



A nonpartisan organization that encourages informed citizen participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

# Dallas

# VOTER

## April 2004

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### April Combined Unit and General Meeting

## Voting in the 21st Century

We learned in March Unit Meetings about electronic voting machines and the HAVA voting reforms, and we developed lots of pertinent questions. Now Dallas Leaguers are ready to meet and greet our Dallas County Elections Administrator, **Bruce Sherbet**, and hear about “**Voting in the 21st Century.**” Please bring guests and prospective new members to our **April 8th Noon Combined Unit and General Meeting at St. Thomas the Apostle Episcopal Church** on the northwest corner of Inwood and Mockingbird.

Box lunches will be available for \$8.50 (including beverage). Please reserve (214-948-6992) before April 4th.

### Annual Meeting Plans

*Nancy Todes, Board Member*

The 2004 Annual Meeting of the Dallas League of Women Voters will be held on Saturday, April 24, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Oak Room at the Center for Non Profit Management located at 2900 Live Oak. Registration and Silent Auction browsing will begin at 9:30 a.m. **Susybelle Gosslee**, our President, will convene the Business Meeting at 10:00 a.m. Lunch will be served around noon, followed by our speaker's address and the presentation of the Bulkley and Macdonald awards.

Our speaker this year is **Louise Raggio**, a prominent Dallas attorney and long-time member of the Dallas League, who has recently published an autobiography entitled *A Texas Tornado*. Louise is an accomplished and entertaining speaker, so Annual Meeting attendees have a real treat in store. Copies of *A Texas Tornado* will be available for purchase and autographing. After all, a book, particularly a signed copy, is an excellent gift for any occasion. Hopefully there will also be a signed copy for bid in the Silent Auction.

Your presence will help to ensure a quorum as we conduct our annual business, elect our leaders, and establish our goals for next year. Please complete the enclosed registration form, include your check to LWV/D, and mail to Nancy Todes, 16083 Longvista, Dallas, TX 75248. Also be sure to set aside items for the Silent Auction. **Linda Wassenich** (214-368-5305) will gladly receive your donations. Hope to see you on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

### Doin' Our Thing

Dallas Leaguers hit the pavements to conduct Exit Surveys at four voting precincts this past Primary Day on March 9th, and what a welcome reception we received! Comments from “I just love you people” to “Thanks for being here and looking out for us” resonated throughout the day.

Kudos to all who helped make this such a successful event: **Donna Beavers, Becky Brakke, Dottie Box, Lucie Carleton, Eleanor Conrad, Jane Davis, Barbara Downey, Susybelle Goslee, Lucille Gropp, Katherine Homan, Gayle Hurst, Maureen Jones, Tommie Kemp, Meg Kimberland, Libbie Terrell Lee, Alix Mason, Pam Meyercord, Judi Stewart, Nancy Todes, Pat Vaughan, Barbara Weinstein, and Suzy Wills.**

Results of our Survey will be presented at the Combined Unit Meeting on April 8th. Come and find out what we found out!

## League of Women Voters of Dallas

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### **President's Message**

## Texas Is Being Deluged With Mercury Emissions

If a sign of intelligence is to learn from [the past](#) to improve the future, then what can be learned from mercury pollution in Minamata Bay in Japan over the last 72 years? Minamata is a small factory town dominated by the Chisso Corporation. According to the TED Case Studies, the Chisso Corporation dumped waste into Minamata Bay, destroying the fish. The people living around the bay depended on the fish as a major source of food and industry. The theory of the corporation was to “pay off” the fishermen in exchange for damaging their fishing economy. Interviews of the people who lived in Minamata revealed that the company believed that it was much cheaper to pay off the few people who were opposed to the dumping, rather than implement an environmentally safe technique of waste removal. Since the people accepted the compensation of money and the government supported the practice, the process “appeared” ethical.

By the 1950's the people noticed a “strange disease,” causing degeneration of their nervous systems ranging from numbness in limbs and lips, slurred speech, and [constricted](#) vision to later signs of serious brain damage, unconsciousness or involuntary movements. Cats and birds were affected. Chisso's doctor reported in 1956 that an “unclarified disease of the central nervous system has broken out” and linked the fish diets to the disease. Soon investigators linked the pollution in the bay to the Chisso Corporation, which denied the accusations. After shifting the dumping from the bay to the river, another nearby community reported the same health problem.

