



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY

League Lines

MARCH/APRIL 2005

Calendar

414-273-8683
www.milwaukee-voters.org

March

- 1 **Early Bird Registration Deadline**
Legislative Day in Madison, April 12
(See insert for program and registration)
- 2 Wednesday – 7 p.m.
Lynn Broaddus, Executive Director
Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers
“What’s Happening to the Rivers in Milwaukee?”
Firefly Room, Wauwatosa Library
Corner of 76th & North
Contact: Barbara Hussin (414) 351-0819
- 7 Monday – 7:15-9 p.m.
Internat’l Relations Committee
THE MIDDLE EAST
7010 Milwaukee Ave., Wauwatosa,
Contact: Marge & Ned Maxwell,
(414) 258-9222
- 14 Monday – 7:15-9 p.m.
Internat’l Relations Committee
GLOBAL POVERTY GAP
623 N. 93rd St., Milwaukee
Contact: Doris Zwickey, (414) 258-2589
- 16 Wednesday **UNIT DISCUSSIONS**
Selected local issues
AFTERNOON WEST UNIT – 1 p.m.
St. Matthew’s Church
1615 Wauwatosa Ave.
Contact: Minna Jones (414) 476-5249
EVENING EAST UNIT – 6:30 p.m.
Shorewood Public Library
Contact: Judith Lindsay (414) 963-9829
or Louise Petering (414)351-3617
EVENING WEST UNIT – 7:30 p.m.
Location Varies
Contact: Ruth Snedic (414) 771-7690
- 21 Monday – 7:15-9 p.m.
Internat’l Relations Committee
GLOBAL WATER CRISIS,
2815 N. 67th St., Milwaukee
Contact: Michael Daun, (414) 258-2745

- 22 Tuesday
Wisconsin Women Forward 2005
Madison
(For full information see
ltgov@ltgov.state.wi.us)
- 28 Monday – 7:15-9 p.m.
Internat’l Relations Committee
RUSSIA
7325 N. Port Washington Rd.,
Windsor House West, Glendale
Contact: John Abelt, (414) 228-8392

April

- 5 **Tuesday VOTE!**
Spring Election
- 7 Thursday – 7:00 p.m.
“Trading with the Dragon – Golden Opportunity or Dangerous Game?”
Debate the pros and cons of China’s impact on the US economy
Wehr Hall – Alverno College
3400 S. 43rd Street
Corner of 41st & Morgan
Contact: Marianne Steigerwald
(414) 476-9272
- 12 Tuesday – 8:30 a.m.
Legislative Day – Madison, WI
Madison Inn on the Park
Speakers on a variety of legislative Issues
Time allotted to visit your legislators
- 18 Monday – 9:15 a.m.
Internat’l Relations Committee
China Briefing and Geo. Soros
“The Bubble of American Supremacy”
8220 Harwood Ave., Wauwatosa
Contact: Pauline Scribner (414) 256-6881
- 20 Wednesday, **UNIT DISCUSSIONS**
Selected issues
AFTERNOON WEST UNIT – 1 p.m.
St. Matthew’s Church
“Trade with China”
1615 Wauwatosa Ave.
Contact: Minna Jones (414) 476-5249

EVENING EAST UNIT – 6:30 p.m.
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**LWV MILW. CO.
ANNUAL MEETING**

May 18, Wednesday Evening
5:30 Social, 6 p.m. Dinner
**KEYNOTER, MILWAUKEE POLICE
CHIEF, NAN HEGERTY**
Italian Community Center

**FIRST CALL
59TH CONVENTION**

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
Friday, June 3 and Saturday June 4
Holiday Inn Express, Janesville Confnc. Ctr.
3100 Wellington Place, Janesville, WI

SAVE THESE DATES

March 2, Wednesday
Lynn Broaddus, Exec. Director of Friends of
Milw. Rivers: “The Status of our Rivers”

April 12, Tuesday
Legislative Day, Madison Inn on the Park

May 18, Wednesday
LWV Milw. Co. Annual Meeting
Social and Business Meeting

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Gloria Weiskotten, Membership Co-Chair

We invite our two newest members Gale Mendeloff and Anna Grimm to join us at unit meetings, activities, and events. Please find these and other new members with their phone numbers and addresses on the insert in this bulletin. Attach this sheet to your 2004-2005 Directory for ready reference. Invite a new member living near you to join you at one of the upcoming meetings listed on the Calendar. And of course, do invite friends and coworkers as well.

