



The VOTER

**January 2009
Volume 45 Issue 1**

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization dedicated to promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government and to acting on selected government issues.

2008-2009
Board &
Committee
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**Wednesday,
January 14**

Judge Donna Berlin
"Reflections on the first
two years in office"



9 - 10:00 a.m. \$3.00

Waterside Estates, 4540 Bee Ridge Road
*(just past the light at McIntosh going east or
just before the light going west. South side of
Bee Ridge)*

Please RSVP to Kim Noyes,
at 921-9778 or lwvsc@comcast.net

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED



Hot Topics

Monday, January 26

**Effects of Medicare and Medicaid
Reimbursements on Nursing Homes**

Come and join us for this lively and timely discussion. What are the recent changes in reimbursements, how do they affect the elderly, what are the staffing levels, will there be legislative relief in the near future and more.

Listen to the story of this 60-year old not-for-profit nursing home facility founded by the Kiwanis Club in 1948. Tour the new state of the art skilled nursing facility and rehabilitation center. The Pines is a certified Eden community

Speaker: John Overton, CEO
The Pines of Sarasota

Where: The Pines of Sarasota
1501 N. Orange Avenue
Sarasota

11:30 a.m. \$10.00 luncheon

Please RSVP to Kim Noyes,
at 921-9778 or lwvsc@comcast.net

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

Membership Chair...Andrea Rogers



Our League Membership Committee is proud to announce that we are kicking off our New Year activities with a reception and orientation for new LWVSC members on January 15, 2009, to be hosted by Life Member Lucille Wallace. We are looking forward to this opportunity to meet and greet our new League members in a relaxed and comfortable setting and to learn more about how your League membership can work for you.

Along that note, the Membership Committee would love to hear from any of our members regarding how you can become more actively involved in *your* League. It is only with active membership participation that our League chapter can remain vital, healthy and strong.

Continued on page 5...

A message from your Sarasota County League President...

We begin a new year with a new President of the United States, who has encouraged us all to become involved in our government and to work together on the many serious challenges that face us today as a country and as individuals. The League of Women Voters' very existence is to be involved and to encourage and facilitate participation for all of our citizens. Since no one group can effectively address everything, the LWV sets issue priorities every year through a grassroots process. The League of Women Voter of Sarasota County selected health care as one of its top priorities this year. Health care is also currently a legislative priority at the state and national level.



LOCAL PROGRAM - HEALTH CARE

The Health Care Committee is researching Medicare issues and has already provided a well attended and very successful blue-ribbon panel discussion of Medicare as it affects hospitals and doctors in Sarasota County. When panel members were asked what the League could do to help, they pointed out the importance of informing the public of the facts and focusing attention on these issues. In so doing, the Committee is continuing its research and is looking into the effects of Medicare and Medicaid on nursing homes. Our January Hot Topics program will be addressing this at The Pines, the only not for profit, long-term care facility in Sarasota County. A tour of the facility will be available to those who are interested following the program. (See event announcement in this newsletter.)

NATIONAL STUDY – NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

The conferees at the 2008 National Convention approved a study on the National Popular Vote Compact (NVP). The NPV Compact provides a way to choose the President of the United States by popular vote without amending the Constitution. The LWVUS already has a position in favor of abolition of the Electoral College and adoption of the 'direct-popular vote' method for electing the president and the vice-president.

We will be doing a consensus on this in the month of February. **If you are interested in participating in this important discussion, please contact Cindy Guest, cquest01@yahoo.com or 922-0585.** The pros and cons on this issue are available on the national website, www.lwv.org.

Cindy Guest

Rule 1S-5.026 Post-Election Certification Audit...Millie Headdy

The Florida Voters Foundation (FVF) in conjunction with the League of Women Voters (LWV) conducted an Audit Observation project. LWVSC members Lee Burns, as lead person, Millie Headdy and Andrea Rogers volunteered to be on the team to observe the Sarasota County audit held at the Supervisor of Elections office. We each received an observation study packet and participated in a training conference call prior to the audit. We were asked to consider ourselves as a reporter. We could ask questions when they did not interfere with any portion of the audit process.

