



A force for progress on the Emerald Coast since 1962

Jan / Feb 2015

“One must wait until the evening to see how splendid the day has been.”

*Sophocles,
Ancient Greek Playwright*



Happy New Year!



National Women's History Project turns 35

Meet the 2015 National Women's History Month honorees and learn how their pioneering work and diverse narratives have transformed the fabric of American history at <http://www.nwhp.org/35th-anniversary-celebration/>.



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

This edition of the Voter is late to press – even for me. On the bright side, I didn't even pretend to resolve not to procrastinate in 2015, so at least no broken resolutions are involved!

I hope to see you this Thursday evening at our January meeting (details below). The February general meeting will feature Susan Glickman, Florida Director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. Details are still being finalized, so stay tuned. I keep trying to find a time/day

that is most convenient for interested parties to attend our general meetings, so if you have a preference or suggestion, please email me today at mary.blackwell@lwvokaloosa.org.

Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Laurel Hill and Shalimar residents: municipal elections will be held 10 March, so look for a link to the E-Voter on our website (www.lwvokaloosa.org) on 26 Jan.

Mary Blackwell

January general meeting: Electronic Voting and Registration

The World Wide Web turns 26 in March, which means an entire generation has never known a world without access to the Internet. This generation takes electronic connectivity for granted, and most of the rest of us have gradually succumbed to the convenience of online shopping and banking, despite high profile security breaches and hacking incidents. In today's smartphone world, the ease and speed of electronic transactions are just too good to pass up.

Florida was concerned enough about electronic security that it banned touch-screen voting machines. Our state's Supervisors of Elections prefer optical scanners, which simplify and speed up vote counting, maintain a vote tally, and rely on paper ballots that can be counted manually if all else fails. And

since they aren't connected to the Internet, they're not vulnerable to hacking.

But what of the public trust? The right to vote is at the foundation of American democracy. Is the franchise ready to meet 21st-century technology?

League invites you to find out from **6-8:00 p.m. Thursday, 22 Jan**, when Supervisor of Elections Paul Lux will be on hand to discuss whether we can expect online voter registration — or perhaps online voting itself — any time in the near future. The meeting will be in **Shalimar Town Hall** (2 Cherokee Road, opposite the post office).

The meeting is free and the public is welcome. We look forward to seeing you there.

News & Notes

• **63%** of Americans think that it's more important to protect free speech than to avoid offending religious people. **19%** say that the dignity of religious beliefs is more important. **18%** are unsure.
Huffington Post/YouGov

• **Six in 10** Americas believe that the new Congress will not accomplish any more than the last one. Just 28% think that the Senate will function more effectively with Republicans in control.
CNN/ORC

• The US budget deficit shrank to its lowest level since 2007. The Treasury posted a shortfall of \$483B in the year ending 30 Sep 14, compared with a deficit of \$680B a year earlier.
The Week

• The US economy added ~3 million new jobs in 2014, and unemployment fell to 5.6%, but, job growth hasn't meant wage gains for most workers: wages increased 1.7% in 2014, barely ahead of 1.3% inflation.
The Week

Voting trends in the US

According to a recent Gallup survey (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/180440/new-record-political-independents.aspx>), 43% of Americans identified as political independents in 2014 – the highest number ever. Only 30% identified as Democrats, and just 26% identified as Republicans. Before you start writing obituaries for the two-party system, keep in mind that voters affiliated with political parties are more likely to vote. And that's not all.

Politico.com recently reported that (<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/01/income-gap-at-the-polls-113997.html#.VL1bTicXE4Q>) over the last half-century affluent Americans have turned out to vote at significantly higher rates than their lower-income counterparts. Exit data from the 2014 midterms indicate those making under \$50K – who comprise 48% of the population – made up only 36% of voters, while those making over \$100K made up 30% of voters – but only 22% of the population.

