

Vision & Voices

NEVADA WOMEN'S LOBBY A VOICE FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

The Organization Dealing with Issues Concerning Women, Children and Families

VIEW FROM THE LEDGE

By Bobbie Gang, NWL Lobbyist

"Hostile Hallways" is the phrase I think best characterizes this legislative session. (Not to be confused with AAUW's report on school harassment.) The atmosphere in the building is uncomfortable, almost painful; everyone is stressed as the pace intensifies to pass or defeat legislation before the April 15 deadline for passage out of committee in first house.

As we publish this newsletter, we have passed the midpoint of the legislative session. In the first 60 days, property tax relief was passed, easing some tension between the political parties, the two houses and some of the leadership. At this midpoint, over 1150 bills have been introduced, more than half in the past two weeks.

Now the committee chairs are rushing to schedule those bills for hearings and many won't make the cut – just not enough time on the committee agendas. Any bills that aren't heard and passed by the deadline are dead. At hearings, some committee chairs discourage testimony so hearings can move along quickly and more bills can be heard. Citizens who travel to the legislature to participate in the process are intimidated and don't testify.

In addition to the crunch of bills in committees, problems with bill-drafting is causing many bills to be amended in committee or floor sessions. This is causing further delays and stress.

Add to this the polarization of different political philosophies in the two houses: the Assembly controlled by the Democrats with some very progressive proposals; the predominantly

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TRAINING GROUND FOR GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS

Over 200 citizens attended NWL's Grassroots Lobby Days in Carson City in March. At least half were college students from the Boyd School of Law, UNR, UNLV and Great Basin Community College. This nonpartisan group, primarily Nevada women, journeyed from sixteen cities and towns to our state capitol to learn about and get involved in their law making process.

GLD participants, ranging in age from 20 to 80 and representing over 30 different groups, attended workshops on hot topics in this legislative session and received tips from panels of lobbyists and legislators on how to lobby their issues.

Several sat with their assemblypersons during the floor session; some met with their representatives one-on-one or in small groups; and some students testified before committees.

Attendees gathered at an evening reception sponsored by AARP, where First Lady Dema Guinn and sixteen senators and assemblypersons joined them for good food and conversation.

Since Lobby Days, participants have continued their involvement by doing research on issues before the legislature and testifying before committees. One attendee is exploring the creation of a new NWL region in Elko (for information, call Carol Snyder at (775)777-0949.) Some comments by attendees:

"I did meet with my legislator & sat on the floor with him. It was a wonderful experience."

"Watching the debates and the decision making first hand was such an incredible experience. After this experience I learned I could become an unpaid registered lobbyist. So, I registered..."

"Less than a month after attending GLD I testified during an assembly subcommittee about an issue dear to my heart, NEW Leadership Nevada."

NWL thanks all the co-sponsors, attendees, speakers, scholarship donors and volunteers who made Grassroots Lobby Days a success. Event co-sponsors: AARP Nevada, AAUW of Nevada, Committee to Aid Abused Women, Family and Child Treatment of Southern Nevada, Greater Nevada School Counselors Association, League of Women Voters of Nevada and of Las Vegas Valley, National Association of Social Workers - Nevada Chapter, Nevada Nurses Association, Nevada Women's Agenda, PLAN, Planned Parenthoods of Mar Monte and of Southern Nevada, Reno Association for the Education of Young Children, Soroptimist International of Greater Las Vegas, Southwest Gas.



Grassroots Lobby Days participants watched an Assembly general session from the gallery while others joined legislators on the floor.

View, Continued from Page 1

Republican Senate with some very conservative proposals. Strategy is intense as bills are heard in the first house, knowing that they could easily be killed in the second house.

NWL steering committee members and lobbyist are spending long hours to keep up with the process: reading bills, determining positions, working in coalitions, and testifying.

We will be working the "Hostile Hallways" until the end of the session.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

They did it! One day behind schedule, the legislature passed AB 489, providing property tax relief for all.

- All owner-occupied homes are capped at 3% a year.
- Other properties are capped at 8% a year.
- Low-rent housing is capped at 3% a year, but there is no guarantee the savings will be passed on to tenants.
- Small businesses not performing well may apply for a tax reduction.

The ramifications of AB 489 are not readily apparent. As with the tax reform package of 2003, we have yet to see the actual impact on local government services and the public education system. The bill does include \$44,000 to pay the shortfall in the Distributive School Account and up to \$50 million for the counties that will suffer under this property tax scenario.

