



# The Okaloosa Voter

*A force for progress on the Emerald Coast since 1962*

## July / August 2013

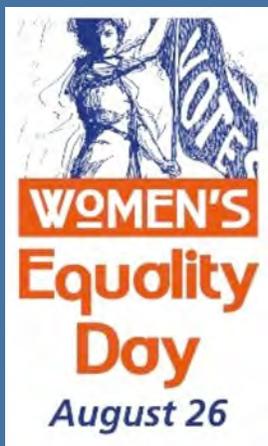
"If you don't like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time."

*Marian Wright Edelman  
American Activist, Attorney  
and Educator*



### USA and FOIA share a birthday!

As you celebrate this Independence Day, be sure to remember the Freedom of Information Act (article at right).



Check out the history of this event at <http://www.nwhp.org/news/equalityday.php>



### League's Mission:

*The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

## Message from the President

I know many of you are suffering from "political fatigue" after a long presidential election year, but we must remain vigilant. Our elected officials *do* care what we think, and we need to tell them. League distributed 1.1 million Voter Guides in 2012, spoke to 23,000+ people about the amendments, registered 4,000+ new voters and had 5 million hits on the state website in 2012 – which demonstrates there is

a lot of hunger for knowledge about state and local issues.

Thanks to your support, we are making democracy work. Happy summer vacation!

*Mary Blackwell*

### Attention Members:

The Planning meeting is coming up and we need your input. See the calendar (p. 2) for details.

## FOIA's 47th Birthday is July 4th

Independence Day marks 47 years since the landmark Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was signed into federal law, yet Americans are still distrustful of government. A 2013 poll showed only 26% of Americans surveyed trust government in Washington "almost always or most of the time" – among the lowest ratings in 50 years.

FOIA established our right to access government records and find out what our government is doing. Exercising that right keeps government accountable and enables the

public to ensure our health and that of our democracy.

Public participation is the key to a healthy and open government. If citizens don't make it their business to know how their elected officials are handling business, then complacency sets in and accountability suffers, as we know only too well in Okaloosa County.

This FOIA anniversary, exercise your right to know by attending a government meeting, contacting an elected official, or visiting a government website.

## Fair Districts Update

Thanks to the Fair Districts amendments, Florida's legislative districts are more compact, more cities and counties remain whole, and there were historically high numbers of competitive races in 2012. However, records in a case involving Florida's congressional and legislative redistricting suggest Senate and Congressional maps may still

be "infected" with intentional bias.

Both sides accuse the other of partisanship and delaying release of emails and other records to slow down the case's progress and resolution. In the meantime, Florida voters are held hostage to legal wrangling. Find out more at <https://fairdistrictsnow.org/home/>.

## Statewide School Choice Study

The LWV of Alachua County/Gainesville is studying School Choice and its financial and social impacts on the county school system. Their study includes the procedures to evaluate how alternative schools fulfill the constitutionally mandated requirement to provide "a uniform, efficient, safe, and high quality system of free public schools that allow students to obtain a high quality education ... "

So far their studies indicate that school choice programs need better management, evaluation and reporting, in addition to stronger local oversight to make charters accountable for state tax dollars.

The Okaloosa League wants to join the statewide study to see if our charters offer a genuine alternative that ensures a quality education for our children. Join the committee: [mary.blackwell@lwvokaloosa.org](mailto:mary.blackwell@lwvokaloosa.org).

### Renew your membership!

The new League year begins in September, and your member invoices will go out soon. One look at this issue shows how much our state and county need League to keep our democracy strong. So please return your invoice and check as soon as you receive it. Thanks!

## Looking Back at the 2013 State Legislative Session

The 2013 session was a better one than we've seen recently. There was more bipartisan collaboration this year, thanks to the loss of the Republican supermajority in the 2012 elections, and there were two bright spots. After a 37-year wait, the Florida legislature finally passed substantive ethics reform, and they also undid the mess they made last year by passing an historic election reform package.

With prodding from League, citizens and state Supervisors of Elections, the legislature crafted a bill that expands access to early voting,

restoring two weeks at the discretion of the Supervisors and giving them more flexibility in choosing early voting locations. It also provides a window of time for a voter to sign their absentee ballot if they forgot, and allows voters who have moved around the state to update their address and cast a regular ballot on Election Day. This was a big win for voters, but League will remain vigilant.

Unfortunately, healthcare reform is still unresolved. This will be League's biggest challenge going forward (see article below).

