



League of Women Voters® Austin Area

Voter

Summer 2009 Volume 14 #1

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"The League may take action on governmental measures and policies in the public interest. It shall not support or oppose any political party or candidates." The VOTER is partially funded by the League of Women Voters of Austin Education Fund.

Summer Calendar

- Thu. June 18th** **Author's event.** Women & Their Work Gallery, 1710 Lavaca, 5:30 to 6:15 p.m. with author Jill Tietjen
- Sun. September 13** **Fall Kickoff**

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Legislative Update on Education

The League is on record supporting or opposing 33 education bills in the 81st session. Following is a list of all education-related bills that appear to be headed into law.

- HB 3 by Rep. Eissler, the proposed overhaul of the public school accountability system, passed both chambers on May 31. The League took no position because this bill does not sufficiently reduce the emphasis on high-stakes testing; nor does it adequately address the punitive sanctions that are closing low-performing schools.
- HB 130 by Rep. Patrick and Sen. Zaffirini, which would create a competitive grant program for pre-K, was passed by both chambers. The League supports.
- HB 772 by Rep. Howard, requiring the State Board of Education (SBOE) to broadcast its meetings over the Internet, was passed by both chambers and signed into law.
- The Senate rejected another term of office for Don McLeroy (sitting chair of the SBOE). The governor must now appoint a new chair.
- HB 3646 by Rep. Hochberg, the major school finance bill this session, was passed unanimously by both chambers on June 1. The League supports.

For more information go to <http://www.lwvtexas.org/LNL/2009/LNL%2020.12.pdf>

-Anne Roussos & Nan Clayton — Capitol Corps

New Meeting Place for Day Unit

Due to renovations at Howson Library, the Day Unit will meet at Old Quarry Library during September, October and November 2009. The meetings will be held on the second Monday of those months (September 14, October 12 and November 9) from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. Old Quarry is located at 7051 Village Center Dr., 1/2 block off Far West Blvd. More details in the next *Voter*.

President's Report

The Austin League of Women Voters serves this community in many ways. Our mission is to provide information to the public and encourage participation in the political process. This is democracy at its best and you should be proud that you are a supporter of the League. Not enough people in Austin know about the League and the good work it does. The new Board of Directors decided that even though this organization has an extremely good reputation in this community and is known by all our governing authorities, we need to make an effort to inform the general public of our mission and accomplishments. League members are ambassadors to the public and can spread the word. I hope you are willing to help us by talking about the League to your friends and neighbors. Here are a few things you can mention:

- 1) We publish and distribute the only nonpartisan Voters Guide before EVERY election, free of charge. We printed 15,000 Voter Guides for last fall's election. It is also available at www.lwvaustin.org, which received over 119,000 hits during the election period.
- 2) The Austin League continues to provide educational programs (all are open to the public) on a variety of subjects such as Austin's water problems, the State Board of Education, an independent judiciary, land use authority and redistricting.
- 3) The Austin League helps guide our city and county officials toward transparency in government with initiatives such as:

- Publishing the costs of tax abatement on the City's and County's web sites
- Setting budget priorities that help our most needy citizens
- Considering a mixed at-large and single member district representation for our City Council.

This is an organization that is highly respected by Austin residents, so brag on it.

Thanks to all who came to the Annual Meeting. You will see a report of all the important decisions the membership voted on elsewhere in this *Voter*. The big surprise

was the increase of \$2.00 in the dues for individual members. The Board did not recommend an increase this year even though the dues we pay to LWV-US are going up (thereby decreasing

Austin's share of your dues). However, a motion came from the floor to increase dues by \$2.00 to compensate. After a great deal of discussion, it passed. This increase will allow us to retain approximately \$8 of your dues for our local budget. The members also were enthusiastic about the new program studies we adopted.

Thanks so much to our outgoing, wonderful Board members, Jaci Collins, Yvonne Khouri and Karen Hayward. They dedicated so much time and talent to our League. Congratulations to new Board members Stewart Snider and Jo Reichler. We see a great year ahead.

Happy summertime to everyone.

-Frances

*"League members
are ambassadors to
the public."*

Randall's Donations

Randall's Good Neighbor Program gives the Austin League a percentage of sales from members who have the League linked to their Randall's "Remarkable" cards. Our account number is 465. If you shop at Randall's, this is a great way to help the League.

Welcome New Members!

Randy Chapman, Kelley A. Russell-DuVarney, Anne Wheeler

Thank you to our renewing members: Jaci Collins, Linda Friedman, Verna Grice, Charles Holt, Lola Jennings, Judi Nudelman, Robert Rutishauser, O. R. Schmidt, Stewart Snider and Betty Williamson. Thanks to all for your support.