THE COLUMBIAN CONNECTION

Barbara Hussin, Program Director

Special thanks to Diane Steigerwald and David Thomas for their presentation at the January 27 meeting on the conditions facing the Peace Communities in Colombia, S.A. Their pictures put human faces on the determined efforts of Colombian citizens struggling for peace and human rights. Those efforts are truly a life and death struggle. Just recently Doctors Without Borders released its list of the ten most underreported news stories regarding conflicts in the world and Colombia, S.A. was number two on that list.

TRADING WITH THE DRAGON

Barbara Hussin, Program Director

The LWV-US has a long-standing interest in world trade and has generally supported measures that expand rather than restrict trade. In our global trade affairs, the participation of China is a major factor.

Our Thursday, April 7 General Meeting will be one of the Alverno Debate Series, featuring experts discussing pros and cons of China's impact on the US economy. The debate series has been very successful in presenting factual and reasoned discussions of each selected issue. "Trading With The Dragon" starts at 7:00 pm in Wehr Hall and there is no charge for the event. There is convenient parking in the two lots bordering Morgan Avenue. Don't miss this opportunity to understand how "Made in China" affects us all.

MILWAUKEE'S RIVERS

Barbara Hussin, Program Director

Since it's founding, Milwaukee has always been about water and not just Lake Michigan. Our rivers have played a pivotal role in Milwaukee's history. We are very pleased to have Lynn Broaddus, Executive Director of Friends of Milwaukee's Rivers speak to us on issues facing our rivers and Lake Michigan today. These include pressing public issues such as sewage dumping, flood management, the

USS Des Moines, upstream wetlands destruction, as well as ways that each of us individually can make a difference in our own homes. Her presentation will leave room for questions and discussion about the issues of the day.

The Wednesday, March 2 meeting is being held at the Wauwatosa Library (Corner of North & 76th) in the Firefly Room. (There is ample parking adjacent to the building.) We encourage you to bring other interested members of the public to hear about this important subject.

ANNUAL MEETING MAY 18, 2005 Featuring Police Chief Hegerty

Barbara Hussin

Wednesday, May 18 is the date of this year's Annual Meeting at the Italian Community Center so mark the date in ink on your calendar. Invitations will be mailed to all members and please feel free to invite a guest. We begin at 5:30 pm for socializing and will have dinner at 6:00 pm. Our speaker this year is the Chief of Police of the City of Milwaukee, Nan Hegerty. She will be talking about the policies of community policing as it relates to the problems in Milwaukee (including the mentally-ill).

The business meeting, which follows, includes the election of officers, budget adoption and local program priorities.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EVENTS

The March IR Committee meetings related to the Great Decisions series lectures at UW-Milwaukee are Mondays at 7:15 p.m. The topic and location of each IR meeting is listed on the calendar on the front page of this bulletin. **REGULAR MEMBERS, PLEASE CALL the host IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND.**

The March weekly Tuesday programs at UW- Milw., 7:00-8:30 p.m. are:

- Mar. 1, THE MIDDLE EAST, Dr. Marc Copin, Director, Center for World Religions, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University
- Mar. 8, GLOBAL POVERTY GAP, Representative of the World Bank, TBA
- Mar. 15, GLOBAL WATER CRISIS, Dr. Val Klump, Director, UWM WATER Institute
- Mar. 22, RUSSIA, Dr. Marshall Goldman, Director, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University

Contact Prof. Gary Shellman for location (414) 229-3228

ACTION ON ELECTION ISSUES

Louise Petering

Recently the Board developed and sent two letters, one to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Morning Mail calling on voters to go to the polls on February 15th to support the troops who have played a critical role in the election in Iraq. We urged people not to take for granted our right to vote when we witness the courage of other people to exercise that same right. The letter did not appear before the February Primary.

The second letter was sent to all Milwaukee-area State Senators and Assembly Representatives expressing League's concern that Voter ID legislation is premature and ill-founded. The scheduled Legislative Audit Committee examining the problems of the November election processes will be completed later this year. The letter stated,

"The League believes the proposed voter ID bill will have its own problems. What happens:

- if an ID is lost or misplaced on Election Day?
- when absentee ballots are sent without a copy of a photo ID?
- when seniors or disabled are allowed witness verification without photo ID, what is the proof of age or disability?

