



The VOTER

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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.

2007-2008
Board &
Committee
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Upcoming Events

Food for Thought

Jim Ley
County Administrator

Waterside Estates
4540 Bee Ridge Road

(Just past the light at McIntosh going West or just before the light going East. South side of Bee Ridge)

\$3 per person 9:00 a.m.

Call in your reservation to either meeting:

The League Line: 921-9778
Or lwvsc@comcast.net

ANNUAL MEETING April 18, 2008

Laurel Oak Country Club

Business meeting - Election of Board
10:30-11:30

Lunch and speaker at noon

Lunch \$25

Guest Speaker:
Dr. Susan MacManus
**"Conventional Wisdom Being Tossed
Aside in Election 2008"**

A Message from your President



A LOOK AT THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION 2008

I am just back from a stimulating LWVF Legislative Seminar in Tallahassee. Ann Hardy and I attended this well organized event and came back enlightened on many of the important issues, processes and players that have come together to make up the 2008 legislative session. We joined approximately 60 leaguers from across the state of Florida to listen to our leaders, sit in on committee meetings, and meet with our legislators to discuss legislation important to League priorities.

Upon arriving in Tallahassee we discussed climate change issues with Sue Dudley, Climate Change Committee member, and other leaguers. Listening to what was happening in other counties in the State of Florida, I was very proud of the progress our local governments have made on environmental issues. We shared some of the projects and programs that have been implemented

in Sarasota County. We heard from league lobbyist, Jeanne Zokovitch, who updated us on the LWVF issues she is working on and gave us advice on how we could best lobby for these issues. Many of us met after dinner the first night to share ideas on how to recruit, retain, and recognize members.

We heard from several legislators on Monday morning and met with President of the Senate Ken Pruitt to hear about their priorities and strategies for this year's session.

We sat in on what will undoubtedly be one of the most important debates of this year's session - the Taxation and Budget Reform Committee. Debate lasted all day. We heard the merits of the current complicated proposal debated, as well as the classroom size issue as it relates to budget impacts. The prolonged discussion, including amendments and amendments to amendments, was difficult to follow. It was fortunate that we had Martha Barnett, a Taxation and Budget Reform Committee member, speak to us the following morning to explain what had been decided, the long term ramifications of the proposal from her perspective and to answer our many questions. (It will be very interesting to follow this very important and very complicated issue.)

We met with Rep. Keith Fitzgerald and in addition to discussing several bills including election reform, civics education, use of local tax dollars, and public transportation funding, we gained some insights into the ways and means of passing legislation in Tallahassee.

Continued on page two...

Presidents message continued...

All in all, this experience served to bring to life to this annual legislative event. We returned better informed about not only the issues of the day, but about what state issues we want to focus our local league's attention on this coming year. And we always come back with valuable news and ideas, i.e. taxation, election reform, education funding and more, gleaned from other league members. It's a great experience and Tallahassee is a great city to visit. Kudos to LWVF, Executive Director, Peg McGarity, President Diane Wheatley-Giliotti and the entire State Board for providing an excellent and worthwhile event.

LWVSC Annual Meeting

I would like to encourage you attend this year's annual business meeting on Friday, April 18 and the luncheon and presentation by Dr. Susan MacManus that will follow. The 2008-2009 proposed budget is included in this Voter, as is the Nomination Committee Report. The local programs we will be proposing are:

1. Further study on health care in Sarasota County to provide forums on several health care issues to help inform our community about these important issues and look into the status of the uninsured in Sarasota County.
2. To study and promote climate change initiatives with the following goals for the coming year:
 - A. At least Four Committee members, (including Michele Mician) to serve as a Speaker's Bureau and utilize the power point presentation to educate schools, churches, other groups about Climate Change
 - B. Two speakers each year to focus on climate change
 - C. Participation in local events such as World Ocean Day (June 8 at MOTE Marine) and others to promote the League and our Sustainability efforts.
 - D. Energy Saving Pledge and Campaign – 2 times this year at Farmer's market – give away CFL Light bulbs and do energy pledges

Cindy Guest

If you haven't had a chance to send in your dues, please bring them with you to the annual meeting.

