



The League of Women Voters

Okaloosa County, Florida



July/August 2008

"The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men."

*Lyndon B. Johnson,
36th U.S. President*

With grateful thanks and appreciation to this month's Voter Sponsor



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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.

LWV Florida Project R.O.A.R.: Reach Out and Register!

LWV Florida organized **Project R.O.A.R.** in June to maximize voter registration efforts before the books close for the August 26th primary election. The formal project ran from 15-22 June and featured dozens of registration events across the state.



Project R.O.A.R. focused on under-registered demographic groups. In 2006 only 65% of voting eligible citizens in Florida were registered, down from 72% in 2004. Fewer than 60% of eligible black and Latino citizens and only 45% of those under age 30 were registered.

While the project was initiated to raise voter awareness and participation before the primary and general elections, timing was dictated by a possible moratorium

on voter registrations efforts by Florida Leagues. LWV Florida continues to fight new legislation that would place undue burdens on third party voter registration efforts, and registration efforts could be suspended at any time.

Florida is not the only battleground for voters' rights; the recent court case involving voter ID requirements in Indiana is another example of imposing barriers to registration and voting to combat anecdotal voter fraud.

The results from registration drives across Florida will be forwarded to Project R.O.A.R. headquarters, and the consolidated results will be broadcast across the state by the end of June! Watch www.lwvfla.org for results.

In Memoriam: Peggy Lou Wise (1935-2008)

Long-time League member Peggy Lou Wise passed away Sunday, June 1st, after a brief illness. Peggy was passionate about her community, and strove to give back as much as she got. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her and by those who were touched by her many charitable contributions. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested donations be made to the American Cancer Society or to the Steeple Fund for the First United Methodist Church of Samson, Alabama.



New LWVOC Board Elected at Annual Meeting

If you did not attend the Annual Meeting on April 25th, you missed a great time, some good food, an excellent speaker and most important: our elections!

Our 2008-2009 board members include Fort Walton Beach City Councilman Bill Garvie, local realtor Fran Goodall and retired teacher and State League Board member Nancy Mitchell. Returning officers include President Mary Blackwell, 1st Vice President Stan Berg,

2nd Vice President Mary Hahn and Treasurer Carol Davis. Nancy Mitchell will also serve as Secretary.

Thanks go out to Fran Goodall and Mary Hahn for planning the meeting; to Fort Walton Yacht Club for great service; to the Troy University Speakers Bureau and Dr. Dan Robison for the presentation on the Electoral College; and to outgoing secretary Debra Self for her many years of "Self-less" service!

Dates to Remember

Registration Closeout for Primary Election: 28 July
Supervisor of Elections open for registration 8:30-4:30pm, Monday through Friday **plus** Saturday, 19 and 26 July.

WSRE Candidate "Rally"
• 18-19 Aug 08
Watch Cable Channel 9.

Primary Election: 26 Aug
Vote early: 8:30-4:30pm, Monday-Saturday, from 11-23 August, Bob Sikes Library in Crestview or the NW Florida Fairgrounds.

Voter Registration at Westwood Retirement Resort
• 6 Sep 08, 10:00-4:00pm.

Back to League Meeting
• 20 Sep 08, 10:00-12:00
Topic and Location TBA.

Meet the Candidates at Westwood
• 4 Oct 08, 10:00-12:00

Registration Closeout for General Election: 7 Oct
Supervisor of Elections open for registration 8:30-4:30pm, Monday through Friday **plus** Saturday, 27 Sep and 4 Oct.

2008 Ballot Initiatives Explained
• 25 Oct 08, 10:00-12:00
General meeting, free and open to the public. Location and Speaker TBA.

WSRE General Election "Rally"
• 28 Oct 08
Watch Cable Channel 9.

Presidential Election!
• 4 November 08
Vote early: 8:30-4:30pm, Monday-Saturday, 20 Oct-1 Nov. Locations TBA.

Wrap-up: Florida 2008 Legislative Session

The 2008 session was a successful one for League. We were able to defeat significant issues of concern, and in a few instances to assist in passage of good legislation dealing with League priorities. Our efforts were noticed: Legislators mentioned League frequently when discussing why they voted one way or another on various legislation.

TABOR DEFEATED!

League strongly opposed the so-called Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, which would have implemented a tax cap and mandatory budget cuts, resulting in steadily deteriorating state services. This actually happened in Colorado after TABOR implementation in 1992. Results were disastrous, and voters approved a 5-year "time-out" from TABOR to enable economic recovery. Fortunately, the Florida TABOR bill died in the Senate.

NATURAL RESOURCES PRESERVED

League was worried when the House proposed a budget that zeroed out funds for Florida Forever and the Everglades restoration program. Luckily, the Sen-

ate's proposed budget contained \$100 million for Everglades restoration and \$300 million for Florida Forever, and both houses approved that budget on 2 May.

CITIZEN INITIATIVES PROTECTED

In the past few sessions, the League has spoken out against proposed bills that further limit citizen access and elevate the role of the legislature in writing, rewriting and regulating the constitution. This increased role of the Legislature is troublesome to the League as it dramatically curtails checks and balances in the Florida government system. League and its allies helped defeat several questionable bills that would have further eroded citizens' input to the state constitution.

