

League of Women Voters
of Dallas

VOTER



A nonpartisan organization that encourages informed participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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2007-2008

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I am very pleased to address you for the first time as president of the League of Women Voters of Dallas. Thank you for your support. I am honored by this opportunity and will work hard to earn the trust and confidence you have placed with me. This organization is historic. It is well respected and epitomizes all that the democratic process represents, including advocacy and education. It is tremendous to have the privilege of leading this League.

The community looks to the League to inform and educate on issues that are in the forefront and that matter the most. Voter complacency and indifference are troubling. To see more voters "take the day off" rather than vote on Election Day is distressing.

I do not have the solution to this national tragedy, but I do have a plan. Between now and the time my term ends, I am proposing two initiatives for the League of Women Voters of Dallas. Each on its own is expected to strengthen our respect in this community. Please join in making these things happen.

1. That we commit to meeting as a general body four times a year. The plan is in addition to providing for Units to meet across communities. The "call for members" effort will highlight a planned attempt to diversify our membership by strategically inviting women and men from other ethnic groups who share our mission and vision.
2. That we think critically of meaningful ways to awaken the "sleeping giant" known as the 18 – 35 year-old voters, especially female voters; and then identify and implement ways to generate excitement while creating lifetime voters.

I realize that the initiatives are lofty! Even if both cannot be accomplished in two years, I ask you to join me in getting them started. If all of your friends are members of the League, then go make another friend to bring to the general meeting in SEPTEMBER!

Until next time...

Libbie Terrell Lee

Annual Meeting Recap and New Board Notes

Katherine Homan, Organization Vice President

In the photos on these pages, you can recognize the VIPs from our May Annual Meeting, especially **Joyce Forney, Genie Fritz, Helene Greenwald, Sue Lichten** and **Geraldine Sobel**, 50-Year Members who were in attendance. Surprise honoree was **Nancy Caveness** who received an MVP Award in special recognition for her service in producing last Fall's *Voters Guide*, our first print edition in six years.

Important business that was conducted included electing our new President, **Libbie Terrell Lee**, Secretary, **Suzanne Wills**, Organization VP **Katherine Homan** and Program VP **Mildred Pope**, and new Board Directors, **Karlton Remington** and **Miriam Foshay**.

Also, an **update of our 1972 Study on City and County Appointed Boards and Commissions** was approved after discussion, noting that one-fourth of all seats on boards and commissions are currently vacant, leaving many Dallas residents without representation. **Virginia Whitehill** pointed out that gender equity should be considered as well as other kinds of diversity on boards and commissions. **Linda Sharp** will be chairing this Committee, comprised of **Marsha Fogarty, Miriam Foshay, Genie Fritz, Sandy Greyson, Kathleen Matsumura, Mary Vogelson** and **Bessie Weed**.

At the New Board Retreat, **increasing our visibility, membership diversity, and fundraising** topped the list of goals. **Four full-member meetings**, in addition to Unit Meetings and Forums, were scheduled. Our president issued a "Call to Members" for the first meeting to be on **September 18th** from **6-8 PM** in the Oak Room at the Center for Community Cooperation. The second one will be on **December 12** at the same time and place. The third full-member meeting is the **Susan B. Anthony Award Luncheon** on **February 15** at the Dallas Arboretum, and the fourth is our **Annual Meeting** on **May 3** at the downtown Public Library. **Our units will be conducting consensus** on LWV-Texas' Study on Mandated Testing in the Public Schools, LWVUS and LWV-Dallas Immigration Studies. Enjoy a relaxing Summer and rest up for this challenging League year!

President's Meritorious Service Awardees



Linda Sharp



Fran McElvaney and Brenda Marks presenting a gift from the Board



Brenda Marks



Ann Jones



Nancy Caveness

**Katherine Homan
recognizes
this year's
Most Valuable Member
and
next year's
New President**



Libbie T. Lee

**Virginia Macdonald
Awardee**

Marsha Fogarty



**Myrtle Bales Bulkley
Awardee**

Pat Vaughan

Fifty - Year Member Honorees



Geraldine Sobel, Sue Lichten, Helene Greenwald, Genie Fritz, and Joyce Forney

80th State Legislative Session Adjourns

Lynda Ender, Vice President of Advocacy

This State Legislative Session began with lots of optimism. The state coffers had a surplus, and there were indicators that many issues had real momentum.

Two of the areas that seemed to have momentum were dealing with high electric rates and various environmental issues. The TXU buyout proposal slowed the momentum on these issues, and very little was achieved. The Legislature did reinstate funding to the system benefit fund for Lite Up Texas, so customers who qualify for the low-income discount on their electric bills can apply now by calling 1-800-241-7011.

