



TEXAS VOTER

League of Women Voters of Texas

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Spring 2007

League Advocacy Activities

Elaine TalarSKI (San Antonio Area), Advocacy Vice-President



The 80th Legislative session has convened and LWV-TX is prepared! The following is a summary of the tools and individuals who help make our advocacy efforts a success:

In order to advocate for the League's priorities, program chairs are using **Gallery Watch**, an important tool used by the program chairs to manage and gather the information they in turn can use to alert League members concerning our priorities and to take action

when needed. The program is "a web based subscription service offering legislative professions consolidated Texas legislative and governmental information, updated throughout the day, as events happen". Gallery Watch allows program chairs to track bills from filing through activity in committees and hearings to final passage. The program also offers other services that are helpful in tracking legislative activities, such as ability to search for bills, notification of events and emails to program chairs of changes in bill status. This service is only accessible to program chairs and the Advocacy Vice President. Members interested in a specific priority and related legislation are encouraged to contact the appropriate program chair who can provide you with bill numbers so you can find information on-line. Program chairs are listed in the League Handbook & Directory where addresses, phone numbers and email addresses are available.

The Capitol Corps is a group of volunteers from the Austin Area League coordinated by Mary Finch. They provide a valuable service by volunteering their expertise and time to advocate and lobby for LWV-TX's legislative priorities. When program chairs are unable to be in Austin, and testimony for a particular bill is imminent, Capitol Corps members will deliver oral and written testimony at committee hearings and legislators on behalf of the League.

Legislative Priorities will be the focus of League advocacy efforts during the 80th legislative session. Program chairs submitted priorities of importance for their portfolio.

Not all priorities will rise to the top nor is the list inclusive. **A list of the League's legislative priorities for the 80th Legislature can be found on page 6.**

All League members are encouraged to participate in the important activities of advocacy and lobbying. Members are kept informed of legislation the League supports or opposes through

the **Legislative Newsletter (LNL)**, which you should be receiving electronically. In the LNL, members are provided information on bills that LWV-TX is tracking, supporting and opposing. It may also include articles that examine the issues on which we are working. If you are not receiving the Legislative Newsletter and would like to subscribe, e-mail lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org. In the LNL, you may find **Action Alerts** to which you should respond. Action Alerts may also be sent to you by e-mail when necessary. The **LWV-TX web site**, www.lwvtexas.org is also an important resource where you will find the League Advocacy Papers and other helpful information.

When You Go to Austin (WYGTA) brochures for the 80th Texas Legislative Session are now printed and ready for delivery from the state office. These handy brochures provide contact information and committee assignments for all Texas Representatives and Senators, as well as other helpful information. WYGTA brochures are free with a nominal charge for shipping and handling. Contact lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org or 512/472-1100 to order.

League Lobby Day

Elaine TalarSKI (San Antonio Area), Advocacy Vice-President

The Advocacy Committee, headed by Deanna Frisk (Comal Area), Director, did a marvelous job planning League Lobby Day held at the Legislative Conference room in the Capitol Building on January 30th. Not only was there a good turnout of members and legislators for the breakfast, but many legislators whose schedule would not allow them to attend, dropped in to say hello. There was time for attendees to visit with some of the legislators in person and interact with League members attending from around the state. Senator Jeff Wentworth gave insights on some proposed legislation, some which he is sponsoring.

In preparation for visits to legislators, Elaine TalarSKI (San Antonio Area), Advocacy Vice President, gave tips on advocacy and lobbying. Presentations on the three issues selected to advocate were made. Presenters were Program Chairs who spoke on three issues selected from the many LWV-TX priorities.

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Texas VOTER

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

President's Reflections

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, League of Women Voters! On February 14, 1920, six months before the 19th amendment of the U.S. constitution was finally ratified, the League of Women Voters was launched. An office and professional staff was established in Washington, D.C. The League of Women Voters was designed to be different, a "mighty political experiment" designed to help women carry out their new responsibilities as voters. Carrie Chapman Catt, said that LWV would be "an anomaly; we are going to be a semi-political body. We want political things; we want legislation; we are going to educate for citizenship....we have got to be non-partisan and all-partisan."

