, we had initiated a study on responsible expenditures of state income, wisely anticipating the slowdown of our state's economy that occurred in the middle 1980s. Some of our energy was directed toward implementing the state's first independent Reapportionment Commission that was the result of the League's successful 1974 ballot initiative.

Mostly, I remember those years as interacting with people I thoroughly enjoyed. Together we did make a difference!

Wilma R. Davidson, President 1983–85

Being president of the League is always a challenge. There seems never to be enough volunteer hours or money to reach the goals we set for ourselves. In 1983, we were in the midst of national and state political scenes that were not friendly to the goals of equality under the law, conserving the environment, and making government more accountable to citizens.

The Colorado legislature had "sunsetting" the Commission on Women at the beginning of the 1980s. The Equal Rights Amendment failed to gain ratification by the last three states before the deadline set in 1982. The National Decade of Women (1975-1985) brought some advances in the status of women, but issues supported by the League and other organizations were not supported by the Reagan administration. The opposition of women to these concerns was as hard to understand as the opposition to woman suffrage. Those same women were quick to take advantage of new opportunities in education and employment that had been won by the support of feminists.

The right to privacy in reproductive choice became the focus of political conflict. Concurrence was implemented for the first time at the national level of League. Delegates to the 1982 national League convention voted to ask concurrence by local Leagues on the LWVUS position: "*Public policy in a pluralistic society must affirm the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.*" The position was based on the League's adoption in the 1950s of a position on Individual Liberties. Colorado League members approved the concurrence in their unit discussions early in 1983, but it was not without the loss of some long-time members who interpreted the position as an endorsement of

abortion-on-demand. However, membership also benefited from new members who joined because they approved the League action in supporting women's rights.

Although we could expect little success in the "veto proof" legislature, 1984 brought approval of the "Motor Voter" initiative by Colorado's voters. Spearheaded by Leaguers Phyllis Horney, Jane Wasson, and Sonya Pennock, our members circulated petitions and gathered more signatures than the other organizations in the coalition and got the issue on the ballot.

Mary Hess combined her duties as Program Vice President with volunteering as League Lobbyist during one session, and continued to represent the League for the next several years. At the 1985 state convention, we were reminded of the League's role of legislative action when LWVUS President Dorothy Ridings made this statement: "Not one person in Congress today was there 65 years ago, but the League was there. And not one of them will still be there 65 years from now, but the League will still be there!"

There were big changes in the administration of the state League. Members responded generously to an appeal for contributions to add more modern equipment in the office. We talked about computers, but that was just something to think about! When a copier replaced the mimeograph machine, communication with local leagues improved. Long-range planning for the League was suggested by the national Board with the proposal of a new mission statement:

*The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization
that influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

The State Board implemented planning for the future in a workshop that made innovative suggestions for flexibility of meeting times, provision of unit-ready program materials, revenue-sharing in fundraising by state and local boards, employment of a professional fund-raiser who would solicit foundation funding, and improved communication by greater use of the telephone. There was a strong consensus in the group that the unit is still the place for meeting with friends to discuss important issues — it is the "League" to most members — and that the "grassroots heritage" is the asset that makes League different from other organizations and gives League the power to make a difference in our communities.

Patricia Johnson, 1989–91:

The major accomplishments of the League of Women Voters of Colorado during the two years of my term as president were, in my judgment, the following:

ADMINISTRATION

1. In March 1990, the League established a separate Education Fund, dedicated exclusively to the educational aspects of League work. By doing this, League took a big step to enlarge its educational role in the state and to receive money from sources, such as foundations and government, which are not available to the League. Our first grant came from the Environmental Protection Agency for the Solid Waste Education Project, which involved every League in the state for the two-year period, and provided each League financial return for their work.

2. In September 1990, through the good work of Betsy McBride, Administrative Vice President, we moved from Race Street to larger office space at 14th and Grant, right across from the Capitol. We upgraded our computer capability and generally improved the office ability to produce and communicate with our members.

3. Seeking more efficiency and flexibility, we reorganized the Board into three large committees. A vigorous outreach committee was established, headed by the incredibly energetic Jo Rock. Leagues

around the state were visited to give orientation, counsel and encouragement. Local Leagues really appreciated this attention.