Our questions regarding the ID bill concern not only election process, they raise the serious issue of voting denial to qualified voters. We believe that our concerns reveal the need for a more deliberate approach to election legislation. Until all investigations such as the audit review have determined the actual problems, it is unreasonable to proclaim solutions.

The League of Women Voters is celebrating its 85th Anniversary this year. Our organization was founded by the same women who fought for and won the right to vote. Since our beginning 85 years ago, we have championed the right of citizens to participate fully in all elections and we continue to advocate for this basic principle of citizenship."

NATIONAL LEAGUE NEWS

Louise Petering

First the Good News – The LWVUS has been awarded a \$250,000 MacArthur Grant for Civil Liberties to coordinate a national public dialogue about the delicate balance between civil liberties and homeland security. Visit the National website to read about it (www.lwv.org).

News of Concern to the LWV Milw. Co. Board - The following letter addressed to the "Technical Guidelines Development Committee of the National Inst. of Standards and

Technology" came to us from National League. Kay Maxwell, LWVUS President, responded to the Committee's request for League's position on the issue of developing guidelines for computerized voting systems. The letter reads as follows:

"The League of Women Voters Education Fund has developed a whitepaper entitled Helping America Vote: Safeguarding the Vote that touches on several issues that will be considered by the Technical Guidelines Development Committee. (The whitepaper was attached)

In addition, the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) at its convention last June adopted the following statement: "In order to ensure integrity and voter confidence in elections, the LWVUS supports the implementation of voting systems and procedures that are secure, accurate, recountable, and accessible." The term "recountable" is not a code word for paper trail, indeed, the League's stand is based on the understanding that voting technology is rapidly developing. We believe that standards must allow for technological innovation.

We also believe that any analysis of voting systems must be balanced, and apply the same criteria equally and appropriate to all systems, including and attached devices for recording, reprinting, or other function. Thus, each element of the voting system that produces a ballot to be counted must assure that the ballot is secure, accurate, recountable and accessible."

The LWV-Milwaukee Board is concerned that President Kay Maxwell is relying on "technology that is ...developing ..." before that technology is fully developed to assure that ballots will be secure, accurate, recountable and accessible. These were also the concerns of the members attending the 2004 National Convention. We feel the National Board is not heeding the concerns expressed at the Convention and needs to show more caution in endorsing "new technology" and dismissing paper trails. **Please contact us with any concerns you as a member might have.**

Happy Birthday to Us!!

February 14th marked the 85th birthday of the League of Women Voters. Love your League! Join local, state and national Leaguers at meetings, and invite friends and colleagues as we celebrate 85years of "making democracy work." Legislative Day in Madison on Tue April 12 is one good way to get in on the action. So is being a delegate to State League Convention.

The League of Women Voters Milwaukee County will be featured in the March issue of Wisconsin Woman Magazine. Look for this free magazine at local stores.

KEEP COMMON SPECIES COMMON DNR Species Conservation Plan Briefing

Judith Lindsay, Natural Resources Committee member

On January 18, 2004 at Havenwoods Environmental Center, the Wisconsin DNR presented its southeast regional briefing on development of the state's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan (CWCP), one of six regional briefings. The plan, to be finalized in October, is requisite to making the state eligible for federal funding for the support of conservation efforts. Congress initiated the State Wildlife Grants program in 2001. These Grants will be the sole source of federal funding for species preservation. The CWCP plan is an assessment of species in most need of protection and the best means to preserve them. The briefing's attendees (about 40) included representatives of six DNR departments, various conservation groups such as Sierra Club, managers of nature preserves, ecologists, and naturalists. For information on the plan, and to contribute ideas and information on problems and threatened areas, contact Owen Boyle, DNR's southeast region ecologist, at (414) 263-8681, or visit the web site, dnr.wi.gov.

The CWCP plan will be based largely on the results of the state's Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) comprehensive study of current and projected conservation needs. This study assessed the abundance in Wisconsin of species in four taxa of vertebrates: birds, fish, herptiles, and mammals. Species' status was gauged relative to abundance in the rest of their natural range in regional, state, and local areas, and relative to their global abundance. In Wisconsin, of 556 species studied, 106 were deemed of low to moderate abundance, 24 very low. This broad assessment of species' populations allows coordination across political boundaries for the sake of assessing and protecting the most-threatened species throughout their habitat ranges.

