



**The West Bay
RI League of Women
Voters' SENTINEL**

serving Cranston, Coventry, East Greenwich,
Exeter, North Kingstown, Warwick, West
West Greenwich and West Warwick

FEBRUARY 2011

**2-year STUDY OF RI EDUCATION
FUNDING offers Documents on-
line, Statewide Info Session, and
Local Consensus Meetings --**

Save Sat. 2/26 and Tues. 3/1

How *should* Rhode Islanders pay for public education? As a League we can't say—not yet. But smell that coffee perking?!

At our 2008 Annual Meeting, retired school librarian Mickie Bonneau struck a vital spark by offering to chair a study of that soon-to-be-burning question: “What makes a statewide school funding formula fair?” 2009’s economy then cut to the bone RI state school aid, and new RI Dept. of Ed. Commissioner Deborah Gist (who spoke at 2010’s League Day at the State House) initiated deep reforms. So West Bay’s spark soon blazed into an intensive 2009-2011 statewide LWVRI study.

But ours is a League—we speak based only on principles we members agree on. So those months of meetings that Mickie convened of members from Newport to South County to West Bay to Providence to East Bay can now produce authoritative testimony for this spring’s RI legislative deliberations---*if you’ll help.*



First, do your homework! Please, read our study’s consensus questions and five carefully researched papers at www.lwvri.org (or call LWVRI Study Chair Mickie Bonneau at 946-9245 for paper copies) on these hot topics: RI’s History of Education Aid, Fair Taxation Policies, 2012’s proposed State Education Aid Formula, Formulas in Other States, and Funding Charter Schools.

Then, bring your caring questions to a public information session: we West Bay Leaguers can carpool to Cranston’s **William Hall Library**, 1825 Broad St., **on Saturday, Feb. 26 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30** (followed by a Dutch-treat lunch?!).

Finally, help form West Bay’s consensus (see definition on p. 2) at a

POTLUCK LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday, March 1, at 11 a.m.
at President Marie Hennedy’s home
56 Marion St., EG (884-3976)

so LWVRI’s Board hears US at its March 14th meeting to formulate an authoritative all-RI Leagues’ position on Fair RI Education Funding.

MELT THE ICE WITH

Love Letters



Some fine Sunday in March (we'll forward the date asap), let's enjoy together the Academy Players' 2 p.m. matinee of A. R. Gurney's Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Love Letters* at the Varnum Armory at Main and Division Sts. in EG! Valerie Tarantino (Mrs. Gibbs in *Our Town*) and Michael Thurber (Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*) star in that fine performance, directed by the talented Cait Calvo, one of Trinity Rep's founders. (Sadly, a death in Michael Thurber's family means the show can't go on in February.)

And why not meet first for a Dutch-treat brunch at The Grille on Main (50 Main St.) about 12:30 p.m.?! Play tickets cost \$16 (\$14 for seniors). Reserve yours today by calling 885-6910, or at www.academyplayers.net.

P.S. Valerie and Michael are much better looking than our clipart photo suggests!

LWVUS-Endorsed Marriage Equality: Local Rally Feb. 9, 4 p.m.

If you too see marriage as a civil right for all, wear red to this week's State House rally!

Congratulations, Shirley Payne!

The front page of Jan. 27's *NorthEast Independent* aptly saluted one of our fine West Bay members, former North Kingstown Library Director and then 19-year (!) volunteer Shirley Payne. Her wisdom and charm have graced many of our meetings, especially those Hot Topics Suppers at North Kingstown's Sonoma Pub, and we look forward to Shirley's presence at many more League events!

Say, just what is a League

“CONSENSUS”?

Not a majority vote, a League consensus rather a series of statements that all in the room can live with if not heartily endorse.

We'll attain our Fair RI Education Funding position by each local League's discussing and agreeing, when we can, upon answers to a carefully crafted, logical series of questions. Starting with very broad issues (e.g., Should public schools in RI be funded fully by the state, by the state and localities, or by some other means?), questions become more specific. E.g., If localities are to share in school funding, how will each one's capacity to pay be determined?

Obviously, we all need to read those study documents (on-line or on paper) and to attend our statewide public information session before offering our thoughtful opinions at our West Bay consensus potluck lunch meeting at Marie's at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, March 1. Do call her at 884-3976 to arrange a carpool to the William Hall Library in Cranston on Saturday morning, Feb. 26, from 10:30 to 12:30, and/or to say what you'll bring for lunch—we're building upon her own excellent essence of beef stew!



Gov. Lincoln Chafee to Speak at March 30th's League Day at the State House

Up close and personal—that's how we Leaguers can experience state government, at least at our yearly League Day at the State House!

Do save **Monday, March 30, 2011** for your opportunity to carpool to Providence (parking's easier with fewer cars) in mid-afternoon. After hanging your coat outside the historic Governor's Reception Room just off the rotunda on the 2nd floor, first on our agenda might be an informal tour to include the 3rd floor visitors' balconies. There we can see the House and/or Senate in action, including their acknowledging the League's presence and its now-91 years of non-partisan voter service.

