



The Houston *VOTER*

League of Women Voters® – Houston Area

February 2012

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Privatization: Boon or Bane?

Thursday, March 8, 2012

5:30 p.m. Registration & Refreshments

Brownbag if you like.

6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Program

Sosa Community Center
1414 Wirt Road, Houston 77055

Featuring

Gregg Phillips, former Executive Director for
Programming Services at Texas HHS.

Representatives from
City of Houston,
Houston Zoo, and
Houston Organization of Public Employees

City Budget Seminar

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

5:30 p.m. Registration & Refreshments

Brownbag if you like.

6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Program

Sosa Community Center
1414 Wirt Road, Houston 77055

RSVPs are encouraged. Call 713.784.2923
or email lwv@lwvhouston.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Linda Cohn

Election Season 2012

First, there's the headcount. A census once every ten years, just as the U. S. Constitution requires. We took care of that on April 1, 2010.

Next, there's the tally. On April 1, 2010, we were a nation of 308,745,538 individuals, 25,145,561 of whom called Texas their home. Done.

Now divvy up all 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives so that each state will send a delegation proportionate to its population. Texas, a mighty population powerhouse, gets 36 seats. That's four more than last time. Rather nice, don't you think?

And so in 2011 the Texas Legislature crafted a map dividing the state into 36 geographic districts, with one U. S. Representative to be elected by the voters of each district during the primary and general elections of 2012. Texas legislative and Texas State Board of Education Districts were also redrawn to reflect population shifts, just in time for election season 2012.

All set? Nope. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 demands that the U.S. Department of Justice supervise every element of the election process in Texas. Every proposed change – and new representation districts amount to one heck of a proposed change – must be approved by the Justice Department or a federal court to affirm that no racially discriminatory intent is served.

I write this note on February 1, 2012. Decisions are pending. There are no certain primary election dates; some prospective candidates cannot be sure what district they would represent; no ballots and no new voter registration certificates can be generated. Our *Voters Guide* team stands ready with a rapid response plan as well.

Perhaps by the time we go to press all will be settled. If that's the case, please think of this note as testimony to how hard we Americans try to get it right. And if things sometimes become a little clumsy, well, we'll handle that too.

Call to State Convention

The Houston Area League can send as many as 25 members to be delegates to the Texas League convention. The convention runs from noon Friday, April 13 through Sunday, April 16, 2012, at the Hilton San Antonio Airport on NW 410 Loop. The room rate is \$104 (plus tax) and includes parking and breakfast. The main plenary session occurs on Saturday morning and the final plenary occurs on Sunday morning. Workshops will be held on Friday afternoon.

All Leaguers are welcome to attend. If you would like to be an official LWV Houston Area delegate with voting privileges, please contact the office at 713.784.2923 or email president@lwvhouston.org.

Hotel reservations using the group rate are available only through March 13, 2012. Make hotel reservations by phone (1-888-728-3031), or www.hiltonsanantonioap.com. Give our convention code LWV.

LWV Texas Board Recommends Human Trafficking Study

We are pleased to report that the LWV-TX Board of Directors has endorsed our proposal for a statewide study on human trafficking. Convention delegates will decide whether to adopt the study.

The proposed scope of study: To establish a state position on human trafficking that considers state and local policies as well as the public's role in abating human trafficking. The state study is to focus on these questions: (1) Understand what human trafficking is; (2) Consider its extent in Texas; (3) Explore how to reduce its occurrence, including considering state and local laws and their enforcement; (4) Assess the components of social services for victims to rescue and restore their lives.

The Houston League's 2010 study on human trafficking was chaired by Laura Blackburn and assisted by Penny Milbourn and Ann Herbage. Penny and Ann worked to secure support from other local leagues. Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Montgomery County, San Antonio, and Tarrant County Leagues joined Houston to recommend the study.

March Programs Focus on Privatization of Government Services

By Judy Hollinger

In cooperation with LWVUS, a local League task force has prepared a *Facts and Issues* paper to guide March Unit consensus discussions and a Focus on Issues program with a local angle to the issue.