Congress requires SGNC-based plans to address eight strategic elements regarding the description of problems and solutions, plan implementation, process, and broad public participation. All states will be presenting their SGCN results, providing a full national view of species' abundance and creating a basis for collaborative conservation efforts. Ultimately, the combination of all states' SGCN reports will provide the most thorough assessment of species and habitat status and needs ever undertaken.

Through the SGCN results, the Wisconsin CWCP plan identifies specific threats to species and habitats, among them: development and habitat conversion; water use; transportation infrastructure; energy production; multiple sources of pollution; invasive species and pathogens; recreational and military uses; consumptive uses such as hunting, grazing, logging, and other commercial gathering of wild materials; genetic and climate change; and others. These will provide the focus for conservation efforts. The CWCP also puts forth six primary means through which people can be involved in granted preservation

efforts, whether as professionals, governing bodies, tribes, land owners, environmental protection organizations, or private individuals. These realms for action include land and water protection; species management; research and public education; law and policy; economic and other incentives; and capacity building.

The goal of the SGNC, the CWCP, and federal funding through State Wildlife Grants is to enable an effective response to conservation and remediation needs and, foremost, to proactively KEEP COMMON SPECIES COMMON by preventing degradation rather than reacting when it's too late. The mandates and goals of the federal State Wildlife Grants include habitat restoration, reintroduction of native wildlife, public education, and development of public/private partnerships in conservation efforts—and the mandate that CWCP plans will be accomplished without introducing new regulations and constraints.

AIR POLLUTION AND LAKE MICHIGAN

Judith Lindsay, Natural Resources Committee

Dr. Jon Kahl, Prof. of Mathematical Sciences at UW-Milwaukee, spoke at the Lake Park Pavillion Community Room about Milwaukee and Wisconsin's air pollution and its relationship to the lake effect on Dec. 11, 2004. He noted federal regulation of air pollutants is based on the concentration of seven substances in the atmosphere as measured during eight consecutive days. States with areas in non-compliance are fined by the EPA. The seven substances measured are carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter of 10 micrometers or less in size. Chicago and Milwaukee are regularly in violation of the EPA clean air standards. Many violations include an area extending north along Lake Michigan's shore through Door County. Interestingly Minneapolis and Detroit are in compliance.

The high levels of pollution along the Lake north of Milwaukee are likely due in part to the "lake effect." This effect is experienced in areas on large bodies of water like the Great Lakes during warm or hot, sunny, summer days. Prevailing winds here are mostly from the southwest and during the hot, sunny days air over the land warms, rises and is carried by prevailing winds out over the lake. As the day wanes the air cools and falls carrying pollutants down over the lake. As morning sunshine warms the air above the land (more than that over the lake) morning breezes move from the lake onto the near shore in a slightly northerly direction. The pollutants from the previous days' emissions are brought back on shore. This pattern is essentially like a corkscrew or helix that cycles air – and pollutants – between the lake and land. So when, gasoline fumes, and auto, power plant, and factory emissions enter the air, sunlight energizes chemical reactions that convert the oxygen produced by green plants to ozone. It is that ozone that we are warned against on "ozone alert days."

continued from pg. 4, Air Pollution

The good news is that regulations put in place by a succession of Clean Air Act provisions have resulted in a decrease in the level of pollutants in our area in the last eight years. But beware of the Clear Skies proposal touted by the President. While it does provide for decreases in pollutants, it weakens the more stringent provisions of the Clean Air Act that require greater reductions in pollutants over a shorter time period. It is in this context that the Oak Creek power plant retrofit is being waged.

MILWAUKEE COUNTY'S CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICERS

Louise Petering

A recent communication from member and former County Treasurer Dorothy Dean called my attention to an omission in our Membership Directory, namely the Directory does not include the constitutionally mandated officers of our County. In working to address this omission, I went to the County website and found a search of constitutional officers erroneously included these offices: Election Commission, Family Court Commissioner, Medical Examiner! Correctly listed were the offices of the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Sheriff. Omitted were the Treasurer, Clerk and Register of Deeds. The five constitutionally elected officers are independent of the Co. Executive's office, although communication and coordination among them is necessary if County government is to serve the public interest. It is interesting to note that the five constitutional officers are elected in the fall when voter turnout is higher. The Co. Supervisors and Executive are elected in spring when voter turnout is lower. Below in alphabetical order are County website-derived descriptions of the five constitutionally mandated offices. See and SAVE the MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY INSERT For Officers Contact Information.