"At the rise," i.e., when official House and Senate business is over for the day, committee hearings begin. We can choose to sit in on testimony (and/or to testify in our own names, not that of the League) before, perhaps, House Finance on heating aid for the poor, or Senate Judiciary on domestic violence—the topics depend upon each committee's business for the day. In other words, we'll see first-hand what lobbying is all about!

Then we'll gather back at the Governor's Reception Room to greet and hear Governor Lincoln Chafee speak to us and to answer our questions.

The day officially concludes with a delicious catered buffet dinner, eaten at big round tables overlooking the dome's rotunda, while we schmooze among Leaguers from throughout Rhode Island. But often best are the conversations in the carpool on our way back home!

Respond to the form in our state newsletter, *The RI Voter*, to reserve your seat at dinner. And look forward to a local phone call offering you a carpool opportunity!

LWV's Community Health Centers' Salute to feature West Warwick's Thundermist

What difference is federal health care reform bringing to RI? At our Hot Topics Coffee from 9-11 a.m. on Saturday, June 4, at the then-brand new Thundermist Health Center in West Warwick's Cottonshed (on Providence St. across from the Royal Mills condos), we'll offer, to West Bay town council members and state legislators as well as our members and the public, tours and a distinguished panel to discuss The Role of Community Health Centers, the \$11 billion centerpiece of federal health care reform. Thundermist, one of 18 CHS's in RI including others in Warwick, Coventry and Cranston, brings respectful, top-quality, comprehensive physical, mental and dental health care to all, regardless of high or low income. Good idea?

Calendar to Come:

Wed. 2/9	State House Marriage Equality Rally
Tues. 2/15	Board Meeting, Atria, 2 p.m.
Sat. 2/26	Education Study Information Mtg.
Tues. 3/1	Education Consensus Lunch
Mon. 3/30	League Day at State House
Tues. 4/12	Board Meeting, Atria, 2 p.m.
May ?	Our 63 rd Annual Meeting & Dinner
Sat. 6/4	Community Health Centers Salute



Whew! October's 10 Local and 3 Statewide Candidate Forums Informed 2010 West Bay Voters

Over 200 candidates for Town Council, School Committee, Mayor and State Legislator seats debated in 10 local West Bay League candidate forums held and taped for public access TV in October of 2010 in senior centers, libraries and schools in Cranston, Warwick, East Greenwich, North Kingstown, West Warwick, Coventry and (really stretching to offer a taste of League in new territories) Exeter and West Greenwich—but only on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Wednesdays were reserved for our helping LWVRI to stage debates for RI Congressional District #1 and #2 and Gubernatorial candidates—events televised live on ABC6-TV. And the final debate for RI Governor candidates, staged live at Bryant University, was also broadcast worldwide on C-Span!

A \$3200 grant from LWVRI's Education Fund underwrote our efforts. And Brian Crowley of Brycomedia provided our taping and editing services and our sound equipment. But what really made it all happen was our own members who volunteered their time to organize our efforts, to drape tables and arrange flowers and pumpkins, to moderate debates, to distribute programs and encourage audience members to write questions for each contested office on index cards placed in lobby shoeboxes.

Thank you, Colleen Azzaro, Mickie Bonneau, Autumn Guillotte, Marie Hennedy, Millie Plouffe, Caroline Stouffer and Charlann Walker, and especially Helen Friend.

WRNI'S Scott MacKay De-Briefed RI's 2010 Elections at Nov. 11's Hot Topics Supper, and We Got Heckled!

Once again we packed the stone-studded back room at North Kingstown's Sonoma Grill & Pub (where we also held last year's "Quo Vadis, Quonset?" event) on Nov. 11—for good reason. Scott MacKay, RI public radio's expert political analyst, shared with us that night the inside scoop on RI's 2010 election campaigns and outcomes. We learned too an another lesson.

Our audience was studded with local political celebrities including the newly elected RI Representatives Doreen Marie Costa of North Kingstown and Larry Valencia of Exeter as well as NK's perennial Larry Ehrhardt who conveyed Sen. James Sheehan's regrets that he was ill and couldn't be there.

After Scott's excellent presentation, he answered many fine questions. But one came from a mystery guest who asked his opinion of a sour-grapes e-mail she read from a likewise anonymous candidate who'd lost his election and sees RI as doomed. "I'm not smart enough to answer that one," Scott replied, with a straight face.

During President Marie Hennedy's thanking the audience for coming and urging them to join the League, that lady questioned relentlessly our organization's non-partisanship, e.g., with reference to the Electoral College. Finally accorded our entire attention and urged to identify herself and her purpose in being there, she demurred but let us to conclude our meeting.

In future, our Board later decided, we will continue to hold meetings open to the public but also rely upon one another to notify our host, e.g., a restaurant owner or library director, of any lack of security, and leave intervening and/or calling the police to his or her discretion.

SAD NEWS: Helen Abrams' husband Hank has died. We hold her in our love and our prayers.