



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

Dallas

VOTER

September 2004

Visit us at: www.lwvdallas.org
Reach us at: lwvdallas@sbcglobal.net

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League Members!

Please take a moment to figure out how **you can help the League** in the next months to do everything possible to **encourage citizens to be registered** to vote and to **cast their ballots** in the appropriate place.

Call the **League Office** at 214-688-4125 or **Julie Metzinger**, Community Relations VP, at 214-275-8101 or any **Board Member** to volunteer.

Opportunities abound to **register voters**, **tend office phone lines**, and **work at the forums**. **Please call now!**

Meetings on the 8th, 9th, and 16th Busy Agenda for September Units *Katherine Homan Unit Co-ordinator, 214-948-6692*

In less than 60 days we will be voting for the most powerful man in the world, but we have less than 30 days to register voters. So, guess what we will be doing this month?

All in attendance at the September Unit Meetings (members and guests alike) will have the opportunity to be deputized to register voters. Then, on Saturday, September 18, each Unit will be registering voters at a Block Buster Video store in a low voter turnout location.

Your country needs you to help **Get Out the Vote**. Please do not miss attending one of our six Unit Meetings to become a deputy voter registrar.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR GET THE WORD OUT

Candidate Forums

Sandy Thornton, Coordinator
214-827-1988

A Candidate Forum for the **Dallas County Tax Assessor** race, featuring Democrat, Diana Lackey and Republican David Childs, will be held on **Thursday, September 30** at **St. Thomas the Apostle Episcopal Church**, 6525 Inwood Rd. (Mapsco 34M) from **6:30 to 7:15 p.m.**

Following a 15 minute break, we will have the **Dallas County Sheriff Forum** at the same location from **7:30 to 9:00 p.m.** The Republican candidate is Danny Chandler and the Democratic candidate is Lupe Valdez.

Mountain View College Performance Hall on the campus off Knoxville St. (Mapsco 52Q) is the place to go for the **32nd District Forum** on October 6, featuring **Martin Frost and Pete Sessions**.

Oak Cliff Unit meets 2nd Wednesday at 10:00 a.m.

Polk-Wisdom Branch Library, 7151 Library Lane,
1 block east of Polk/Camp Wisdom intersection, M64X
Co-leaders: **Lucille Gropp & Mildred Pope**, 214-374-8067

East Dallas Unit meets 2nd Wednesday at Noon

Lakewood Branch Library, 6121 Worth,
bordered by Abrams & LaVista
Leader: **Liz Wally**, 214-821-2237

Dallas Evening meets 2nd Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

Ursuline Academy, 4900 Walnut Hill Ln
SW Corner Inwood and Walnut Hill Rds
Leader: **Arline Pitt**, 972-243-3966

Preston-Hillcrest meets 2nd Thursday at 9:45 a.m.

Churchill Way Recreation Center, SE Corner Hillcrest & Churchill Way
Leader: **Gayle Hurst**, 214-348-7112

Preston-Mockingbird meets 2nd Thursday at 9:45 a.m.

St. Thomas the Apostle Episcopal Church, 6525 Inwood Rd,
NW Corner Inwood & Mockingbird
Co-leaders: **Jane Davis & Pat Vaughan**, 972-763-1787

SMU Campus meets 3rd Thursday at Noon

SMU Women's Center on Fondren near Airline Road
Leader: **Courtney Aberle**, 214-768-4796

President's Message

**League of Women
Voters of Dallas
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Advocating for Better Elections in Dallas County

There is nothing like spending one's time studying the issues, learning about the candidates and then voting in an election—only to realize that your vote did not count. The League supports a well-run election system, from voter registration to the counting of ballots, and we have worked for the last four years to study, understand, and help Bruce Sherbet, Dallas County Elections Administrator, improve the election process. However, Dallas County voters will nevertheless be facing a system in November fraught with ways in which their vote might not get counted.