The Clerk of Circuit Court is a constitutional office providing support to the state circuit courts in Milwaukee County. The Clerk is also a liaison between the court system and the County Board, County Executive, State Legislature, Director of State Courts, the media and the public. He is also an administrator in charge of a department of over 300 employees and a budget in excess of \$32 million. The office of the Clerk of Circuit Court processes over 150,000 case filings annually for the 47 Circuit Court Judges and 22 Court Commissioners in Milwaukee County.

The County Clerk provides services to the County Board, County Executive, department administrators, County staff and the general public. The County Clerk records and indexes the proceedings of the County Board of Supervisors; maintains all of the legislative files and indexes of ordinances and resolutions for Milwaukee County; administers oaths of office, maintains the central files for Milwaukee County reports, records documents; receives and publicly opens bids; licenses; processes garnishment actions, tax levies and wage assignments of County employees; processes lien notices; registers all lobbyists and reports to the County Board and

Executive on the number of registrants. The County Clerk's staff consists of eight employees.

The Register of Deeds office generates net revenue of over \$3 million per year; and all real estate-related instruments that affect title to approximately 300,000 parcels of land located in Milwaukee County are recorded here.

The following documents and services are available through the Register of Deeds:

- certified copies of birth, death, marriage records*
- request to file a military discharge for safe keeping.

In addition, the Office of the Register of Deeds records, scans, and compiles an index of real estate documents, corporation papers and military discharges; records informal probate instruments; files and keeps an index of financing statements; maintains a motor vehicle lien index; collects the real estate transfer tax; and performs such other functions as provided, pursuant to Sections 59.51, 69.23 and other pertinent sections of the Wisconsin Statutes.

*Event must have taken place in Milwaukee County.

The Sheriff's Office is the largest sheriff's office in the state of Wisconsin. Founded in 1835, it is also the oldest. The sheriff's constitutional mandates include maintaining the county jail, providing bailiff services for circuit courts, policing the expressway, serving legal process, and preserving the safety of Milwaukee County residents.

The Office of the Sheriff is divided into four bureaus: Administration, Special Operations, Police Services and Detention. The Sheriff's Office also provides specialized services to local jurisdictions when requested. These services include, but are not limited to, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), drug enforcement, and community services.

Pursuant to Section 59.25 of the Wisconsin Statutes, the County Treasurer receives all monies which belong to or are deposited in trust with the County of Milwaukee; pays out all monies on directive of the County Board, or as otherwise provided by law or ordinances; transmits State taxes, fees, and revenues from other charges to the State Treasurer; collects and enforces the collection of delinquent property taxes; assists with certain administrative details in connection with the sale and redemption of 1982 and prior County bonds or notes; provides for the daily cash requirements of Milwaukee County; and invests County appropriations not needed immediately in low risk, short-term investments. The Treasurer is also responsible for investment of public funds not needed for daily operations. In addition, the Treasurer is responsible for collecting delinquent property or real estate taxes for the 18 suburban communities in the county. The City of Milwaukee does its own collection of property taxes.

Watch the May/June League Lines for an inside view of the County Treasurer's Office.

SMART GROWTH UNIT DISCUSSION

Louise Petering

Our November 2004 Unit Discussions on Smart Growth reported back to the Natural Resources Committee. The Committee summary below reflects much of what was said during discussions.