History was made when the House and Senate passed HJR 19 (Branch), a proposed constitutional amendment to record all votes on final passage and make the results easily accessible to the public. We will vote on it in the November election. The League was one of the lead groups on this issue, and Dallas member, Linda Camin, led the charge as State Program Chair.

The State of Texas has programs that provide nursing care in the home versus care in a nursing home for persons of lesser means. These programs have long waiting lists, and the appropriations bill included funds to reduce the Community Care waiting lists 10% a year for the next two years.

The 80th Texas Legislature also opted for other humane measures regarding older people. **HB 52**, for instance, raises the personal needs allowance for persons on Medicaid in nursing homes from \$45 to \$60. Our state's guardianship safety net will be significantly stronger thanks to a variety of bills passed by the 80th Texas Legislature. **HB 1295** establishes a \$20 probate fee that will fund investigations into whether someone needs a guardian and fund local guardianship programs that care for vulnerable older Texans. For most guardianship programs to receive state grants, **HB 2691** requires them to also have money management programs, which can be the help some need to stay out of more restrictive forms of guardianship.

Mental health scored big with \$82 million new dollars for mental health crisis services. The funding must be spent on community-based interventions

designed to prevent individuals who may be experiencing a mental health crisis from being sent to an inappropriate state hospital or jail due to the lack of other options.

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) will be able to cover an additional 120,000 children in 2008/2009. It will be an improved program with a 12 month eligibility for most kids, no more 90-day waiting period and other positive changes.

And **HB 75** allows state judicial court review of decisions by Health and Human Services denying or reducing public assistance benefits like Medicaid or food stamps.

Homeowners will be pleased by **HB 438**, which limits a homestead's appraisal from increasing more than 10% in a single year regardless of when the last appraisal took place.

Older drivers will face more stringent requirements. **HB 84** declares that beginning September 1, 2007 when a person turns 85, their driver's license will expire on the second anniversary of the expiration date before renewal and will have to be renewed every two years thereafter. Texas drivers age 79 and older will not be able to renew their license by mail.

And older people who stray will receive protection with **SB 1315**, which requires the Department of Public Safety to develop a Silver Alert system to notify the media if a senior citizen goes missing. This is similar to the Amber Alert system for children that is currently in place.

Finally, we will all benefit from **HB 948** requiring large type on our prescription drug bottles.

On May 28, 2007, the 80th Session of the Texas Legislature adjourned "Sine die," signaling the end of the many hours of deliberation on the 6362 filed bills.

To view the entire text of an individual bill, or search for bills by subject or author, go to Texas Legislature Online, www.capitol.state.tx.us, or call the office of your state representative or state senator.

City Budget Needs Your Action

Important health and human service programs appear below the line in the preliminary City of Dallas Budget— meaning that they will not be funded unless they get moved above the line.

Ironically, at a time when the older adult population is booming, the services pushed below the line are mostly programs that serve older adults—funding for the two senior centers that the City of Dallas has and all their services, the Senior Services Program (counseling, case management, utility assistance, information and referral), environmental assessments, dental health services (indigent seniors and children), Senior Transportation Project, child care for homeless children, and the Former Offender Reentry Program.

Urge the people who represent you to fund these important city services. Contact City Manager Mary Suhm (214-670-3296), Mayor Tom Leppert (214-670-0773) and your councilperson at City Hall, 1500 Marilla Street, Dallas, Texas 75201.

Fight Elder Abuse!

You might know of an elderly woman who signed her life savings over to a family member and found herself living in a nursing home or an elderly man who depends on others for his care, but does not seem to get the care that he needs because the caregivers are using his money for booze and parties.

It is very difficult to prosecute cases of financial exploitation in Dallas County. You can help change this tragedy by writing letters or making phone calls to your County Commissioner and the Dallas County Judge.

Our District Attorney, Craig Watkins, is including in his budget, funding for a special prosecutor and investigator to fight elder abuse. **Ask your commissioner and judge to vote "YES" to fund a special prosecutor and investigator in the Dallas County District Attorney's office.**

Here are a few facts that you can use:

- It is estimated that for every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect reported to authorities, about five more go unreported. (National Elder Abuse Incidence Study. 1998. Washington, DC: National Center on Elder Abuse at American Public Human Services Association.)
- Dallas Police Department's Statistics for 2005 and 2006 – Crimes against Victims 65 & Older— Grand Total of 15,411. This total includes several categories such as fraud, forgery, theft, etc. The Department notes that exploitation is seldom the exclusive criminal act and is usually clustered with other crimes and/or abuses. This makes accessing exploitation stats difficult.

