



OHIO VOTER

Vol. 56, No. 4 Spring 2006

We Can Only Care About What We Know: **Political Reform through Civic Engagement**

Cynthia Gibson, in *Thinking Outside the Ballot Box: A Broader Political Engagement Strategy for America's Civic Organizations*, explains that associations such as the "League of Women Voters... are well positioned to help promulgate (the) broader agenda of (political) reform." She explains that the League and similar organizations "should be the infrastructure of what they call a civic renewal movement... They are the foundation for a healthy democracy."

And we can't have a healthy democracy without political reform. We're not going to let Cynthia down!

Leaguers understand that for political reform to be realized in Ohio, citizens need to be engaged and educated on the issues. **The League of Women Voters of Ohio Education Fund is poised to provide a new opportunity to increase civic engagement and education on the most critical political reform issues.**

We are working hard to develop an exciting town hall meeting program that local Leagues can implement in early

fall 2006. This initiative will **create synergy** across Ohio by **reinvigorating local stakeholders** in ways that will significantly help move political reform forward in Ohio.

First, citizens identified by local Leagues will be honored in League communities at Town Hall meetings throughout the state.

These honorees will have made an impact in their community – for example: high school civics teacher, board of elections director, clergy member, Rotary Club officer, Clerk of Council, journalist, local editor,

etc. This broad representation should expand the scope of stakeholders by attracting the honorees' fans, friends and family to the Town Hall Meeting.

A Clever Plan plus Money—Flash for Fall '06: LWVO is in serious negotiation with funders to underwrite Town Hall meetings across the state this fall. Local Leagues can definitely benefit from this project!

Town Hall continued on Page 6

HB 3 and the May 2, 2006 Primary Election *or... and they wonder why we have gray hair!*

The now infamous election reform legislation, HB 3, has been signed into law. After countless hours of analysis, writing letters, giving testimony, putting on forums, and reading the nearly 500 pages in this legislation, including its amendments, the League of Women Voters of Ohio remains befuddled over many parts of this law. Apparently we're not the only ones as most of the provisions will not be able to be put into place until after the primary.

In the coming months, as clarifications are made, as ambiguities in the legislation are addressed, you can count on the League of Women Voters to help you understand just what you need to know for upcoming special elections and, of course, the general election on November 7, 2006.

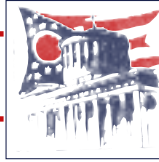
Several important pieces of information that you need to know, which may or may not be related to HB 3 prior to the May 2, 2006 Primary Election:

1. Information on the web site of your local Board of Elections may or may not be accurate with regard to absentee voting. The information on the Secretary of State web site is correct: www.sos.state.oh.us

Absentee voting begins 35 days before primary and general elections and – except for voters hospitalized due to emergencies – ends the day before the election. Once absentee ballots are available for voting, an absentee voter may either vote in person at the county board of elections office, or receive and return the absentee ballot via U.S. Mail.

Voting continued on Page 6

ADVOCACY



UPDATE

This installment of "Advocacy Update" focuses on the proposed TEL constitutional amendment, gun control, and health savings accounts. Additional information is available on the League's web site, www.lwvohio.org, under the Advocacy link.

TEL/TABOR UPDATE

To date, the Coalition for Ohio's Future has filed legal protests with the boards of elections in 20 counties against the petitions that would place the proposed TEL (Tax and Expenditure Limitation) amendment on the November ballot. The protests cite specific defects in the petitions. Meanwhile, as the petition review work continues, local governments are organizing to oppose the amendment. The TEL is patterned after a Colorado spending limit known as TABOR (so-called Taxpayer Bill of Rights) and is a flawed attempt to control government spending by formula. More information is on the web site, www.ohiosfuture.org.

GUN CONTROL

HB 347, Concealed Handguns, passed the House on March 8 by a vote of 76-19. The bill revised concealed carry laws to make them less stringent, and preempted from municipalities their right to regulate the possession, sale, purchase, transfer or acquisition of firearms. LWVO opposed this preemption. The bill is now in the Senate

Judiciary-Criminal Justice Committee. On March 15, an amendment to HB 9, the public records bill, was passed in the House that will bar journalists from access to lists of concealed carry registrants. HB 9 now moves to the Senate; if the amendment stands, the governor is expected to veto the bill.

HEALTH CARE

HB 506, Health Savings Accounts, was introduced in February to offer high-deductible medical plans to state and local government employees, as a means of controlling health care costs. This bill would be the wedge used to expand market-driven health plans in Ohio. However, LWVO expects to oppose the bill: little information about price and quality is available to aid consumers in making health care decisions, and the plans tend to draw the wealthier and healthier employees away from traditional coverage, undermining traditional employer-based health care coverage.