Eighty-seven years later, the League is still an anomaly in American politics. Nonpartisanship, consensus on issues, study before action and concerted advocacy are central to the League's philosophy. The League provides citizens the tools to make a difference. Let's all celebrate the founding of the League of Women Voters.

Some on the state board met with Roger Williams, Texas Secretary of State while in Austin for League Lobby Days. He tells us that voter turnout was lower (33%) in 2006 than it was in 2004 (36%). The state and local Leagues worked hard to provide information and motivation to voters in Texas through producing and distributing state and local Voters Guides, holding forums, providing public announcements to local TV and radio stations, conducting voter registration events, and writing opinion pieces and

letters to the editor. Educating citizens of the importance of the vote, and motivating them to vote is difficult, but it is something that the League needs to do to Make Democracy Work. Begin now to brainstorm how your local League can help build voter participation for your next elections.

Leagues across the state are busy participating in local, state and national studies and preparing for the 80th Legislative session. Each of you should be receiving the LWV-TX Legislative Newsletter (LNL). The LNL is e-mailed to all members (if we have your current e-mail address). If you are not receiving the LNL, contact LWV-TX at lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org to subscribe. Look for Action Alerts that will be sent and respond to them in a timely manner. We are counting on you!

Two of our members, Julia Marsden (Austin Area) and Melanie Barnes (Lubbock), are retiring from boards that they have served on for many years. Julia Marsden has represented LWV-TX on the Region K/Lower Colorado Regional Water Planning Group. This is a regional planning group which is part of state water planning setup by SB 1 in 1997. She has served on this group for nine years. Melanie Barnes has served on Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's Pollution Prevention Advisory Committee for eight years. This is a committee which is legislated by the Waste Reduction Policy Act of 1991. Thanks to you for the dedication of your time and expertise by representing LWV-TX on these boards.

Darlene Hicks-Comal Area

LOCAL LEAGUES USE ISSUES TO ATTRACT DIVERSE MEMBERS

Karen Nicholson (Midland), Organization Vice-President

Membership is local. Issues are local. Local Leagues have at least two excellent opportunities to attract new members: public school testing and immigration. Those are the two issues currently being studied by LWV-TX and LWVUS; those are the two issues likely to attract local interest.

Local Leagues are targeting individuals and organizations at the local level to invite to forums and information sessions to dispense written information supplied by the state and national study committees. Local Leagues are further gathering local information about testing and immigration and using those studies to attract new members.

Many local Leagues are not limiting themselves to these two issues. Some communities have other important issues to address. Issues are diverse and have different impacts on local communities. Because the League is a multi-issue organization, local Leagues can select issues attractive at the local level. Diverse issues attract new members.

Now is the time to use diverse issues to reach out. Because the Legislature is in session, many are particularly interested in specific issues. Look elsewhere in this VOTER to find LWV-TX priority issues; that is a good place to start to identify those issues particularly attractive to your community. LWV-TX and LWVUS have positions on so many issues, there's something for everybody's interest. If local Leagues find something missing, they can study an entirely different issue locally. Issues even cross party lines to reinforce the League's nonpartisanship. Now is the time to develop diversity of issues to attract members.

TAKE A VACATION FROM THE LEAGUE

Linda Wassenich (Dallas Area), Public Relations Vice-President

Just in time for the end of the Legislative Session, the drawing for Take a Vacation from the League will be held on Friday, May 25th. Prizes will include two round-trip airline tickets from Southwest Airlines for anywhere they fly in the lower 48 states.

You can enter this drawing by sending a contribution of \$25 to LWV-TEF for one chance or \$50 for three chances. Be sure to mark your check for Take a Vacation from the League. Only 300 chances will be offered; so your odds are good.

Many thanks to Southwest Airlines for being such a strong supporter of the League of Women Voters.

