

League of Women Voters
of Dallas

VOTER



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

Units Get Together on January 14-15

On Wednesday, January 14 at **12 Noon, East Dallas and Oak Cliff** will meet at the Lakewood Library to hear League member **Roger Kallenberg** review the history and possible future of our position on Economic Conversion from military to domestic priorities.

On Thursday, January 15 at **10:00AM North Dallas** will be joined by **Mockingbird** at the Churchill Recreation Center to hear **Mavis Knight**, League member and State School Board member, speak about the revision of the science curriculum in high schools of the state and other educational issues.

Don't Miss Our General Meeting January 7 at 7:00PM

Regulation of Electric Utilities will be discussed at a forum arranged by our Evening Unit. **The panel, including State Representative Will Hartnett who sits on the Committee for Regulated Industries, Kelly Rod of TXU LITE-UP Texas program, and a representative from the Public Utility Commission, will be moderated by State Representative Terri Hodge.** Check the League web site for additional participants.

Join us at **Temple Emanu-El**, 8500 Hillcrest (corner of Hillcrest and Northwest Highway) on **Wednesday, Jan. 7 at 7:00 p.m.**



A sneak preview of Lea Frailey's contribution

Silent Auction Is Just Around the Corner!

**Becky Brakke and Jane Pak,
Silent Auction Co-Chairs**

Last call? Already? Yes! The Susan B. Anthony Award Luncheon, our League's **single fund-raising event**, is just a month away. There is still time, but your **contributions are needed before Sunday, February 8.** We have invited the public to a luncheon. **We are the hosts.** Let's make it a day to remember!

What do you hope to find at a benefit luncheon?

- a great honoree and program
 - a marvelous lunch
 - welcoming faces and helpful League members
 - an inviting silent auction with smooth checkout
- Table monitors and cashier's aides** are still needed.

What do you hope to find at a silent auction?

- restaurant and service provider gift cards
- movie, orchestra, opera, theater and lecture series tickets
- books, both fiction and nonfiction, new and gently used
- jewelry, accessories, art and handmade things
- vacation stays and celebrity luncheons

A week-in-June stay at a home in Santa Fe has already been contributed! We need your **help to fill the Auction tables.** Use the enclosed donation form and see how easy asking can be. Take along a friend to double the smiles!

Contact Becky at 214-363-0921 bbindal@aol.com or Jane at 972-233-2715 pakjane@aol.com and **let us know how you can help us help the League!** And please don't forget to **deliver your contributions before Sunday, February 8.**

From the President's Desk

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The New Year brings with it reflection on opportunities missed, renewed optimism, and the expectation that given another chance, the outcome would be different. So much happened in 2008 that the Dallas League of Women Voters championed that it is difficult to see areas of missed opportunity – and I would be hard pressed to spend much time on it anyway because, as an organization, we took the lead in the areas of civic engagement. In other words, as we had opportunity, we did well for all people.

Whether focused on environmental issues, voter engagement, or levels of reform, our future work in 2009 must be rooted in a commitment to develop and implement highly effective programs that make a real and lasting difference in people's lives. Since effective programs must be implemented broadly to bring about widespread change, we must be committed to devoting resources replicate program strategies that work and produce meaningful results. This approach responds to a stark reality: the enormous disparity between any given civic and or social issue and the level of human resources available to address it.

So I am proposing for 2009 that our program planning strategy incorporate the following:

- Pinpoint and define the most effective aspects in our program review.
- Assess the potential for expanding program elements
- Engage in a growth planning process that allows for efficient member inclusion and joint efforts to maximize member power; target efforts with identified performance measures and designs from a self-reporting method.
- Manage the process over time, either by helping to forge the strategy or by directly assisting in managing the process until another structure is in place.