If you would like to receive e-mail action alerts on pending legislation and/or monthly updates on the status of legislation while the legislature is in session, just send a request to leg@lwvohio.org.

New Grant Announcement - see Page 5

Make Your Voice Heard! Prevention First Lobby Day to be May 10

A first-ever lobby day to promote legislation that prevents unintended pregnancies will be held in Columbus on Wednesday, May 10. The event is sponsored by Freedom of Choice Ohio (FOCO), with member organizations Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Ohio and NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio taking the lead. Rep. Joyce Beatty, Ohio House Minority Leader, will be a guest speaker. Advocacy training will be included in the day's program.

We will ask our legislators to put prevention first by:

- Restoring state family planning funding,
- Funding comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education,
- Establishing contraceptive equity,

- Recognizing a pharmacist's duty to fill lawful prescriptions for birth control,
- Promoting proven teenage pregnancy prevention programs, and
- Supporting access to emergency contraception.

Registration cost, which includes lunch, is \$10 before April 14 and \$15 after that date. The registration form may be downloaded from the LWVO web site, www.lwvohio.org., and mailed with payment to Freedom of Choice Ohio, 35 E. Gay St., Suite 400, Columbus, OH 43215. We encourage early registration to help in scheduling appointments with legislators.

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Articles from OHIO VOTER may be reprinted only in full and with complete acknowledgement of the League of Women Voters of Ohio.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

For membership information, call (614) 469-1505, e-mail membership@lwvohio.org, or visit us on the Web at www.lwvohio.org.

FEBRUARY CONFERENCE CALLS: Full of Possibilities

As I watched the clock for the appropriate hour, finished some chores, took out my notes, and sat down at the phone, I needed no car keys, no special clothing, and no battle with the elements. And that, folks, is a conference call. How convenient and how very satisfying.

It was the Member Services Committee's response to the traditional Regional Meetings. Several local Leagues either did not respond to our request or responded that they would not participate. As we called them and spoke of the benefits and energy that would result from this call, many opted to join us – and

then thanked us for our persistence. Sixteen Leagues participated out of a total of thirty-six. We'll catch you on the next go 'round.

So what does the future hold for this method of communication? Yes, there is a benefit to face-to-face contact; yes, there is a transfer of energy amongst people in the same room; and yes, there is the concern of losing our personal relationships. But, we were able to have a dialogue with leaders from similar sized Leagues, even though the distances between them were daunting. And, we generated energy and enthusiasm amongst the participants.

Bur for now, let us fast forward. Perhaps we can have a conference call with our state legislators and express our priorities, encourage our Assembly members, and support our positions. Since Unit Meetings appear to be diminishing, consider a conference call to report on a project of interest to your local members. Legislative interviews: a conference call with a candidate to be interviewed by members of a region that encompasses the legislator's district. This would allow League members from several counties to interview the legislator with an emphasis on the specifics of their individual region.

Do the benefits outweigh the disadvantages? As one of the facilitators on the Member Services Conference Calls, I would say a resounding "yes." So grab your house slippers and jammies, and join the group for another invigorating League meeting.

Four teleconferences were held during February with local League membership chairs, in place of the regional meetings held in November of the last several years. More teleconferences are planned. Stay tuned!

FIRST PERSON

Vivienne Himmell

LWVO Board

*Member Services
Committee*

From the Co-Presidents' Desk

Spark Plug Problems?

Spark plugs don't exactly evoke the image of high technology, but they are critical. If they are not present under the hood of your new, technology-laden car, your car will not run swiftly down the highway; it will sit in your garage.

We see each of you as a spark plug in the League of Women Voters vehicle. To push this metaphor, what kind of a spark plug are you? New, well functioning? Fouled through disuse? Are you lacking other spark plugs in your car (League)?

The point we are making, of course, is that good things happen only if there is someone (a spark plug) with a keen interest who makes it happen, attracts others to their cause, allows the issue to run and pick up speed, and steers the effort to a successful outcome.

The League has issues – redistricting, school funding, sustainable development, election reform. The more involved members we have, the more deeply we can understand and take action on issues dear to our hearts.

Our local Leagues already provide us with many engaged members, and we have plans that will give all of them a workout! The front page article, *We Can Only Care About What We Know*, will give you a taste of what's to come.

As part of our strategy to win foundation funding, Linda and Jerolyn recently attended the Midwest Democracy Collaborative Meeting in Chicago sponsored by the Joyce Foundation. They report that the advantage the League gains by being a grassroots-driven organization was readily seen by the other participants. The League has depth, which allows us to communicate quickly and mobilize to take action statewide.