Constitutional amendments to put permanent property tax relief into the state constitution will be considered by the legislature before the end of the session. And Assemblywoman Angle waited until this property tax bill was passed to renew her commitment to leading a Proposition 13 type ballot question to cut property taxes even further.

Most legislators of both parties do not want a Prop 13 in Nevada. It could have severe economic effects on local governments and school districts. The lessons learned in California after they passed Prop 13 should be lessons studied to avert the crisis that was created in our neighboring state, and which continues to negatively impact services and education.

FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN

AB 198, Full Day Kindergarten, is working its way through the Assembly with strong support despite the \$72 million price tag. NWL supports this bill because full day kindergarten has been proven successful in pilot schools right here in Nevada.

Those opposed have expressed concern that five- and six-year olds cannot sit in a classroom for six hours. However, kindergarten teachers who have taught full day say their students do not sit at a desk for three or more extra hours. Rather, their varied programs are designed to supplement the learning of the children falling behind and provide additional opportunities for children who have mastered the kindergarten criteria.

Please contact your assembly-person and senator and let them know you support AB 198.



"D-" AGAIN FOR NEVADA

As legislators look at excess funds and competing priorities, they might look for guidance to the 2004 Nevada Children's Report Card, compiled by the Children's Advocacy Alliance.

Nevada's overall grade, when compared to national averages and other states' figures, remains at D-, the same as 2002. Composite grades in several categories are below. Each of these has several sub-categories that are also graded. For copies of this report call (702)228-1869.

Nevada Children's Report Card	
Health	D+
Safety & Security	D
Education	F
Teen Years	D-
Overall Score	D-

FOSTER CARE CHILDREN

Much of the foster care legislation being considered this session comes from the recommendations of the Legislative Committee Study on Children, Youth and Families:

- 1) transfer children in state custody needing "higher levels of services" ("severely emotionally disturbed" or mental health diagnoses) to Clark and Washoe County Social Services;
- 2) give a rate increase to individual or agency providers of higher levels of services;
- 3) maximize collection of federal dollars by setting up a "cost allocation unit";
- 4) provide a transition plan for children leaving foster care at eighteen, to assist them with Social Security cards, driver's licenses, work cards, health care coverage; and, if applicable, arrangements for disability benefits, housing and other services. These changes are contained in AB 35, AB 36, and AB 37.

AB 42 codifies the rights of foster children:

- to live in a safe, healthy home;
- to be free of physical, emotional, sexual abuse;
- to receive adequate food, clothing and an allowance;
- to receive medical, dental, vision and mental health services;
- to be free of the administration of medication or chemical substances unless authorized by a physician.

In addition, there are several bills dealing with adoption, and disclosure of information in adoption records.

AB 46 continues the transfer of foster care and other child welfare duties from the state to the larger counties, and extends the Legislative Committee on Children, Youth and Families to June, 2007. This interim committee is very important in oversight of the transfer of services from the state to the counties and in recommending further changes needed to protect and nurture the foster children of Nevada.

NWL will be supporting all of these bills that improve Nevada's foster care system, and we urge your support also.

MINORITY HEALTH DIVISION

The special health needs of Nevada's minorities will be the focus of a new Division of Minority Health if AB 53 passes. Thirty-nine other states have already established such divisions, which work to improve quality of care and access, and address the unique health needs of African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. According to the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, there is a profound disparity in health status among America's racial and ethnic minorities.

The division created in AB 53 would provide education, advocacy and centralized resources, in addition to programs for improved health care quality and access. It also is directed to provide training in cultural diversity for health providers.

The Division of Minority Health would complement the work of UNLV's new Center of Excellence for Health Disparities, funded through a recent grant from the National Institutes of Health, and help access additional federal funds aimed at improving the health of minorities.

AB 53 requires \$40,000 over a two-year period, so it awaits action by the money committees. Similar bills have died in the Senate in the 1999 and 2003 sessions. We will be working to help assure this division is finally established in Nevada.

EQUAL PAY DAY

WEAR RED TUESDAY APRIL 19

Equal Pay Day is set for April 19 to raise awareness about unfair pay for women and people of color. The month of April indicates how far into each year a woman must work to earn as much as a man earned in the previous year. Tuesday symbolizes the day when women's wages catch up to men's wages from the previous week.

Wherever you are on April 19, please join NWL and wear RED to symbolize how far women and minorities are "in the red" with their pay.