We had to maintain strict impartiality in the conduct of our duties and at no time during the audit, publicly express or exhibit any bias or preference in relation to the election process; it was nonpartisan as is the League of Women Voters.

Each member of the team completed and submitted a Random Selection FVW Audit Study. This multi-state, multiyear study will have tremendous impact on the way audits are conducted in the future. It was a rewarding experience for the team!

Board Bytes...

A more informal holiday Board meeting for December included:

- A discussion of legislative interviews,
- Proposed February events: The state of the State Economy and hearing from the Supervisor of Elections for a post-election report
- A special visit with LWVF Executive Director, Peg McGarrity, and enjoying a sunset at the beach.



Membership continued from page 3...

A prime opportunity to become more involved in League activities and to help our chapter and community thrive is by joining a League committee. The Membership Committee is a great place to start. Unlike many membership committees, our purpose is not to ask committee members to round up friends, family and colleagues to sign them up (though if you *like* that kind of recruiting, we certainly will not discourage you!). Rather, we see the current role of our Membership Committee as working to help our League be the kind of organization that people just naturally *want* to belong to.

If you enjoy meeting and chatting with new people, and if you enjoy participating in planning fun events, the LWVSC Membership Committee is for you! Our current committee members are: Michele Mician (LWVSC Vice President), Millie Headdy (LWVSC Director), Kerly Sekera, John Lewis, Tracy Seider, and Andrea Rogers, Membership Committee Chair. You may contact the Membership Committee through our administrative office by phone at (941)921-9778 or via e-mail at lwvsc@comcast.net. Or, you may contact me directly at (941)359-3076 or via e-mail at andrea@sarasotapartychic.com

Thank you, and we look forward to seeing you at our next monthly meeting: Monday, February 2, 2009, 12:30 pm at Andrea's home (please call for directions)!

LWVSC Health Care Committee...

Ann Hardy

We're living in a period of imminent change in health care delivery in the United States. What was already a troubled system because of the lack of insurance coverage for so many of our citizens has become even worse with rising unemployment. How will the Obama administration address this issue? Will our state government, with its diminishing resources, reduce funding for Medicaid, Kid-Care, and other health resources?

The Sarasota County League of Women Voter's health care committee will be researching and discussing these important issues this year. Along with our lobbyists in Tallahassee and Washington, D.C., we will be following bills as they make their way through the legislative process.

If you'd like to join us in exploring these issues and voicing our opinions, contact Ann Hardy at annhardy@verizon.net.

League Collaborates with CHIP...Ann Hardy

The Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) has invited the League of Women Voters to join its Leadership Council in an effort to provide another avenue for improving the health of Sarasota County residents. Ann Hardy, as chair of the Health Care Committee, will represent the League.

CHIP's mission is to engage and support citizens and agencies to positively impact the physical, mental, social, and environmental health of their community through research, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

CHIP's Leadership Council serves as a planning body for long-range health improvement efforts. It works to increase visibility and advocacy around key health issues in the community, and informs and advises policy makers on local and regional health policy issues. The League of Women Voters should fit right in.

The Council includes representation from health provider agencies; the business community; Sarasota County health, school, library, and government; not-for-profit organizations; and concerned citizens.

CHIP was created in 2002 with funding from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation and local hospitals and health departments and managed by SCOPE.

Many of CHIP's accomplishments have occurred through Community Health Action Teams (CHATs) in Englewood, North Port, and Laurel-Osprey-Venice-Nokomis..."LOVN". New Town is its newest CHAT.

CHIP's Provocateur Project has promoted collaboration among the hospital CEOs and the health departments in Sarasota, Charlotte, and DeSoto Counties.

