

The Houston VOTER

League of Women Voters-Houston Area • September/October 2009

September General Meeting

A Focus on Ethics

Friday • September 11

11:30 to 1:00

Hess Club, 5430 Westheimer

Speaker:

Hon. Ed Emmett

Harris County Judge

Luncheon • \$30

Deadline is September 8

Send a check

or call the office with your credit card

President's Message

By Nancy Parra

Our summer events, a visit to the Willow Water Hole and a tour of the Election Administration Offices, were well attended and very informative. It's now time to get ready for our fall activities.

We have an exciting program planned for September; Judge Emmett will speak on Ethics in Government, which he has been very active in promoting. In October, we will revisit Voter Participation as part of the LWV-TX concurrence on ways to increase voter turnout.

The Voter's Guide for the Mayor, Comptroller, City Council, HISD and HCC races will be ready when early voting begins on October 19. The Voter's Guide Committee, chaired by Sherle Watson, has formulated the questions and is in the process of gathering responses from the candidates.

October should be an exciting month. Ann Wood and her committee are organizing Rally on the Green: Discovering Houston's Leadership, on October 4 at Discovery Green. The Rally will include Controller and Mayoral Candidate's Forums, a reception with the other city candidates, and a voter registration drive. I hope everyone participates in this fun and informative afternoon at Houston's downtown park.

Judy Hollinger, Sarah Schimmer, and Sherry Walshak have been working on the marketing sponsorship packages, and they are being mailed this month.

We have many exciting undertakings planned for the fall, and we need you to join in and help make them a success. This is a good time to get more involved with the League, whether volunteering to help with events, registering voters or attending our meetings and unit discussion groups.

I hope to see all of you at our many exciting activities in September and October. Get involved and participate!

October General Meeting

Increasing Voter Participation

Friday • October 9

11:30 to 1:00

Emerson UU Church, 1900 Bering Drive

September general meeting

A Focus on Ethics

We are fortunate to have Judge Ed Emmett for our kickoff September meeting. And, yes, the focus is ethics! The Houston LWV studied "Ethics in Local Government" in 2007 resulting in our consensus position of "Support of effective ethics regulation with strong enforcement." We have been fortunate to be a voice on the Citizens Task Force on Ethics established by Judge Emmett. We also lobbied at the Texas Legislature with Commissioner Sylvia Garcia for passage of a "revolving door" bill, which would have kept employees of the county from lobbying for the county for two years. Unfortunately, it was vetoed by Governor Perry.

Judge Emmett was successful in passing ethics reforms that could be instituted by the county without state laws having to be passed. The Houston League was also active in these discussions. Judge Emmett will tell us how these reforms are working.

Units, too, are on this topic. Be ready to discuss your views on ethics, from what makes government "ethical" to how we can improve. Join us for great discussions on this topic.

--Laura Blackburn

INSIDE

- Reduced VOTER Mailings
- Summer tour reports & pix
- Unit Meetings resume

... and more

The LWV-HA Observers

Houston City Council

Shirley Gibson Reporting

August 5

The Council session began with the City Controller's report on the monthly finances. Controller Parker reported that we had a short fall of \$24,000,000. Sales taxes are down due to the deficit. We are receiving more money from municipal courts. The projection is 4.8 million higher because of companies declaring bankruptcy. We are still holding our own in this recession.

Mayor White mentioned the trip he made to Washington DC so that we would begin to receive our FEMA money from hurricane Ike. He said that Washington would really hear him scream if we do not receive our money before another hurricane devastates us. He also said that we are going to have difficult years ahead all the way to 2012.

He noted that various council members want things like libraries to be built, but that we must conserve funds. He is having another financial report in September to go over the revenue to determine if these council members can have those things that their districts need.

Council Member Brown pointed out that the surplus funds since Mayor White's administration have increased three fold and he was pleased with Mayor White.

After the acceptance of the financial report Council Member Johnson announced that it was the birthday of Anna Russell where upon Anna received a small cake with candle. The council sang "Happy Birthday" to Anna.

There was a public hearing to consider the re-adoption of the ordinance regarding standards of care of Houston Youth Recreation Programs. There were no speakers but the city spoke to continue the Parks Department's Summer After School Enrichment Program. The council passed the ordinance.