My challenge in 2009 is also to invest more deeply in sustainable solutions to the widespread challenges facing disconnected Dallas voters who located their voices in November 2009. Left unchallenged, many will return to their previous apathetic and disinterested political behavior. We must deepen our focus on programs that serve populations with unique needs and challenges, particularly people of color, new immigrants, and women. And finally we must continue to advance systemic change by promoting innovative collaborations and bringing lessons learned at the local level to opportunities for shaping policies and practices at the state and national levels.

Until next time...

Libbie Terrell Lee

Hold On to Your Hats, a New Session is Upon Us **Brenda Marks, Advocacy Vice President**

When the 81st session of the Texas Legislature convenes on January 13, 2009, the Dallas County Legislative delegation will have some new faces. New to the Austin scene will be Carol Kent, who defeated incumbent Tony Goolsby in House District 102 and Robert Miklos of Mesquite, who was elected to an open seat in the House from District 101. Representative Kirk England of House District 106 was re-elected to his seat – this time as Democrat. And one closely watched House seat – that of incumbent Linda Harper Brown of Irving – remains undecided pending a full recount. As of November 11th, only 20 votes separate the incumbent from her challenger Bob Romano. Dallas-area State Senators Royce West and **John Carona** were re-elected by comfortable margins.

In preparation for the beginning of the upcoming session, we will conduct legislative interviews with the 14 members whose districts encompass Dallas or a large part of Dallas County. **Miriam Foshay** will interview Representative Will Hartnett. **Sandy Greyson** agreed to interview three State House members: Representatives Joe Driver, Carol Kent, and Barbara Mallory Carroway. **Ellen Key** will interview Representative Allen Vaught. **Brenda Marks** will interview State House members Roberto Alonzo, Raphael Anchia, **Dan Branch**, and Robert Miklos and join **Libbie Lee** in interviewing Senator West. Libbie will also interview Representative Yvonne Davis. **Mildred Pope** has accepted the assignment with Representative Helen Giddings, and **Suzanne Wills** will see State Senator Bob Deuell and Representative **Terri Hodge**. Our goal is to complete the interviews prior to the opening of the legislative session, specifically by January 7.

Mark Your Calendar for Lobbying in Austin

February 1-3, 2009 Women's Legislative Days rescheduled at the Wyndham in Austin

March 9, 2009 LWT-TX Statewide meeting and Lobby Day

Drug Policy in the 81st Legislature **Suzanne Wills, Drug Policy Issues Chair**

The League has positions on two drug policy reform bills that will be introduced in the 2009 session of the Texas Legislature. Both bills were introduced in the 2007 Legislature but were not given hearings in House public health committee. That committee will have a new chair in 2009.

Bob Deuell (R-Greenville) will introduce SB 188 to allow all county public health departments to operate sterile syringe programs. **Providing sterile syringes to addicts** is among the most effective and certainly least expensive methods of curbing the spread of blood borne diseases such as HIV and hepatitis. A similar bill passed the full Senate in 2007.

HB 164, which would make **medical use of cannabis** an affirmative defense against a charge of marijuana possession, will be introduced by Elliott Naishtat (D-Austin). Texas makes no distinction between recreational and medicinal marijuana smokers. Under this bill patients who are arrested would need to show that a doctor recommended marijuana use. If so, they could avoid conviction, probation, and further incarceration.

I am aware of one other drug policy bill that will be introduced. It is not a reform bill, and LWVTX does not have a position on it. Charles (Doc) Anderson (R-Waco) will introduce HB 126 to make possession of *Salvia divinorum* a crime. *Salvia divinorum* is a mild hallucinogenic herb.

Please ask your representatives to support SB 188 and HR 164. Mention that the League of Women Voters of Texas supports this legislation in your letters, emails and phone calls.

Advocating on Behalf of Boards and Commissions

by League member Liz Wally (Adapted from an e-mail)

Citizens have been forced--yet one more time--to show up in strength at Dallas City Hall for the issue of form-based zoning. This is a citywide issue and very complex. Let me give you my own particular beef--**it is about the civic process and the precedent that is being cemented down at City Hall.**

Citizens are requested to volunteer for and work on advisory boards and committees. They donate hours of work, both in preparation and meeting time, and struggle towards outcomes with which they can live and/or are excited about. In this case, a hard-won agreement on a form-based zoning code went to the City Plan Commission (CPC) and was negotiated there until the CPC voted unanimously to approve the agreement from the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC).

