



The League of Women Voters

Okaloosa County, Florida



Sep/Oct 2008  
Special Election  
Issue

“Legislators do two things really well: nothing and overreact.”

Senator Don Gaetz,  
Florida, District 4

With grateful thanks and appreciation to this month’s Voter sponsor:

Advanced Concepts Enterprises, Inc.,  
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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.*

**Westwood Retirement Resort to Host Voter Registration and “Meet the Candidates” Events**

League will partner with the Westwood Retirement Resort in September and October to get out the vote for the general election and help voters make informed decisions on Election Day.

On Saturday, September 6th, we will be registering voters from 10:00 to 4:00 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 Okaloosa County candidates for office at every level have been invited to greet the public and discuss issues of interest one-on-one. Watch your newspaper in September for more details.

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

**Don’t Miss WSRE Local Election Program “Rally 2008”**

WSRE, PBS for the Gulf Coast, presents “Rally 2008,” a general election television candidate forum. This special will feature local candidates from the races for Okaloosa, Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, and will air on Cable Channel 9 on October 28-29 from 7:00-9:30 p.m.

“Rally 2008” is co-sponsored by WSRE and the League of Women Voters of Okaloosa County and the Pensacola Bay Area. Rally’s purpose is to give citizens an unbiased look at the candidates and

learn where they stand on the important issues affecting our community. The Okaloosa and Pensacola Leagues prepare questions for the candidates and provide them to program moderator Lloyd Patterson, on-air host of WSRE’s “Connecting the Community.”

WSRE provides the program as a public service and joins League in encouraging all citizens to exercise their constitutional right to vote. **Be more informed.** Watch. Decide. Vote.

**2008 Ballot Amendments Explained**

Up to 9 proposed constitutional amendments are slated to appear on the ballot November 4th. Don’t miss the general meeting on October 25th at Shalimar Town Hall, 2 Cherokee Road, where we’ll describe the arguments for and against each proposed amendment.

Amendment #5 was pulled from the ballot at Circuit Court, and was still in the Florida Supreme Court appeal process at press time. Court challenges to Amendments #7 and #9 – which were dismissed at Circuit Court level – are also still in the appellate process.

**Be an informed voter:** Don’t wait until Election Day to find out about the proposed amendments and how they will affect our state and our community.

**Welcome Back to League**

Summer’s over! Get “Back to League” at Niceville City Hall on September 20th. Enjoy refreshments while you learn how to navigate the judicial system, and get a “pocket” Constitution while supplies last. You’ll be ready when special guest Judge Stone asks about your favorite amendment!

## Dates to Remember

### Voter Registration

• 6 Sep 08, 10:00-4:00pm  
Westwood Retirement  
Resort, 1001 Mar-Walt  
Drive, FWB.

### Back to League

• 20 Sep 08, 10:00-12:00  
Niceville City Hall, 208 N.  
Partin Drive, Niceville.  
“De-coding the Judicial  
System,” featuring Judge  
William F. Stone.

### Meet the Candidates

• 4 Oct 08, 10:00-12:00  
Westwood Retirement  
Resort.

### Registration Closeout for General Election: 6 Oct

• Supervisor of Elections  
open for registration 8:30-  
4:30pm, Monday through  
Friday plus Saturday, 27  
Sep and 4 Oct.

### Baker Act Explained

• 18 Oct 08, 10:00-12:00  
Shalimar Town Hall, 2  
Cherokee Road, Shalimar,  
with reps from Bridgeway  
Center, First Circuit Court,  
FWB Medical Center, and  
the Sheriff's Department.

### 2008 Ballot Amendments

• 25 Oct 08, 10:00-12:00  
Shalimar Town Hall. Hear  
the pros/cons for each pro-  
posed amendment.

### WSRE “Rally 2008”

• 28-29 Oct 08, 7:00-9:30  
pm on Cable Channel 9.  
Watch. Decide. Vote.