Privatization of government services is a controversial issue, introduced at all levels of government primarily with the goal of saving money and/or improving efficiency. Unfortunately, there seems to be no definitive way to determine if such a move is a success or a failure. Opponents cite this difficulty as a disadvantage of privatization. They also point to issues of transparency, a negative impact on government employees, and the long-term interest of the public.

The decision to privatize is a complex undertaking that requires a major commitment of resources. It involves careful definition of the goals to be achieved, assurance that all efficiencies have been implemented with the existing service model, evaluation of the "market place" served to assure a fair and competitive selection of the vendor, expert contract negotiation, and a thorough understanding of the potential impacts on those served. Most important, the process requires transparency, oversight and ongoing communication with stakeholders to understand their concerns about privatization. (See *Strategies for Best Practice*, Cathy Lazarus, LWVCA, and Ted Volskay, LWVSC.)

The *Facts and Issues* outlines the advantages and disadvantages of privatization with a look at best practices for evaluating a proposal and includes two case studies—the Houston Zoo and the Texas Health and Human Services Call Center. Our speakers on March 8 (see page 1) will highlight the pros and cons and describe the experience of the two case studies.

The program begins at 6:00 p.m. at the Sosa Community Center, 1414 Wirt Road, Houston, Texas, 77055. Light refreshments will be served, but brownbag if you are hungry.

March units will answer consensus questions for the national study.

LWVUS background papers are available from the [lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) website. You can read about privatization at the federal level <http://www.lwv.org/content/federal-privatization-ryan-plan>; a survey of state laws <http://www.lwv.org/content/surveying-state-laws-addressing-privatization>; and a summary of the public policy debate <http://www.lwv.org/content/privatization-public-policy-debate>.

A Repast With Political Pioneers XI

BENEFITING
The League of Women Voters of Houston Education Fund



Anne Clutterbuck

**Honoring
The Honorable Anne
Clutterbuck
And
The Honorable Sue
Lovell**



Sue Lovell

Friday, February 24, 2012
Registration 12:00 – 12:30 p.m.
Lunch & Program – 12:30 – 2 p.m.

Four Seasons Hotel
1300 Lamar Street (downtown)
Houston, Texas 77010

This is Go Texan Day in Houston!
Stylish Western Wear Encouraged.

Along with your two-course luncheon, you will enjoy an insightful and lively discussion facilitated by Ernie Manouse, whose award-winning program, InnerVIEWS, airs on 80 public television stations throughout the country.



Ernie Manouse of PBS

Table Sponsorships: \$5,000 Underwriter; \$2,500 Leader; \$1,800 Partner
LWV Houston Unit Table \$1,000

For table sponsorships or to purchase 10 or more tickets, please call 713.784.2923

Individual Tickets:

President's Table Preferred Seating \$250
General Pubic Open Seating \$100
League Members and their Guests Open Seating \$75.00

To purchase tickets online, visit: <http://lwvhouston.org/html/repast.html>

Your *Voters Key* included with this *VOTER* is an annual publication of the League of Women Voters Houston Education Fund. Volunteers Marlene Cohn, Judy Viebig and Marcia Miqueloto researched, created, and proofed this important directory of elected officials. A more complete list that includes local judges and boards of education will be available online at lwvhouston.org.

The directory is in English and Spanish.

When you share your *Voters Key* with a concerned voter, be sure to ask that citizen to join the League.



LWVUS Board Sets Legislative Priorities for 2012

The LWVUS Board established the following as its Legislative Priorities for 2012: Voter protection, campaign finance reform, environmental defense, and health care defense. In addition, these items were included on the LWVUS Watch List for 2012: fair taxation, CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), U.N. support and immigration. Items on the Watch List will be acted upon only if the opportunity arises for League action, it appears the LWVUS can make an impact, and doing so does not interfere with action on a LWVUS priority.

The Board considered many issues and the responses from members suggesting Legislative Priorities. The decisions were based on what issues are likely to come before the 112th Congress, the opportunities to make an impact, program decisions made by members at the last Convention, member interest, and resources available to manage these priorities effectively. The Board reviews these priorities throughout the year, making changes if necessary.

Welcome to the League!

