

BAY AREA

VOTER

League of Women Voters of the Bay Area

Summer 2008

LWVUS Sources for Election Information

The June 2008 issue of the *NATIONAL VOTER* contains an article describing the League's on-line sites for voter information for the 2008 Presidential elections. www.VOTE411.org is a one-stop source for state-by-state voting information – including on-line voter registration and polling place locations. The LWVUS website, www.lwv.org contains a section, *Elections 101*, which presents a variety of get-out-the-vote resources for League members.

The LWVUS publication, *Choosing the President 2008*, can be ordered (for \$11) on-line at www.lwv.org or by mail or phone at League of Women Voters, 1730 M Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036-4508 or at 202/429-1965.

A new publication for young voters and students, *Electing the President: A Guide to the Election Process*, is available as a free download from http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voters_Service_Chair&CONTENTID=10594&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm. (If you do not have internet access, call Elizabeth Glenn (281-482-1067) and I will download it and mail it to you.)

Dues Renewals Due in September *New Members Welcome Anytime!*

For most Bay Area League members, September is the month when dues are due for the following 12 months. In late August, members will receive a letter encouraging them to rejoin—and an envelope for returning their dues check and form. *Your dues payment makes you a member of the Bay Area League, the Texas League, and the League of Women Voters of the United States.*

Dues remain the same for 2008-2009. Individual memberships are \$54. When more than one person in a household joins, the first pays \$54 and each additional person pays \$27.00. Student memberships are available at half rate. High school students need to provide name of school and expected graduation date. College students must provide evidence of registration for at least 6 hours per semester.

When your dues notice comes, *do renew!* ***At all levels, your membership counts.*** There is no other organization quite like the League of Women Voters. Female or male, young or experienced, too busy to help or looking for a way to get involved—we need you to help us promote the informed and active participation of citizens in government. That's what makes democracy work!

Election season is a great time to ***invite family, friends, and colleagues to join*** the League too! Application forms available from Diane Sheridan, Membership Chair, 281-326-5253 or DBSheridan@aol.com

Presidential Election Process Was Speaker's Topic at Annual Meeting

Did you know that George Washington was the only U.S. President ever elected unanimously by the Electoral College? If tradition holds sway, he will always have this unique honor. In 1820 an elector made a rare move to cross party lines and vote for John Quincy Adams. A unanimous vote for James Monroe was avoided, Washington's position remained intact, and the custom is likely to persist.

Even savvy League members learned something at the LWV-BA Annual Meeting on May 31st. Guest speaker Van Wigginton, Doctor of Jurisprudence and government professor at San Jacinto College Central Campus, enlightened attendees on the process of electing the U.S. President.

Throughout his talk Wigginton wove factual information, insights and interesting anecdotes:

- 2004 had the highest voter turnout in history based on the number of voters. 2008 may surpass this record.
- Media attention helps to narrow the field of viable candidates. After Barack Obama's 2004 convention speech garnered that attention, he courted Silicon Valley and embraced electronic social networking. This tactic yielded donations as well as an organization to send to caucuses all over the country.
- The Electoral College is made up of one delegate from each House district, one for each Senator in the 50 states and three from the District of Columbia. There are none from the U.S. territories. The total is 538, so it takes 270 to win.
- Candidates focus on battleground states. Historically Republican states have 200 Electoral College delegates; historically Democratic states have 207. The campaigns will focus on the other states' 131 electoral votes.
- Texas has 34 electoral votes, second only to California's 55.
- Within each state, popular vote determines which candidate's electors win. If McCain has more votes than Obama in Texas, for example, all 34 electoral votes go to McCain. Electors may defect but they very seldom do.
- The Electoral College system ensures that candidates come to most states to campaign. If the election were won by the popular vote, candidates would spend their time in the largest states and cities with the biggest media markets.
- The Electoral College also distances the President from Congress, thus helping to maintain a balance of power. By contract, in Great Britain the prime minister has to answer to his or her party rather than the people.

The allotted time ran out well before the discussion cooled, and many voiced the hope that Wigginton would return for another meeting. More information on the topic is available, however, from www.lwv.org and the LWVUS publication *Choosing the President 2008: A Citizen's Guide to the Electoral Process*. At the Web site click "Library" and then "Store" to purchase the book for \$11.00.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Issue Discussions Will Resume This Fall

Saturday morning issue discussions resume in the fall. Topics are derived from the studies selected at state and national League conventions and from the suggestions made at the LWV-Bay Area Annual Meeting. The board of directors will select dates after we learn more about the timing of the state and national studies. We anticipate three issue discussions again this year. Dates will be announced in future VOTERs.

Two national League topics will provide opportunities for stimulating discussion over the next two years. Delegates at the recent LWVUS Convention adopted a *Health Care* program to educate members and communities in order to be better prepared to do health care advocacy as needed. (The League has a strong advocacy position on Health Care.)

National convention delegates also adopted a fast-track study of the *National Popular Vote Compact* among the states as a method for electing the President. Former LWV-Texas President Carolie Mullan will return to the national board to chair the study. Consensus will probably be scheduled for January or February, 2009.

Delegates to the LWV-Texas Convention voted to restudy the *state position on Voting Rights and Election Laws* to consider various procedures to increase voter participation. The study will include, but not be limited to, vote-by-mail, Internet voting, same-day registration, election-day centralized voting, overseas ballot procedures, other procedural barriers to voting, and procedures that may increase voter participation.

Bay Area League members also suggested discussion topics at this spring's Annual Meeting: the death penalty, local impacts of changes in environmental protection, and renewable energy sources and the price of gasoline. (Of perennial interest are air quality and the Trans-Texas Corridor.)

When selecting topics for the three issue discussions, the board will consider member suggestions along with our responsibility to take part in the stimulating state and national studies.

Watch your VOTER for dates and topics. Issue discussions are held on Saturday mornings. We gather at 9:30 to welcome new members and chat with old friends. Discussion begins at 10:00 and ends by 11:30 a.m. Discussions are held at the home of LWV-BA Program Chair Diane Sheridan. Contact Diane with any questions. 281-326-5253 or DBSheridan@aol.com