But someone (staff, City Manager, council member, special interest group) decided they didn't like the resulting agreement from the CPC and the CAC. They modified the original agreement and attempted three times to bring to a vote a form-based zoning code which cut out vital points that had been unanimously approved by the CPC and CAC. One attempt occurred before all council members had been adequately briefed because they had just arrived back in town.

Fortunately, citizens, who learned at the last minute that form-based zoning was coming up for a vote, foiled all three attempts to hold votes that had not been announced to the public. However, this meant they had to leave jobs or put children in child care in order to appear and have a voice. Having done so four times, citizens were left frustrated when the mayor again removed the item from the agenda. Naturally, fewer and fewer citizens are showing up each time, not trusting the system anymore or having run out of extra hours off work or funds for child care.

Such tactics discourage citizen participation and attendance – which I liken to voter suppression tactics. **In a democracy, those involved in a decision should be informed and welcome at the table. Our City Council and Mayor are not being transparent;** they seem to be bowing down to forces unwilling to openly engage in the discussion. **If we don't show up to complain and begin to actively get into dialogue with our representatives, nothing will change -- it's that simple.**

A Copy of Our President's December 1 Letter to the Mayor

Dear Mayor Leppert,

The League of Women Voters of Dallas encourages your support of the compromise agreement on the form-based zoning code. Citizens, realtors and developers have met and come to an agreement that should be respected and accepted. The Dallas League supports best practices in city-wide comprehensive planning.

Thank you for considering our recommendation.

Yours truly,



Libbie T. Lee
President

Applying the ABC's of the ABC's: Getting Appointed to Boards and Commissions *Linda Camin, City Government Observer Corp Chair*

At the general meeting on "The ABC's of the ABC's" on November 20th, the fabulous panel advanced everyone's understanding of the "who, what, when, why and how" regarding boards and commissions in the City of Dallas. The attendees were welcomed by **Mildred Pope**, the panel was moderated by **Julie Lowenberg**, **Barbara Downey** served as timekeeper, **Katherine Homan** assisted with arrangements, and **Meg Kimberland** also helped with arrangements and took care of registration. **Jane Davis** did much of the Update Study research, and **Miriam Foshay** invited our guest panelists.

In addition to an attractive handout, **Dr. Theresa Daniel** provided relevant, practical background information and survey data. Comparisons were made with other similar cities such as Detroit and Phoenix. **Deborah Watkins**, City Secretary, spoke about her role in moving applicants through the process, making sure they meet the qualifications of state law and the Dallas City Code. **Sandy Greyson**, City Councilmember, 1997-2005, explained the difference among advisory, quasi-judicial, and instrumentality boards and commissions. She recalled the process of appointing constituents who reflected the district's racial and gender composition. **Beverly Tobian**, a member of numerous boards and commissions and currently Vice Chair of the Vickery Meadow Tax Incentive Financing District (TIF), noted some frustrations that result when Council persons fail to appoint a chair for an extended period of time or finding that the staff has set the agenda in advance. **Rebecca Bergstresser** has also been a member of numerous boards and commissions and is currently serving on the Ethics Advisory Commission. They primarily consider conflicts of interest and abuse of power in elected, appointed, or staff positions. Their scope is limited to holding hearings, rendering judgment at preliminary hearings, and recommending full hearings.

One of the initial issues prompting an update study on appointed boards and commissions was an article in the *Dallas Morning News* (January 2007) reporting that there were more than 22% unfilled positions on boards and commissions in the City of Dallas (see page 28 of the League Handbook). A subsequent survey conducted by the City Government Observer Corp revealed less vacancies, but demonstrates the ongoing need for appointments because of term limits and resignations. Some of those present at the meeting expressed considerable and enthusiastic interest in being appointed to a board or commission.