The next item discussed was the ordinance approving agreement between the City of Houston and Sunnyside Place Community Development Corporation, Inc. to a performance based loan for the acquisition and rehabilitation of a 150-unit Apartment Complex known as Chateau Village Apartments located at 3815 West Fuqua in District D.

Council Member Sullivan said that in his district that there are several blighted apartment complexes that he would also like to get loans to either raze or improve them. He had asked to find out how to do this, but he is yet to hear. The Mayor said he should find out if the apartment units had storm issues first, then to ask for information. The issue was discussed and the ordinance passed.

The next ordinance was on hiring two legal firms for \$190,000 concerning employment policy recommendations associated with equal employment opportunity practices of the Houston Fire Department. There was discussion by those who felt that it was unnecessary to spend that much money. Some thought it was a good way to handle an already volatile situation. The ordinance passed with some abstentions.

County Commissioner's Court

Leslie Taylor Reporting

Those who want to know the details about any County Commissioner's Court meeting can get the agenda online at <http://www.co.harris.tx.us/agenda>.

On June 17, the commissioners first reviewed a report on Capital Improvements. Here are some highlights:

Port. The chairman of the Port of Houston Authority gave an annual status report. Houston's port has sustained the economic downturn well compared to other major ports. One reason is that Houston has business exporting as well as importing, while other ports are busier on exports than imports.

Parks. The county has 166 park sites on 26,296 acres of land. About half of the land needed for new parks in future years could be obtained through joint use of the acreage to be acquired by the Flood Control District for regional stormwater detention storage.

Family Law Center. Voters approved bond funding for a new family law center, but actual construction is a long way off. First, two buildings must be demolished and cleared. One now holds records for the County Clerk, District Attorney, and Information Technology. To relocate those records may take two years.

Jail. The jail population continues to increase. The county's jail system capacity is 9,337. A temporary variance allows an additional 2,064 temporary beds. So total capacity is 11,401, which is still inadequate. The county contracts with parishes in Louisiana to hold prisoners. At the July 14 commissioners' court meeting the court approved agreements to put even more prisoners in Louisiana through December 31, 2009 costing close to \$5 million.

In the June 17, 2009 regular meeting, the commissioners were presented with the preliminary findings of the Justice Management Institute, which reviewed the entire criminal justice system, including the jail overcrowding situation.

The July 14, 2009 meeting the commissioners approved acquisition of properties on behalf of the Flood Control District. Seventeen deferred down payment loans for low and moderate income homebuyers were approved. The county will partially fund development and construction costs for the Cypresswood Estates multi-family housing complex for seniors project on Kuykendahl Road in Precinct 4.

August 12

The Council Meeting began with Mayor White's report in which he asked a commission to be appointed to decide on term limits by the November Election. It would require a charter change. The Mayor chose this time since his term is up and he believes this is a good time to wrestle with the issue. He believes that the mayor and council should leave the city government in better shape that they found it.

The Mayor went on to say that he is in favor of deed restrictions and the prevention of flooding but he believes that there are natural disasters and that the city should allow a citizen to rebuild his house after the occurrence of

continued on page 4

League takes center stage for elections

Mark your calendars: Sunday, October 4, 2–5 p.m., at Discovery Green in downtown Houston, the Houston Area League of Women Voters Education Fund will present Rally on the Green: Discovering Houston's Leadership. This three-hour program will feature forums for both controller and mayoral candidates as well as provide a meet-and-greet for all city council, HCC, and HISD candidates. You do not want to miss this big event; big for our city and big for our League.

At 2 p.m. the day's event will commence with a Controller Candidate Forum. At 4 p.m. the candidates for Mayor will face off. Questions for both forums will be developed by the League and accepted from the public.

The Rally Candidate Reception at 3 p.m. will support citizens' efforts to connect with the women and men who would represent them in City Council, and on HCC and HISD Boards. For one hour on a Sunday afternoon in the park, candidates and citizens can meet and discuss their concerns while local high school musicians provide entertainment.

Discovery Green is a wonderful venue for this event and we can thank

Central Houston for underwriting the cost. We are also very excited to have KPRC Channel 2 on board as our media sponsor. Bill Balleza and a Leaguer will host the day's events and Channel 2 reporters will moderate the candidate forums. We will be actively seeking additional sponsors and community partners to broaden our audience and provide necessary funds and staff to make this both fun and informative for everyone who attends.