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Medicaid:

A Wise Investment of State Dollars

Jensie Madden (Comal Area), Social Policy Coordinator, emphasized the need for increased funding for services under Medicaid for children and the elderly and for fully funding CHIP, and increasing eligibility and renewal for 12 months, rather than the current six months

Air Quality for All Texans

Laura Blackburn (Houston Area), Air Quality, addressed measures to reduce emissions, the League's position on the proposed coal-fired power plants and the issue of enforcing the regulations on air toxins.

Recorded Legislative Vote

Linda Camin (Dallas), Recorded Votes, discussed the League's continued support for "Recorded Legislative Votes", advocating a Constitutional Amendment requiring the legislature to record the legislators' names and make them readily available to the public.

Each participant was provided Advocacy Papers, talking points and cookies with the LWV emblem to take with them to present at the legislative offices they visited.



(left to right) Anne Eaton, Frances Hargrove, and Jensie Madden gather materials to take to their assigned legislators at the capitol during Lobby Day as Marita Mirzatuny, LWV-TX intern, looks on.

AROUND THE STATE

Barbara Weinstein (Dallas), Director

Congratulations to **LWV-Gainesville** on setting up an Education Fund for their League with LWV-TEF. This is a first for them, providing them additional ways to raise money for their League.

On January 11th **LWV-Tarrant County** held a forum on Gas Well Drilling & Natural Gas Safety. Over 150 people took time to attend this interesting, evening meeting.

KUDO'S TO.....

Jeanne Grisham, (LWV-Tarrant County), was recently appointed to the Fort Worth Transportation Board.

Catrina Williamson (Lubbock Area) has been appointed to TCEQ's Pollution Prevention Advisory Committee

Nancy Wilson (LWV-Richardson) was recently honored by the R.E.A.L Board (recycling) with the dedication of a bench, complete with a plaque on a walking trail in Richardson.

\$\$\$UCCESSFUL FUNDRAISER\$\$\$

LWV-Houston Area held their 6th annual luncheon, A Repast With a Pair of Political Pioneers.

LWV-Dallas held their 2nd annual Susan B. Anthony luncheon

LWV-Comal Area sponsored a benefit at the Circle Arts Theatre performance of The Sound of Music.

LWV-San Marcos - see picture below.

Please let me know about YOUR successful fund raiser for the next VOTER.

VOTERS GUIDE UPDATE

Judy Hollinger (Houston Area), Voter Service Chair

Local Leagues once again demonstrated their resourcefulness and community outreach for the November 2006 General Election. Seventeen local Leagues in Texas distributed 494,370 (almost half a million!) printed copies of local Voters Guides, including information on statewide races supplied by LWV-TX. Kudos especially to Austin Area, Brazos Valley, Comal Area, Dallas Area, Gainesville, Houston Area (Ft. Bend Unit), Kerrville Area, and Sherman/Grayson County for working with local newspapers in distributing to subscribers. Thirteen local Leagues provided electronic versions of their Voters Guides, either on their own websites or through the LWV-TX website.

The state office staff kept busy distributing printed and electronic copies, in both English and Spanish, of LWV-TX Voters Guides to libraries in areas without local Leagues and to several colleges and universities. The LWV-TX website registered a whopping 1.4 million hits in the 6 week period prior to the November 7 election.



(left to right) Holly Mullins, Jeannie Lewis of LWV-San Marcos Area, and Darlene Hicks enjoy a glass of wine at LWV-San Marcos Area's wine tasting seminar and fundraiser.

COAL-FIRED POWER PLANTS

Laura Blackburn (Houston Area), Air Quality Chair

The issue of coal-fired power plants brings together many concerns: global warming, conservation, energy efficiency, renewable resources, energy independence, and other international concerns, including global conflict. The position of LWVUS is “Use of a variety of energy sources, with emphasis on conserving energy and using energy-efficient technologies, the predominant reliance on renewable resources, and policies that limit reliance on nuclear power.” Thus we do not oppose the use of coal technologies, providing the environmental impact is minimal—though we do prefer conservation and renewable resources. Global warming is also a priority for the League.