The League is currently represented on the "Get Sarasota Insured" committee of CHIP. This committee works to address the needs of the uninsured and the under-insured in Sarasota County. It does this by offering information on more affordable health insurance coverage, and local free or low-cost healthcare (including medications). The committee offers community education forums, one-on-one consultations, web-based information and information kiosks at county libraries.



If you would like more information on CHIP, go to: chip4health.org. If you would like to find out more about the League's Health Care Committee, contact Ann Hardy at annhardy@verizon.net

LWVF STATEMENT OF 2009 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
Marilynn Wills, ACTION

The LWVF board has selected Legislative Priorities for the 2009 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature. The priorities were selected using input from local Leagues, the LWVF Board and other sources. A summary statement of the LWVF's position on each priority is included.

Government: Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the state.

Finance and Taxation: Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

Redistricting: Support single-member election districts that are equal in population, provide access for minorities, and are not determined by the Legislature.

Citizen Initiatives including the Statutory Initiative: Support citizens' right to have both constitutional and statutory initiatives.

Election Law: Promote integrity of process for matching voters to state-wide data-base under HAVA; support automatic restoration of voting rights for felons who have been released from prison.

Education in Florida: Support for a free public school system for Florida with high standards for student achievement and with equality of education opportunity for all.

Funding: Support adequate funding for the public school system

Accountability: Support a reliable accountability system that measures the achievement of all students whose education is provided by public expenditures.

Civics Education: Promote the extension of the civics education requirement.

Social Policy in Florida: Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice, and the health and safety of all Americans.

Health Care: Support a health care system that provides access to a basic level of quality health care for all Florida residents and controls health care costs

2009 LWVF Legislative Priorities

FINANCE AND TAXATION

The League supports a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs.

Background:

After two special sessions devoted to taxation issues were held by the legislature in 2007, Senate President Pruitt was not willing to devote leadership assistance to any new tax bills during the 2008 session. However, House Speaker Rubio aggressively pursued his desire for deeper tax cuts during the session.

The League supported a bill aimed at closing loopholes in the Florida tax system that allow companies in Florida to assign business profits gained in Florida to other states, thereby avoiding Florida taxation. We strongly opposed Constitutional Proposal 45 (Tax & Budget Reform Commission), a bill that would restrict revenue growth and lead to a deterioration in public services. Colorado implemented this system in 2001 and has since put it on hiatus because of dwindling income. That state saw its K-12 funding go from 35 to 49 in the nation and its higher education budget declined by 31%. An attempt by the House Speaker to pass the same type of legislation died in the Senate.

Currently, there is a proposed constitution amendment that provides that the total property tax on any parcel of real property shall never exceed 1.35% of the highest taxable value of the property. This property tax limit shall apply to all property taxes except property taxes approved by voters.

This is a version of the Colorado law. It has been sent to the Supreme Court after approval by the Secretary of State.

None of the legislation proposed in 2008 or the constitutional amendments passed or proposed agree with League positions. We will continue to oppose legislation that is not responsive to public needs and work for real reform of the Florida tax system.

Legislative Position:

The LWVF will support tax legislation that:

- Focuses more on ability to pay
- Does not jeopardize local services

- Addresses Florida's infrastructure deficit

- Enhances Floridian's quality of life. Removes unfair tax exemptions that hinder the State's or local governments' ability to serve Floridians.

The LWVF will oppose tax legislation that:

- Does not provide true, fair tax relief to Floridians Further burdens the State's or local governments' ability to serve Floridians

REDISTRICTING

The LWVF supports single-member election districts that are equal in population, that provide access for minorities, are compact and, when possible, take local characteristics such as political and geographical boundaries into consideration.

Background:

While redistricting suffered a setback when the amendment was stricken from the ballot by the Florida Supreme Court, the court did establish guidelines for compliance. Many of the groups in the original coalition have joined Fair Districts Florida in a new petition drive. The Supreme Court heard arguments for and against the amendment on Thursday, November 6; we are awaiting their decision. Local Leagues have been getting petitions signed throughout the past year.