1. a) What do you see in your mind's eye when you envision a community that looks like it has grown smartly? Affordable housing, safe pedestrian areas (walks, street crossings), environmentally friendly businesses, parks and green spaces, leaders planning for the future, an integrated transportation system that includes all types of transportation, a safe public, contained shopping areas, no slums, no sprawl.
b) What do you view as contributing to this community's smart growth? Planning, planning, planning came through loudly and clearly and that included a master plan incorporating redevelopment and/or conservation of old buildings and new development. Lower population, one car families, availability of rail and bus transportation, and jobs were all seen as contributors.
2. How is smart growth defined? Remember Smart Growth may be defined as "a master plan for how and where growth and development can or should occur and where land needs to be protected. Included are policies that provide incentives (usually taxes or tax-breaks) to conform to the plan. Smart growth does not mandate growth boundaries.
3. What elements are critical to smart growth? List some elements and why they are critical to smart growth.
 - Willingness of government, business and citizens to work together to plan ahead for a community and to implement the plan for sustainability
 - A balanced, multimodal, efficient transportation system providing choice and access to jobs
 - A clean, healthy, sustainable environment
 - Quality, affordable housing options
 - Local and regional planning
 - Public areas that are pedestrian friendly and aesthetic (restrict signage, utility poles and wires)
4. What current issues pertain to smart growth in
 - a) your own community? Members identified the Park East Freeway, Brady Street Condo height and the River Walk, in the City of Milwaukee. In West Allis the "Six Points Area" development, crime, citizen safety and absentee landlords were discussed.
 - b) Milwaukee County? Development of the County Grounds, care of Milwaukee County Parks, improved social services, and uncoordinated general development were identified.
 - c) the Milwaukee metropolitan area? Freeway reconstruction (I-94, the Marquette Interchange and I-43), big box stores, and interbasin transfer of Lake Michigan water to Waukesha pertain to Smart Growth.
5. What initiatives toward Smart Growth do you see and is progress being made?
 - a) in your community? Milwaukee - METRA connecting to Milwaukee, Mayor Barrett's dialog with Waukesha Co., the new AMTRAK Station downtown and the stop at Mitchell Field, and mayors supportive of Smart Growth are all progress toward Smart Growth, but land use decisions need to be more central to planning.
 - b) in Milwaukee County? Redevelopment of the Menominee Valley, discussions of multimodal transportation, and support of extant mass transit (buses), maintenance of County Parks and development of natural areas are progress. Progress is slow.
 - c) in the Metro Milwaukee Area - Metro Milwaukee has benefited from good river planning. The State has done a good job in addressing Brownfield redevelopment as has West Allis. Also, see items in 5a and b.
6. What are your thoughts about
 - a) high-density development? Generally, members favored it if it included enough green space and broadened the tax base. Arlington, VA was mentioned as a good example of how Smart Growth can accomplish this. Other members wondered who would want to put a \$250,000 home within an arm's reach of a neighbor. Perhaps row houses are too close. Some like apartment living, but only if open green space was nearby.
 - b) low-density development? It has its place in the scheme of development and could occur near fragile areas (not in them) or where groundwater is recharged by rain water seeping down to aquifers. Not all areas should be developed.
7. What is government's role in Smart Growth? Government at all levels has a critical leadership role in Smart Growth. It needs to be involved in planning and providing fair incentives for the plan and its implementation. It needs to bring expertise to the process. Without vision and coordination, government's role can be overwhelming!
8. Are you in support of the state requirement that each Wisconsin community have a Master Plan by 2010? Although Wisconsin's requirement for a master plan does not mandate Smart Growth, plans developed may be Smart. Members agreed it was good to require a master plan by 2010. Coordinated planning among communities (municipalities, towns and counties) is critical for successful municipal planning. Some areas and folks do not want planning. Disagreement occurs over issues like libraries. Planning for waste water treatment, wetlands, floodplains, employment opportunities, and the items in 3 above are elements that need to be considered in Smart Growth.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Part IV: How U.S. Foreign Policy Is Made: The Policymaking Machinery

The article below is the last of a four part series. See earlier bulletins for parts 1, 2 & 3. Excerpted, with permission, from GREAT DECISIONS 2004. Foreign Policy Association, New York. www.fpa.org. Written by Nancy Hoepfli-Phalon, FPA's editor in chief, 1981–98; updated by Justin B. Slaughter, editorial assistant, November 2003.

The American Political Process

Throughout most of U.S. history, a very small group of people conducted foreign affairs. In the minds of this “elite,” public participation had no place in the management of foreign relations. It was Woodrow Wilson, a tireless champion of democracy, who was determined to “democratize” diplomacy—to do away with “secret deals” arrived at “behind the backs of the people” in favor of “open covenants openly arrived at.” His ideas had a profound impact on the U.S. conduct of international relations long after his era. During World War II and throughout the cold war, when public support for America’s foreign policy was critical, the role of public opinion rose to new eminence.

Not all members of the public exert the same degree of influence on policymaking. Social scientists tend to classify the public into three groups: the public-at-large or mass opinion, the attentive public and organized interest groups.