The Houston Area League welcomes the following new members:

Veronica & Robert Chapa-Jones
Joan Perry
Coyia Richter
Karin Shipman
Nita Gilbert
Markey Deborah
Kristen Capps
Carl Materson
Karen Overton

All new members are encouraged to attend a unit meeting convenient to them so that we can give you our in-person welcome.

Lifetime member Elizabeth (Betty Jane) Baker died January 1, 2012. Ms. Baker joined the League of Women Voters in 1956. Her 1965 Harris County poll tax receipt is used in our voter education efforts.

Watch League TV

Your local League partners with Houston MediaSource TV to present "LWV - Houston Roundtable Conversations." Most programs are aired live on the first Thursday of each month from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., and then rebroadcast. Houston MediaSource TV is available on Comcast Cable Channel 17, ATT U-Verse 99, TVMax 95, Sudden Link 99, Phonoscope 75, and live-stream at www.hmstv.org. The next show will be March 1, 2012. Programs are also available to download from lwvhouston.org.

Keep an eye out for our public service announcement about Texas Voter Photo ID.

On February 2, Sonya Aston, Assistant Election Administrator under Harris County Clerk Stan Stanart, discussed the voting process, early voting, provisional ballots and the challenges in preparing for an election as courts decide redistricting issues.

The January program featured LWV-HA Advocacy Vice President Laura Blackburn, who moderated a discussion about Air Quality. Matt Tejada of Air Alliance Houston; Austin attorney Chris Thiele; Larry Soward, a former commissioner at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality; and Elena Craft of the Environmental Defense Fund were distinguished guests.

Think you know which parts of town typically have the highest ozone levels? No, it is not the East End or the ship channel. The soccer fields of suburbia are more likely to merit our infamous ozone alerts. Tune in to learn more.

It is not too early to think AUCTION!

Ann Wood is coordinating the Silent Auction that traditionally accompanies our annual meeting set for May 10, 2012. This year League members are encouraged to offer the bounty of their unique talents in addition to the customary goods, tickets, or services. Think creatively and have fun! Proceeds will benefit the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area. See the donation form below for more information.

Donation Form May 10, 2012

Silent Auction

Benefiting the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area, a 501(c) (4) nonprofit organization

Donor Name: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone # _____ Address: _____

Item description: _____

Estimated value: \$ _____

Comments*: _____

Contribution in lieu of auction item: \$ _____

Please note: To maintain our strict nonpartisan policies, we are unable to auction items autographed by office holders or candidates. Donors are identified on the bid sheets. Contributions to the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area are not tax deductible.

Mail this form to P.O. Box 10633, Houston, TX 77026.

* Comments can include requests to have the item picked up by a volunteer, express your intent to deliver the item to the League Office or to bring the item on May 10, 2012 to the Annual Meeting. If using email, please include all requested information.

Federal Human Trafficking Bills Stall in Committee

By Penny Milbourn

The 112th Congress is considering 38 bills relating to human trafficking, but has passed no new laws. The most important bill is the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2011. It is still in committee and only a few of its components would be funded in the appropriations act passed December 23, 2011. Less than \$10 million was authorized through September 2014. Another appropriations bill would provide about \$36 million to combat “gender-based violence and trafficking in persons” through training programs for foreign police, the judiciary, and military personnel.

Volunteer Opportunity

WANTED - Volunteers to help with Printing and Distribution of Primary Election *Voters Guides*. This is a short-term commitment! The project lasts two or three weeks. Please contact Jackie Alfred at 281.531.7298 or jaalfred@flash.net if you can help.

Nominating Committee Update

The Nominating Committee is in the process of filling board and officer appointments for the upcoming 2012-2013 year. If you would like to serve on the board or would like to suggest that someone be on the board, please contact Nancy Parra at nparra@parradesigngroup.com.

NOTE: Election Dates and associated deadlines may change by court order. Watch the news!