WHY THE FEDERAL BUDGET MATTERS

Our mission at NWL is to lobby and educate on issues that affect women, children and families at the state level. It is most unusual for us to take a position on a national issue, but we're making an exception because of the dramatic way that proposed cuts in the federal budget will hurt us here in Nevada.

Of the three versions, Presidential, House and Senate, the Senate version has the fewest cuts to programs that will hurt Nevadans, but all three versions increase the deficit while cutting services to those who need them most and preserving tax cuts for those who need them least. The next step in the process is reconciliation of the House and Senate versions before a final budget is passed, so there is still time to contact our Senators and Representatives to tell them what we think.

Under the House budget we will lose between \$55 and \$74 million in Medicaid funding, crucial to providing health care for 169 thousand Nevadans and keeping healthcare costs down for the rest of us. In that same budget plan, Nevada will lose \$20.4 million in SSI funding, \$28.5 million in the earned income tax credit, \$6.9 million in TANF and child care, \$3.3 million in foster care and adoption services programs, \$3.8 million in child support enforcement, \$1.4 million in the Social Services Block Grant and another \$15.4 million in various other grants to the state. The total loss to Nevada would range from \$132 to \$164 million, all to programs that help working poor and low income families. Nevada will have to make up the difference or cut needed services.

Under the Senate plan, there are no cuts in Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Plans (SCHIP), but there are cuts in food stamps and a greater increase to the deficit than the House version. The House version's cuts in social programs are at least ten times greater than those proposed by the Senate.

To continue tax cuts to large corporations and wealthy Americans while taking funding away from programs that help ordinary Americans provide food, shelter and health care to their families is unconscionable. NWL encourages you to join us in contacting your federal representatives (Senators Reid and Ensign and Representatives Berkley, Gibbons and Porter) to tell them we prefer the Senate's proposed budget over the House version; that cuts to social programs could be avoided by reducing or eliminating recent tax cuts to the wealthy; and that ultimately we want a budget that puts the interests of ordinary Americans first.

July 19 could become National Women's Suffrage Day through legislation being prepared by Nevada Congresswoman Shelley Berkley, commemorating the women suffragists who fought for women's right to vote in the United States.

You, your friends, daughters and granddaughters are invited to march as suffragettes in the Hellsdorado Day Centennial Parade in Las Vegas on May 14, joining the League of Women Voters, NWL, and the many others in the coalition promoting creation of a National Women's Suffrage Day.

Organizers Teresa Bell and Carolyne Dunne say "The suffragists fought long and hard for passage of the 19th amendment securing the right for women to vote, and we need women on board for the future or we will lose this work of the past."

Marchers will wear all white and will be given purple ties with sunflowers and white hats or visors. Each organization will have a sign with their name on one side and "Stand and Be Counted - Vote!" on the other. Voters will be registered along the route. Contact Carolyne at (702)897-4333, or stagelyric@cox.net, for information or to sign up.



CALENDAR

- April 19, Equal Pay Day, NWL, See box on page 3, to see why to Wear Red
- April 29 - May 1, AAUW Nevada State Convention: Purpose, Power, Progress, Sparks, (775)826-9494
- May 6, Adelante Awards Dinner, Nevada Hispanic Services, Reno (775)232-7925
- May 7, 8, Cinco de Mayo, Reno Downtown, cincodemayoreno.com
- May 14, Helldorado Parade, League of Women Voters Las Vegas and others will march as suffragists (see page 3), (702)897-4333, stagelyric@cox.net
- June 6, Nevada Legislature's Last Scheduled Day
- July 9, PLAN's Annual Retreat, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, jgilbert@planevada.org, (775)348-7557
- July 19, National Woman Suffrage Day? Congresswoman Shelley Berkley is writing legislation to have this day proclaimed. Watch for local events, (702)897-4333, stagelyric@cox.net
- September 26, 27, 28, Breaking Down Barriers: Building Community, State-wide Domestic Violence Conference, Reno, katy@nnadv.org, (775)828-1115

CONGRATULATIONS SARAH



We're proud to have you representing us in Washington, D.C., Sarah Winnemucca. In a March dedication, Sarah's statue was placed in the Capitol rotunda, and on April 6 a replica was unveiled in Carson City.

North NWL CONTACTS

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PLEASE JOIN US!

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Dues:

- Individual \$40
- Living Lightly \$15
- Sustaining \$100
- Circle of Empowerment \$250
- Organization \$75



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Dues:

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- Circle of Empowerment \$250
- Organization \$75



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