

## SPOTLIGHT ON. . . IMMIGRATION

by Jerolyn Barbee, LWVO Executive Director

The League of Women Voters launched a two-year Immigration Study in 2006 aimed at helping communities understand the implications of immigration at the local, state, and federal level. As a part of this project, League members and leaders are exploring the underlying values and principles regarding immigration, reasons for immigration, current federal immigration policy, and the impact of immigration in American society.

The immigration issue is not only a hot topic for League, but it could become a tipping point in the 2008 Presidential race. Education forums on immigration could be a much-needed outreach opportunity for local Leagues next fall. Although Ohio is not a border state, there has been a steady influx of immigrants to Ohio over the past ten years. Immigration is currently on the minds of many Ohioans.

According to a recently released survey from the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute, Ohio voters:

- Oppose 84 to 11 percent issuing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants
- Favor building a fence along the Mexican-U.S. border
- Creating a national ID card for all legal residents and citizens.

They also oppose, 61 to 35 percent, providing a free public education to children of those in the United States illegally. Illegal immigrants in the U.S. should be allowed to work to apply for legal status, 55 percent of Ohio voters say, while 38 percent say they should be deported. By seven-to-one margins, voters oppose giving illegal immigrants access to government health insurance or social services such as welfare or food stamps, the independent Quinnipiac University poll finds.

"Immigration may be an issue that divides voters in some parts of the country, but not in Ohio where public opinion is very firmly opposed to efforts that would make it easier for illegal aliens to become part of American society," said Peter Brown, assistant director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. "Although Ohio voters don't favor deporting illegal immigrants already here, they firmly oppose providing incentives for them to stay."

Ohio voters say 53 to 34 percent that illegal immigrants take jobs nobody wants, rather than jobs Americans need. In general, voters favor tougher measures to deal with illegal immigration:

- They favor 82 to 12 percent stricter penalties on employers who hire illegal workers;
- In addition to the 84 to 11 percent margin against issuing driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, voters oppose 75 - 17 percent issuing limited driver's licenses that could not be used for things like getting on airplanes or crossing borders;
- They support 61 to 32 percent the government issuing a tamper proof identification card to all those living in America legally;
- By 60 to 34 percent, voters say build a fence along the U.S.- Mexican border;
- By margins of 86 to 11 percent and 85 to 12 percent respectively, they oppose providing illegal immigrants with government-financed health care and with social services such as welfare and food stamps.

"The message to presidential candidates from Ohio, perhaps the most important swing state in the Electoral College, is that voters - be they Democrats, Republicans or

independents - are very frustrated with illegal immigration and come down on the side of toughness rather than accommodation," Brown said.

From November 6 - 11, Quinnipiac University surveyed 1,231 Ohio voters, with a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points. The Quinnipiac University Poll, directed by Douglas Schwartz, Ph.D., conducts public opinion surveys in Florida, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Ohio and the nation as a public service and for research.

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### **What you can do as a League member?**

Help your community by becoming educated on the impact of immigration. The LWVUS website has great study resources that can be used by all members to learn more about this issue.

Local Leagues looking for additional resources to supplement study work on immigration should check out *Growing Season, The Life of a Migrant Community*, a recent book by Kent State professor Gary Harwood. The book is a photographic essay of an immigrant community in northeast Ohio. He has been a photographer for KSU for more than 24 years and chief photographer since 1987. Thanks to LWV Lake County member Gale Bromelmeier for sharing this resource with us.

We are now in the member agreement phase of the LWVUS Immigration Study-- the time when Leagues prepare to take consensus. Grassroots agreement on positions is one of the League's greatest strengths. Preparing for and taking consensus is hard work, but worthwhile. The resulting position will allow the organization to affect state and national policy for years to come, just as we have been doing in other areas for 87 years. For more information, click here [LWV | Immigration Study](#)