There are several factors that have brought the issue of coal-fired power plants to the fore in Texas.

- The Electrical Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) has projected brown-outs by the end of the decade if we do not add to our electricity generation facilities.
- In Executive Order RP-493 Governor Perry ordered the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to “prioritize and expedite the processing of environmental permit applications that are protective of public health and environment and propose to use Texas’ natural resources to generate electrical power.” Furthermore, hearings shall be held “no later than one week after the required 30 day public notice for any electric generating facility that has been issued a draft permit by the Commission.” Then, the “Texas State Office of Administrative Hearings shall set a schedule that returns a proposal for decision to the Commission in no more than six consecutive months from the date of the referral.”
- Applications have been received by the TCEQ for 17 coal-fired power plants, 11 of which are for Texas Utilities Company (TXU).

Some environmental groups are opposed

to any use of coal in our energy mix. For example, the Sierra Club opposes the use of “combustion coal power plants” in its Energy Resources Policy of September 2006, preferring to rely upon energy efficiency and renewable resources to meet our energy needs.

There have also been lawsuits filed in order to stop or slow down the permitting of these coal-fired power plants. Environmental Defense has filed suit against TCEQ for changing its definition of best-available control technology (BACT) from including consideration of coal gasification and fluidized bed combustion to “BACT—BACT with consideration given to the technical practicability and the economic reasonableness of reducing or eliminating emissions from the facility.” Various cities and local governments, particularly those in non-attainment areas, have joined together to oppose the power plants due to possible increase in oxides of nitrogen (NOx) emissions, keeping them from meeting required State Implementation Plans (SIP). The Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention (GHASP) has filed suit against TCEQ for extending the ozone standards for the Houston-Galveston-Brazoria non-attainment area. Furthermore, on January 28, 2007, four environmental groups sued Governor Perry, accusing him of violating state law and the Texas Constitution by issuing an executive order to speed the permitting process for new power plants. (One point of this lawsuit is that interfering with the Texas State Office of Administrative Hearings is in conflict with the separation of powers doctrine.)

In contrast to all of this opposition is Thomas L. Friedman, a noted “green advocate” and columnist for The New York Times, who said on January 19th that “If we are to turn the tide on climate change and end our oil addiction, we need more of everything: solar, wind, hydro, ethanol, biodiesel, clean coal and nuclear power—and conservation.” TXU says it is using “clean-coal technologies”—some environmental groups say they are using “dirty-coal technologies.” Who is right?

Energy Sources

Natural Gas: Natural gas is considered the cleanest of the fossil fuels. The problem with natural gas is that the U.S. has

only 3% of world known reserves (Russia has nearly 30%), and the price is volatile. We now import 33% of the natural gas that we use, and it is predicted that we will import 50% by 2020. This fluctuation in price was noted in Gov. Perry’s Order RP 49, where it is stated that “the price of natural gas has increased more than 300% in the past five years.”

Wind: Texas is the largest producer of wind energy in the U.S., and TXU is the largest user of this wind-generated electrical power. The problem is that population centers tend to be far away from the wind source, current transmission lines are inefficient and they are expensive. Furthermore, wind is less reliable than other sources.

Nuclear: While we have some nuclear generation in Texas now, nuclear plants require at least a 10-year lead time to build. While they produce no CO2 or other pollutants, they do have long-term storage problems. TXU and other electric utilities are considering future nuclear plants.

Coal: Montana has 1/3 of all coal deposits in America and 11% of all coal worldwide. Its coal equals 240 billion barrels of oil (enough to replace all imported oil for 60 years according to Montana’s governor.). TXU will use Wyoming low-sulfur coal, which will help with SOx emissions. Coal also produces about 1.8 times the CO2 as natural gas—very important in global warming. Other emissions from coal-fired power plants include particulates, NOx, and mercury.

