



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

SUFFRAGETTE

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LEAGUE'S SIDE LOSES IN HOBBY LOBBY DECISION

In a five to four decision June 30, 2014, the United States Supreme Court decided that a corporation in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, Inc.* could refuse to cover the cost of some forms of contraception for its female employees, based on religious grounds. The decision in the case dealt a serious blow to women's right to equal health care in America. The League of Women Voters joined an amicus brief in this case.

This decision was the opposite of the position which the LWV took in 2012 when employers sought "religious or moral" exemptions to the Affordable Care Act. At that time the League asserted in response to attempts to allow any employer or provider who claimed an ill-defined "religious or moral" objection to a health care service, such as reproductive health care, to be exempted from providing such coverage under the Affordable Care Act. The League opposed this exemption which would undermine the very premise of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that all persons, regardless of gender, should be eligible for health services under the Affordable Care Act, and that failure to do so is discrimination based on sex.

The League's long-standing position on reproductive rights was adopted in 1983:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that public policy in a pluralistic society must affirm the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.

The League's position on advancing health care was adopted in 1993:

The League is dedicated to ensuring access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans. We believe that all Americans should have access to a basic level of care, including disease prevention, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute long-term care, mental health care and health promotion and education. We support the inclusion of reproductive health care, including birth control and abortion coverage, in any health benefits package.

Throughout the years, the League has joined several lawsuits and worked with reproductive rights groups to oppose the continued threats by Congress and the Courts against reproductive rights.

Elisabeth MacNamara, President of LWVUS, said that "Some argue that this is a narrow decision, applying only to the Affordable Care Act's contraception coverage provision. Given the other cases likely to come before this Court, it would be unwise to allow today's decision to lull us into complacency. The Hobby Lobby decision is an ominous sign for what may be to come on this vital issue."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's 35-page dissent warned just that. She said the decision will have sweeping consequences with the potential of opening the door for opting out of any law. (To read her full dissent, copy and paste this address into your browser: http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/13pdf/13-354_olp1.pdf)

It has been reported that more than 80 companies have petitioned the courts for permission to use their owner's religious beliefs to discriminate against women. That's not surprising given the constant attacks on birth control and women's reproductive health care.

LEAGUE'S SIDE WINS IN FLA. REDISTRICTING DECISION

Last week, a Florida Circuit Court ruled that the congressional state map was unlawful. This decision is a big step forward in the fight for voter-based redistricting. In *Romo v. Detzner*, the court examined whether Florida's congressional districts violate the Florida constitution. The final judgment of the court was that the congressional map drawn by the Florida legislature and adopted in 2012 violates the Fair District Amendments which were adopted to remove partisan influence from the redistricting process.

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The League of Women Voters of Florida was the lead organizational plaintiff in this lawsuit and was also the driving force behind passage of the Fair Districts Amendments. During the case, the Florida court required legislators to disclose secret emails used in the redistricting process. These messages showed that the Florida congressional redistricting was intentionally designed to benefit one party over the other. Circuit Court Judge Terry Lewis wrote, "political consultants or operatives did in fact conspire to manipulate and influence the redistricting process."

LWVUS National President Elizabeth MacNamara applauded the decision. "With a big win like this, the League has shown that citizen-led initiatives can stop partisan redistricting. We can have redistricting processes that allow the voters to choose their representatives rather than the politicians choosing the voters," she wrote.

Does the Florida win bode well for the redistricting lawsuit to which LWV of North Carolina is a party? Plaintiffs in the North Carolina case alleged that plans violated the state and national constitutions when the legislators secretly drafted districts in a way that diluted the African-American vote across the state. Race was the overriding factor in the drawing of the 2011 voting districts creating "majority minority" districts throughout the state splitting counties and even precincts to do so.

The plaintiffs lost the first round of arguments that the districts should be thrown out and redrawn and that the February 2014 election deadlines be stayed while the court reviewed the districts.

The LWV of North Carolina has had redistricting as one of its issues for emphasis during the past two years and has joined with other groups lobbying to establish an independent agency commissioned by the legislature to draw district lines every 10 years.

PRELIMINARY INJUNCTION SOUGHT AGAINST NEW VOTING LAWS

by Peg Chapin, who attended the court hearing

A member of the LWVNC state board was present daily for the federal court hearing in Winston-Salem in which plaintiffs are seeking a preliminary injunction against North Carolina's new voting laws which are slated to take effect for the November 2014 elections. Plaintiffs, which include the LWVNC, argued that the law discriminates against minorities and reduces access to the polls for the elderly, teenagers and low-income citizens. The state says the new laws will prevent voter fraud.

Since last year's Supreme Court decision striking down a key part of the 1965 Voting Rights Act on preclearance requirements, plaintiffs now have to prove that provisions of voter laws prohibit people from being able to vote. Previously, the state had the burden of proof to prove its laws didn't harm minorities.

Plaintiffs' 11 witnesses testifying included:

--expert witness Charles Stewart, a MIT political scientist who gave statistical evidence that if the law had been in effect in 2012, "almost 300,000 African-Americans early voters would have been shoe-horned into more congested early voting and election day voting sites."

--93-year-old Rosanell Eaton who spoke about the day she registered to vote and her voter registration efforts.

--Rep. Rick Glazier, member of the NC House, who testified that trust has been lost in the Legislature because of the way the Senate added further restrictions to the Voter I D Bill.

The state presented no tangible evidence of any problems associated with the voting regulations that were in place prior to the voting law change, nor did they present any evidence of voter fraud. Judge Schroeder told attorneys he wanted to consider the national implications that could result from his decision and added that he would issue a ruling "sooner than later".



