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Maine League of Women Voters

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The MAINE VOTER

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1972 – A New Call To Action

It MATTERS How You Slice it:

Senate Reapportionment

by Nancy Masterson, State President

The League year began earlier than usual for me last August when I received an unexpected assignment. A letter from the Governor arrived asking me to serve on the Senate Reapportionment Study Committee. Our task was to advise him on signing the Senate reapportionment measure which had been passed just before legislative adjournment, or to offer a more equitable plan. Despite the fact that I knew reams of new material would have to be digested and hundreds of figures surmounted, and that the ticket promised to get political—I said yes. What else could a former League Constitution chairman say when she knew that here was a chance to participate directly in governmental policy-making in a field for which the League had prepared her?

It is always fascinating to watch a committee coalesce and gain expertise. The Chairman of the Study Committee, President Bernard Currier of St. Joseph College, was new to Maine, new to us, and certainly not an old political hand. He was an extremely intelligent and able chairman. Our four "politicos" were a State Senator from each party, and a Young Republican and Young Democrat (both women!). The remainder of the Committee was more or less "non-partisan", representatives of labor, industry, municipalities, county government, Maine colleges and League of Women Voters—15 of us in all.

At the outset we realized we must catch up on our court decisions on apportionment cases since the 1964 Reynolds v Sims decision which mandated the one-man one-vote principle under the equal-protection clause of the 14th amendment of the Federal Constitution. We learned that courts have become even more stringent in demanding equally populated districts. The days of allowable deviations from 15-20% mathematically are gone forever. We saw the whatever districting plan we were to recommend, it must contain districts as close to 100% equality as achievable. This became our single most important criterion, with compactness, contiguity, and community interests of secondary consideration.

The 31-seat plan passed by the Legislature as a last minute compromise was even less satisfactory mathematically than the two 33-seat plans that did not pass. Having voted unanimously to recommend against the Governor's signature of the plan approved by the Legislature, we set to work on a plan of our own. Our weekly sessions took place in the State House rooms strewn with books and papers, the walls a crazy-quilt of redistricting plans, revisions, maps of city wards. Every meeting produced another plan—some by committee members, some by interested party people.

With the November 1 deadline only three weeks away, we took the plan with the best figures and, with the idea of making them even better and the districts more compact, got down to the tedious chore of drawing our own district lines—group effort, via trial error!

Who can describe our joy as York and Cumberland counties fell neatly into place? Our distress as we realized the state had no authority over city ward and precinct lines? Our frustration over populations in large unorganized territories which were never pinpointed as to exact residence by the Federal Census-takers? Our elation when we solved

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE at the Legislature LOBBY CORPS TRAINING DAY

February 3, 1972

9:30 A.M. - 3:30 P.M.

Meet in the Hall of Flags, State House

If you can volunteer time in Augusta during the Special Session or the Regular Session 1973 . . . if you can fly to your post at the drop of a postcard . . . if you feel the League can and should improve its effectiveness at legislative lobbying . . . and you want to learn how . . .

JOIN THE LOBBY CORPS
Lobby training, position briefing, etc . . .
and the REAL THING

WHAT'S DOING WITH MALS

Increased communications with our many far-flung members-at-large, known as Mals in League parlance, has been assumed by Doris Birkett as chairman. More publications and letters have gone out and a questionnaire is helping us to know their talents and areas of interest.

A meetings for Mals was held at the home of Elaine Goodwin in Manchester on Nov. 18th when State Board Chairmen, Whit McEvoy, Dot Dunton and Joan O'Toole outlined past efforts, current positions and future prospects on State Government, Taxes and Human Resources. After a luncheon break, Sheila Seymour, head of the environmental item and a member of the Board of the Natural Resources Council, conducted a land use discussion. For those who have no local League affiliation it was an informative and enjoyable occasion which we hope to repeat if enough members can participate.

A group of about ten Mals living near Augusta have formed a unit to study state and national programs. They will also be learning first-hand about the legislative process with the aim of assisting the State Board in keeping abreast of developments during a legislative session.

The State Board has drawn up guidelines for establishment of such units in locations where a full-fledged League has not been feasible or where a new group might become the nucleus for the start of a provisional League.

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the "Aroostook problem" by achieving the most compact districts we had seen?

The trial result looked good. The districts are impressively near-equal in populations. Aiming for a quota of 30,111 persons in each district (state population divided by 33 seats), we were able to draw 16 districts that came to within 1% of this figure, 11 that came to within 2%, and the remaining 6 within 4%. The largest district has a population of 31,140 (curiously enough, my own!), or deviates from the quota by 3.42%. The smallest district has a population of 29,167, a deviation of 3.14%. The ratio of the largest district to the smallest is 1.07% to 1. Not bad!

Before the plan even emerged from committee, we began to wonder if it would ever see the light of day. The question arose as to when the Legislature period of grace (in which it could still legitimately reapportion itself,) began, and when it would end (after which the Supreme Judicial Court would become the reapportioning agency). The opinion given by the Court was that if the Legislature had not reapportioned in a Special Session by Jan. 1, 1972, the task would go to the Court.

Meantime, our committee report went to the Governor, who heeded our recommendation against the 31-seat plan. He then submitted our own plan to the legislative leadership. A late fall whirl of consultations, opinion polls, and party caucuses ensued, yielding a consensus among the majority that our plan was unacceptable, among the minority that it was acceptable. At the turn of the year, the responsibility of deciding upon district lines for the next Senate would go to the Supreme Judicial Court.

The League of Women Voters of Maine has always thought that the Legislature should reapportion itself, since it is its own members that are affected by redistricting. Yet twice in the last few years, the Legislature has demonstrated its inability to rise to the occasion. What will happen when the House must redistrict in 1973? It is interesting to note that our Study Committee endorsed and recommended reapportionment by an independent commission composed of legislators and non-legislators. Is the League behind the times?

A final note about politics. Throughout our committee work sessions, political advocacy was conspicuously absent and gerrymander attempts were frankly identified and rejected. It seems ironic that the Legislature, along party lines, has informally rejected our committee plan. The last item on our committee agenda was to evaluate each district in terms of majority vote. The considered judgment of the committee, "partisan" and "non-partisan" members alike, was that our plan would produce 15 seats for Republicans, 15 for Democrats and three toss-ups!

LWV OF MAINE VOTERS SERVICE QUIZ BOX FOR MARCH

- Do you know how to HAVE A VOICE IN THE CHOICE of delegates to your political party's STATE CONVENTION?

IT'S SO SIMPLE!

GO TO YOUR PARTY'S LOCAL CAUCUS and VOTE there.

HELP THE PARTIES PUBLICIZE THOSE MARCH CAUCUS DATES and PLACES in your community.

SPREAD THE WORD FOR GRASS ROOTS POWER.

LEAD A CROWD TO THE CAUCUSES!

- WHY — Because this is our chance to vote for the best possible delegates to the party's STATE CONVENTION. They will help to choose delegates to the NATIONAL CONVENTION where our PRESIDENTIAL candidates are nominated.

- ARE YOU —

A RESPONSIBLE DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN PARTY MEMBER?

PROVE IT by your CAUCUS ACTION!

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