

League of Women Voters
of Dallas

VOTER



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

New League Year Programming: No September Unit Meetings!

Mildred Pope, Program VP and Katherine Homan, Organization VP

Our opening meeting this year will be a **Call to Members Meeting** on Tuesday, **September 18** from **6-8 PM** in the **Oak Room at the Center for Community Cooperation** on Live Oak. This is a special effort to bring all our members together for a presentation of the year's programming.

You will also get a lot of information about the current State League's study from a discussion on **Mandated Testing in the Public Schools**. **Roger Kallenberg** will moderate an outstanding panel of experts including **Aimee Bolender**, President of Alliance/AFT, **Dan Branch**, State Representative and member of the Public Education Committee, and **Cecilia Oakeley**, Ph.D., Executive Director DISD Evaluation and Accountability.

This program will augment a Facts & Issues report on **Mandated Testing** that you will be receiving by mail from LWV-Texas. Please become informed about this issue which will be the **consensus topic at October Unit Meetings**.

Whether or not one is a League member, this meeting will be of interest and value in learning more about the **new legislation** on public school testing **enacted during this past Legislative session**.

We hope that you will start the League year by being in attendance at our first meeting and helping us grow our membership by **bringing a guest!**

Trinity Parkway or Trinity Toll Road?

Brenda Marks, Voter Outreach VP and Lynda Ender, AdvocacyVP

Since the Dallas City Council did not adopt the **Trinity Greenbelt Ordinance** shown on the enclosed insert, citizens will vote on it in a **Referendum Election** on November 6. The ballot language for the Trinity River bond program, passed by voters in 1998, was:

Proposition No. 11 – The issuance of \$246,000,000 general obligation Trinity River Corridor Project bonds, the project to include floodways, levees, waterways, open space, recreational facilities, the Trinity Parkway and related street improvements, and other related, necessary, and incidental improvements to the Trinity River Corridor.

LWV-Dallas has two positions on this subject. Consult our newly adopted **consensus position on City of Dallas Municipal Bonds**, published on pages 7-8 of the Summer *VOTER*, as well as our 1994-5 **consensus position on the Trinity River Corridor**, published in the 2006-7 *Handbook* on page 35.

Hear the pros and cons and get the facts about this critical component of the TrinityRiver Corridor project. **Bring a friend and make this a potential new member opportunity!**

Attend our **TrinityReferendum Debate** on Tuesday, **September 25th** from **6:30-8 PM** at the **Mattie Nash-Myrtle Davis Recreation Center**, located just south of the Trinity River, at 3710 N. Hampton Road, Dallas 75215, across from the Dallas Housing Authority campus.

From the President's Desk

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An unknown poet shared these these words...

"The heights achieved by the greatest were not attained by sudden flight; but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night."

Those who have most powerfully and permanently influenced their generation have been visionaries – people who have seen more and farther than others.



Those in some circles may call it a "Brag" list; some may call it a list of accomplishments; still others may say it's simply "tooting your own horn." But this one thing is certain, in 2006, the League of Women Voters – Dallas **provided** voter services to over **5,000 new citizens; led the LWV COMMUNITY COALITION** in registering and educating nearly **7,000 voters at eleven DART rail and bus stations in September 2006.** Coalition partners included the League of United Latin American Citizens, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Alpha Xi Omega Chapter; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (Dallas Chapters); American Association of University Women; DFW Asian American Citizens Council and the Social Action Council of the First Unitarian Church; **conducted** a record-breaking number of "**Meet the Candidates**" forums taped and broadcast by DCTV in October 2006; **presented** issue forums on **Electronic Voting Security, Financing City Government with Bonds** and the **Local Impact of Immigration in Dallas; published the 2006 Dallas County Voters Guide**, serving a **quarter-million voters** with nonpartisan voting and candidate information online and, for the first time in six years, in hard copy; **broadcast a How to Make Your Vote Count PSA** which raised League visibility and promoted use of our local *Voters Guide*; **Published two Op Ed articles in the Dallas Morning News**, one on Women's Equality Day and women's voter turnout and another on the improper counting of Texas prisoners as residents where they are incarcerated; and **hosted the Susan B. Anthony Award Luncheon** where Mayor Laura Miller read a Resolution from the City of Dallas. It was quite a year!

The 2006 League influence in this community is indisputable; and so with the same commitment and resolve, onward we go...

Libbie Terrell Lee

Some Facts about Immigration Issues in Dallas

Immigration Study Committee: Betty Bernhardt, Barbara Downey, Laura Gonzalez, Katherine Homan, Maureen Jones, Roger Kallenberg, Lou Ann Ligon, Arline Pitt, and Eileen Ricks

Environment – According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Dallas County's total population in 2005 was 2,267,080. Immigrants comprised 556,572 or 24.6% of that population, and non-citizen immigrants comprised 423,198 or 18.7% of that population. Ecological Footprint (EF) is a theoretical measure, expressed in acres per land required, of environmental values plus land-use patterns. A Dallas County resident's average personal EF = 26.4 acres of land. The composite EF of all Dallas County residents' needs is more than 105 times the land area of the county.