Board Bytes March

- Ann Hardy and Cindy Guest reported on their trip to Tallahassee for Legislative Days.
- Special events to plan with the upcoming election in mind and in addition to candidate debates include forums on proposed tax reform and education funding.
- We are also planning a summer series on health care issues.
- Membership dues were discussed. Considering the fact that dues have not increased in many years (no one could remember the last time) and the fact that 80% of them go to state and national, we will most likely be considering proposing an increase in dues at the 2009 annual meeting.
- A special Susan B. Anthony membership level was also discussed for further consideration.
- The Annual Meeting was discussed.

REDISTRICTING REFORM UPDATE

Caroline Emmons-Schramm, Off Board Director, LWVF

We are close to qualifying for Supreme Court review!

February, 2008, has drawn to a close and Fair Districts Florida (FDF) believes that the 61,011 valid signatures necessary to qualify for review in the Supreme Court have been collected. The signatures have been submitted to the supervisors of elections but all have not yet been processed. As of February 26, 2008, almost 45,000 signatures had been certified for the Congressional amendment and over 46,000 had been certified for the legislative amendment. There are approximately 25,000 of each measure that have been submitted but not yet been processed. You can track the certification totals on the Division of Elections website at: www.election.dos.state.fl.us.

We expect the remaining signatures to be processed by the end of March. Once the Secretary of State certifies the measures for Court review, the Attorney General has 30 days to challenge. So the earliest the court will have the amendments is the end of April. The Supreme Court has no deadline to meet in reviewing the amendments, so we may not be notified of a decision until early 2009.

By law, in order for us to qualify for the 2010 ballot, all 611,000 signatures must be submitted for processing by December 31, 2009. Due to difficulties with collecting up to the end and due to processing snafus experienced by a number of groups trying to qualify amendments for the 2008 ballot, all efforts should be made to have all signatures collected and submitted by October, 2009.

While the Court is reviewing the amendments, FDF plans to move ahead with building a volunteer signature collection program, lining up funding for the balance of the campaign and negotiating with a paid signature gathering company to begin signature collection as soon as possible after the Court rules. As many League members and local Leagues did during the 2005-2006 campaign, we hope that you will again enthusiastically support this effort!

The League is ready. Local Leagues have been meeting with their local legislators. League point persons and the League legislative issues they will follow have been identified. LWVF Lobbyist, Jeanne Zokovitch has started posting the *Capitol Report* on the website at www.lwvf1a.org. To keep you informed on current activity during the legislative session, the *Capitol Report* will be posted every Friday with that week's update and issues likely to happen during the next week of session. *Peg McGarity, Executive Director LWVF*

Florida Rights Restoration Coalition Calls for State to Life Barriers to Civil Rights Restoration

At a news conference today, the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition called for the Florida legislature and the executive branch to implement comprehensive measures that would lift occupational licensing restrictions imposed on individuals with past felony convictions and to work toward truly automatic and comprehensive civil rights restoration reform.

Many Floridians convicted of a felony who have completed their sentences are denied the right to vote for the rest of their lives unless they are granted restoration of their civil rights by the Governor and Cabinet sitting as the Clemency Board, including the fundamental right to vote, eligibility to serve on a jury and the right to hold public office. Also, due to many restrictions imposed by statute, regulation or agency practice, citizens with past felony convictions are ineligible for certain state-issued occupational licenses until their civil rights are restored.

Mark Schlakman, senior program director, FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights and former special counsel to Governor Lawton Chiles, has provided CFO Alex Sink, at her request, with a concise overview regarding the extent to which the rights restoration process is impacted by such employment restrictions and proposing ways for the Clemency Board to achieve more comprehensive reform. Schlakman spoke to those issues in today's press conference.

With nearly 1 million disfranchised citizens, Florida accounts for nearly 20% of the nation's approximately 5.3 million disfranchised citizens. Florida is one of only three states where a felony conviction can result in a permanent, lifetime ban on voting rights.

Governor Crist and the Board of Executive Clemency took an important step to change the antiquated policy of disfranchising citizens with past felony convictions in April 2007 when the Clemency Board enacted clemency rule changes to streamline the restoration of civil rights (RCR) process for certain offenders. However, further reforms must be accomplished so that civil rights restoration is truly automatic and paperwork-free for all Florida citizens upon completion of all non-monetary terms of sentence.