ENERGY: +/-

Energy is one of Governor Crist's priorities, and was one of the most addressed issues of the 2008 session. There were good and bad provisions in all the bills that passed, but some progress was achieved. Considering the economic issues this session, it was apparent we could not get more.

On the Ballot: November 2008

AMENDMENT #1 would delete constitutional provisions for the regulation or prohibition of ownership, inheritance, disposition, and possession of real property by aliens ineligible for citizenship.

AMENDMENT #2 would define marriage as the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife; no other legal union would be valid or recognized.

AMENDMENT #3 would exclude certain improvements from being considered in property value assessment for ad valorem taxation purposes.

AMENDMENT #4 would give a property tax exemption to perpetually conserved land.

AMENDMENT #5 would eliminate state-required school property tax and replace it with equivalent state revenues to fund education.

AMENDMENT #6 would base tax assessment of working waterfront property upon current use.

AMENDMENT #7 would eliminate the constitutional ban against sending state tax money to religious institutions.

AMENDMENT #8 would authorize counties to levy a sales tax to supplement community college funding – subject to voter approval – providing the tax will sunset in 5 years.

AMENDMENT #9 would require at least 65% of school district funding to be spent on classroom instruction rather than administration, and would reverse legal precedent prohibiting public funding of private school alternatives.

Be an informed voter: Don't miss the general meeting on 25 October, where we'll describe the arguments for and against each proposed constitutional amendment.

Get details at www.votesmartflorida.org or www.ballotpedia.org.

We'll see you in October!

2008 State of the County Report

On May 31st League sponsored its 9th annual State of the County Report, featuring updates on the state of county government, schools and courts.

1st Circuit Court Judge William F. Stone explained why the Constitution guides his actions on the bench, and described recent improvements, including Court Emergency Management Teams, electronic courtroom reporting, a judicial wide area network and use of the county's fiber optic network for "virtual" hearings (to save transportation costs and improve security). He warned that budget cuts will be offset by significant increases in filing fees, which he fears will effectively deny access to the courts for many citizens.

County Commission Chairman James Campbell discussed several "hot" issues. He believes the more modest courthouse annex planned for property adjacent to the fairgrounds will suit our needs and budget. He noted that Amendment #1 hit hard, but prudent fiscal planning softened the blow. The county has ~\$8M in reserves, sufficient land along the Shoal River to provide for future water needs, and a new fiber optic cable system that will support the entire community and

save money in the future. He emphasized that our area's biggest asset is the water and beaches, which must be protected to sustain the economy **and** residents' quality of life.

School Board Chairman Chuck Kelley reported that enrollment is declining overall, but growing in Crestview, where two new schools are under construction. He also announced that county FCAT reading and writing scores placed #1 in the state for grades 4-5 and 7-10, and our 6th graders placed 2nd. Despite this success, the board is struggling to meet district goals within budget constraints, which included a \$7M midyear cut, with another expected next year. Either services or people in classrooms must be cut, but the board is working hard to keep nurses in the schools.

LWVFL Pubs Now Available

Download your copies of *My Florida Government* and the Florida League's *Study and Action 2007-2009 Guide* today! Find these indispensable voter education materials at www.lwvfla.org/publications.htm.



Help Florida Ratify ERA in 2009!

The ERA is **not** just for women! Sandy Oestreich of "Ratify ERA Florida" visited the Panhandle this month to get out the word about why ERA is also good for men and the economy. She appeared at numerous events sponsored by both the local Democratic and Republican parties to energize the local citizenry.

Okaloosa County voters can make the difference by letting Speaker Designate Sansom know that his constituents support passage of ERA. Call his local office today at 833-9328, and ask him to refer ERA to committee and agenda it for a vote next session!

Westwood Retirement Resort to Host Voter Registration and "Meet the Candidates" Events

League will partner with the Westwood Retirement Resort in the fall to get out the vote for the general election.

On Saturday, September 6th, we will be registering voters from 10:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the Atrium at the Westwood Resort, located at 1001 Mar Walt Drive in Fort Walton Beach. The event is timed to ensure new registrants will be eligible to vote in the November general election.

On Saturday, October 4th, Westwood will host a "Meet the Candidates" reception in the atrium from 10:00 a.m. to noon. All local candidates for office at every level will be invited to greet the public and discuss issues of interest one-on-one.

Both events are free and open to the public, and the resort will provide refreshments. Mark both dates on your calendar now, and plant to bring a friend!

The US Elections Project

Dr. Michael McDonald of George Mason University's Department of Public and International Affairs sponsors the U.S. Elections Project, to provide timely information on our electoral system. The Project's major finding: U.S. voter turnout is not declining!

Project statistics reveal that the oft-cited decline in voter participation results when the turnout rate is calculated based on the "voting-age population" – everyone age 18 and older residing in the US – which includes persons ineligible to vote (mainly non-citizens and ineligible felons) and excludes eligible overseas voters. Calculating turnout rates based on the eligible voter population shows U.S. voter turnout has held steady since 1972.

The highest percentage turnout so far in 2008 was in New Hampshire, where 52.5% of eligible voters made it to the polls. The Maine and West Virginia Republican caucuses tied for the worst showing, with only 0.1% of eligible voters participating. There are 12.5 million eligible Florida voters, and 4.2 million (33.8%) cast ballots on January 29th. With your help, we can do better in November! Check out the rest of the results at <http://elections.gmu.edu/>

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



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

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

Name(s): _____

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\$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!**