### Presidential Election!

• 4 Nov 08 or vote early:  
8:30-4:30pm, Monday-  
Saturday, 20 Oct-1 Nov at  
UWF REEF, FWB, or Bob  
Sikes Library, Crestview.

### Offshore Drilling Redux

• 15 Nov 08, 10:00-12:00  
Shalimar Town Hall, with  
reps from environmental  
groups, Minerals Manage-  
ment Service and industry.

## Low Voter Turnout for Primary



You already know who won each race, so let's focus on voter participation. Out of 123,702 registered voters in Okaloosa County, the largest number of votes cast (in the universal primary for Sheriff) numbered 23,820. Do the math.

Only 19.3% of Okaloosa's registered voters cast their ballots, and only 17.4% of registered voters turned out statewide. Worse yet, out of over 12.5 million eligible voters in Florida, only 10.5 million are registered to vote, so less than 15% of the state's voting-eligible population decided the Primary.

We can and must do better. Encourage your friends and family to vote in the

general election, and don't forget there's a new early voting location in south county, at the UWF Research & Engineering Education Facility (REEF) at the intersection of Lewis Turner & Poquito Road (dang that county fair!). The north county early voting site is still at the Bob Sikes Library in Crestview.

### Voter Audit Study

**Volunteer** to monitor Florida's new election audit system. It involves a conference call before the election and a few hours on one day afterwards. Call Mary at 240-1528 for details.

## On the Ballot: November 2008

### AMENDMENT #1 – REPEAL “ALIEN LAND”

**LAW:** would delete constitutional language allowing the Legislature to regulate or prohibit property ownership by aliens ineligible for citizenship. From 1862-1965, more than a dozen states passed laws restricting Asian immigrants from owning property. Most states did away with them, but Florida hasn't yet.

### AMENDMENT #2 – GAY MARRIAGE BAN:

would define marriage as the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife. Florida already has such a law, but backers want it in the Constitution to preclude legal challenge.

### AMENDMENT #3 – ENERGY/HURRICANE

**TAX BREAK:** would exclude improvements on residential property for energy efficiency or windstorm protection from property tax assessments.

### AMENDMENT #4 – CONSERVATION LAND

**TAX BREAK:** would exempt land held in perpetuity for conservation from property taxes, and other conservation lands would be taxed on their current use rather than their “highest and best,” or potential use.

### AMENDMENT #5 – TAX SWAP:

would reduce overall property taxes by about 25 percent by eliminating most property taxes for schools in 2011. To replace the more than \$9-billion, lawmakers would have to increase the sales tax, eliminate

sales tax exemptions, extend taxes to services (e.g., lawyers) or cut other state spending. **(PULLED FROM BALLOT)**

### AMENDMENT #6 – “WORKING WATERFRONT” TAX BREAK:

would provide a property tax break for waterfront businesses such as marinas and boat repair shops that do not intend to convert to a more lucrative use, such as condos.

### AMENDMENT #7 – REPEAL BAN ON FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS:

would remove the “Blaine Amendment” from the Constitution, a century-old ban on providing direct or indirect funding to religious groups. The provision was partly responsible for the court's 2004 rejection of school vouchers in Florida.

### AMENDMENT #8 – COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

would allow local option sales taxes to support community colleges if approved by local voters.

### AMENDMENT #9 – SCHOOL FUNDING AND

**VOUCHERS:** would require 65% of school funding to go toward classroom instruction. Changes a provision of the Constitution to allow private school vouchers.

**Be an informed voter:** For more details on the pros and cons for each proposed amendment, don't miss the general meeting on 25 October. See you there!

*Alex Leary, Staff Writer*

*Adapted from the St. Petersburg Times*

## Upcoming General & Special Meetings

### DE-CODING THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM SEP 20TH, 10:00-12:00, NICEVILLE

When did you last try to navigate our judicial system? Do you know about Court Emergency Management Teams, electronic courtroom reporting, and the judicial wide area network that uses "virtual" hearings to save transportation costs and improve security? Come to our "Back to League" meeting at Niceville City Hall on September 20th and hear Judge William F. Stone explain how the system is organized, how it works, and how you can access the courts.