4. In order to get more professional about fund-raising, a development program was instituted and a development director, Marge Johnson, was hired to administer it. She led the committee into new patterns of thinking about raising money and secured donations from new sources.

PROGRAM

5. In 1990, the League worked in a coalition on a petition drive to extend the Sunshine Law to local governments. The coalition failed to gather enough signatures, although the League fulfilled its quota, as usual. However, this effort paved the way for a successful effort by Mary Hess (General Lobbyist) and Sandy Eid (Program Vice President) to get such a bill through the legislature, so the goal was indeed accomplished.

Betsy McBride, 1991–94:

The reality is that any era really belongs to the full board — the state president has the enormous pleasure of presiding over it.

In my estimation, the time was characterized by growth — many manifestations of growth. Our state membership grew (during a time when national's did not), our capacity to manage large projects grew, our professional staff grew, our confidence grew, and our ability to manage a complex organization grew. Both boards accepted more responsibility with great zest for possibilities. Our office was a lively, exciting place in which to spend time. As to details:

- A dedication to field service, with the end result being more training, stronger local Leagues, a better partnership between local Leagues and the state League and membership growth.
- More organizational comfort with development — members responding to direct mail and new financing methods, product development, innovations in publications, work with fee-for-service contracts, and full board involvement in development planning and execution. Creative funding opportunities for local Leagues were offered.
- Strong community networking and productive alliances. Fearless leadership for hard campaigns. Recognition from the Secretary of State for election service to Colorado citizens and from other organizations.
- Good partnerships with the LWVUS — grants, workshop invitations for Colorado League members, national advisory committee for LWVUSEF and an invitation to host and organize logistics for a national workshop for LWVUSEF. Invitation to give a workshop at a national convention and an invitation to host candidate's session at 1994 convention.
- Most importantly, I am proud that we empowered our leadership. Diane Young increased her role and felt comfortable enough to make decisions and exert leadership. Project leaders and vice presidents did good planning and made decisions. We spread the power around and gained a more confident organization.

Wilma Davidson, 1994–95

An interim president has the options of being a caretaker of the accomplishments of her predecessor, embarking on a new and different course, or something of a combination. When Betsy McBride moved out of state and left the presidency of the League of Women Voters to me, there was a long list of accomplishments to be maintained and promoted. And these were ideas and plans in no way predicted during my previous term ten years before.

First of all was Development and the concomitant Education Fund. The Development Committee was already having modest success in raising EdFund money through projects and publications. As Executive Director, Diane Young worked with Lois Linsky and other committee members. Lois managed successful direct mail campaigns, and Diane handled corporate and foundation solicitation. The EdFund budget was stable. The administrative cost of our successes in office management and legislative action, and decreases in membership (and the PMP), caused concerns regarding the budget of the 501.c.4 League.

Then came the challenge of a citizen's initiative on Campaign Finance Reform with the League, Common Cause, and Copirg leading a coalition of other organizations. Once again, it was League members who circulated petitions in their communities to gather the greatest percentage of signatures to get the issue on the ballot. A court challenge delayed the process, but Campaign Leader Pat Johnson held on with confidence and efficiency. Gerry Cummins teamed up with Bill Vandenberg, of Copirg, to direct the field operations. Strong opposition with greater financing eked out the defeat of our meaningful reform. In the belief that legislators must acknowledge the message of strong support for reform, the League and its partners now return to the General Assembly with legislation.

Marilyn Shuey directs League action at the General Assembly with a strong Legislative Action Committee and a new general lobbyist. When Mary Hess retired as the League Lobbyist, we knew she would be hard to replace. Fortunately, we got to know Bill Vandenberg during the several months he worked on Campaign Finance, and were pleased when he accepted appointment as the League's Lobbyist. It is a change to have a young man represent us — one we are undertaking enthusiastically!

Now, we are celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the League of Women Voters, which preceded by a few months the final approval by Congress of the Nineteenth Amendment that guaranteed the right to vote to all American citizens. At that time, the women of Colorado had already been voting since the election of November 1894, and had already elected eighteen women to serve in the General Assembly — with many more to come.

Celebrating a 75th Anniversary is truly a demonstration that the *League has made a difference!*