Legislative Position:

While a bill to require redistricting was listed among the Senate bills in 2008, it did not have a hearing.

The LWVF will support redistricting legislation that:

- Would depoliticize the redistricting process by setting statewide standards
- Provides an equitable process for redistricting. Establishes a process that supports true representation for minorities

The LWVF will oppose redistricting legislation that:

- Further politicizes the redistricting process. Fails to allow minority representation.

INITIATIVES

The LWVF supports citizens' right to have both constitutional and statutory initiatives

Legislative Priorities continued from page 4...

Background:

In 1968 the Constitution Revision Commission placed a citizen petition initiative procedure on the ballot; it passed. The LWVF supported the amendment and feels that Florida should have both constitutional and statutory initiatives available to its citizens.

After the 2006 session, representatives from the League, Common Cause and FPIRG met with the attorneys for the Senate Judiciary Committee and discussed the statutory initiative. We were hopeful that a bill would be introduced in the 2007 session; however, a good deal of the session was devoted to tax reform with no results. There was very little time left in the session to address all other issues. We did not see any movement in the 2008 session, but hopefully, we will see some stirrings in the 2009 legislative session.

Legislative Position:

For the past three sessions, the League has fought to keep restrictions on the initiative process from passing. The legislature was successful in getting the 60% amendment on the ballot, and it passed. The revocation process was put in place, and while we were trying to amend it, it was struck down in the Appeals Court. The status at this time is unknown.

The LWVF will support initiative legislation that:

- Creates a statutory initiative process Puts the same restrictions on Legislative sponsored constitutional amendments that are on citizen amendments

The LWVF will oppose initiative legislation that:

- Keeps the revocation process in the hands of third party groups
- Increases moneyed interests' strangle-hold on the initiative process

EDUCATION IN FLORIDA

After the 2007 convention, an education committee was formed to study education and the FCAT in Florida. No concurrence was reached on a previous study done in 2005. The new study is to focus on accountability systems measuring student achievement. Legislators attempted to reduce the influence of the FCAT scores on the grading of schools during the 2008 legislative session. There was a large education bill passed during the last session, but there were other bills that would modify

use of the FCAT that never made it out of committee. We may see more activity along those lines during the 2009 session.

The League will support legislation that:

- Supports a reliable accountability system for measuring achievement of all students
- Supports high standards for teacher certification and compensation. Supports equality of educational opportunity for all

The League will oppose legislation that:

- Decreases the role of the state in funding of the public school system. Does not fully finance programs mandated by the state

CIVIC EDUCATION

The LWVF seeks to restore the historic civic mission of our schools. The key to strengthening civic education is improving state and local policy support for it. For our system of representative democracy to be healthy, we need citizens who understand what it means to participate in governing themselves, actually engage in that self-governance, have the knowledge to do it well, and appreciate the complexities of the process and understand how it works.

Background:

The League of Women Voters of Florida has made civic education a legislative priority for the last three sessions. During the 2006 session, LWVF joined Common Cause and succeeded in getting a semester of civic education required at the middle school level. We supported a bill during the 2007 session that would include the teaching of civic education in the teacher preparatory curriculum. Former Senator Bob Graham and former Representative Lou Frey promoted a bill that would require civic education be added to the FCAT. The rationale for this requirement is that subjects not tested are usually given short shrift in the classroom.

There are two school districts in Florida that require a year long civics course in the middle school: Miami-Dade and Palm Beach. The LWVF would like to see that requirement extended to all school districts in Florida.

Legislative Position:

As indicated at least one bill on this issue has already been filed for the upcoming Session.

The LWVF will support civic education legislation that:

- Requires civic education in middle school
 - Enhances high school civic education requirements
- Adds civic education to the FCAT

The LWVF will oppose civic education legislation that:

Hinders civic education at any level.