- Feb. 21 LWVUS Webinar on convention
- Feb. 24 Repast With Political Pioneers XI
- Feb. 27 Board Reports Due
- March 2 Board meetings (10:00 a.m. League Office)
- March 5 Last Day to Register to Vote (Assuming April 3 Primaries)
- March 8 Focus on Issues: Privatization
- March 13 Unit Discussion Leader Briefing
- March 19 Early Voting in Person Begins



- March 21 VOTER copy deadlines (Including Annual Meeting Information & Nominations)
- April 3 Texas Primaries (Tentative)
- April 4 Focus on Issues: City Budget
- April 13 – 15 LWV Texas Convention San Antonio Airport Hilton
- May 10 LWV Houston Area Annual Meeting

Spring Program Changes

The subject matter for unit discussions has changed. In February we will discuss the State Board of Education. In March we take consensus on Privatization. In April we discuss the Houston City Budget.

The local study on increasing Harris County voter participation was stymied by the discovery that the principle methods of improving participation are all dictated by state election laws. No local study report or program is planned. The committee met with Harris County election officials to advocate for a shift of some voting hours to later on Saturdays and Sundays. Our suggestions have not yet resulted in change. It often takes years of effort before League priorities are adopted.

Voter Photo ID was to be the topic for April Units, but the new law is not yet in force because the Justice Department has not yet ruled on Voting Rights Act Section 5 preclearance. The Justice Department declined to preclear a similar statute in South Carolina. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott has predicted the same result for Texas and has already sought judicial relief. Odds are that we will still be waiting in April to know what voters will need to bring to the polls for the 2012 primaries and general elections.

Program Vice President Jan Wilbur has put together two great committees to provide discussion materials for February and April units.

The Houston VOTER is published five times per year by the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area. This newsletter is provided as part of yearly membership dues.

Linda Cohn – President
Christina Gorczynski – Executive Director
Leslie C. Taylor – Editor
Penny Milbourn – Editor

League of Women Voters of the Houston Area
4100 N. Shepherd Dr., Suite 213
Houston, TX 77018
713.784.2923 FAX 713.784.2984

Website www.lwvhouston.org
Email lwv@lwvhouston.org



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).

Disclaimer: This edition contains links to websites that are not under the control of LWV-Houston. We have no control over the nature, content, and availability of those sites. The inclusion of any links does not necessarily imply a recommendation or endorsement of the views expressed within them.

City of Houston Budget: Where Has all the Money Gone?

By Jan Wilbur

Mark your calendar right now for the League's April 4 meeting on Houston's finances. It will be at Sosa Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, 5:30p.m. Refreshments and sign in and 6:00 – 7:30p.m. program. In the last fiscal year, the city closed eight swimming pools and seven community centers, pulled funding from three health centers, reduced library hours and still had to lay off 747 employees. This year a \$115 million shortfall is already being projected. This does not even take into account the \$5 billion in future pension costs for which the city has not set aside funds. Hard choices will have to be made that will affect the quality of life and fiscal health of this city for years to come. Please come and bring your friends and neighbors.

Monthly Unit Meetings

Unit meetings are open to all League members and guests.

THIRD MONDAY

City Wide Evening Unit

Feb. 20, 2012, 6:00 p.m.

March 19, 2012, 6:00 p.m.

April 16, 2012, 6:00 p.m.

Black Lab Pub, 4100 Montrose

Jackie Friedman 713.521.0702

friedmanjj@aol.com

West Harris County

Feb. 20, 2012, 1:30 p.m.

March 19, 2012, 1:30 p.m.

April 16, 2012, 1:30 p.m.

Eagles Trace Unit PW 117

Call Joan Golding for gate access

281.596.0935

THIRD TUESDAY

Spring Branch Unit

Feb. 21, 2012, 9:30 a.m.

March 20, 2012, 9:30 a.m...

April 17, 2012 9:30 a.m.

The Buckingham, 4th Floor,

8580 Woodway

Ellen Goins 281.496.9344

ellen_goins@yahoo.com

THIRD THURSDAY

Southwest Day

Feb. 16, 2012, 1:00 p.m.

March 15, 2011, 1:00 p.m.

April 19, 2012, 1:00 p.m.

Rhoda Haddox 713.667.5952

Midwest Unit

Feb. 16, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

March 15, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

April 19, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

Gerald Womack Building,

4412 Almeda

millieKBW@aol.com

**Want a unit more
convenient to you?
Call 832-868-9925**