Here is how you can go about getting appointed:

- Go to www.ci.dallas.tx.us/cso/pdf/Bds-descript.pdf. It lists all the 46 boards and commissions that have members appointed by councilmembers; also included are qualifications, missions, and meeting times.
- Decide which of the boards and commissions meet your interests and qualifications.
- Submit your resume with a cover letter explaining your interest to your City Council Member. References are not necessary, but could help, including one from the League.
- Of course, it helps to attend Town Hall meetings and seek other ways for communicating with your Councilmember, including in-person appointments. It is not necessary for your Councilmember to know you personally, but it can help.

The City Government Observer Corp is continuing its update study of boards and commissions and will be submitting a document for member concurrence to update the LWV-D position. Members of the City Government Observer Corp are: **Linda Camin, Chair; Theresa Daniel, Jane Davis, Agnes Ellsworth, Miriam Foshay, Genie Fritz, Julie Lowenberg, Gillian Parillo, Toni Rose, and Linda Sharp.**

Units Met in December to Plan Ahead for 2009-2010

Oak Cliff Unit members recommended updating and enlarging our Economic Conversion position so that it incorporated the social aspects of our veterans returning to a peacetime economy. Recommended topics for general meetings were:

- (1) Meeting with City Manager Mary Suhm regarding what happens to unspent bond funds and how closely the City adheres to our Muni Bond position
- (2) Meeting with the Mayor for an update on the Inland Port and Trinity River Corridor Project
- (3) Meeting with County Elections Administrator Bruce Sherbet on electronic voting machines and straight ticket voting

For the Evening Unit, the main topic of interest is the current review of the LWVD position on Appointed Boards and Commissions. The following issues are not being addressed by our position:

- (1) Grant-writer. It has been proposed that the City should hire a professional grant-writer to solicit funds for various worth projects. Some of the unfunded proposals from various boards and commissions could be funded in this way. Is this a worthy proposal? Do other cities do this? Or should such projects be handled by private not-for-profits?
- (2) Feedback. Our position says nothing about how the city should relate to each board or commission. Testimony at our November meeting indicated that feedback from the City Council to the boards and commissions is sorely lacking and needs to be addressed.
- (3) Follow-through. Who tracks actions taken by the City to address citizens' concerns? Is there adequate reporting?
- (4) Conflicts of interest on TIF review boards. What are the criteria for membership on TIF review boards to prevent conflict of interest, and who monitors whether those criteria are being followed?

The other topic of interest is the review of the Inland Port Facility and development of a master plan called for by Mayor Leppert and questioned by The Allen Group as politically motivated to Dallas's detriment. We propose a meeting on the subject to gather information.

The Mockingbird Unit's primary suggestion for Local Programming in 2009-2010 was posed as a question: *What is the best way for the City to handle the convention district and hotel?* Other suggestions:

- (1) How to keep the large number of registered voters engaged and educated between elections
- (2) Study effectiveness of TIF's
- (3) Continue study of Appointed Boards and Commissions
- (4) Water policy for the City of Dallas

North Dallas Unit members were very interested in the effectiveness of citizen participation in local government, updating our economic conversions position, and further study of the proposed Bill of Rights for the City of Dallas in our local program. They also came up with a number of suggestions for further study and/or informational programs.

- (1) The issue of closing State Schools.
- (2) Learning about the County Election Department's process for counting provisional and mail-in ballots.
- (3) Establishment of a Dallas County Mental Health Facility, perhaps at the old Parkland site.
- (4) Reorganization and unification of City and County health departments.
- (5) Study of teaching the Bible in schools and the issue of separation of church and state.

After reviewing these suggestions the Program Exploratory Committee will make recommendations to the Board. When the final proposal is presented, decisions will be made by the membership at the Annual Meeting in May.