



# The Voter

February 2009

League of Women Voters - Comal Area, PO Box 311324, New Braunfels, TX 78131  
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## Our Mission

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Neither the League nor its Educational Fund supports or opposes any political party or candidate.

## Lobby Day – The League at its Best

On Monday, March 9, the League of Women Voters of Texas will gather at the State Capitol in Austin. The morning events will begin at with our statewide conference from 9 to 10 am. During the session, we will record your board’s acceptance of changes to two of our state League’s positions, Judicial Selection and Child Abuse and Neglect.

This will be followed by a presentation on other issues we in LWV-CA have been working on recently. Senator Jeff Wentworth will discuss possible legislation during the 81<sup>st</sup> Session on redistricting, county authority and the death penalty moratorium. After a lunch at the capitol cafeteria, LWV-CA members will visit our state congressmen.

We hope any of you who are interested and can attend this important and exciting day at the Capitol will fill out the attached registration form, return it by February 16, and join Fran Hargrove and Bonnie Leitch on their trek to Austin. For details on carpooling call Bonnie at 830.660.2335.

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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF TEXAS

League of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Will be attending the Statewide Conference.

Note: Each League is allowed two votes: the president or her alternate and one other delegate. There is no limit on the number of members who may attend.

If the president is unable to attend, please notify us of the name of your designated alternate (may be from another League).

Name of alternate:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Will attend Sunday evening Special Event

\_\_\_\_\_Yes    \_\_\_\_\_No    \_\_\_\_\_Don't know

\_\_\_\_\_ Will NOT be attending the Statewide Conference.

Please email or mail this form to the LWV-TX State Office ([lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org](mailto:lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org)) for receipt by Feb. 16.

**HOTEL INFORMATION**

DOUBLE TREE HOTEL at 15<sup>th</sup> and Lavaca  
\$179.00 (sleeps 3-5 people on 2 queen beds and a pull-out bed)  
\$129.00 (two beds)  
\$\$\$ - Overnight Parking

# Circle Arts Theatre A Success

By Jill Sondeen

Our Circle Arts Theatre fundraiser was a 'lovely' success! We netted \$753. Julie Andrews eat your heart out - Yesenia McNett was magnificent. The whole cast did a fantastic job to a full house. Thanks to Jan Estes for organizing another smashing success and to all who sold tickets 'with a little bit of luck.' I think Elizabeth Elliott 'could have danced all night' wherever she was at the fine production by Robin Williams – Kudos to all.

## Legislative Update

By Jensie Madden

Many members join the League because they want to learn more about how government works and they want to be involved in making government better. There is no better time than right now to get involved in Texas government. Our legislature only meets every two years, and the current session began in January and will run through the end of May. It is a very short time period, but very intense!

Our local League hosted experts from LWV-TX at our Legislative Forum on January 28, 2009. This report is to summarize what we learned, and to give you suggestions on how you can help the League advocate for important issues in the next few months.

We were especially pleased to have audience members Donna Eccleston, Jan Kennady, and Jay Millikin from Comal County Commissioners' Court, as well as representatives from nearby Leagues, San Marcos and Wimberley Valley. Appreciation goes to the following LWV-CA board members for help before and during the Forum – Fran Hargrove, Bonnie Leitch, Mary Jean Tipler, and Lois Yocum.

Mary Finch, Advocacy Vice President for LWV-TX, gave an overview of the League's advocacy work at the state level. She explained that the League supports certain positions that we have studied and come to agreement on. During this 81<sup>st</sup> Legislative Session, there are 26 volunteer Program Chairs from around the state who are following particular issues for the League. (One of those chairs is our own Bonnie Leitch, who is following legislation dealing with financing state government.)

Each Program Chair summarizes important bills in the ***LWV-TX Legislative Newsletter***, which is sent by e-mail to all League members in Texas every two weeks during the legislative session. Mary Finch urges every member to read the *Legislative Newsletter* when it arrives in your inbox. You can follow issues that may be particularly of interest to you, such as child abuse, campaign finance reform, or energy issues, and be prepared to contact your legislator when necessary with up-to-date information.

### **ACTION ALERTS:**

Another way that LWV-TX keeps members informed of advocacy opportunities is through "**Action Alerts.**" When the League needs speedy action by members across the state, you will receive an alert asking you to contact your state representative or state senator. Your voice does make a difference, so please help when asked! Each local League will write an official letter and we will ask each League member to contact our elected members of the legislature on their own.

