

February 2008

League of Women Voters of Okaloosa County



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

*Margaret Mead,
American Anthropologist*

LWVOC

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www.LWVOkaloosa.org

This month's Voter sponsored by Advanced Concepts Enterprises, Inc., of Mary Esther, FL, a service-disabled, veteran-owned small business.



Mission:

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

Presidential Preference Primary: January 29th!

Election Day is at hand – don't miss this opportunity to exercise your hard-won franchise. Not only will you be choosing your preference for your party's presidential nominee, but you will also be voting on Amendment #1, Property Tax Reform. Make your voice heard!

Are you unsure about the candidates or the amendment? Just use the links at <http://www.lwvokaloosa.org/calendar.htm> to access and review the LWV Voter's Guide to the Candidates and the Project VoteSmart Guide to Amendment #1. This information is accurate and concise, and will help you make an informed decision.

This year Florida voters have an unprecedented opportunity to affect the outcome of the national primaries: it's up to you; **make a difference!**



If you are registered as an Independent, you won't be able to vote for either party's nominees, but you **can** and **should** still vote on the Amendment, which will have far-reaching effects along the Emerald Coast if approved.

Democracy is not a spectator sport, so get out and **vote!**

Take Action: VOTE and Make a Difference!

Last month I told you I was on a mission to get League members involved by providing discrete opportunities for action that could fit into anyone's schedule without impinging on professional or personal responsibilities. This month you'll notice a number of Voter articles that stress the same theme, beginning with the lead item on the primary.

I invite you to visit the new "take action" link on our website. There you will learn about our immigration consensus as well as opportunities to write or interview your legislators, join our Observation Corps or

respond to Action Alerts from the US and Florida Leagues. While you're deciding which activity is a good fit for you, don't miss the calendar page with its links to voter guides on the candidates and Amendment #1. Be an informed voter.

I also invite you to follow the "Yellow Rose" link to learn how you can nominate someone for this award, which will honor a county resident for promoting democracy in action.

Be a part of it: Make your voice heard!

~ Mary Blackwell, President, LWVOC

Take a peek at the future on February 9th!

Please join us at Shalimar Town Hall on February 9th to learn what **you** can do to help preserve the Emerald Coast's economic prosperity and quality of life. Our featured speaker will be Michelle Anchors, prominent local attorney and Chair of the governor's Committee for a Sustainable Emerald Coast (CSEC).

Much as we would all like to maintain our comfortable status quo, there's just no way to avoid change. However, while

change is inevitable, progress is not. That's why we need to learn all about the CSEC recommendations and what we can do to facilitate implementation.

CSEC's final report, submitted December 31st, contained a comprehensive and detailed plan to address growth management issues in Okaloosa and adjacent counties for the next 25 years.

Find out how you can be a part of it on February 9th!

The Voter is published 8 times a year by the League of Women Voters of Okaloosa County, PO Box 4546, Ft. Walton Beach FL 32549.

**Hot Topics
2008**

**Presidential Preference
Primary**

• 29 Jan 08, 7:00-7:00. Make your voice heard: **Vote!**

**Sustainable Emerald
Coast**

• 9 Feb 08, 10:00-12:00, Shalimar City Hall, featuring Michelle Anchors, Chair of the Committee for a Sustainable Emerald Coast. The public is welcome.

LWVOC Board Meeting

• 12 Feb 08, 12:00-2:00, Golden Corral, Mary Esther. All members welcome.

Political Parties: Where do they stand on local issues?

• 8 Mar 08, 10:00-12:00, Niceville City Hall, with representatives from the Democratic, Libertarian and Republican parties. The public is welcome.

LWVOC Board Meeting

• 11 Mar 08, 12:00-2:00, Golden Corral, Mary Esther. All members welcome.

2008 Legislative Seminar

• 16-18 Mar 08, Doubletree Hotel Tallahassee. See <http://www.lwvokaloosa.org/calendar.htm> for details.

April Annual Meeting

• Date, time, location TBD. All members welcome.