To lend your support, attend the following Commissioner's Court meetings which will be held at 411 Elm Street, Dallas, Texas 75202.

On July 31, 2:00 PM, District Attorney Craig Watkins will present his budget to the County Commissioners and County Judge. It is not a hearing. Normally, the public does not speak unless the Judge or a commissioner requests that someone speak. The plan is to get a large crowd of people there to show support.

On September 18, 9:00 AM, we can speak at the County Budget hearing on the Special Prosecutor for elder abuse. You call 214-653-7165 the Friday before to sign up to speak.

Voting Matters: Risk Assessment of the Election Process ***Doug Taylor, League Member and Contributing Columnist***

I recently attended a computer security conference in Phoenix. During that conference I spent 2 days in a class on communicating risk information to management. One of the case studies was the Australian National elections system.

Australia has a single agency that runs its elections nationwide. In contrast, here in the U.S., we have a hodgepodge of state and local agencies that administer elections. By law the Australian government requires risk assessments of all agency business processes. One of the things that Australian elections officials wanted to do was ensure that whatever new computer systems and software were deployed, a full assessment of the risks was taken.

Risk assessment is a methodology that is used by management to identify and mitigate risks. For example in elections, voter confidence in elections has risk. If voters lose confidence in the elections system, then the risk is that they won't vote. For example the risks in online or electronic machine voting were assessed, and the risks of system failure or inaccurate vote counts were considered too high. As a result, Australia still uses a paper ballot system.

Australia requires all its citizens to vote. Since a significant part of the population lives in remote areas and cannot easily travel to a polling place, vote by mail is very popular. In larger urban areas, voters vote in person. Some of the risks in mailing ballots is that the ballot could be lost, stolen, or tampered with enroute. Experience has shown that we can mitigate those risks in various ways such as by requiring sealed outer and inner envelopes, signatures on envelopes, affidavits, etc. These risk mitigation methodologies have become standard as they have proven effective in reducing the risk of a particular problem.

The interesting idea about establishing a risk assessment and mitigation methodology is that it requires management to accept risk and responsibility. This sounds obvious, but for anyone who has worked in a large organization, management generally tries to avoid having responsibility for anything risky (especially to their careers). Australia actually requires the risk assessments be presented to the legislature as part of the annual report by elections officials. Imagine how quickly elections officials would look twice at electronic voting systems if they were held publicly accountable for their performance and problems.

Lower risk and increased reliability can go hand in hand. As New Mexico discovered, switching from all electronic to paper ballots decreased the number of under votes (risk of votes not being counted) and increased the perceived reliability of the elections process. Of course other risks tend to rise, such as a shortage of ballots or perhaps the wrong ballot style delivered to a polling place.

I've never found a published risk assessment from the Dallas County Elections department. It would be interesting to see how they perceive the risks to our elections process and what they are doing to mitigate them. If the County Commissioners Court doesn't require risk assessments for all county departments, that would certainly be a major improvement in governance.

Drug Policy and Electronic Voting

Suzanne Wills, Drug Policy Observer

Drug policy effects a myriad of social issues in which the League is interested. Now a reform organization's efforts to assure accurate results from an initiative may help produce fairer and more accountable elections around the country.

In November 2004, voters in Berkeley, California were presented with an initiative, known as Measure R, which would have made changes to the state's medical marijuana rules. The measure lost by 191 votes, according to official results from the Alameda County registrar. The recount showed the measure lost by 166 votes. Americans for Safe Access (ASA) and the Alliance for Berkeley Patients then asked the county to provide proof that the count was accurate by providing full access to voter records.

Specifically, ASA asked the county to download election results directly from the 420 touch-screen voting machines (which accounted for fifty-three percent of the Berkeley vote), divulge internal access logs to show no one had manipulated the software during or after the election and to see chain-of-custody records for the electronic data as it moved from the voting machines to memory cards to a central tabulating machine and result printouts.

Two successive county election chiefs argued that a single version of the electronic ballot stored on removable and rewritable PC cards were the only official ballots needed for a recount.

For two years the county refused to provide the requested records. After a state appeals court sided with ASA, county election officials returned the voting machines to the manufacturer, Diebold, rather than allow ASA access. This led to a sharp rebuke from the judge hearing the case, created the possibility of punitive fines against the county, and allowed a replay of the initiative in the 2008 election.