Tribute to Melanie Malewitz

(From the May 13, 2009 Annual Meeting)

Many of us will always remember Melanie as our longtime office manager. She was always there for us. She became the face of the Austin League, bringing us together and inspiring us with just the right measure of wit and wisdom. She was also our voice—the one we heard on the answering machine for many years.

In her role as office manager, Melanie always made sure that things ran smoothly: organizing office volunteers workers to mail publications, driving to the Post Office to ensure the mail complied with regulations and making sure that the office machines were running and supplies were available.

Melanie joined the LWVAA in the early 1970s after moving from Houston. Following are some offices she has held: treasurer, 1978-79; office coordinator, 1980-81; budget, 1982-84; unit coordinator, 1984-86; budget, 1991; 3rd VP, Organization, 1992-2002; bylaws, 2003-2005. In addition, Melanie was on the nominating committee and was the LWVAA's representative on the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District, where she also served as secretary. She worked on local study committees on water and juvenile justice.

Comments from League members:

"On many occasions when I was president, I would have to call Melanie to fix some breakdown in equipment or other problem.

No matter what time of day, she drove from her home in far South Austin to the office to attend to the problem," said Maxine Barkan, who served as LWVAA president for many years.

"When Melanie retired in 2002, it took two people to replace her and those two people found out what a big job it was," notes Phyllis Portnoy, who has since

shared the Organization vice-president position with Yvonne Khouri.

"Over the years, Melanie has mentored me in the ways of the League and in the ways of life-- often

with a dose of wit. One was, 'Just hold your nose and jump.' Melanie has faced adversity with such unflappable grit. She is my role model."

"Melanie was one of the first League members I met when I transferred my membership in 1972. I loved her energy and wit (still do!) and the no-nonsense way she wades into life."

"Melanie has certainly been a devoted member of the Austin League for many years--prompt, competent, dedicated and cheerful. She just has a knack for making people feel good."

"Melanie is indomitable--an inspiration for us all!"

THANK YOU, Melanie! You personify what makes the League special to us.

– Anne Roussos

"When Melanie retired in 2002, it took two people to replace her."

Step Up the Vote in Texas

The League of Women Voters of Texas along with ACLU-TX, Advocacy, Inc. Common Cause of Texas, MALDEF and NAACP-TX propose non-partisan principles to replace the very partisan principles that have been offered for election reform in Texas. These would increase voter participation and address election problems such as possible fraud, misinterpretation of the law and voter intimidation.

Problems

1. Texas was 46th in voter turnout in the 2008 general election.
2. Texas has the highest number of recent violations under the Voting Rights Act.
3. Rejection rates for Texas provisional ballots are among the highest in the US.
4. Poll workers are not following existing election law on provisional ballots and ID requirements.
5. Hispanic registration rates are lower than white-non-Hispanic rates in Texas.
6. False claims of voter fraud (there is virtually no evidence of voting by non-citizens or voter impersonation).

"Poll workers are not following laws."

Addressing these issues

1. Register all eligible Texas voters and ensure their votes get counted accurately.
2. Protect all Texas voters from practices that intimidate or mislead voters.
3. Encourage all eligible Texans to participate in all Texas elections.
4. Provide avenues to identify, report, investigate and resolve election issues
5. Prosecute voter and election fraud.
6. Make substantive changes in voting policies with robust poll worker education.
7. Reduce the 16-point registration difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white voters in Texas.

Texas Election Facts

1. If Texas turned out voters like the rest of the US, 1 million more people would vote.
2. The average rejection rate for provisional ballots across the country is 20%. In Texas the rejection rate is about 75%.
3. Texas has the second highest number of Dept of Justice objections.

Specific Needed Improvements

1. Establish a non-partisan Texas Election Committee to identify election issues and recommend changes in election law.
2. Increase voter registration by providing same day registration, reducing the need for provisional ballots for ID related issues.
3. Automate registrations as mandated by the National Voter Registration Act.
4. Improve registration forms and voter database procedures so that eligible registrations are counted.
5. Increase voter education and poll worker training re: provisional ballots.
6. Define processes and procedures for equal treatment of provisional ballots.
7. Post voter's rights at every polling location with instructions on how to file a complaint.
8. Mandate that the Texas Secretary of State compile an Election Day report including complaint incidents, performance measures for NVRA compliance and voter turnout analysis.
9. Stop the wrongful purging of voter lists and find ways to improve voting data.

Call to Action

Talk to your friends and family. Attend advocacy meetings. Write letters to the editor. Let your city, state, and federal elected officials know this is important to our democracy.