To begin with, while voter information about polling places is printed in the *Dallas Morning News* and on-line at www.dalcoelections.org, many voters do not have access to either of these sources. Moreover, as a result of recent redistricting changes, many seasoned voters found themselves in the wrong polling places during the March 9th primary election. Poll workers were able then to advise voters as to their correct polling site, but in November, they may not have the time to do so. In many areas of the country, voters are mailed sample ballots, along with notification of their polling location. Dallas County needs a better way to inform its voters of where they are expected to cast their ballots.

Poll workers are trained by the County Elections Office, but not very well if the phone lines to the Elections Office were constantly busy and inaccessible to poll workers with questions during the 2000 Presidential Election. Our League Office received so many calls from confused voters that our phone lines were continuously busy during early voting and on Election Day. That is not an exaggeration! Our County Commissioners approved increasing the phone bank from 10 to 20 phone lines, but this may be inadequate, considering the inevitable problems arising from implementation of a new election law in effect this year regarding a voter's right to a provisional ballot. Commissioners should more fully fund training to ensure that poll workers are informed and competent. League members can help by calling 214-819-6300 to sign up for poll worker training.

The ES&S electronic voting machines used by Dallas County for early voting and by handicapped voters have been reported to have problems with accuracy, and the results are not recountable according to a study reported in the July 11 issue of the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*. Mr. Sherbet reports that every effort is being made to secure voting machinery before, during, and after elections and that Dallas County uses electronic machinery approved by state and federal authorities. Yet, the ES&S machines in Dallas County are the same type used in the March 9th Democratic Presidential Primary in Florida's Palm Beach, Browar, and Miami-Dade counties where they reported "votes not recorded for 1 out of 100 votes. That is at least 8 times more than the number of flawed votes cast in the same election using pencil marking on paper ballots tallied by an optical scanner." Dallas County needs to conduct more vigilant testing of its machines by independent security experts, and election officials should randomly check machines on Election Day, not just at the start and close of voting, in order to ensure that machines are reporting meaningful and accurate election results.

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President's Message (continued)

During budget hearings, County Commissioners asked Mr. Sherbet to look for ways to cut costs— for example, in the area of hiring Sheriff's deputies to man Election Day Rapid Response Teams for delivering extra ballots, investigating illegal electioneering activities, etc. Citizens should tell the Commissioners that our elections need to be MORE fully funded, because minimalist oversight does not make it easier for either the voters or poll workers, nor does it create accurate vote counts or build voter confidence. Trusting in our elections is one step closer to trusting our democracy.

HAVA Nice Day!

Katherine Homan, Unit Coordinator

This year, for the first time, voters whose names do not appear on the list of registered voters or who do not have proper identification have **the right to cast a provisional ballot**, according to voting reform legislation called the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). However, cities are finding from their primary election experience in March that these provisional ballots are not being handled properly and that provisional voting, HAVA's centerpiece, is causing more balloting woes than it is averting (*NYTimes*, August 5, 2004).

Here in Dallas County during the March 9 primary election, 86 provisional ballots were cast but only 21 were certified and counted, according to Bruce Sherbet, Dallas County Elections Administrator. The main reasons for ballots not being accepted were that the voter was (1) ineligible, (2) not registered or (3) not registered to vote in the appropriate place.

As we register voters these final weeks before the November elections, we need to be clear about what constitutes a **qualified voter in the State of Texas** and what constitutes an **adequate form of identification that any and all voters** may be required to present at the polls. The *VOTER* insert this month is a statement of voting rights, furnished by the Dallas County Election Department, as well as a definition of a qualified voter, provided by the Texas Secretary of State's Office. Please keep this information at hand when you register voters.

If you missed our HAVA program, try to attend LWV Richardson's September 2nd program entitled: "**It's Not the Same Old Polling Place,**" featuring Elections Administrator Bruce Sherbet. Richardson Civic Center at 7:15 PM.

LWVUS Convention 2004

Nancy Todes, LWVD Board Member

The 46th Convention of the League of Women Voters of the United States met at the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. from June 12 - June 15 2004. **Susybel Gosslee, Linda Wassenich**, and I, **Nancy Todes**, were the delegates from the Dallas League.