Conservation and Renewable

Resources: No one opposes conservation. Most electric utilities have energy-efficiency programs for both homeowners and industries which are helpful if customers avail themselves of them. In his Executive Order RP 49, Governor Perry ordered each state agency to “develop a plan for conserving energy and set a percentage goal for reducing its usage of electricity, gasoline, and natural gas” and to report back to the governor and the Legislative Budget Board quarterly, beginning with April 1, 2006.

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The use of renewable resources has reduced our dependence on fossil fuels, but the impact is still relatively small. For example, in 2004 ERCOT said that nuclear, hydro and wind provided only 16% of our electricity generated. Natural gas provided 44%, and coal 40%. Interestingly, installed capacity in 2004 in Texas was 72% natural gas, 19% coal, and 6% nuclear, hydro and wind. This shows that greater use was made of nuclear, hydro and wind as well as coal even when other sources were available.

Cost Comparison: Cost comparisons per kilowatt-hour are as follows: coal—4.5-5.4¢, wind—4.7-6.3¢, geothermal—4.8¢, hydroelectric—4.9-8.5¢, natural gas—5.2-6.5¢, biomass—5.5-6.4¢, solar—12.4-26¢, and nuclear 5.9¢. The cost of conservation technologies varies with the type of technology.

Coal-Fired Power Plants & TXU: As stated above, 17 permits for coal-fired power plants have been filed with TCEQ. Eleven of those have been filed by TXU, and TCEQ has issued draft permits for all eleven. Each of these plants will be carbon-capture and storage-ready—meaning they will be ready to sequester CO₂, use it for drilling for oil and gas, or use it in some other fashion. Furthermore, in building these plants, TXU promises to reduce its total emissions by 20% through the use of supercritical coal technology (much higher temperatures leading to greater efficiency and thus fewer emissions), dry flue gas desulfurization for sulfur dioxide (SO₂), selective catalytic reduction for nitrogen oxides, sorbent injection for mercury control, and shutting down eight old, inefficient natural gas plants. If TXU does not build the new technology coal plants, they cannot shut down their older plants, and we will continue to have that pollution. They also plan to retrofit nine lignite plants, converting four to use Wyoming low-sulfur coal. TXU projects the use of coal gasification in 5-15 years, and plans to reduce CO₂ within 15 years so that it compares favorably with modern gas units.

LWV-TX Position: One of the flaws in the Texas Clean Air Act is that it grants permits on a case-by-case basis, without taking into account the cumulative impact of all pollution-producing plants, though ozone studies have been conducted by the

Texas Environmental Research Consortium in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. We are urging the legislature to require that TCEQ look at the cumulative effect of these plants before permits are issued. While we are concerned about all possible pollutants as well as carbon dioxide and its impact on global warming, we are particularly concerned about the EPA non-attainment areas (Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, Dallas-Fort Worth, Beaumont-Port Arthur, and San Antonio), and the possibility that Texas will not be able to achieve the 4.656 tons of total mercury required by the EPA by 2010.

WHY I DONATE TO THE STATE LEAGUE

Linda Wassenich (Dallas Area), Public Relations Vice-President

I am in my eighth year of service on the state board, and I have to admit that I typify the research about volunteers and philanthropic donations. People who are active volunteers in an organization are often among the most loyal donors. As volunteers, they see the work of the organization up close and know the need firsthand.

During the eight years I've been on the board, the state League has gone from one full-time professional staff person with a part-time secretary to two full-time professional staff people and one or two interns who work a total of 20-30 hours a week. The staff has contributed greatly to the operations of the League. They have made it possible for the Voters Guide to be posted on the state League's website, and local Leagues can now have a page on the state League's website. They have greatly increased our capability to send news releases to media all over the state and e-newsletters to nonprofit organizations statewide, thus increasing our visibility.

As we enter the legislative session, the Legislative Newsletter is now available free of charge to League members who want to receive it by email. The League Lobby Day provides an excellent opportunity for League members to be briefed on current issues and call on their legislators to talk about those issues.