**“Yellow Rose” Award
Presentation Ceremony**

• Date, time, location TBD. The public is welcome. See <http://www.lwvokaloosa.org/yellowrose.htm> for details.

**Be a part of it:
Democracy is
not a spectator
sport!**

Immigration Consensus

Thanks to all the members who participated in the consensus meeting on January 5th. There were many complex issues to consider, but we did find common ground.

Members generally believe legal immigration is a net plus for the US, but illegal entry makes unauthorized immigrants vulnerable to exploitation, is unfair to legal immigrants, may drive wages down for citizens, and creates a burden on local governments and infrastructure.

Unauthorized immigration must be brought under control by simplifying immigration law, approving immigration for nuclear families (spouse and unmarried dependent children) as a whole, and matching immigration quotas to

business/economic requirements.

US sovereignty and national security must be reinforced, not undermined, by immigration policy. We should also tailor our foreign policy to help other nations redress the economic disparities that make the US so much more attractive than “home.”

The US League will tabulate responses from all the local Leagues to determine if consensus has been reached and a position can be adopted. The final report will be published next fall.

The consensus process helps set the agenda for League’s lobbying efforts, so thanks again to all who made a difference on January 5th.

Why aren’t more American women in Politics?

After the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the United States made sure that when those two countries held elections, 25% of the seats in their legislatures would be reserved for women. That may not seem like much, but it’s better than the current US Congress, where women account for just 16.3% of members (16 of 100 in the Senate; 71 of 435 in the House). Eighty-four other nations have a greater percentage of female legislators than the US, including Mexico, Canada, Rwanda, Vietnam and Cuba.

According to the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, of the current members of Congress and the nation’s governors, 86% are men, 81% are white, and 29% have a relative who served in office. Marie Wilson, president of The White House Project, a nonparti-

san organization that seeks to get more women in leadership roles, says the media don’t take women politicians seriously. She cites a White House Project study: on Meet the Press and other TV talk shows, which often shape policy, male guests outnumbered women 13 to 1 after 9/11, though Dianne Feinstein and two other women chaired Senate subcommittees on terrorism.

For this year and beyond, The White House Project is launching “Vote, Run, Lead,” to get more women into the voting booth and into public office. “We must interest young people in the value and meaning of voting and politics,” says Wilson. And that is no easy task: It takes at least six requests to get a new voter to the polls. Visit www.voterunlead.org to learn more.

~ Source: www.parade.com/intel

Dates to Remember!

Election	Date	Registration Closeout
Presidential Preference Primary	January 29, 2008	CLOSED
Primary Election	August 27, 2008	July 28, 2008
General Election	November 4, 2008	October 7, 2008

January Hot Topic: Property Tax Amendment

A standing-room-only crowd filled the Shalimar Town Hall on January 12th to learn about Amendment #1 and how it will affect them and Okaloosa County.

County Property Appraiser Pete Smith opened the panel discussion by stressing that Amendment #1 is not tax reform, but will provide some tax relief. He assured the audience that the Save Our Homes cap on tax increases would remain in place, though it has only been invoked in 3 of the last 15 years. The amendment requires 60% voter approval to pass, and homestead property owners can expect an average savings of \$240 a year if it does. Homestead owners may also take their exemption with them if they move, but a number of restrictions apply.

County Commissioner Sherry Campbell assured the audience that she and her colleagues were good stewards of public funds. County millage rates decreased each year for the last 3, and were flat for 3 years before that. She warned attendees to consider what they will be giving up for the estimated \$20/month savings, since the county has \$1B in unfunded mandates from State and Federal levels, and \$1.43B in mandated revenue cuts. The Commission reserved \$1M from increased revenues in 2004-07 to cover the cost of future infrastructure projects. However, reserve funds are reported as income, turning the commission's careful planning into a "\$1M budget increase."

Legislative Forum in Sandestin

On January 17th local area Chambers of Commerce sponsored a public forum for the northwest Florida state legislative delegation featuring Senators Don Gaetz and Al Lawson Jr., as well as Representatives Ray Sansom, Don Brown, Marti Coley, Greg Evers, Dave Murzin and Jimmy Patronis.

