



THE WEST VIRGINIA VOTER

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2011 Legislative Priorities

The Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of West Virginia has selected the following issues to focus on during the 2011 legislative session:

1. The LWVW supports legislative action that will implement the Affordable Health Care Act of 2010 in West Virginia.

Along with passage of the 2010 federal Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act (ACA) came passionate pros and cons on the Act. The League supported the passage of the law because it extends health care insurance to more than 30 million Americans, protects the coverage that currently delivers care to most, contains essential elements to reduce costs over the long term, and accomplishes these goals at a reasonable cost. Through increased eligibility for federal payments for Medicaid and the establishment of state insurance exchanges, West Virginia has the possibility of increasing insurance coverage to more than 184,000 adults, preponderantly low-income working adults. Opponents of health-care reform, however, have adopted a strategy of fear, delay, and obfuscation. Many from the opposition groups are appealing the law in the courts and plan to work to repeal or, at the least, de-fund the Act.

Meanwhile there are several measures West Virginia must take action on in order to comply with the federal law. Deadlines are involved so we should not wait to see what happens in the courts and new Congress.

INSURANCE EXCHANGES

Under the ACA most of the people in the US are required either to be covered by insurance already or to buy insurance. Insurance Exchanges are to be set up in the states for individuals and small businesses to shop for health insurance in a cafeteria-like menu. The states will establish rules for the exchanges, with the rules to be submitted to the federal government by 2013 for approval so they can go in effect by 2014. The federal government will provide money to set up the exchanges. In states that opt

out of providing the exchanges, the federal government will set them up. The idea is that by banding together consumers will be able to buy at lower costs, with a greater variety of plans, such as corporations and large groups get now. There will be subsidies for lower and middle-income individuals and families. Those who already have insurance are guaranteed their same insurance. The exchanges will approve policies that meet government standards.

Four levels of plans are to be offered: "platinum," "gold," "silver," and "bronze." The newly insured do not have to buy insurance through the Exchanges.

Some of the questions WV must resolve are:

1. How to set up boards to manage the program. Different non-profits, agencies, businesses, and consumers will vie to be members of the board.
2. Should the exchange be run by a state agency or a non-profit organization?
3. How to provide transparent, complete, and evaluative information about the different insurance plans. The plans must be made readily available to the public.
4. How can the exchange reduce costs?
5. How to ensure that the clients know which is the appropriate program for them (through the Exchange, Medicaid, or Children's Health Insurance Programs [CHIP]), as well as providing information on what federal subsidies are provided.
6. Should WV establish two exchanges, one for individuals and one for small businesses? How can WV be business friendly?
7. Should WV enter into a regional exchange?
8. How can WV avoid adverse selection? (Adverse selection is where policies sold inside the exchange attract a sicker population, while insurance sold outside the exchange attract a healthier population.)

MEDICAID

The WV Legislature must recommend that WV set its poverty level at a rate so that more low-income adults will be eligible for coverage. Presently WV's level for those covered by Medicaid is 34% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

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Affordable Health Care Act, continued from page 1

In 2014, under the Affordable Care Act, the federal government will expand Medicaid to low-income working adults who earn up to 133 % of the FPL. The federal government will pay 100% of the expansion costs until 2020 when the match will be 90%. In addition, children in the foster care system who are covered by Medicaid when they turn 18 will be eligible for Medicaid coverage with a comprehensive benefits package until they turn 26, regardless of income. Additional services also will be provided in the expansion. Because West Virginia is a low-income state, its match now from the federal government for Medicaid reimbursement is \$2.85 for every \$1 WV pays into the system.

SOURCES

*Delegate Don Perdue, Chair of the Health and Human Resources Committee, WV House of Delegates

*West Virginians for Affordable Health Care - www.wvahc.org

*The Commonwealth Fund - www.commonwealthfund.org

2. The LWVWV supports the regulation of horizontal/Marcellus Shale drilling for natural gas in order to protect nearby residents and the environment (water, air, and land).

The League of Women Voters of West Virginia supports strong controls on the horizontal drilling/fracking process for accessing natural gas in Marcellus Shale deposits. West Virginia's deposits are considerable, especially in the northern part of the state, so we are seeing an exponential increase in drilling.

Our concerns about the horizontal drilling/fracking process include:

- The large use of water in the process. We fear that surface waters will be dewatered to the point where the streams do not have an adequate flow and are no longer able to support viable fresh water habitats.
- The disposal of the tremendous amount of wastewater generated. Strong standards for the disposal of the wastes are necessary so that neighboring wells and surface waters are not polluted from the chemicals used in fracking.
- A knowledge of what chemicals are in the fracking fluids.
- Adequate funding mechanism for regulation of the fracking process.
- Runoff pollution from large land disturbances and from the cinders used on the roads and diesel oil spills. The cinders come from power plant waste and may be considered hazardous.