At the opening Plenary Session, after the Credentials Committee gave its report and the Rules and Order of Business had been established, President Kay Maxwell addressed the convention concerning the state of the League. Following Kay's speech the Nominating Committee presented its slate of Officers and Directors for the 2004-2006 biennium. Since there were three nominations from the floor for the Director positions, the delegates voted by secret ballot the next day. The Nominating Committee slate was accepted.

One of the elected Directors who will serve on the National Board for the next two years is Carolie Mullan, immediate
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past president of LWVTX who spoke at our Annual Meeting a while back.. Congratulations, Carolie! We look forward to having you represent us on the National Board.

The Program Planning Committee and the Board recommended that positions be retained in the areas of Representative Government, International Affairs, Natural Resources, and Social Policy and that there be no new studies or updates during the next biennium. Delegates were then allowed to declare their intent to move consideration of non-recommended items. Eight items were proposed and some of them involved studies and resolutions on the voter verified paper trail with the use of electronic voting machines. There were lots of debates on the floor concerning voter verifiable paper trails and numerous caucuses on the subject in the evenings between Plenary Sessions, but the Convention body concluded by following the National Board's recommendations and the proposed program was approved before the close of the Con
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Governor and Legislator's Spotlight on CPS - Misplaced Concerns!

Madeline McClure, Child Abuse Prevention Issues Chair

Earlier this month, Governor Perry responded to recent tragic child deaths and abuse cases by calling for an investigation of Child Protective Services (CPS), the largest division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (FPS). This action followed Comptroller Carole Keeton Srayhorn's report criticizing FPS in its oversight of foster homes and Residential Treatment Centers. Currently, three legislative interim committees are charged with studying the agency's policies and practices and offering recommendations for change.

Advocates welcome the interest of the legislators in learning more about the agency. Yet, while the Governor is criticizing the agency for not removing enough children from dangerous homes, one legislative committee chair of the house select interim committee on child welfare and foster care believes that the agency over-removes children from their homes. The Comptroller is critical of the children's placement after removal. All are calling for changes in CPS policy.

What the Governor, Comptroller and the legislators need to acknowledge is that any policy, law or management changes are useless if they don't take care of the most fundamental problem: CPS is inadequately funded.

Tragic cases are the price we pay for cutting CPS services and staff to the bone.

Over the last decade, CPS funding has dropped a whopping 30% when adjusted for population growth and inflation. Texas ranked 47th nationally in per capita funding of its public child welfare system in 2000. At \$24.22 per capita, Texas funding is 66% less than the \$71.06 per capita national average....

While the National average caseloads for workers ranges from 12-20 cases per worker, Texas CPS workers carry an overall average of 26 cases per worker. But investigative workers, the ones who make the critical early decisions about child removal, on average are each responsible for 56.2 cases. That is 3-4 times the national average and almost 4-5 times the caseload recommended by the National Child Welfare League of America. These overwhelming caseload levels compromise worker's ability to provide thorough, quality case-work, set good workers up to feel incompetent, increase the turnover rate and reduce the "institutional memory" of agency workers, thereby leaving the agency with new inexperienced workers making life and death decisions.

Moreover, while the Legislative committees are calling on CPS to contract with accredited subcontractors such as child-

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placing agencies and residential treatment centers, Texas CPS itself is not accredited. To qualify for accreditation with The Council on Accreditation (COA), CPS would have to reduce the current worker caseloads by half. High caseloads are the #1 factor that leads to high turnover among caseworkers according to national research. The average 2003 turnover rate for CPS caseworkers was 23.5% and as high as 39.9% for entry-level caseworkers. This compares with turnover for all Texas state employees in 2002 of 14.8%....

To address the toughest of these issues, we recommend that CPS become accredited with the COA such that caseloads are reduced to 12-17 cases per worker over the next decade. In the next session, the legislature needs to add enough CPS caseworkers to lower the caseload to 20 cases per worker for the next biennium. In 2002, FPS reported that the total cost to add these additional staff over the biennium is \$29,484,649 of which \$20,305,561 would be funded from general revenue.

Not only would this \$20 million investment, three one hundredths of one percent of the total state general revenue budget be a compassionate investment and better serve Texas children, it would be cost neutral in the intermediate term by decreasing worker turnover and training costs.