Source: Americans for Safe Access Monthly Activist Newsletter, June 2007

Announcing Our New Municipal Bond Study Position

Congratulations to our Municipal Bond Study Committee on bringing the Study to completion and arriving at the following support position. Committee members included **Theresa Daniel, Marsha Fogarty, Michelle Manners, Barbara Materka, Kathleen Matsumura, Linda Sharp, Pat Vaughan, Mary Vogelson, Linda Wassenich, and Susybelle Gosslee, Chair.**

LWV-Dallas Local Position re. Municipal Bonds for the City of Dallas (2007)

III. Municipal Bonds: Support of:

A. Planning for the bond process with informed citizen participation, including:

1. Using a transparent strategic planning process connected to a Master Plan, comprehensive plans, or a Capital Improvement Plan related to city needs with periodic update to citizens as the basis for bond elections
2. Complete and accurate disclosure of all bond propositions, made available to all citizens throughout the planning and election process
3. Involvement of citizens during the entire municipal bond process through an appointed citizen review or advisory committee that is open to citizen comments and recommendations and monitors the bond process from needs assessment to project completion
4. Ongoing presentations/reports of city needs by city staff to public
5. Formal annual reports to citizens and city council members of the progress of the bond projects throughout the life of the bond project

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Development Report 2006-2007

Linda Wassenich, Development Chair

LWV-Dallas experienced significant success in raising money during FY2006. Much of the credit goes to **Cecilia McKay** and those who worked on sponsorships for the Susan B. Anthony luncheon and to **Jane Pak** and **Becky Brakke** for their excellent work on the silent auction.

Altogether that event and the auction raised over \$29,200. Expenses were about \$6,500, for a net of \$22,700. Approximately \$4,000 went to LWV-Dallas through the silent auction with \$18,700 going to the Dallas Education fund.

Many of our loyal donors gave through the Susan B. Anthony luncheon. However we also received many donations as memorials, honor gifts, patron dues, scholarship funds, and other purposes. Those gifts totaled \$5,122 for LWV-D, and \$7,945 for LWV-DEF. The totals come to \$26,645 for the Dallas Education Fund and \$9,122 for LWV-D. The grand total is \$35,767.

Once again, let's recognize and thank the following for their donations:

\$1,000+ Cecilia Boone, **Katherine Homan, Cecilia McKay**, the Harold Simmons Foundation, Catherine & Robert Estrada, Walmart Foundation, and UTA.

\$500+ **Jeanne Dodds, Carol Crabtree Donovan, Eve & Newell France, Joy Mankoff, Brenda Marks, Fran McElvaney, Eleanor Sutherland, Pat Vaughan, Linda & Mark Wassenich, Barbara Weinstein**, and the Dallas Summer Musicals.

\$200+ **Patti Crumley, Jane Davis, Jeanne Fagadau, Ann Folz, Dora (Vee) Gerken, Sharan & Lynn Goldstein, Julie & Mike Lowenberg, Jane Pak, Mary Jane Reynolds, John Sheehan, Judi Stewart**, and Arlene Dayton.

\$100+ **Serena Connelly, Jennifer Cutrer, Ann Early, Sally Eatmon, Rabbi Rachel Goldenberg, Jane Green, Caroline Homan, Audrey Kaplan, Liz & Alan Lerner, Harriett Lowe, Franci Moses, Essie Reed, Adrienne Rosenberg, Ellen Solender, Elissa Sommerfield, Rosalie Taubman, Doug Taylor & Elizabeth Sutherland, Sandy Thornton, Liz Wally, Ginny Whitehill, Elaine Wiant, Rosemarie Yeslow**, Mrs. Fred Catterall, Edwin Cabaniss, Ann Margolin, Elizabeth Branch, and TWU.

Those not previously recognized but who gave two or more times during the year are **Kathy Freeman, Marsha Fogarty, Jane MacAdams, Mickey Maribo, Barbara Materka, Barbara Morchower, Lucy Polter**, and **Freda Robinson**.

New Municipal Bond Study Position (continued)

B. Bond elections that include:

1. Increased citizen education by the city staff using a variety of methods to encourage citizen and city council member comments and recommendations
2. Distribution to all voters of truthful, clear, and accurate printed informational material about the bond propositions, with such materials clearly marked as having been produced by the city and approved by the city council
3. Education for the public about substantive changes to a previous bond project,
4. Full disclosure regarding all propositions, including the projects' cost estimates and evaluations through an open process
5. Listing under the same heading or category general obligation bond projects that involve phases of construction in more than one bond election so voters can track the project
6. Projects that are balanced and equitable throughout the city, based on a needs list and a comprehensive plan, with a priority assigned to projects that benefit the whole city
7. No line items for discretionary spending

C. General obligation bonds that are:

1. Used for capital improvements that have a projected life longer than the term of the bond
2. Not used for routine maintenance of existing facilities

D. Allowing citizens to vote again on bond projects when compelling situations develop, such as:

1. Major changes from what was originally presented on the ballot to the voters
2. Major cost overruns
3. Catastrophes or emergencies