Plan to celebrate Women's Equality Day Tuesday, Aug. 26, 2014, with women's groups across the county, commemorating passage of the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote.

Wine, heavy hors d'oeuvres, one-act suffrage play and guest speaker Kaye McSpadden will be featured.

The League of Women Voters of Charlotte-Mecklenburg is lead sponsor of the celebration at the Midwood International & Cultural Center, 1817 Central Ave., 6:15-8 p.m., RSVP at www.goleaguego.org or call 704-556-4600. A \$10 donation is suggested to defray costs.

Ms. McSpadden is a high school English teacher in South Carolina and award-winning writer. She has written a novel and writes columns for the *Charlotte Observer*. In 2012 she won The Norman Mailer Center and the National Council of Teachers of English fiction award, which included a three-week writing fellowship in NYC.

Suffrage Takes A Bow

by Suzanne Elsberry Schweikert

In the waning years of the nineteenth century in America, the progress of the women's movement was discernible in novels, songs, addresses and essays. To the great disappointment of suffragists, no suffragist plays were available to counteract popular anti-suffragist burlesques such as "The Spirit of '76," which parodied the movement as well as its leaders.

Interestingly, the vast majority of nineteenth-century farces and burlesques were not written to be performed on the stage, but in the home for the amusement of family and friends. These pieces came to be known as parlor dramas. As such, they required a minimum of space, scenery, and properties. These performances were often combined with other diversions such as charades and tableaux. Eventually, the upper middle classes developed such an appetite for these theatricals that they were relocated to larger venues such as hotels and halls. At the same time, many acting groups and clubs were organized for non-professional actors.

At the turn of the century, society began to frown upon and discourage amateur dramatics because it was felt that women (in particular) would be seduced into the acting profession. During the preceding years (1890s), professional actresses had become involved with parlor dramas, often in high society settings. Thus, the legitimate theatre saw a friendly merger with its domestic cousin.

ENTER from the wings: The Woman Question. With this entrance, a union formed between the women of the suffrage movement and the actresses of the theatre world, and they worked together for a common cause. This timely alliance of two formerly disparate classes utilized the stage to achieve their common goal: obtaining the vote for women. Together the women began to produce "women's pageants, tableaux, and suffrage propaganda plays." Many revered actresses both wrote and performed in suffrage plays for the New York and Broadway stage, and soon many women's colleges began performing them. The movement sometimes used the productions as fund-raisers.

We can only conjecture as to why twentieth-century suffragists welcomed drama and the performing arts as a vehicle for their message. It is surmised that activists felt any and all means were needed to gain the public's support, and that the influential actresses in the eastern U.S. were inclined towards becoming avid supporters of the movement.

The suffrage play was created to bring attention, and, hopefully, a solution to a social problem. Once the problem was resolved, in this case by the adoption of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, the genre became passé in the United States, and thus, a part of history.

Playwright George Bernard Shaw captures the thought best:

When we have achieved reforms enough to bring our institutions as far into harmony with the feelings of women as they are now with the feelings of men, there will no longer be a Woman Question.

No conflict, no question.

Information in this article was compiled from *On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (1987), edited by Bettina Friedl

A Congresswoman from North Carolina is trying to get help for women who have to deal with complex financial items as they relate to the budget by asking the men folk if they "can bring it down to a woman's level". She explains:

"Men do tend to talk about things on a much higher level. Many of my male colleagues, when they go to the House floor, you know they've got some pie chart or graph behind them and they're talking about trillions of dollars and how, you know, the debt is awful and, you know, we all agree with that. We need our male colleagues to understand that, if you can bring it down to a woman's level - - - that's the way to go".

My question is: Could we establish a committee to help League of Women Voters members with finding some men to explain the budget to us - and do so on a level we can grasp, of course?

-----Ann Wood



What I Learned From the Recent “Freedom Summer” PBS Video

By Linda Levy

Having been an adult in 1964, I remember vividly the “Freedom Summer” Project. But there was much that I didn’t know and learned from watching the recent American Experience “Freedom Summer” video.

The 1964 Freedom Summer Project was designed to draw the nation’s attention to the violent, oppression experienced by Mississippi blacks who attempted to exercise their constitutional right to vote and also to develop a grassroots freedom movement that could be sustained long after the student activists left Mississippi. More than 700 black and white students from around the country went to Mississippi, one of the most viciously racist, segregated states, and, with local African Americans in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) started to register voters. Freedom Schools were established to provide much-needed education to black students. As one of the northern students said, “If you cared about this county and about democracy, you had to go down.” Many of the local, black Mississippians, however, were skeptical of the ability of the northern student volunteers to carry out the project.

We remember that soon after the project began, three students went missing, and, much to the nation’s horror, their bodies were found on August 4, 1964 buried in an earthen dam.

During that same summer, the Democratic Party held its National Convention in Atlantic City. All the Mississippi delegates were white and did not represent the interests of the black community. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) was formed with the intention of gaining recognition by the Democrats as the legitimate Mississippi Democratic Party and sent delegates to the Convention. After much negotiation, a “compromise” was offered which allowed only two delegates from the MFDP to attend. This compromise was turned down by the MFDP.

After this turbulent summer, the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed, which provided for federal oversight and inspection of the electoral process in selected situations. The state of Mississippi vigorously fought these rules. It was only with Supreme Court rulings and the passage of time that black voting became a reality in Mississippi. At the very end of the PBS program it was noted, “Now Mississippi has more black elected officials than any other state.”

A postscript to this dramatic story is that many of the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are being overturned, but the LWVUS is working hard to ensure that justice prevails.

This issue of the Suffragette is a publication of the membership committee, Suzanne Elsberry Schweikert, chair, and edited by Lucille Howard.

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