## LEGISLATIVE DAY:

Mary Finch also invited all members to come to Austin on **Monday, March 9 for Statewide Meeting and League Lobby Day**. League members will gather in the Capitol Building at 9 am for a brief business meeting, and then will hear from Sen. Jeff Wentworth about his redistricting bill. Members will also be briefed about two other LWV-TX priorities, county authority to manage growth and moratorium on the death penalty. In the afternoon, members will make the rounds to legislators' offices. If you would like to join the group going to Austin from LWV-Comal Area, please contact Bonnie Leitch, 660-2335.

## COUNTY AUTHORITY TO MANAGE GROWTH:

Our next speaker was Karen Rankin, LWV-TX Program Chair for State/Local Relations. She gave background information about the **issue of county authority to manage growth**. She explained that rapidly growing counties, like ours, need tools to deal with development that threatens water supplies, water quality, air quality, natural vistas, and wildlife. While no bills had been introduced at the time of our meeting, Karen said that several legislators were drafting bills. The tools most likely to be requested in legislation are for county commissioners' courts to have the ability to set density limits within a development, the ability to designate buffer zones between incompatible uses (like between residential areas and a quarry), and the ability to assess impact fees on developers to offset capital costs of infrastructure (like new intersections) to serve new developments. Karen asked members to read the *Legislative Newsletter* to keep informed about bills as they are introduced.

## ELECTION LAWS AND VOTING RIGHTS:

Laurie Vanhose, member of the LWV-TX Voting Methods Study Committee, gave an update of **bills affecting election laws and voting rights**. The League is supporting bills that streamline the process for voters who vote by mail and supporting bills that aid small municipalities and small school districts with the costs of meeting Help America Vote Act requirements. The League is following bills dealing with "paper trail" for electronic voting machines. Laurie believes that the best answer is for the federal government to set the standards for machines with printers and to provide states with the funding to purchase such machines. "Election day registration" is the topic of several bills introduced in this session, also being followed with great interest by LWV. The League will continue to oppose bills requiring voters to show additional identification at the polls. Current law already requires voters to show either their voter registration card, driver's license, or other ID approved by the legislature. Laurie characterized this issue as "a solution in search of a problem," since there has been no documented instance of "imposter voting" in Texas.

## REDISTRICTING:

Jensie Madden of LWV-CA gave a brief description of Sen. Wentworth's **redistricting bill, S.B. 315**. This bill is a priority for LWV-TX, needing the support of every member for passage in this legislative session. The bill would establish an independent bipartisan Texas Congressional Redistricting Commission, in charge of drawing new district lines for U.S. Congressional districts in Texas following the 2010 census. The League believes that this bill would provide a good first step toward fair redistricting in Texas.

Please respond when you are asked to contact your state representative. All members of LWV are encouraged to be involved in advocacy during this legislative session.

# CARBON OFFSETS: A CAUTIONARY TALE

By Eleanor Revelle (LWVIL and LWVUS Climate Change Task Force Member)

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The voluntary carbon offset market is booming. Dozens of companies are ready to help eco-conscious consumers compensate for their personal carbon emissions by contributing to projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere.

The idea sounds promising. By purchasing carbon offsets, individuals can mitigate their climate impact and help finance projects that keep greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere. In addition, as more people demonstrate their willingness to pay extra for green initiatives, they send a signal to lawmakers that there is public support for tough climate legislation.

But critics consider promoting offsets to be a flawed approach. They argue that it encourages a business-as-usual attitude toward climate change by suggesting that people can neutralize their emissions without altering their lifestyle.

Compounding the problem, there are as yet no agreed-upon standards to ensure that offset projects deliver the promised carbon reductions.

Nonetheless, well-chosen offsets can be an important part of a broader strategy to address climate change. They provide an additional opportunity for individuals who have already curtailed their energy consumption to reduce their impact on global warming even further. And, fortunately, there are resources to help consumers find credible high-quality offsets.

## How Much Does It Cost?

Most offset providers have online calculators that allow potential customers to calculate their emissions and the cost of

offsetting that amount. However, the various calculators frequently give quite different estimates of total emissions. This reflects differences in the level of detail that users are asked to provide and in the methodology used in the calculations. Estimating the climate impacts of air travel is particularly complex.

Moreover, the offsets which are offered range widely in price, from \$5 to \$25 per ton of emissions. For consumers trying to make a choice, analysts suggest that the quality of the offset project rather than the cost should be the determining factor. It's better, they say, to invest in high quality offsets than to buy as many offsets as possible.