The public-at-large tends to have less interest in foreign policy issues than in local and family concerns. It tends to be poorly informed and sometimes distressingly ignorant. In a study conducted a few years ago, most high-school students could not identify the U.S. on an unlabeled map of the world. The public-at-large is also crisis-oriented. Its interest is aroused by vivid television coverage—for example, the events of 9/11—that demands some kind of response. Finally, the public’s foreign policy outlook tends to change with some regularity—from isolationist to interventionist and back.

The attentive public—or elite opinion on foreign policy—represents perhaps 10%–20% of the American people. It consists of citizens who are genuinely interested and involved. They tend to be better educated and well-informed. Many communicate their views to policymakers in Washington. They write letters, sign petitions, visit their representatives. The attentive public helps focus the attention and arouse the interest of the apathetic. They participate in the activities of organizations like the Foreign Policy Association, the World Affairs Councils, the United Nations Association of the U.S.A., the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters, which have contributed significantly to raising the level of public interest in and understanding of foreign affairs. The public-opinion elite also serves as a source of new and creative ideas for policymakers and as informed critics of prevailing policy.

The third category consists of organized interest groups. There are literally thousands of these. In addition to the “big three” of business, labor and agriculture, they represent every segment of society imaginable—religious denominations, war veterans, Foreign Service officers, ethnic groups, environmental groups and human-rights advocacy organizations. Many individual business corporations with foreign interests maintain permanent offices in Washington, D.C.

Some of the most intensive and successful lobbying is conducted by executive agencies and officials of the U.S. government. The President has several White House assistants whose responsibility is “legislative relations.” Their primary goal is to gain support for the President’s foreign and domestic programs on Capitol Hill. The Department of State, along with nearly all other executive departments, has a Bureau of Congressional Relations, which monitors Capitol Hill.

Democratization of Foreign Policy

The foreign policy process has begun to change, and it is becoming more pluralistic, primarily as a result of the growing interdependence of the U.S. with the rest of the world and the dramatic expansion of the role of the media, particularly the Internet. Decisions can no longer be made by the executive branch alone in consultation with a small group of foreign policy experts on the outside. Notes a report by the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, a presidential commission created by Congress to provide bipartisan oversight: “America still needs diplomacy between governments, but policies and negotiated agreements will succeed only if they have the support of publics at home and abroad.”

Once engaged, how can citizens make their voices not only heard but effective? What they need most of all is an understanding of the policymaking process. They can then develop an effective strategy for exerting their influence. This includes expressing their goals in a clear message and demonstrating that they have a strong political base and speak for key constituencies. The appearance of e-mail, Meetup.com and weblogs have aided this trend immensely, with the public able to organize and make their views known to opinion-makers as never before.

Wider participation or pluralism in the formulation of policy brings new voices into the process, and as a result decisions are likely to be based on a broader consideration of the issues and a fuller assessment of the alternatives. But greater participation also makes the foreign policy process more cumbersome. Extensive public discussion does not necessarily lead to consensus; it can be divisive and inconclusive, as evidenced in the debate on the U.S.-led attack on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and President George W. Bush’s war on terrorism. It is especially unsuited to formulating long-range national strategy or addressing complex issues. But democracies are often unwieldy and untidy. As the British statesman Sir Winston Churchill once remarked, democracy is “the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

Join the League Today!

Become a member of the League of Women Voters and help *Make Democracy Work!*

Dues [Circle One]: \$60 Individual \$75 Household (2 or more individuals) \$25 Student \$25 Limited Income
 \$100 Sustaining (supports \$25 memberships) \$160 Centennial (supports action & activities)

Name _____ Home Phone (____) _____

Address _____ Work Phone (____) _____

City _____ WI Zip _____ e-mail _____

Involvement [Check One]: Active ___ or Supporting ___ Interests _____

Please Note: Please place a check () by your preferred means of contact and mail this form with your check to the **League of Women Voters of Milwaukee County, P.O. Box 100785, Milwaukee, WI 53210**. Thank You. (Non-tax deductible contributions may be made to the LWV Milwaukee County. For a tax deductible gift to the LWV Milwaukee County, write a separate check, minimum \$50, payable to the LWV Education Fund. Mail contributions to the membership dues address above.)



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF MILWAUKEE COUNTY

P.O. Box 100785
Milwaukee, WI 53210
414-273-8683
www.Milwaukee-voters.org