Education - Immigrants from Mexico now account for nearly 3/4ths of Dallas' foreign-born population; a language other than English is spoken in 43.9% of Dallas homes today; 49.3% of Dallas immigrants do not have a high school degree; Dallas ranks 54 out of 79 cities studied nationwide in literacy; 33% of DISD students are Limited English Proficiency; DISD was nearly 1000 classrooms deficient in meeting State requirements for bilingual teachers in elementary classes with Spanish-speaking pupils last year. 68% of DISD Hispanic students do not graduate;

Economics – Dallas exceeds any other city or county in the State in terms of its percentage of non-citizen immigrants; despite a sluggish national economy, Dallas still ranks among the top US metro areas in every key measure of business expansion and employment growth; Tourism brings over \$10 billion to our local economy and employs a Hospitality work force that is comprised of 60-70% foreign-born residents and Construction in North Texas employs a labor force that is 70% immigrant. State Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn's 2006 report "Undocumented Immigrants in Texas" states that aliens in Texas paid about \$2 billion in Sales and School property taxes and Court costs and fees, while using only \$1.16 billion in government resources.

Culture – Among the institutions in Dallas that work to bridge different cultures are the DFW International Alliance, the Dallas Public Library (DPL) system, the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA), and the Dallas Police Department (DPD). Each has knowledge of the diverse cultures in Dallas and uses the information for their specific function. DFW International publishes cultural information in their weekly online calendar of community events; the DPL seeks to serve the library needs of all residents, OCA supports performing and visual arts, and DPD uses data to train officers who respond to calls.

Political –Citizenship applications in Dallas rose 80% this past year, and recently elected Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert was reported as leaning towards establishing an Office for New Americans. Local organizations such as the Catholic Charities of Dallas, Inc., Dallas Area Interfaith, Dallas County Community Colleges, and ACORN assist immigrants in learning about and obeying the laws and making a smooth transition into becoming contributing members of the community and building a foundation for self-sufficiency. The International Rescue Committee in Dallas (IRC-Dallas) resettles approximately 500 refugees and asylees per year. During its three decades of service, IRC-Dallas staff and volunteers have assisted with housing, English language training, health care and employment.

A Little-Known Quirk in the Census Rules

Katherine Homan, Organization VP and Suzanne Wills, Secretary

Equal representation in Congress and the Legislature is fundamental to democracy. Yet a little-known quirk in the census rules is being allowed to undermine that doctrine.

Like most states, Texas, relies on Census Bureau data to draw its legislative boundaries so that each will contain the same number of people. Equally-sized districts ensure that each resident has an equal access to a representative to advocate for his or her needs. The Census counts everyone—including people who can't vote such as prisoners and children.

Since children have a stake in their communities, no distortion of representation arises from counting them. The same, however, cannot be said for prisoners.

The Texas Election Code recognizes that prisoners are residents of the communities where their homes and families are, not where they are incarcerated. Section 1.015 defines residence as "One's home...to which one intends to return after any temporary absence." It specifically states that, "A person who is an inmate in a penal institution...does not...acquire residence at the place where the institution is located." Nevertheless, the Census Bureau counts prisoners as residents of the community where they are incarcerated.

In 1970, when Texas imprisoned only 14,293 people (128 per 100,000 population), ignoring the residence of inmates had little consequence. In the last 40 years, since the drug war began, Texas has imprisoned its citizens at a rate unprecedented in human history. On August 31, 2005 there were 152,213 people in Texas prisons and state jails. Per 100,000 population there were 2,300 blacks, 600 Hispanics, 400 whites and 100 of other ethnicities. The Legislative Budget Board estimates that Texas will have 11,200 more prisoners by 2011.

Where this many people are counted as residents has a significant effect on representation. Voters in the largely rural communities where prisons are located have increased legislative power. In 2005 inmates made up more than 20% of the populations of six Texas counties—Anderson, Bee, Hartley, Jones, Mitchell and Walker. Counted but **disenfranchised inmates give each legitimate resident of Anderson County the voting strength of 1.31 constituents.**

Conversely this voting strength is lost to the inmates' home communities. 45% of Texas inmates came from six other Texas counties—Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, Travis and El Paso. After adjusting for the inmates held in Harris and Dallas Counties, more than 28,000 constituents of Harris County and 16,000 constituents of Dallas County are counted as residents in other counties.

Texas cannot change the Census Bureau's methodology to count the incarcerated at their homes. The state is highly unlikely to give inmates the right to vote as do Vermont, Maine, eighteen European states and Iraq. However, **Texas could and should remedy the distortion between urban and rural counties by adjusting the Census Bureau data to meet the Texas Election Code.**

The League of Women Voters of Texas strongly supports the right of each citizen to equal access to Congressional or Legislative representatives. For many years it advocated for passage of the Texas Election Code. It became law in 1986, recognizing prisoners as residents of the communities where their homes and families are. **This principal should not be undermined for bureaucratic convenience, blurring and distorting representation ratios so that one person equals 1.31 constituents and another person loses access to her representative.**