

The League of Women Voters continues to make an imPACT locally and statewide as we work together on five critical areas of political reform: election administration, redistricting reform, judicial independence, campaign finance reform and accountability. Since the first Town Hall Meeting (THM) was held by LWV-Athens in 2006, 25 Leagues have engaged their communities and elected officials on one or more of the reform topics. In fact, many local Leagues are hosting their second or third THMs and expanding the focus to include a local issue because they recognize the potential of their actions. Several local Leagues have experienced the benefit of increased member and community engagement. The THMs have provided another opportunity for members to carry out their commitment to their communities. The Winter Voter features the successful ballot campaign that began with a THM in Marion. Marion's story is highlighted in the 2009 Winter Voter that you should soon receive in the mail. (See 2009 Winter *VOTER*, "The ImPACT of Marion's Ballot Issue").

There are already 7 THM's planned by various local Leagues for early 2009 as local Leagues effectively use THM's to bring about meaningful reforms and help communities make democracy work. In 2009, we are keeping the momentum going so that we can strive to attain our goals. Way to go!

LWVO/EF has built a strong foundation for advocacy based on local and state Town Hall Meetings. Take the area of election reform. Reflecting the importance of the issue, in just the past few months, the League:

- Is leading the way in *convening* a statewide election-reform coalition that will capitalize on the energy and involvement in the past election. Its focus is to continue the reform work begun—but not finished—prior to the 2008 election. (See 2009 Winter *VOTER*, "Election Reform to Be Key Focus in 2009," page 1) The LWVO/EF board identified the Four R's of Election Reform are priorities for election reform. They are:

1. **Review** and Revise the Statutes and Rulings Governing Election Systems
2. **Reassign** Election Administration to an Independent Non-Partisan Authority
3. **Remove** Barriers to Voting
4. **Resolve** Statewide Voter Registration Database Problems by 2010. More information on the Four R's can be found by clicking [here](#)

- Testified, and successfully lobbied the governor to veto a hastily conceived election-administration law, SB 380. League members and supporters are to be commended for responding to the Action Alert, which helped convince the Governor to veto the bill (See 2009 Winter *VOTER*, "Legislative Update," page 2).
- Held a press conference and submitted an Opinion Editorial (Op Ed) on the overlap between voter registration and early in-person absentee voting. This period, known as the Golden Week, allowed same day registration and voting for the 5-day overlap. The League Op Ed, which supported the overlap, was carried in several Ohio newspapers.
- Was the go-to organization for media seeking expert—but nonpartisan—perspectives during the tumultuous 2008 election cycle. From the Columbus *Dispatch* to NPR to AP

to Britain's ITN (Independent Television News), a wide variety of local, state, national and international media interviewed LWVO President Linda Lalley, LWVO Election Specialist Peg Rosenfield and Executive Director Deidra Reese.

- Received an appellate ruling allowing our 2005 election-reform lawsuit, which affirmed our claims as appropriate for litigation. This ruling will allow our lawsuit to proceed to the next step of the litigation process. (See 2009 Winter *VOTER*, "From the President's Desk," page 3).
- Analyzed the voter databases in key Ohio counties and identified flaws in the system.
- Signed on to an *amicus brief* in support of "Golden Week," the five-day window for registration / absentee voting.
- Participated in numerous voter-education and voter-protection ad hoc coalitions at the state level prior to the general election.
- In addition, LWVO Elections Specialist Peg Rosenfield was a panel discussant at Secretary of State's Elections Summit in December critiquing the general election; and League members serve on the Secretary's Voting Rights Institute, working to ensure all eligible voters can vote.

But wait... There's more! LWVO/EF has been a strong advocate for increased judicial independence, impartiality and fairness, as well as judicial campaign finance reform. To that end, LWVO/EF:

- Is working with Chief Justice Moyer of the Ohio Supreme Court and the Ohio State Bar Association in promoting a judicial appointments process and public funding for judicial campaigns.
- Worked with the secretary of state to develop an on-line Voters Guide for all judicial candidates across Ohio in the 2008 general election.
- Partnered with the Ohio State Bar Association to offer local Leagues a program based on *The Least Understood Branch*, which focuses on the importance of fair and impartial courts in a democracy. (More information can be found at <http://www.abanet.org/judind/toolkit/impartialcourts/home.html>
- Partnered with Justice at Stake and the Midwest Democracy Network to promote guidelines for judicial candidates [*Guidelines for Judicial Candidates Running Campaigns That Educate the Public and Promote Public Confidence in the Courts*](#).
- Provided questions for local and state-level candidates' forums and Voters Guides on judicial independence, fairness and impartiality for the primary and general elections.
- Co-sponsored televised debates for the Ohio Supreme Court and attorney general candidates.
- Approved an 8-Point Plan in support of public policies that would help ensure a fair and impartial judiciary. It includes public financing of judicial campaigns; increased transparency and timely reporting of campaign contributions to judicial candidates; stricter standards for recusal; and an appointments process for judicial vacancies.

With Ohio's highly partisan process in place to redraw electoral districts in 2010, redistricting reform is another major area of League involvement. This effort, led by Redistricting Specialist Ann Henkener, builds upon LWVO/EF's [Eight Points for Redistricting Reform](#). Over the past months, LWVO/EF has been working with Secretary of State Brunner, Rep. Vernon Sykes (D), former Rep. Joan Lawrence (R) and

members of interested organizations to develop a statewide redistricting contest. By demonstrating that the winning plans provide reasonable and fair electoral districts, LWVO/EF and its partners hope to build bipartisan support for a redistricting process that uses objective criteria.

A critical focus for 2009 will be on preparations for the U.S. Census as that data will determine the number of representatives each state will have in the Congress. More importantly, that data will determine the amount of resources that will be available to communities for schools, highways and social services such as health care. The League can play a critical role in educating communities about the importance of the Census and the stakes involved if there is an undercount. Through the community contacts and programs, League members can be a key messenger to encourage participation in the Census.

Finally, campaign finance reform and accountability are woven throughout the three reform issues discussed above. The influence of money and special interests continues to affect elections (including those of judges and redistricting officials)—and undermines voters’ faith that their interests are truly being represented. Accountability and transparency are similarly intertwined with elections, the judiciary and redistricting. For example, until candidates’ campaign contributors are transparent and government records are open as provided for by law, voters will never really know who “the man (or woman) behind the curtain” is.

To address these critical concerns the League will collaborate with the Americans for Campaign Reform on legislation sponsored by United States Senators Dick Durbin and Arlen Specter on public financing of campaigns.

NOTE: Workshops on these critical reform issues will be offered at Statehouse Day 2009 (March 17) and/or Convention 2009 (May 1-3). Please join us—together, we can make a difference! Link here for more information and to register [Convention 2009](#) or [Statehouse Day 2009](#)