The state League is undertaking a critical study of mandatory testing in the public schools. There is a lot of debate about this issue among politicians, people as-

sociated with the schools, and the public in general. Won't it be great to have an unbiased report from the League on the facts and issues associated with this important issue!

The state League sponsored and organized a debate on KLRN, the PBS station in San Antonio, which featured the U.S. Senatorial candidates last October. This program provided great visibility for the League in Texas and an unparalleled service to Texas voters.

The staff facilitates the Board's approval of local Leagues' TEF projects via email; so there is no longer a fee to the local Leagues for submitting a project to be reimbursed through their TEF funds.

Soon LWV-TX publications will be posted on the LWV-TX website and accessible to League members, thanks to the technical knowledge of our staff. The Services to Local Leagues committee, chaired by Karen Nicholson (Midland), is creatively addressing the ways that the state League and the state board can help the local Leagues in more meaningful ways. The development of several potential new local Leagues is being nurtured by this committee and Gloria Sasser (San Marcos Area), who is serving in an off-board capacity.

In the 36 years that I have been a member of the League of Women Voters, I have always appreciated the information that I gained from the League about candidates and issues. My favorite saying has been that I know of no other organization that gets a bigger bang for the buck than the League of Women Voters.

So why do I give to the League? I believe that it is a unique organization that, in many ways, is a guardian of our democracy. The League promotes informed and involved participation in public policy matters of government. The League wants to level the playing field so that all voices are heard, so that voters' rights are respected and all votes are counted, so that government works in the public interest—not for the special interests.

Now, how can you give to the League? Well, you can give gifts in honor of someone, in memory of special people, as a birthday gift, to put someone's name on a Sustainers Plaque, to spotlight someone on the League's website, to have a chance

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to win something in the Take a Vacation from the League drawing, or to support the auction at state convention. You can transfer appreciated stock to the League for the endowment or simply for a major gift. You can contribute to sponsor the Excellence in Environmental Awareness Awards luncheon. You can respond to the direct mail appeals or keep the envelope and give when the time is right for you.

Many different ways are offered to contribute to the League. Some people like the excitement of an auction or the visibility of a special event. Some like to contribute and recognize other people. Some like to contribute for the chance to win something. Some give to the LWV-TX because they want to support the League's advocacy efforts or they itemize their deductions on their tax return. Some give to the endowment because they want to make sure the League is there for future generations to continue Making Democracy Work.

Gifts of all sizes and from lots of members are important. Outside funders often want to know what the board and the membership are doing to support the

League. Many different ways to donate to the League are offered with the full recognition that members will choose the solicitation or way to contribute that is most satisfying to each person.

So, thank you, one and all for the tremendous loyalty and support that you give to the League of Women Voters of Texas and for Making Democracy Work.

SPOTLIGHT ON A LEAGUE MEMBER

Linda Wassenich (Dallas Area), Public Relations Vice-President

Here's a great way to thank a League member. For \$50 you can shine a spotlight on a League member who has done a terrific job on a League project, or who is celebrating a birthday or an anniversary, or just to say thanks for the special way that she or he is a member. All you have to do is write a short statement about the person and send it with a check for \$50 to the state office. Your contribution can be made to LWV-TX or LWV-TEF. The state office will notify the individual being honored of your thoughtful gesture and spotlight that person on the League's

website for a month. Send a picture, if you can; if you can't, the state office will request one from the honoree at the time she or he is notified.

Four people have already been honored in this special way: Julia Marsden (Austin Area) on her 65th birthday, Catherine Gordon (Waco) for serving as the president of the Waco League for 8 years, Val Standifer (Richardson) for her creative ideas and hard work on the Voters Guide and outreach to college students, and Anne Eaton (Comal Area) for providing a lovely setting and great meals for the July state board meeting and her dedication and contributions to the achievements of the Comal Area League.



*Look for this icon on the home page to access **Spotlight on a League Member**, the **Minnie Fisher Cunningham Society**, and the **Sustainer's Plaque**.*

★ LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 80TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION ★

Air Quality: Monitor legislation regarding air toxins and enforceable standards regarding the proposed coal-fired power plants.