Finally, while all are concerned about how children are treated in the Child Welfare System, no leaders are calling for an increased investment in proven, cost-effective prevention programs to ensure the protection of Texas children. In 2001, Texas ranked 43rd in prevention services provided to at-risk families. And that sorry performance has gotten even worse, with 12 out of an inadequate 17 prevention programs being cut from state funding during the 78th legislative session for 2004-2005. Reductions in prevention programs lead to increases of child abuse and referrals to CPS, increasing workers' caseloads on the front end. Prevention investment could save Texas money in the intermediate and longer term by reducing the costs of foster care, court and prison costs by intervening in the cycle of violence earlier.

It's time our legislators stop requesting studies or investigations and start taking action to correct this crisis. We know the problems, we've seen the data and we have the tools: We just need the will to use them. Abused and neglected children don't need more lip service: They need more direct service.

Madeline McClure is the Director of TexProtects, The Texas Association for the Protection of Children, Advocacy Division of Prevent Child Abuse Texas.

ISSUE UPDATE

Religious Groups and the Drug War*Suzanne Wills, Drug Policy Issues Chair*

The injustices of the drug war have not escaped the notice of Americans of faith. On March 1, 2002, eight denominations and other religious groups released a statement endorsing a variety of drug policy reform recommendations, including: less focus on law enforcement and prisons; better access to treatment; more effective drug education; restoring financial aid to students with drug convictions; demilitarizing international drug control efforts; and reducing or eliminating racial profiling, racially discriminatory sentencing, and mandatory minimum prison sentences.

The signatories were the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, the Progressive Jewish Alliance, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and the Religious Society of Friends. The complete statement is at <http://www.idpi.us/dpr/8steps.htm>.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has been a leader in advocating **more just and compassionate drug policies**. The General Assembly of the UUA passed its "Alternatives to the War on Drugs" Statement of Conscience on June 22, 2002. This thoughtful, comprehensive statement calls for treating drug use as a health issue, not a crime. See <http://www.uudpr.org>.

Several major religious denominations have passed resolutions and signed statements explicitly supporting immediate legal access to medical marijuana for patients who have obtained their doctors' approval. These include the Episcopal Church in 1982, the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association in 2002, the Union for Reform Judaism in 2003, and the United Methodist Church and Progressive National Baptist Convention in 2004. The 2004 statement reads, "Licensed medical doctors should not be punished for recommending the medical use of marijuana to seriously ill people, and seriously ill people should not be subject to criminal sanctions for using marijuana if the patient's physician has told the patient that such use is likely to be beneficial."

The Progressive National Baptist Convention, which represents a primarily African-American congregation, also passed a resolution outlining the unjust and racially biased effects of mandatory minimum sentencing. It concludes, "**To ensure that an individual's punishment fits the crime, judicial discretion should be restored. Accordingly, we advocate the repeal of mandatory minimum prison sentences.**"

A recent statement by Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy defined the challenge the drug war presents to the religious community clearly and succinctly although it was not made in a religious context. He said, "The political phrase 'tough on crime' should not be a substitute for thoughtful reflection or lead us into moral blindness."

LWV-TX ACTION ALERT

FROM: Julia Marsden, Advocacy Vice-President

DATE: August 13, 2004

RE: PROTECT OUR KIDS: Campaign for Reliable, Accurate Information in Health Textbooks

WHAT WE WANT YOU TO DO: We are asking local Leagues to distribute postcards for a statewide effort to get as many individuals as possible to sign and return postcards in support of the Protect Our Kids policy. And we want local Leagues to contact their members of the SBOE in support of accurate and complete information in the health textbooks. We also want League members to write their own personal letters and ask them to get their friends and colleagues to write as well. Thank you in advance for your efforts.

Your response to the Alert is critical if we are to present accurate health information to our children and therefore protect them from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy!