An interim committee has been studying the drilling in Marcellus Shale problems, and it is hoped it will come up with a proposed bill for the 2011 legislative session.

For more information about the drilling for gas in Marcellus Shale deposits, see the LWV of Pennsylvania's website, <http://palwv.org/issues>. Go to Marcellus Shale.

3. The LWVWV supports legislative action to assure adequate funding to implement the Supreme Court of Appeals Public Financing Pilot Project.

In 2010 the Legislature passed the WV Supreme Court Public Campaign Financing Pilot Project, which went into effect in June. The project will allow candidates for the state Supreme Court of Appeals in 2012 the option of running as "clean elections" candidates, receiving public funding for their campaigns while agreeing to accept no private campaign contributions.

Imagine an election in which voters know that a candidate is beholden to no one but the voters, a campaign in which the candidate can devote all of his or her time to communicating with voters and none of it raising money, and an elected justice about whom citizens have no basis for wondering if donors might have influenced a decision.

Public financing allows candidates without personal wealth or connections to generous donors to run for the Court based on their qualifications. Candidates must start the process by raising seed money contributions of \$100 or less from at least 500 donors to demonstrate that their candidacy has broad support. Once they qualify for public financing, they no longer have to beg for money.

The task at hand for the 2011 legislative session is to assure that the Legislature defines a funding mechanism for the pilot project. The League will continue to work with the Citizens for Clean Elections coalition to lobby for passage of a funding plan.

The Secretary of State's office has established a fund to accept contributions, to which coalition members made contributions totaling \$1800 at a press conference in November. The LWVWV board later voted to make a contribution from the League. While the contributions may be small compared to the total that will be needed, they are a visible demonstration of citizens' support for clean elections. Legislators tell us they often hear from citizens about what they are against; they say they'd like to hear more often about what people are for.

Video of the November press conference is at <http://www.lwvwwv.org/>. For a summary of how the pilot project will work, see the pilot project summary sheet at <http://www.wvoter-owned.org/>

Follow the actions of the legislature online ...

The 2011 regular session of the West Virginia Legislature convenes on January 12 at noon. There is a variety of information available at the Legislature's website - www.legis.state.wv.us:

Bulletin Board

Access prompt information during legislative sessions through the Legislature's Calendars, Meetings, Abstracts, Indexes and Journals.

Blog - Today in the Legislature

Read an up-to-date summary of daily legislative activities.

Wrap-up

The Legislature's official newsletter - published weekly throughout each regular session. It contains summaries of bills and other legislative actions.

Streaming Audio

Listen to the Legislature live. Streaming audio is available for House and Senate floor sessions as well as the House Education, Finance, Judiciary and Government Organization Committees and the Senate Finance and Judiciary Committees.

You can keep abreast of bills by using the Bill Tracking and Bill Status features. Legislators' addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are also available at the site.

For Your Information

- Mark your calendars for the State League Convention to be held in Morgantown on April 30. Arrangements will be announced later.
- Kathy Stoltz spoke on behalf of the League at a press conference on November 16, 2010 about the Supreme Court public financing pilot project. A video of the press conference can be viewed at lwvww.org.
- The State Board applauds Marion Weiser, Voters Service Chair, for all her hard work during the 2010 election cycle. Job well done!
- All local Leagues participated in election activities, such as holding candidates' meetings and publishing Voters Guides. The Morgantown League also helped with the U.S. Senate debate held at the WV Public Broadcasting studio in Morgantown. It was a busy year!
- Representatives from each local League met on November 13, 2010 for training by national coaches in the techniques of the Membership Recruitment Initiative. The initiative focuses on growing the membership of the League.
- Women's Day at the Legislature is scheduled for January 25-26. For information, go to wvdhhr.org/wvwc.

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Susan Watkins
President and Editor



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Calendar

January 12	WV Legislature convenes
January 25-26	Women's Day at the Legislature
February 14	League's 91st Birthday
March	Women's History Month
March 12	WV Legislature adjourns
April 22	Earth Day
April 30	LWVWV State Convention, Morgantown

JOIN THE LEAGUE! The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan 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. **If you live in Cabell, Jefferson, Monongalia, or Wood County, please contact the local League in those counties.** To join at the state level, send a check or money order payable to LWVWV to: Margie Renaud, Treasurer, LWVWV, HC 60, Box 148, New Martinsville, WV 26155. Dues are \$40 for individuals, \$60 for a household, and \$20 for students. Because we are a lobbying organization, membership dues are not tax-deductible.

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