Another key hurdle for restoration of voting rights for citizens with past felony convictions is payment of restitution as a precondition. Further reform is needed in this area. While restitution should be paid when ordered by a court, it can often be difficult for this population to secure meaningful employment – often because they cannot obtain an occupational license – and thus pay back their restitution until their rights have been restored. The Department of Corrections has estimated that 40% of the ineligible citizens with past felony convictions are affected by the restitution precondition.

"The FRRC maintains that payment of restitution should not be a precondition to civil rights restoration. Civil rights need to be restored and barriers to employment removed first, so that applicants are able to secure meaningful employment and pay court-ordered restitution obligations," said Muslima Lewis, Senior Staff Attorney and Racial Justice Project Director, ACLU of Florida, a founding member of the FRRC.

Individuals seeking assistance to restore their civil rights please call the FRRC toll free at: 877 826 8682 or 877-U-COUNT-2.

The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition is a coalition of over 50 national, state and local organizations dedicated to eradicating Florida's Reconstruction-era civil rights ban. FRRC member organizations host Restoration of Civil Rights (RCR) workshops, lobby the Clemency Board and the legislature for RCR reform, and create public awareness of the unfair ban on civil rights, including voting rights, in Florida. For additional information, visit our Web site at: www.restorerights.org.

An Independent Judiciary Elizabeth Mannion, Off-Board Director, Judicial Independence

May of 2008 will be the 50th Anniversary of Law Day, an event established by President Eisenhower and "dedicated to the principles of government under law." Our freedoms are based on this rule of law, which allows all citizens to challenge authority. The framers of our Constitution, who had experienced in their own lives persecution by the British Parliament and King George III, believed that human nature might lead our own executive and legislative branches to expand their power at the people's expense. Their brilliant solution to that problem was to create a co-equal branch of government as a check against such a possibility. The legislature's power to enact laws is balanced by the executive's power to veto legislation and by the judiciary's power to declare legislation unconstitutional. The judiciary as the third branch of government forms a tripod with the executive and legislative branches. While a tripod is a very stable form, if one leg of the tripod were to be weakened, then the whole structure would begin to wobble.

Today, judges are under partisan attacks from those who disagree with their decisions. Interest groups who used to devote their efforts and money exclusively to legislatures and executive offices are now fine tuning their strategies and going after judges who have not ruled according to their dictates. Campaigns for judicial office look increasingly like campaigns for other offices--from fund raising large amounts of money to misleading television ads. (Not only is their independence under attack, the integrity of our judges is also at risk.) Some state legislatures are threatening to reduce funding for the judicial branch while others pass guidelines eliminating judicial discretion.

When we speak of judicial independence, it is not independence in the sense that judges can make decisions as they wish. They take an oath to uphold the Constitution and follow the law, which includes statutes and higher court decisions. They must follow the law whether they agree with it or not. And, of course, their actions and decisions are reviewable by higher courts. As former Supreme Court Justice O'Connor has stated, judicial independence means that when a case comes to court, the judge deciding the matter will do so fairly and not for personal notions of what is right and wrong--he or she will impartially resolve the case based on the law and the Constitution of the United States.

An independent judiciary cannot stand alone; it must have the support of all citizens, regardless of their politics or stations in life. An educated public is essential to an independent judiciary and the League of Women Voters is uniquely qualified to provide this service to our country. We can educate ourselves and our fellow citizens so that we will make informed decisions about our courts and who presides over them.

Special Contributors

Operating Fund Contributors:

Kerly Sekera
Connie Goldstein

Education Fund Contributors:

Patty Schreiber

Thanks to the following league members who volunteered at the county fair to register voters, demonstrate the voting machines and answer questions.

Ruth and Ray Ritenour

Kerly Sekera
Cindy Guest
Judy Achre
Ginny Tarika
Pat Price

**Special thanks to those sending
in their dues with lightning
speed!**

Eco Tips

Water Conservation

Install a toilet dam or bottle filled with water in your toilet tank to cut down on the amount of water used for each flush. Be sure these devices do not interfere with operating parts.

Don't use running water to thaw food.

Put food coloring in your toilet tank. If it seeps into the bowl, you have a leak. It's easy to fix, and can save more than 600 gallons a month.

Run your washing machine and dishwasher only when full. You could save 1,000 gallons a month.

Soak pots and pans rather than let them sit under running water while you scrape them clean.

Turn off water while you brush your teeth and save 4 gallons a minute - that's 10,000 gallons a year for a family of four.

Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway and sidewalk. You could save up to 80 gallons of water every time.

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