In July 1959, Kumamoto University researchers concluded that organic mercury was the cause of the Minamata Disease. The corporate doctor was the first person who tried to prove to Chisso Corporation that they were the ones responsible for the mercury pollution. [As](#) a result, he was restricted from conducting any further research or experiments and his findings were concealed by the corporation. Chisso Corporation continued to pollute the bay until 1968, when their process became outdated.

Mercury affected thousands of Minamata people. In 1993, almost forty years later, victims were still being compensated for damages. Victims testified about the problem at the UN Environmental Conference in Sweden, but the UN did not intervene.

Today, the question for the Dallas League and citizens is whether corporations are allowed to pollute Texas with mercury emissions from coal burning power plants or whether citizens deserve a safe, clean environment for generations to come.

Texas led the nation in mercury pollution from power plants in 2001, according to the latest data available from the EPA Toxic Release Inventory. More coal burning power plants are being proposed. Twelve of Texas' water bodies, including the entire Gulf Coast and many major fishing lakes, have fish consumption advisories due to mercury. One of our League members purchased and tested seafood from several local grocery stores and found mercury contamination in all.

(Continued in the next column)

## President's Message

(continued)

Eating mercury contaminated fish is dangerous for all age groups, but especially for babies and young children who are at risk for brain damage. Cardiovascular problems are worsened by mercury exposure, kidney and liver damage can result, and one recent study found that people who ate a lot of fish had difficulties concentrating due to mercury exposure.

The EPA is reducing the standards for mercury so that it will be unregulated; therefore coal burning power plants will be able to discharge unlimited amounts of mercury into the Texas air to end up in our lakes and streams.

Texans have a choice now about our environment. Our children depend on us to provide a positive future. Do we learn from past mercury pollution sites and wisely stand up for protection from mercury emissions or sit silently allowing suffering for generations to come?

### What can you do to help?

EPA will be receiving comments until the end of March. You will need to act immediately.

Send a fax to your Congressional Representatives and write a letter to your local editor to let them know you support reducing mercury pollution by 90% at all power plants. Urge them to pressure the EPA for real mercury reductions, not the increases that will result from the proposed new rules.

On December 2, 2003, the EPA's initial proposal to reduce the danger posed by mercury from power plants became public. Instead of protecting mothers and children from mercury poisoning, this proposal protects the energy industry by setting targets so weak that the industry will be allowed to continue polluting without using state of the art mercury controls.

While the Bush administration seems to be acting contrary to public health and the prevailing science, all hope is not lost. Part of the Bush administration's decision may be based on the fact that they're hearing only from the big polluters affected by the rule, not the public who will be left at risk. Now is our time to show the Bush administration that they should act without further delay to cut mercury emissions from power plants by 90 percent by 2008.

For more information contact **Molly Rooke** at [Molly@LaRosa-Ranch.com](mailto:Molly@LaRosa-Ranch.com) or 214-369-6667 or go to [www.seedcoalition.org/act.tpp.htm](http://www.seedcoalition.org/act.tpp.htm)

## Free Speech on Drugs

*Suzanne Wills, Drug Policy IssuesChair*

The protections of the Constitution have been severely eroded by the drug war. The Fourth Amendment, against unreasonable search and seizure, has become meaningless. Of all the protections, freedom of speech is the most in tact, but it is continually threatened.

When California passed its medical cannabis initiative in 1996 Barry McCaffrey, drug czar under Clinton, threatened physicians with the revocation of their prescription-writing privileges if they discussed marijuana with their patients. The physicians sued for their free speech rights in *Conant vs. McCaffrey*. The government lost in every court, but the Bush administration pursued the case. It was finally put to rest when the Supreme Court refused to hear the administration's appeal last year.

In 1998 former congressman Bob Barr (R-GA) successfully pushed an amendment to prevent Washington, D.C. from counting the votes on its medical marijuana initiative. The American Civil Liberties Union sued, and the ban was overturned in federal court. When the votes were finally tallied the initiative passed with 69% approval, just as the exit polls had indicated.

The only publicized use of the infamous RAVE Act, passed in 2003, has been to frighten event promoters into canceling fundraisers for groups that advocate changing federal law. To date no one has paid a fine levied under the Act and challenged it in court.