Panel members fielded questions on small business concerns, transportation infrastructure, illegal immigration and tax reform, among others.

Panel members sympathized with local governments, which they said had done a good job of not abusing taxpayers, even

Fort Walton Beach Mayor Mike Anderson provided details on the city budget and enjoined citizens to come to planning meetings and provide feedback to the City Council. He noted that the city has been cutting staff since 2000 and is actively pursuing more budget savings. The city has also received its share of unfunded mandates as ~\$4.1B in school, pension and insurance costs has been rolled down to the local level. The cost of doing business is going up, and cities need some breathing room to absorb growth-related issues, but instead of providing a comprehensive plan, the state offers band-aids for "feel good" issues.

When asked to name what would be cut if Amendment #1 passes, Commissioner Campbell said capital improvement projects would be delayed. Mayor Anderson said 14 projects were at risk, but the final decision was up to the City Council.

Mr. Smith explained that tax law is in the state constitution, so an amendment is required change it. He also noted that an *ad valorem* sales tax is a potential alternative to property tax **only** if appropriate reserves are kept, and it would still be "very volatile." Instead he recommended reducing the rate at which property assessments are made.

Review the Guide to Amendment #1 at <http://www.lwvokaloosa.org/calendar.htm> for more details.

during the real estate boom. Mr. Sansom said the legislature was forced to address property taxes due to local inaction. Amendment #1's "one size fits all" tax relief resulted. Ms. Coley urged attendees to "rethink" how they want government services provided, as government is all about its own prosperity, not that of taxpayers.

Mr. Sansom closed by praising the CoCs for jointly sponsoring the forum, and vowed that the NW Florida legislative delegation would also work together to ensure our area's interests are protected during upcoming budget debates.

Observers Needed

Are you interested in joining the Okaloosa League's Observer Corps? Observers attend public meetings to report on the decisions local elected officials are making. There are a variety of public meetings every month that will fit into any schedule. See the "action alert" link on our web site for details.

Voter Articles Wanted

Do you like to write? Are you interested in the political scene? Are you involved in our community? If so, I want to hear from you. Let me know what topics you'd like to see discussed in the Voter. Send your recommendations or draft articles to mary.blackwell@lwvokaloosa.org. No reasonable offer will be refused, and I'll even include your byline.

Check Out Updates to the Website

You know about the "take action" link, but that's not all! Look for new pictures and graphics on most pages, but don't miss the additions to the "Yellow Rose." We now have photos of Febb Ensminger Burn and her son Harry, courtesy of her grandson, Harry T. Burn Jr., and the McClung Historical Collection at the East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville TN. This is a first for us, as these photos aren't available anywhere else on the Internet.

While you're checking out the website, be sure to submit your comments using the "contact us" link or the email address listed above. We want to hear from you!

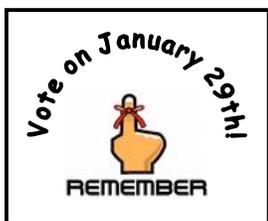




The Okaloosa Voter
League of Women Voters of
Okaloosa County
 P.O. Box 4546
 Fort Walton Beach FL 32549

Non-Profit Organization
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☆☆☆☆ Presidential Preference Primary - January 29th ☆☆☆☆



Yes, I want to join a nonpartisan organization that encourages informed and active participation of citizens in government.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

\$42.50 Individual \$21.25 Additional Family Member \$21.25 Student

Please make your check payable to LWVOC and mail to Carol Davis, Treasurer, 524 Dorado Drive, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548.

Please check (P) for participate or (I) for interest in activities below:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Voter Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislative Action | <input type="checkbox"/> Web Site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Team |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Int'l Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Observe Gov't Meetings |

**Make
 Democracy
 Work!**

**Join the League.
 Be a Voice
 for Citizens and
 a Force for
 Progress!**



**Men can join
 League, too!**