FINANCING AND DELIVERY OF HEALTHCARE

During the 2008 legislative session, the League joined with other groups like AARP, FPIRG, and the Florida Retail Federation to promote SB1486, the "Health Care Consumer's Right to Information Act." The bill was filed by Senator Dean and its companion bill in the House by Representative Zapata.

Passed by the legislature in 2008, the bill will take transparency an important step forward. The **Health Care Consumer's Right to Information Act** will make it easier for Floridians to get advance estimates and compare prices when they are deciding where to go for their non-emergency health care needs. The bill increases transparency by:

- Requiring disclosure of undiscounted prices for the 150 most common procedures.
- Directing the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to post those prices on the Floridahealthfinder.gov website
- Requiring advance, written good-faith estimates for non-emergency hospital care.
- Requiring estimates to be written in language comprehensible to the layperson
- Requiring facilities to provide uninsured patients with information regarding any discount or charity policies
- Requiring providers to inform patients covered under Medicare and Medicaid whether their coverage will be accepted as payment in full Directing AHCA to include the range of procedure charges from the highest to the lowers charge rather than only the average charge when determining the information to disclose on the Floridahealthfinder.gov website LWVF will continue to work with the Health Check Coalition on health issues and providing health care to all citizens of Florida. This is an issue that should be broached to all legislators during interviews.

DIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENT: The League of Women Voters of Sarasota County will promote, in all aspects of the League's activities, a philosophy of inclusion that reflects the diverse composition and issues of the community.

Climate Change Focus: Recycling and Climate Change!

excerpt from: http://www.plantops.umich.edu/grounds/recycle/climate_change.html

Many of us recycle and most of us are also aware that the climate is changing due to human activities. But are the two related? In fact, yes! Recycling and waste reduction are actually very much related to climate change. The energy used in the industrial processing of virgin materials and in their transportation, involves burning fossil fuels such as gasoline, diesel, and coal, all major sources of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. While manufacturing goods from recycled materials still requires energy, it is much less than extracting, processing, and transporting virgin raw materials. Recycling and waste reduction also avoid emissions caused by incinerators and landfills which produce large amounts of carbon dioxide and methane (21 times more potent than carbon dioxide). Waste reduction and recycling also slow the harvesting of forests, which act as carbon sinks, meaning they absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere Did you know?...



- ⇒ The U.S. recycles approximately 32 percent of its waste which saves an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases to removing 39,618 cars from the road.
- ⇒ Increasing the recycling rate to 35 percent would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an additional 5.2 Million Metric Tons of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent.
- ⇒ Emissions are four to five times lower when materials are produced from recycled steel, copper, glass, and paper. They are 40 times lower for aluminum.
- ⇒ Just one person recycling their newspaper, magazines, plastic, glass, and metal for one year is enough to save 471 pounds of carbon dioxide from going into the atmosphere.

Join the League's Climate Change Committee. Volunteers are needed to help increase recycling. Call Michele Mician at 941-448-3901 for information.

Our Tea Bag contribution list is growing! Special thanks to the following lightening fast contributors!

Helen Janssen Marilyn Gerkin
Pat Price Dot and Frank Moore
Millie Headdy Ann Hardy
Mimi Mendelson Susan Chapman
Ida levy.....Cindy Guest.....Jean Slocum
Patty Schreiber.....Corky Pezzati

League Notes...

□ We'll print a new membership directory in April, but have a few remaining from our last printing. If your copy is lost or worn, contact the League office for another copy, while supplies last. Now is the time to update your contact information with us. Please contact the office (921-9778 or lwvsc@comcast.net) and let us know if any of your contact information has changed. Also, if you receive a hard copy of our newsletter and have an email address, help us save postage costs by providing your email address. You'll receive the newsletter via email, along with other important information—you'll not want to miss.

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