Capital Punishment: Protect the mentally retarded from the death penalty.

Child Care: Support early childhood education professional development, expand access to voluntary, high quality pre-kindergarten, and increase reimbursement to improve quality of care for infants and toddlers through equitable workplace development.

Child Health: Implement 12 months eligibility for CHIP and children's Medicaid and fix problems with the Integrated Eligibility System to prevent eligible children from losing coverage.

Election Laws: Monitor legislation to meet the requirements for HAVA.

Energy: Promote incentives for renewable and clean energy sources. Monitor the building of coal-fired power plants and nuclear power plants.

Equal Opportunity/ Income Assistance:

Support policies that improve well-being for families in poverty, programs that provide job training for living wage jobs, and equal education opportunities from preschool to higher education.

Hazardous Waste: Monitor legislation for disposal of nuclear waste and other radioactive materials and promoting recycling efforts.

Immigration: Monitor distribution of programs and services to legal immigrants and undocumented immigrants which they are eligible to receive.

Health Care for the Elderly: Support increased funding to provide adequate programs to serve the elderly.

Judicial Selection: Support merit selection and/or nonpartisan election of Texas appellate judiciary.

Juvenile Justice: Support and fund substance abuse and mental health needs for youth at risk and for those incarcerated.

Land Use: Increase county authority for land development. Support full funding for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Political Campaign Finance: Support legislation for campaign finance reform.

Public School Finance: Support adequate and equitable funding of public education.

Recorded Votes: Support Constitutional amendment to require that votes in Texas Legislature be recorded and made readily available to the public.

Redistricting: Support bill calling for an independent redistricting commission.

Reproductive Choice: Promote and protect women's access to health care, including all aspects of reproductive health.

Services to the Seriously Mentally Ill: Maintain and increase funding for services to the seriously mentally ill.

Transportation: Support local authorization of a sales tax for mass transit projects.

Water: Support full general revenue funding for the TCEQ water programs. Support enhanced protection for environmental flows, Texas rivers, bays, and estuaries.

MINNIE FISHER CUNNINGHAM SOCIETY

*Linda Wassenich (Dallas Area), Public Relations
Vice-President*

Charter membership in the Minnie Fisher Cunningham Society for planned giving now totals seventeen people. Six new members have signed on; they are Julie Lowenberg (Dallas), Nancy Wilson (Richardson), Shirley and John Johnson (Tarrant County), Ruthann Geer (Arlington), and Diane Sheridan (Bay Area). They join Maxine Barkan (Austin Area), Elaine Wiant (Dallas), Charlaine Reynolds (formerly Houston Area), Julia Marsden (Austin Area), Linda and Mark Wassenich (Dallas), Gwen Murphree (Florida), Susybelle Gosslee (Dallas), Sondra Ferstl (Denton), Sandy Ashby (Montgomery County), and Jean Slobod (deceased).

You, too, can leave a legacy for future generations. Leave a bequest of any amount to the League in your will, make a pledge of \$5,000 payable over five years to the endowment, or make a pledge of \$5,000 payable over five years to the operating funds of LWV-TX or LWV-TEF. Contact Linda Wassenich, Public Relations VP, at 214-368-5305 or LindaVote@tx.rr.com, to make your plans known or for additional information.

REACHING OUT

*Jeane Grisham (Tarrant County), President,
LWV-Tarrant County*

The units of the League of Women Voters of Tarrant County meet in five different locations throughout the county. One such location is unique in that it provides a venue that is conducive to a wide age range of members. This Southwest Lunch Unit meets in a beautiful high-rise building located in downtown Fort Worth, the Trinity Terrace Retirement Community building. Trinity Terrace overlooks the Trinity River and provides an excellent meeting place for League members who are residents of Trinity Terrace, as well as a convenient location for members who work in the business and culture district of Fort Worth. Due to the building location, members and prospective members are able to attend on their lunch hour and conveniently get back to work or back to the many activities provided to the residents of the building.