### BAKER ACT EXPLAINED OCT 18TH, 10:00-12:00, SHALIMAR

In July 2008 our community lost Deputy Tony Forgione and Mark Rohlman in the tragic aftermath of a failed Baker Act involuntary commitment, and the public was left wondering what went wrong. How is the Baker Act applied? Should the process be revised? This special meeting will explain the provisions of the Baker Act and address citizen concerns about public safety. Come to Shalimar Town Hall on October 18th to hear reps from Bridgeway and FWB Medical Centers, the Sheriff's Department and the judiciary discuss their roles and responsibilities in the Baker Act process.

### 2008 BALLOT AMENDMENTS OCT 25TH, 10:00-12:00, SHALIMAR

Florida voters will get a real workout on November 4th, thanks to nine proposed constitutional amendments (see synop-

ses on page 2). League will translate the complex "legalese" and present pros and cons for each amendment at Shalimar Town Hall on October 25th. Check out <http://www.votesmartflorida.org/mx/hm.asp?id=home> for the full text.

### OFFSHORE DRILLING NOV 15TH, 10:00-12:00, SHALIMAR

League last addressed this subject in January 2007. It's back due to renewed interest and growing support for offshore drilling. Our event is not at the Hilton like the Offshore Drilling Summit planned for Sep 11th, but ours is free and features local speakers. Come to Shalimar Town Hall on November 15th learn how the Emerald Coast may be impacted. Our panel will include representatives from local industry and the federal government (Eglin AFB and/or the Mineral Management Service), environmental activists and oil spill clean-up experts.

**NOTE:** All League meetings are free and open to the public, and we encourage everyone to attend and learn more about the issues that affect our community. Listen. Decide. Vote.

### Fair District Petition

**Volunteer** on November 4th to collect signatures for [FairDistrictsFlorida.org](http://FairDistrictsFlorida.org). We need 600,000+ signed petitions to get the amendment that would establish standards for the legislature to follow in redistricting on the 2010 ballot. Call Mary at 240-1528 to volunteer.

## It's Time For Annual Membership Renewal



**We want you to pay  
your dues now!**

Members old and new: it's time to renew your membership in LWVOC. We have the lowest per member payment in Florida; our events are free of charge and open to the public; we have an enviable record of community service over our 46-year history; and we have an exciting year planned. League needs your continued involvement and support to successfully address voter education needs in a Presidential election year.

Please renew your membership today, using the form on the next page

## Message from the President

Dear League Supporters:

I'm writing this on August 26th, Women's Equality Day, the 88th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote. In four generations we've progressed from disenfranchisement to the first viable female presidential candidate – and it all started at the ballot box.

A July 27th letter in the Daily News exhorted citizens to boycott the November election, claiming that our votes don't affect the outcome anyhow; that only non-voters can complain; and that voting legitimizes a "corrupt political process."

This letter forced me to re-examine why I believe voting is important, and it's not about complaining or doing your duty. Voting is about honoring the principles and ideals on which our nation was founded by participating in the democratic process.

In America you are free to choose not to vote, but in so doing you dismiss the sacrifice of blood and treasure made by every generation since 1776 to ensure your right to live in a free country. You also dismiss the future by ceding influence to special interests, by ignoring your opportunity to make your community and the world a better place, and by setting a poor example for the next generation.

I thank each one of you for being a part of a better future for all of us.

*Mary Blackwell*

**Democracy: It's not  
a spectator sport!**



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

Non-Profit Organization  
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
 Permit No. 37  
 Ft Walton Beach FL 32548

☆☆☆☆ Voter Registration at Westwood - September 6th ☆☆☆☆



**Renew your  
 membership  
 today!**

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!**