Additionally, the preferences of voters and nonvoters are increasingly divergent. Voters are more economically conservative; whereas non-voters favor

News & Notes (cont'd)

• **Condo Alliance of Okaloosa Island meeting:** CAOI will host County Commissioner Kelly Windes from **5:30-6:30 pm on 28 Jan** in the first floor Lounge of **El Matador** (909 Santa Rosa Blvd). The next "Hands Across the Bridge" rally is at 10:00 am on 31 Jan.

• **New LWVF Executive Director:** Viletta "Vi" Coombs will help provide the support to help us all get to the next level. Learn all about her here: <http://thefloridavoter.org/about/board-of-directors/>.

LWVF goals for 2015

1. Ensure Florida takes the \$55B in federal funds to expand Medicaid and finally close the healthcare gap.
2. Ensure the Land & Legacy amendment funding is spent wisely and distributed to help all parts of the state.
3. Reduce expansion of a parallel system of private schools that diverts funds from our public schools with no

more robust unions and more government spending on things like health insurance, public schools and housing (<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/10144.html>). This research suggests that policy would change rather dramatically if everyone voted, so why does the US have such depressed voter turnout among its poorer citizens?

Because the United States has numerous barriers to voting that don't exist elsewhere. Unlike most other western democracies, the US does not have automatic voter registration. In Florida alone felony disenfranchisement barred 1.5 million individuals from voting in 2014. Voter ID laws have also had a chilling effect on turnout along with roll back of early voting and same-day registration. As a result the poor and people of color – who often do not have acceptable voter ID, struggle to get time off work and are less likely to be registered in the first place – are increasingly unlikely to be able to exercise their right to vote.

Is this what the founding fathers envisioned for the nation they dedicated to the principle that all men are created equal? Surely not.

• **Join Floridians for Fair Democracy coalition:** Support the ballot amendment to restore the rights of former felons in 2016. Read the petition: <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/initiatives/fulltext/pdf/64388-1.pdf>.

• **LWV Ed Team Blog:** This forum promotes exchange of information on school reform and a better understanding of different positions on school choice issues. Subscribe to the blog at: <http://lwveducation.com>. Leaguers and nonmembers are welcome.

accountability.

4. Stop proposed legislation to allow guns in our public schools and universities.
5. Continue to educate our citizens and businesses on key opportunities and challenges to our state.
6. Inspire critically needed higher levels of informed voter participation.

2014 Calendar

E-Registration for Voters 22 Jan, 6-8:00 pm

Learn about what's next for Florida voter registration from Okaloosa Supervisor of Elections Paul Lux.

Update on Commercial Green Energy

19 Feb: Time/place TBD
Is Florida exploiting renewable energy or just waiting for the power to go off? Find out from Susan Glickman, Florida Director, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy.

Juvenile Justice Process, Diversion Programs

March: Date TBD
How are youthful offenders handled in our county? Find out at this meeting.



Travel with League

Piña Coladas in Miami! 5-8 Feb 2015

Enjoy a VIP South Beach art experience, a tour of the Perez Museum, a sightseeing cruise, and a performance by the Miami City Ballet. Get info: [tps://docs.google.com/document/d/1e5Drp11U93oN2v_ed_drkKAHd_j_K13rGScqFhs5eLcM/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e5Drp11U93oN2v_ed_drkKAHd_j_K13rGScqFhs5eLcM/edit?pli=1)

Politicos in Paradise! 15-16 May 2015

You're invited to LWVF's Convention in Delray Beach to shape the 2015-17 program. Sign up or get more info: <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e9z5cn4qb9226e267&llr=jhigmrdb>

Visit Alaska's wild coast! 15-22 June 2015

Visit America's last frontier! Sign up or get more info: <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e9guzk7x7f062218&llr=jhigmrdb>

Discover Cuba with League! 16-22 Feb 2015

Learn more about the island nation! Get more info at <http://www.thefloridavoter.org/events/sisters-across-the-straits> and contact lwvoffice@gmail.com to reserve a spot!