In order to eat at the Southwest Lunch

Unit meeting, it is necessary to make reservations two days in advance so the chef will know how much food to prepare. With the exceptional meals and excellent location, LWVTC is seeing the Southwest Lunch Unit growing in numbers.

We highly recommend searching for various venues in which to hold convenient meetings. Has your League considered a retirement center or other place to take the meeting to your members instead of requiring them to come to you? Reaching out has been a positive step for one of the Tarrant County units and therefore for the League!

GATHERING INFORMATION FROM EDUCATION GROUPS IS FOCUS OF TESTING COMMITTEE

*Nan Clayton and Anne Roussos (Austin Area),
Education Study Co-Chairs*

Since the committee last met in Dallas on September 30, 2006, members have volunteered for assignments to gather information from some fifteen education groups. Members are using a list of contact information for each group, a standard set of questions, and a recommended set of contact procedures. The work is being done by e-mail and by phone. Some committee members are also working on sections of the outline for the Facts and Issues, due out August 2007.

The timeline for the study sets mid-March as the deadline for the reports to be sent to committee co-chairs. The information will help committee members formulate consensus questions. Plans are to meet again in March for this phase of the study.

With the Legislature in session this year, committee co-chairs will attend meetings in Austin and collect resources in an effort to monitor education issues and to keep committee members up to date on the latest developments. Of particular interest is a proposal from Sen. Florence Shapiro of Plano, chair of the Senate Education Committee. She has proposed replacing the exit-level TAKS tests in high school with end-of-course tests and a standardized test to measure college readiness.

This spring, local Leagues throughout Texas are holding informational meetings in connection with the study, Mandated Achievement Testing in the Public

Schools of Texas.

Consider sharing information gathered from local League meetings with the co-chairs of the testing committee. Input from Leagues across the state would be helpful. The study co-chairs can be reached at nanclayton@yahoo.com (Nan Clayton) and roussos@swbell.net (Anne Roussos).

UPDATE ON CONVERSATIONS ON JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

*Maxine Barkan (Austin Area), Judicial Selection
Chair*

Plans are moving forward on the proposed Conversations on Judicial Independence, a panel discussion that will be video-taped at a PBS station. This is the last phase of a grant awarded to the League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund (LWV-TEF) by the LWVUS Education Fund (LWVEF) as part of a three-year program titled "Safeguarding U.S. Democracy: Promoting an Independent Judiciary by Defending the U.S. Constitution." It is funded by the Program on Constitutional and Legal Policy of the Open Society. The program will take place sometime in 2007, and efforts are now underway to secure a PBS station for the event.

We are partnering in this effort with the Texas Young Lawyers Association (TYLA), which has been valuable in helping secure panelists and drafting questions for discussion. To date, participation in the panel is confirmed for former Texas Supreme Court Justices Bob Gammage and Deborah Hankinson.

In addition to the panel discussion, TYLA is working on a proposal to film a "Fire-side Chat" with former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor on judicial independence, possibly with the participation of former Texas Chief Justice Tom Phillips. These two events, the Conversations and the chat could be paired for publicity.

Karin Crump, President of TYLA and Maxine Barkan (Austin Area), Judicial Selection Program Chair and grant coordinator, met with Texas Supreme Court Justice Dale Wainwright and former Chief Justice Phillips, who gave advice and valuable guidance.

Thank you to all the members and nonmember individuals that have recently supported LWV-TX and LWV-TEF:

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**The last issue of the Texas VOTER incorrectly reported that a donation was made to TX in honor of Ann Burbridge by Nadine Bartsch. The actual contribution was made by LWV-Lubbock.*

Mark Your Calendar:

February

14 LWV formed in 1920
19 President's Day

March

2 Texas Independence Day
3 Texas Flag Day
31 Cesar Chavez Day

April

8 Easter Sunday
22 Earth Day
30 Early Voting Starts