## Choosing a High-Quality Offset

Offset providers fund a wide variety of projects, but how can consumers be sure that the offsets they buy will result in real emissions reductions? A report published by Clean Air—Cool Planet suggests a set of characteristics to look for in an offset project:

- **Additionality.** Will the offset revenues make the project happen or would it have occurred anyway (e.g., because it is required by law)?
- **Baseline.** Has a credible emissions baseline been determined against which reductions will be measured?
- **Quantification.** Are rigorous accounting rules used to quantify the greenhouse gas reductions? Are emissions likely to increase elsewhere as a result of the project?
- **Verification.** Are emissions reductions independently verified and verifiable?

• **Permanence.** Will the emissions reductions be permanent or might they be subject to reversal in the future (e.g., if the trees in a carbon sequestration project burn or are cut down?)

• **Registration.** Are the offsets serialized and tracked to reduce the possibility that they could be sold more than once?

The bulk of the report focuses on the companies that sell the offsets. It evaluates the providers' understanding of carbon offsets and offset quality as well as the degree to which the information they offer enables consumers to make effective choices. The authors' longer term goal is to promote greater transparency in the retail offset market.

Another helpful resource for consumers looking for guidance is the Environmental Defense Fund's Carbon Offset Project, which identifies a small number of offset projects that meet the organization's quality criteria.

## Renewable Energy Certificates

Another way in which consumers are encouraged to "offset" their carbon emissions is to purchase Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs), also known as green tags. RECs are created when a renewable

energy facility generates electricity. One REC represents 1,000 kilowatt hours of renewable electricity that is added to the nation's energy grid in place of conventional electricity generated from fossil fuels.

Buying RECs helps build a market for renewable electricity. As a general rule, however, RECs are not considered equivalent to carbon offsets because they cannot be assumed to be "additional." This is an important consideration for consumers whose goal is to become carbon neutral. Only if the sale of RECs is a decisive factor in a company's decision to pursue a renewable energy project can the associated RECs legitimately be used to offset carbon emissions.

An important resource for potential REC purchasers is Green-e Energy, an independent certification and verification program. Green-e certified renewable energy options meet strict consumer protection and environmental standards.

### The Bottom Line

For those who are serious about reducing their carbon footprint, the primary focus must be on cutting their energy consumption. And for real impact, everyone's goal must be effective public policy on climate change.

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### Online Resources for Additional Information

*A Consumer's Guide to Retail Carbon Offset Providers*, Clean Air—Cool Planet, December 2006, [www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/ConsumersGuidetoCarbonOffsets.pdf](http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/ConsumersGuidetoCarbonOffsets.pdf).

*Voluntary Offsets For Air-Travel Carbon Emissions*, Tufts Climate Initiative, January 2007, [www.tufts.edu/tie/tci/carbonoffsets/index.htm](http://www.tufts.edu/tie/tci/carbonoffsets/index.htm).

Environmental Defense Fund's Carbon Offset Project: [www.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=23994](http://www.edf.org/page.cfm?tagID=23994)

Green-e Energy Web Site: [www.green-e.org/gogreene.shtml](http://www.green-e.org/gogreene.shtml)

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**Produced by the LWVUS Climate Change Task Force**

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## Help Us Bring New Talent Into the League!

We're the League of Women Voters of Comal and Guadalupe counties. We are one of hundreds of local LWV organizations across the nation whose members are committed to **Making Democracy Work**. Our non-partisan organization encourages informed and active participation by citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. **The League of Women Voters does NOT support or oppose any political party or any candidate.** Our goal is to empower citizens to shape better communities around the world.

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:

- \_\_\_ \$50/year -- **Full voting member**, receiving monthly newsletter, special information on issues, leadership training, and more.
- \_\_\_ \$75/year -- Two or more **full voting members** in same household

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_

(E-mail) \_\_\_\_\_

Membership dues and contributions are not eligible for a tax deduction under I.R.S. 501 (c) (3) rules. You may make a tax-deductible contribution by writing a separate check payable to: LWV/Texas Educational Fund. These contributions will be used for local educational projects supported by the League of Women Voters of Comal Area.

Mail your application and dues to:  
LWV-Comal Area  
P.O. Box 311324  
New Braunfels, TX 78131-1324

Dues & Contributions can be paid on the website at:  
[www.lwvtexas.org/comalarea.htm](http://www.lwvtexas.org/comalarea.htm)