When the Town Hall Meetings described elsewhere in this Voter occur across the state next fall, the League will be noticed. We plan to help Leagues capitalize on the opportunities these meetings will provide to attract new members. A larger membership will surely bring us more spark plugs, which in turn will help the League increase its influence.

Your state League is on the move. If you are a spark plug fouled by disuse, we invite you to action. Stay tuned, please.



Linda and Jerolyn

Give your League LEGS!

Lead—Engage—Grow—Succeed

is the theme of LWVO Council 2006 and the second ever President Training. Please mark your calendars for May 5-6, 2006 and plan to be at the Sheraton Suites in Columbus, Ohio for these events. Each local League that has paid at least three quarters of its 2005-06 Ohio PMP is entitled to send two delegates, (the President or alternate, and one other delegate) to Council. The Call to Council, complete with Agenda, proposed budget, registration form and map will be mailed to local League Presidents in April.



THE SCHEDULE

The weekend is structured so that President Training participants may also be one of the two Council delegates. All Council delegates are encouraged to participate in President Training workshops on Saturday.

In response to local League needs, there will be workshops for new, veteran, and in-the-wings presidents and leaders to learn and share knowledge. There will be multiple opportunities to talk with and discuss issues with the members of the LWVO Board.

The schedule calls for presidents to arrive on Friday for dinner, an evening training session, and stay through late afternoon on Saturday.

Overnight accommodations and meals for one local representative to the President Training will be paid for by LWVO.

COUNCIL

The **Council business session** will take place on Saturday.

During Council sessions there will be updates on some of the current activities of LWVO, including the historic election reform lawsuit, plans for Fall 2006 statewide election voter service, and Fall 2006 Town Hall Meetings. Saturday workshops are available to all Council attendees, not just those present for President Training.

PRESIDENT TRAINING

The **President Training** workshops are scheduled for Friday evening, and before and after the business session on Saturday.

During the President Training sessions on Friday evening and Saturday, the attendees will hear from the three major LWVO Board committees—Development, Advocacy and Citizen Education, and Member Services. There will be finance training offered, including local League fiduciary responsibilities and using education fund resources to best advantage. Statewide membership goals and partnership opportunities in membership with LWVO will be explored. **The essentials for local study and advocacy, which can energize a local League, will also be a topic. Both novice and experienced Internet users will learn how to explore the possibilities of both the LWVUS and LWVO web sites.**

VALUE ADDED BENEFITS

In between the nuts and bolts sorts of topics will be activities to “meet and greet” and get to know each other better. The LWVO staff of Jerolyn Barbee, Lisa Hall, and Mary Cannon will be there, and this will be a time to put the voice from the telephone or the message from the email together with a friendly face. With an overnight type of schedule, participants will have the time to see each other and get to know other leaders or “soon to be” leaders of Ohio Leagues in a more comfortable and relaxed atmosphere.

Lead—Engage Grow—Succeed

Does your League's program have LEGS?

**Will your community
run with your issues?**

**The Council Planning Committee
wants to see you at Council !**

**May 5 - 6, 2006
Sheraton Suites, Columbus**

The Council Planning Committee of Nike Mendenhall, Ardith Keck, Vicki Ewald, and Chris Driver have a goal that this event will weave together business, training, relaxation, and friendship

Council comes in between LWVO conventions, and offers an opportunity for a statewide gathering of local representatives to focus on the needs and goals of the organization. The most immediate piece of business to decide is the LWVO budget for the next year. There is a saying that the budget and finances of an organization really show where its priorities and commitments are. Sometimes the talk of numbers and budgets may cause anxiety (or boredom). ***But this is the time when the League shows its grassroots origins, and depends on the local Leagues to be a part of the discussion and commitment; the local League delegates, not the LWVO Board, approve the LWVO budget.***

LWVO Awarded LWVEF Grant

Public Advocacy for Voter Protection Project Funded

LWVO has been awarded an \$8,000 grant from the national League of Women Voters Education Fund for a year-long program of state advocacy intended **to prevent the disenfranchisement of eligible citizens, particularly underserved populations.**

LWVO will focus on problems that may occur through inadequate management of the statewide voter registration database, and on voter education in minority communities.

Project co-coordinators will be **Roslyn Talerico** and **Norman Robbins**, who have extensive experience in this area through their work with the Greater Cleveland Voter Coalition.