-Anita Privett—LWV-TX representative to the Election Reform Coalition

Programs for 2009

This is going to be an exciting year for the LWV-AA. We have an ambitious plan to begin or continue studies in these areas. Please contact Anita Privett at 467-2674 or anita.privett@gmail.com if you want to help with one of these studies.

New Study

Austin Energy: Why Do We Have a Publicly Owned Utility?

Comment: The LWVAA has positions on electric utility transfers and electric rate policy, which were studied in the 1980s. This study would be more comprehensive in looking at the entire structure of our city-owned utility.

Continuing Study

City of Austin Finances: Sources of Revenue and Expenditures

Comment: In the early 1980s the LWVAA embarked on a two-year study of the City of Austin Finances. The study was to be in two parts over two years-- Part One: Where the Money Comes From, and Part Two: Where the Money Goes. Only Part One was completed. Meanwhile, under City Government, in 1995 and 1997, the League adopted two positions on finances:

(1) support for the early setting of budget priorities, and (2) Electric Utility and Electric Utility transfer. Given the increase in the City of Austin's population, the fluctuation of the economy, and the resulting complexity of the city's financial structure, an updated review of the City of Austin finances was approved.

Update and Review

Air Quality: Sources of Pollution Other Than Transportation

Comment: Our local Air Quality positions concentrate on the effects of transportation on air quality. An update study would concentrate on other areas of pollution that affect air quality. We have many National and State positions concerning environmental quality that address air quality, including such areas as nuclear and coal.

Solid Waste: How Are Current Recycling Programs Affecting Our Landfills?

Comment: We need to review our Solid Waste position to gain current information on the effect of recycling programs on our landfills.

-Anita Privett—Programs Chair

Membership Info

1. Updated emails - At times we send out reminders of meetings and Action Alerts via email. To subscribe, please send a request to lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org.
2. If you elect to receive your *Voter* electronically, you save LWV approximately \$10 per year. Let the editor, Stewart (s2vs@yahoo.com) know ASAP or call the LWV office, 451-6710.
3. Dues increase - at our Annual Meeting a motion from the floor was made to increase our dues from \$58 to \$60 per year since the national LWV is increasing dues by \$2. The increase maintains the

local League's \$8 share of your dues. The increase will take effect in September. If this is a hardship during this dismal economy, please contact me at 502-0278.

- Judy Parken, Membership Co-Chair

Honors & Memorials

The Austin League provides the opportunity for donations in honor of, or in memory of, League Members.

- Frances McIntyre donated in honor of outgoing Board members Jaci Collins, Yvonne Khouri and Karen Hayward.
- Joann Lovelace donated in honor of Terrell Blodgett and Frances McIntyre.

From the New Editor

First, our deepest thanks to Jaci Collins who has published every LWVAA *Voter* since 2001. It takes a very special person in a very special organization to hold an important volunteer position for so many years.

Second, look for changes to the soft (emailed) version of upcoming *Voters*. I intend to integrate it more with the LWVAA website and make it more interactive. If you use a computer, I strongly encourage you to switch to email delivery. If only 20% more of us opted for emailed *Voters*, it would offset the dues increase we reluctantly had to implement this year.

Third, at the last board meeting I said I wanted to start an effort to attract more men to the League. This had something to do with the fact that I was the only man present. If you are a man

or happen to know one, this section is for you.

Guys, this organization has "Women" in its name not because it is exclusionary but because of electoral discrimination over the country's first 130 years. The LWV was formed when women had to band together just to have the right to vote. Think about it.

Today, the League's issues are electoral politics and public policy. These affect us all. We (men) are not exempt from civic duty. Smart women are delightful to work with, but I'm embarrassed that my gender is not better represented in this outstanding organization.

You qualify if you are civic-minded and aren't afraid of smart women. If they let me in, they'll let you in. So join me in the new Austin League Diversity Corps and help level the field. Call me (345-7047) or email me (s2vs@yahoo.com) if you have the guts, and we'll meet this fall and put together an offense. - Stewart Snider

THANK YOU — 2009 Phonathon Contributors — THANK YOU

The Phonathon is the major source of funding for the Austin Area League. We could not keep going without the generosity of everyone listed here:

Frances B. Allen, Penny Appleby, Deane Armstrong, Mary Arnold, Michelle Augustine, Robbie Ausley, Carolyn Baker, Mary Ann Baker, Natalie Balden, Maxine Barkan, Penny Barnett, Shelly Baumgartner, Nancy Bene, Terrell Blodgett, Jefferson & Nada Boyt, Sister Helen Brewer, Faye Brison, Carole Buckman, Arnold & Ruth Buss, Nancy Chick, Judith B. Clack, Jaci Collins, Sonia Colorito, Mary Comer, Noelle Davis, Dana DeBeauvoir, Alison Dieter, Joan Edmonds, Bruce Elfant & Lisa Harris, Edmund & JoAnn Farrell, Bill & Mary Finch, Sandra Fox, Carol Whitcraft Fredericks, Linda Friedman, Emory Garth, Terry Green, Verna Grice, Bill Groce, Kathleen Hackett, Frances Hamm, Emma Hampton, John & Doreen Harris, Eloise Harriss-Teas, Karen Haschke, Dr. Patricia Hayes, Leslie Hayn, Cheryl Hazeltine, Joan Hilgers, Nancy Hoffman, Linda Holcombe, Charles Holt, Sula Howell, Mrs. Clark Hubbs, Martha Hudson, Flora-Louise Jenkins, Lola Jennings, Maria Johnson, Robert & Kalista Johnson, Veronica Johnson, Keith Carson & Julie Johnson-Carson, Melissa Jones, Elaine Kant, Blake Locklin & Jon Kay, Virginia Kerbow-Moore, Yvonne Khouri, Anne Koler, Sue Kothmann, Vicki Kullberg, Patricia LaCombe, Dolly Lambdin & Lawrence Abraham, Lee Leffingwell & Julie Byers, Rosemary Lehmborg, Sylvia Lester, Christina Little, Ellen Loeb, Marjorie Loehlin, Karen Lorenzini, Joann Lovelace, Jane-Elizabeth Madison & Judd Rogers, Chalda Maloff & Russell Zears,

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LWV-AA Nonpartisan Policy Statement

(Adopted May 1996; updated 2002; revised May 2009)

The League of Women Voters of the Austin Area endorses the nonpartisanship position held by the LWV-US which states: *The League may take action on governmental measures and policies in the public interest. It shall not support or oppose any political party or candidate.*

Board of Directors:

League board members and spokespersons shall refrain from conspicuous partisan political activities during their term of office and should consult with the board before engaging in conspicuous partisan political activities related to their League responsibilities. The political activities of a spouse or relative of a board member shall be considered as separate and distinct from the activities of the board member. Should a board member wish to become a candidate for public office, she/he shall submit a written resignation in sufficient time to allow the League to publicly announce the change in status. Resignation from the board does not mean resignation from the League.

All League Members:

League Positions – Once the League (local, state or national) takes a position on an issue, members may not identify themselves as League members when publicly

expressing an opinion that is in opposition to a League position.

Representing the League – Members representing the League in the community should be sensitive to their responsibilities. When acting in public as League representatives, members must not allow partisanship to be discernible. These members should be fully aware of League positions.

Serving on Commissions – Members may serve on governmental commissions at their own discretion. If the appointee represents the League, then the appointee should be fully aware of the League positions in relation to the commission's responsibilities.

League Meetings – Members in leadership roles at unit and other public meetings have the responsibility to ensure the nonpartisanship of the meeting and its environment.

League Roster – The LWV-AA's roster shall not be made available for non-League use without board permission.

Board Direction – If a board member, off-board chair, or member becomes involved in a situation in which the nonpartisan policy of the League may be jeopardized, such member shall ask for a board decisions on what is appropriate action.

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE AUSTIN AREA**
1011 West 31st Street
Austin, TX 78705

NON PROFIT
ORGANIZATION

U.S. POSTAGE PAID
AUSTIN, TEXAS

PERMIT NO. **2204**

Are your dues paid?

ATTENTION MEMBERS: Please fill out the form below and send with your dues renewal and/or any changes to the LWV-AA Office, 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705. **The League is grateful for your support!** If you do not wish to renew, please notify **Jaci Collins, Member Records**, at jacic@sbcglobal.net or at 257-9636. This will save time and expense in sending follow-up reminders. Thank you .

For new and *renewing* members and for address changes:

***** Not for Women Only *****

Name _____; _____

Name of household member (if applicable)

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Phone (H) _____ (W) _____ (Fax) _____

Email _____

I'd like to receive the *Voter* newsletter via email.

	Individual	Household	Student
Dues (now/Sept 09)	\$ 58.00/60.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 20.00

I'm an existing member and this is a change to my information.

Additional Donation	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____
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You can also PayPal dues to

Total	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____
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lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org

(Dues allocation: National \$27.15/29.15; State \$22.80; **Local \$8.05**; Total \$58.00/60.00)

MAIL TO LWV-AA OFFICE: 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705