Dear State Board of Education:
Ignorance won't protect our kids. That's why I'm asking you to include the common sense, practical information our teenagers need in health textbooks. This means teaching abstinence and also giving teens medically accurate information about birth control and disease prevention.
 Sincerely,

Geraldine Miller, Dallas, SBOE District 12

1100 Providence Tower West

5001 Spring Valley Road

Dallas, TX 75244-3910

972.419.4000

214.522.8560 (FAX)

sboesupport@tea.state.tx.us**Mavis B. Knight, Dallas, SBOE District 13**

P. O. Box 763337

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LWVUS Convention 2004 (Continued from page 3)

vention. Several other non-recommended items received attention from the convention body, one of which concerned civil liberties that the Patriot Act has taken from American citizens.

The LWVUS and LWVUS-EF budgets were presented and explained to the delegates. Both budgets and a per member payment of \$23.80 were approved.

The business proceedings of the Convention were nicely balanced with stimulating speeches, panel discussions, and workshops. Many delegates enjoyed a production by the Capitol Steps, a group of actors who created a series of side-splittingly funny satiric skits featuring a prominent national and even a few international figures such as George Bush, Bill Clinton, John Ashcroft, Condolezza Rice and Saddam Hussein. Another entertainment highlight was the Monday night banquet speech delivered by Helen Thomas, the well-known columnist whose career as a journalist spanned eight Presidential Administrations.

I truly enjoyed this convention. This was my fourth National League Convention, but I came away just as inspired and energized as I was after San Diego in 1998, Washington in 2000, and Miami in 2002.

LWV-TX ACTION ALERT (continued)

BACKGROUND: LWV-TX signed onto a policy statement the week of July 1st that calls upon publishers and the Texas State Board of Education to ensure that health textbooks include information about sex education that is age-appropriate, medically accurate and complete. (The policy statement, prepared by the Texas Freedom Network, was distributed to interested organizations.) We received the request from the Womens Health and Family Planning Association of Texas (WHFPT).

The action came because the health textbook publishers have opted not to include information critically important to the health and well being of Texas teens. In the three textbooks being submitted to SBOE, barrier protection is addressed inadequately and the books state repeatedly that it is not a truly effective measure; contraceptive methods are not listed or explained at all. Perhaps one of the most egregious items in one of the draft textbooks that is included in the list of ways to avoid sexually transmitted diseases is to get plenty of rest!

WHFPT says that they believe teens should abstain and delay sexual activity. However, with over 50% of Texas teens being sexually active and a large percentage of those failing to use condoms or contraception, the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, is too great for Texas to ignore. In fact, more information is not only needed but critically important.

LWV-TX intends to follow this action by presenting testimony in September.

More Convention Results Excerpted from the Corpus Christi *VOTER*

Linda Allen and Peg MacPhail, Delegates

The LWVUS position on the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPAT) was a major focus of this year's convention. The rules were changed to allow resolutions pertaining to program, program priorities, and the board position on Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPAT). The resolution to change the board's negative VVPAT position to one based on the principles of 'secure; accurate; recountable; and accessible' voting systems passed overwhelmingly....The LWVMN printed out a road map for action that we followed to success for the resolution and partial success for the study. The study was considered but was voted down due to cost.

Additional Excerpts from the Austin Area *VOTER*

Barbara Hankins, Delegate

Although there were several proposed amendments to the LWVUS Bylaws (including LWV-TX proposal to require earlier reporting to local Leagues of planned PMP increases), **none passed** except for the housecleaning variety....Campaign finance reform and election reform were proposed priority action items.

Among the non-recommended items proposed for consideration, adding civil liberties as a priority for education and action was **voted consideration and later adopted on a voice vote**.

Four additional items were voted for **consideration but failed vote for adoption**. (1) Concurrence by the convention with the LWV of Illinois position favoring abolition of the death penalty; (2) an abbreviated study to concur with LWVCA position supporting a majority vote for executive offices (and by implication its position in favor of systems such as Instant Runoff Voting); (3) Require LWVUS to monitor "No Child Left Behind" using data from state and local Leagues; (4) Actively work for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in those states which have not yet passed it.

Finally, requiring consideration of the Oregon practice of all mail-in voting in all LWVUS future election systems studies **failed to gain consideration**.