Armchair Conventioneering

LWVUS Introduces New Convention Idea

You may want to sign up for the Convention Discussion List, where all League members, regardless of whether or not they plan to attend LWVUS Convention (June 10-13 in Minneapolis, MN), will be able to learn more about all aspects of Convention, including the Program Planning process. *The interactive Convention List began on March 1 and will continue through the Convention to allow discussions on any convention issue, including recommended and not-recommended program items - the results of the local and state Leagues' program planning meetings; and LWVUS budget and per member payment (PMP) assessments, etc.* The discussion list will give you an opportunity to lobby other Leagues to support your issue, giving Ohio's delegation a leg up during convention debates.

**To join/subscribe the lww-convention list
send an e-mail to:**

subscribe-lww-convention@lists.lww.org.
Carolee Mullan is the Moderator.

Town Hall continued from front page.

Second, LWVO will provide materials and train local Leagues to frame an engaging, interactive dialogue on political reform issues with the Town Hall meeting audience. All attendees will be able to broaden their knowledge of redistricting and other key political reform issues such as campaign finance and election reform.

Ohio is well positioned for a change in the way it draws legislative district boundaries following each census (i.e., redistricting) because both political parties believe the current system needs to be improved. Competitive elections are becoming shockingly rare because gerrymandering has rendered most districts safe seats for one party or the other. Only an informed electorate will be willing to adopt change, and *only an informed electorate will be able to choose change that is in the best interests of the voters, not the best interests of the people for whom they vote.* We want these stakeholders to do just that.

LWVOEF is asking local Leagues to save a date in September! And start thinking about who should be honored in your community.

Important Information for Local Leagues Throughout Ohio

As indicated on the front page of this newsletter, a Clever Plan plus Money– Flash for Fall '06: LWVO is in serious negotiation **with funders to underwrite Town Hall meetings across the state** this fall. Local Leagues can definitely benefit from this clever project with its interactive elements, ideas for honorees, dedicated web site, DVD, and take-home packets.

A final answer to the proposal is expected after the Voter goes to press. However, the time to start planning is now! *We hope every League in Ohio will save a date in September or early October to host a Town Hall Meeting.*

Leagues will not only get integrated ideas and professionally produced materials for a Town Hall meeting– that's what the funders are looking for. *Heightened community visibility and membership recruitment possibilities will be on the front burner as well. We won't let all those non-League participants attending the meetings and opening the web site slip through our fingers without a fight!*

Leagues hosting at least one Town Hall meeting according to the format received, may even have their event covered by the local news. **More detailed information will be available by Council and Presidents' Training on May 6.**

Voting continued from front page.

2. A qualified Ohio voter does not have to state a reason to vote by an absentee ballot, although the ballot must be applied for in writing.

All of the details can be found on the Secretary of State web site.

3. First-time voters may need to provide one of the listed types of identification listed on the Secretary of State web site.

This is another item that may or not be included on local Boards of Election web sites. The "Voter Information Guide" on the Secretary of State web site has the correct information.

For further information, including additional identification requirements, contact your local Board of Elections by phone or visit the web site of the Secretary of State.

4. The "Voter Information Guide" on the Secretary of State's web site will not reflect HB 3 changes until June.

The excerpt from the web site reads:

"This Voter Information Guide contains statutory changes effective through January 27, 2006. However, Amended Substitute House Bill 3 will change several of the requirements listed in this Guide. Therefore, effective May 2, 2006, this Guide will not contain all current information and users should refer to the provisions of Amended Substitute House Bill 3 for complete information. Please re-visit this web site for the updated 2006 Voter Information Guide in June."

As of press time, there is no live link to the legislation. It is not easy to find. The League is very concerned that voters are being asked to refer to a document that is nearly 500 pages long, which, when found, is difficult at best to decipher.

5. HB 3 requirements applicable prior to June 1, 2006 have to do with Provisional ballots.

- *Mandates, for the May 2, 2006, primary election and for any special election conducted on that day, that provisional ballots meeting the requirements of federal law be made available to all voters for state and local elections (offices, questions, and issues) as if the ballots for those elections were ballots for an election for federal office (Section 9(B) of the act).*
- *Mandates, that for the May 2, 2006, primary election, that provisional ballots meeting the requirements of federal law be made available to all voters for an election for federal office (Section 9(C) of the act).*

The Next Secretary of State: What Concerns Loom Large?

The League of Women Voters of Ohio has put tremendous effort into trying to encourage substantive election reform. While the League lauded the intent of legislators to enact reform with the recently passed election reform legislation, HB 3, there remain **serious concerns**.

In an effort to keep election reform issues at the forefront with candidates for the office of Secretary of State, the League **composed an open letter** to the candidates and we have also sent the letter to the press.

We know that current laws already require some of these provisions, but they have often lacked proper enforcement.