The latest salvo against free speech is being tested in court. Late last year, Rep. Ernest Istook (R-OK) added an amendment to the omnibus spending bill that cuts off \$3.1-billion in federal funds from transit authorities nationwide if they accept ads for their bus, train or subway systems promoting reform of drug laws. Perversely, the same spending bill provides \$145 million to be used by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to buy ads promoting drug prohibition. Large transit systems could forfeit tens of millions of dollars if they do not comply with the Istook amendment. The American Civil Liberties Union, the Drug Policy Alliance and other groups filed suit against U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta and the Washington Metro after the D.C. transit system refused to accept a paid ad that proclaimed: "Marijuana Laws Waste Billions of Taxpayer Dollars to Lock Up Non-Violent Americans."

The federal government's influence on what is said about drug prohibition reaches far beyond large, well publicized cases. Since almost all hospitals and research programs receive federal funding, health care workers are very much affected. I know one physician who lost her job for speaking her mind and several others who will not speak out about the drug war, no matter how deeply held their opinions, for fear of losing their livelihood.

## **If You Were Unable to Attend a March Unit Meeting, This Is What Was Covered.**

The first phase of **new Voting Legislation** (Help America Vote Act/HAVA) went **into effect this year**. The reforms that were supposed to be in place for the March 9 Primary Election concerned (1) offering **Provisional Ballots** to voters without registration cards and (2) **improving voter education** by posting of Voting Rights information, sample ballots, and instructions on how to use the voting machinery.

**HAVA reforms** to be phased in **by 2006** (\*indicates Dallas already in compliance) involve: (1) offering a **summary ballot** for the voter to review selections cast\*, (2) preventing or **alerting voter if overvoted** on ballot, (3) producing a **paper trail** of votes cast, (4) providing at least one **electronic voting machine** at each polling place **for blind and disabled voters\***, (5) insuring that voting equipment **error rates** not exceed Federal Election Commission standards\*, (6) the Secretary of State maintaining a **computerized statewide voter registration list**, (7) performing **publicly announced "list maintenance"** (i.e. purges) so only qualified voters are on the computerized list. Voting roll purges to be conducted by officials not connected to political parties or candidates, (8) the State developing a **system to verify** voter applicant's identification prior to approval, as well as assigning a unique identifier for those without driver license or SSN.

**Last but not least, we reviewed Steve Wolen's Ethics Bill** (HB54). This is new Texas legislation governing rules for "assisting a voter", as well as the means for transporting early and/or mail-in ballots. Our League believes this voting legislation performs such a crucial voting service that we will be presenting Steve Wolens with a **Community Service Award** at our Annual Meeting!

For more in-depth information, please contact Katherine Homan at 214-948-6992 or [kvhoman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kvhoman@sbcglobal.net).

### **We pause to remember**

**Helen Boothman, a League member and prominent civic volunteer;**

**Anna Beth Simpson, mother of former City Councilman Lee Simpson, who was actively involved in the League for many years;**

**and send our condolences to  
Jean Bremner whose husband  
Dr. Normand Bremner passed away recently.**

## **Auction At Annual Meeting**

*Linda Wassenich,  
Resource Development Chair*

As is our custom, a silent auction will be held in conjunction with the annual meeting in April. Please call or email **Linda Wassenich** (214-368-5305 or [LindaVote@comcast.net](mailto:LindaVote@comcast.net)) to let us know what you can contribute. Vacation getaways are especially welcome, as are restaurant discounts, books, jewelry, and any kind of autographed items.

Keven Ann Willey, Vice President and Editorial Page Editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, has enthusiastically agreed to be the guest at Lunch with a Legend and so has Margaret Keliher, Judge of our County Commissioners Court. Other possibilities are in the works; so let me know if you would like to host a Lunch with a Legend, one of our most popular items.

**Thank You  
for Your Responses to  
the Patriot Act Resolution**  
*Susybelle Gosslee, President*

Thank you, Leaguers, for writing your city council members to inform them of your position on the Patriot Act. The League is more effective in making democracy work for all citizens when you write as an individual and the League writes as an organization. Together we can truly improve the democratic process. We can not leave our voice out of the process and say that other organizations or individuals will do it. Citizenship means that we all participate in the decision-making process. You are more informed when you go to League meetings and hear all sides on issues. Thank you so much.

Now, please write your city council member to express your appreciation for voting for the Patriot Act Resolution. Those who voted for the resolution were Council Members Loza, Hill, **Greyson**, Salazar, Thorton-Reese, Fantroy, Oakley, Garcia, Chaney. Those who opposed were Mayor Miller, **Finkelman**, Rasansky, **Lill**, Blaydes, and Griffith.