## The Challenge Ahead: Healthcare Reform

Even after the governor and Senate came out in support of accepting federal dollars to expand Medicaid, the Florida House refused, so the session ended with no solution – leaving \$51 billion in federal funds for expansion on the table.

League supports Medicaid expansion because it would mean a large reduction in the uninsured; a large influx of federal dollars; thousands of new jobs; and new coverage to reduce the need for state payments for uncompensated state care. Taxpayers **already** pay for expensive emergency care for the uninsured; Medicaid coverage is much cheaper.

Medicaid expansion would provide benefits for 1 million working poor in Florida, and Senator Gaetz will work with Speaker Weatherford to "find a Florida solution," possibly in a special session this fall. But if Florida does **not** expand Medicaid, we will spend more, get less and leave millions of our poorest residents under- or uninsured.

Meanwhile, Florida – a donor state – will lose money paid by its taxpayers, which will go to other states moving forward with expansion. Ultimately Florida's most vulnerable citizens may lack access to affordable health insurance.

## League Backs Campaign to Save Florida Forever

Last month we reported that LWVF has endorsed a proposed constitutional amendment that would protect hundreds of thousands of acres of land needed to ensure Florida's clean water supply and wildlife habitat for generations to come.

The amendment would dedicate one-third of the existing documentary stamp tax, which is paid when real estate is sold, to restore the Everglades, protect drinking water sources, and revive the state's commitment to protecting natural lands and wildlife via the Florida Forever Program. It would take effect in 2015 and expire in 2035.

The amendment would provide over \$5 billion for water and land conservation over the next 10 years **without** increasing taxes or state spending – it just allocates a portion of an existing tax for conservation. This is the same funding source used for water and land conservation for the last 20 years.

At least 683,000 petitions signed and verified by the supervisors of elections are needed to get the Water and Land Legacy proposal on the 2014 ballot, so please take a moment and sign the petition at <http://floridawaterlandlegacy.org/index.php>, and help preserve Florida.

## SCOTUS Scuttles Section 4 of VRA

The Supreme Court struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 last month, invalidating the requirement for certain counties and states to seek preclearance from the federal government before implementing any changes to their voting laws. The justices made it clear that lawmakers must update the formula for determining which areas of the country must seek federal approval of their voting laws.

This is not welcome news in Florida, where we have battled the legislature's partisan manipulation of our voting rights for the last 2 years. Removing the preclearance process means new voting laws can be implemented in Florida much more easily and quickly now. It also means the VRA no longer has any "teeth" to enforce its provisions. Please urge your representatives to act now to update VRA's authority.

## 2013 Calendar

### Planning Meeting

9 July, 11:30-1:30

Fort Walton Yacht Club  
(180 Ferry Rd NE, FWB).

**Members:** please join your board to map out events for the coming League year. We need your input!



### 2013 State of the County Report

Did you miss the SOTC on 18 May? No worries!

Crestview Community TV filmed the event. You can watch the video on-line:

<http://www.cvctv.info/channel.php?category=events&channelVideo=3797>. Select

2013 Okaloosa County "State of the County" PART 1, and then PART 2.

### 2013 Annual Meeting

Did you miss it? Again, no worries. Check out the president's report, budget and local program on-line:

<http://www.lwvokaloosa.org/members.html>.

### Florida League Membership Update

League now has over 3,500 members in Florida! Can we get 4,000 by the end of the summer? You can make the difference by inviting your friends to join League.

### Members: Sign up for an LWVF Committee

Interested members are invited to join these committees: Immigration ([epines@pineslaw.com](mailto:epines@pineslaw.com)), Corrections & Juvenile Justice ([ajc43@students.uwf.edu](mailto:ajc43@students.uwf.edu)), Health Care ([tmjblackcat@gmail.com](mailto:tmjblackcat@gmail.com) or [marykmahoney@gmail.com](mailto:marykmahoney@gmail.com)) and Natural Resources ([lwvocnr@aol.com](mailto:lwvocnr@aol.com)).

### Membership & Leadership Development

Watch the video about League's program to grow League by growing leaders: [http://participate.lwv.org/p/s\\_alsa/web/common/public/thankYou.sjs?donate\\_page\\_KEY=7259&donation\\_KEY=13145563&recurring\\_donation\\_KEY=-1](http://participate.lwv.org/p/s_alsa/web/common/public/thankYou.sjs?donate_page_KEY=7259&donation_KEY=13145563&recurring_donation_KEY=-1).

### Newseum Website

Check out today's headlines in cities around the world:

<http://www.newseum.org/to-daysfrontpages/flash/>.