As they campaign for the office of Secretary of State, the chief elections officer of Ohio, the League is asking each candidate to commit to the following programs for reform, for legislative initiatives, and for improved procedures.

They are essential for the administration of fair, honest, and efficient elections, and for repairing the damage done to Ohio's reputation in recent elections.

Here are excerpts from the letter –

The complete letter is available on the League web site in the Advocacy Section: www.lwvohio.org

Voter Education. More complete information must be made available to all prospective and registered voters.

Poll worker Training. Voters need to know how the state will **ensure that training and state-mandated procedures are consistent** in all Ohio counties.

Boards of Elections. Voters need to know how each candidate for the office of Secretary of State plans to **improve the working relationship** between the Secretary of State's office and the Boards of Elections.

Redistricting. The Secretary of State **must promote a nonpartisan redistricting process**.

Electronic Voting. All voting devices must be secure, accurate, recountable, and accessible. Hand counts of random precincts for random contests **should be required** as part of the official canvass at every election in order to check the accuracy of the machine count.

It is vital that all other provisions dealing with elections should be revisited to see if they can be modified to encourage voting rather than to restrict it.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio hopes that all of the issues highlighted in our letter are fully explored by the candidates for Secretary of State during their campaigns.

On the Road Cuba's Health Care System

by Ardith Keck

The government of the United States has made it more and more difficult to go to Cuba. Perhaps that is why so many Americans want to go there. It is off-limits to most



of us, but the Treasury Department allows travel for religious, research or journalism purposes. My husband is a "medical research" person and I, a "journalist," so we legally fly from Miami to Havana.

Most of our time there is spent researching the excellent Cuban health care system, which is free to all Cubans, providing a community-based doctor and nurse for each 700 persons. Beyond that, there are consults with specialists when needed, and transplant and surgery referral centers in Havana and elsewhere.

Some medicines are limited, however, and that is partially caused by the US embargo. Cuba earns hard currency through medical tourism, especially Latin Americans. A largely unknown part of Fidel's plan is The Latin American Medical School of 10,000 students. Specifically, a developing country sends the student, pays only for his/her transportation with the promise that she will return to her home country to practice medicine, and Cuba will do the rest free of charge. They have now had their first graduated class from that school and it remains to be seen in years to come what the economic, social, and political impact of more well-trained doctors will be in the developing world. We now have 65 US students from underserved areas studying medicine there.

Life in Cuba is difficult. Money and consumer goods are relatively scarce and some would argue that the freedom to speak out against the government is limited, along with other freedoms. True enough, but the joy of free health care and educational opportunity make living in Cuba much easier.

Ardith Keck is a member of the LWVO Board and hosts a local television and radio show called "Civic Forum of the Air."

Late breaking news!!

The Discovery Stay on our election reform lawsuit has been lifted. More information will be coming in the 2nd and 4th Wednesday Presidential Updates.

Important Dates to Mark on Your Calendar

- May 2 Primary Election
May 5 - 6 LWVO Council and President Training
May 10 Prevention First Lobby Day
June 10 -13 LWVUS Convention
Fall 2006 Town Hall Meetings
October 10 Voter Registration Ends for General Election
November 7 General Election Day

State Board Visits to Local Leagues

Please invite Linda Lalley or Carol Gibson, LWVO Co-Presidents, to speak at one of your upcoming League meetings over the next year. Obviously they will be able to accept only a limited number of dates, but other state board members and lobbyists are willing to go out and speak as well. Who speaks might be determined by what your members are most interested in hearing. Please contact Jerolyn Barbee, Executive Director, with requests, at: (877) 598-6446, or, jbarbee@lwvohio.org

To become a member of the League of Women Voters of Ohio, call: (877) LWV-OHIO (598-6446) or visit our web site: www.lwvohio.org

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www.lwvohio.org (877) LWV-OHIO (598-6446)

- OFFICERS & DIRECTORS: Carol Gibson & Linda D. Lalley Co-Presidents; Rosanne Thomas Vice President/Development Committee Chair; Karen Rainey Vice President/Legislative Director; Bonnie App Secretary/Advocacy & Citizen Education Chair; Deborah Schmieding Treasurer; Donna Marie Lissing Jones Member Services Committee Chair; Vicki Ewald • Chris Driver • Meg Flack Perrysburg Area Hudson Metro Columbus; Vivienne Himmell • Ardith Keck Greater Dayton Area Akron Area; Mike Mendenhall • Nina Sabrack Cincinnati Areas Toledo-Lucas County; STAFF: Jerolyn Barbee Executive Director; Mary Cannon Office Manager; Lisa Fry Hall Membership Manager; Paul Fishel Contract Accountant

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