We also need all of our members to be involved. The Debate and Forum Committee is spear-heading the effort but many more hands will be needed to pull off this ambitious project. We need people to decorate the tables and stage area, organize candidate sign-in, serve as hosts greeting citizens, answering questions and handing out materials. We will also need a team to develop issues and questions for the 2 debates. This is going to be a fun event and we would like as many of our members to participate as possible. Please don't miss out on what promises to be a great day for our city and our League. Call or email Ann Wood, Chair of the committee, to get involved at 713-932-8233 or haaz@att.net.

Marketing Committee needs YOU!

The energetic and creative members of the Marketing Committee have come up with new sponsorship packages for 2009-2010 and other avenues to get out the League message to the community. To implement these wonderful plans, we need enthusiastic and outgoing members who will help in this effort. Training and materials provided. For more information contact Judy Hollinger 713-665-4458 or jbhol@hotmail.com

Fall Garage Sale

Mark your calendars for Saturday, November 14. The League is having a Fall Garage Sale on the parking lot of the office located at 4001 N. Shepherd from 9:00 A.M. until 2:00 P.M.

Start saving items that you will want to donate. Feel free to price them at the value that will bring in the most money for the League. Surely, there are many treasures that can be donated and very much appreciated by others.

We will be collecting the small items at the office the week of the sale and not before. Due to space restrictions, we are requesting that any large items be brought the morning of the sale.

There will be many volunteers needed to work the sale, so save the date and plan on being there. You will be greatly appreciated as always.

Look for further information to come in the weeks ahead.

Reduced Voter Mailings

Due to escalating costs for mailing and printing, we will be mailing the Voter every other month rather than monthly. The five Voters will be as follows: September/October; November/December; January/February; March/April; and May/June. Even though we will not be printing the Voter every month, we update the Voter on our website and will be sending more email reminders with information about upcoming events. If we don't have your email, be sure to send it to us at Secretary@lwvhouston.org.

Police Advisory Committee

by Barb Swartz

Meetings over the summer were mainly about the upcoming city budget. While seven training classes were scheduled for this fiscal year, only two were in the budget for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Chief Hurtt said he was hoping some stimulus money would enable them to have more classes. Recent reports show that this will not happen.

Violent crime is down ten percent this year, but property crime is up. The Police Department believes this is due to the economic turndown. The Chief urged all to be extra careful with locking cars and not leave items visible in parked cars.

We heard a presentation from Crime Stoppers of Houston, Inc. this is a private nonprofit organization that over the last 27 years has helped solve more than 17,000 felony crimes and assisted in the arrest of more than 20,000 felons. They have a 40 member volunteer Board of Directors from local corporations and private businesses. They also have a Safe School Program in over 200 middle and high schools in Harris County. They pay cash rewards for anonymous student tips that prevent or solve campus crimes.

Need instant information?

**Click on:
lwvhouston.org**

Concurrence on Voting Procedures

by Wayne Derrick

LWV of Texas has completed their study on Voting Procedures to Increase Voting Participation and is asking the local Leagues to participate in this important concurrence, which was adopted at the state convention in April, 2008. LWV-TX chose concurrence rather than consensus for this study because this is an update to the present Election Laws and Voting Rights position on the five topics under consideration.

LWV-TX wants to know how Leagues view the following five kinds of Voting Procedures to increase Voting Participation. They list five proposals for discussion: Vote by mail; Election Day registration, Election Day centralized voting, instant runoff voting, and Internet voting

Local Leagues are asked to hold meetings to discuss the concurrence statement, section-by-section between August and September. The Houston League will discuss the subject in October. In March 2010 the State board will reveal results from local Leagues across the state and announce the position.

Voter by mail: Oregon reduced cost of elections between 33 to 50% by conducting all votes by mail. Some states allow county option. This could apply to all elections within the county, or could be used for elections in which vote turnout is traditionally low. Washington

State has all counties except one voting only by mail. 28 states allow anyone to vote by mail with no excuse. A few states allow permanent registration, to vote all elections by mail, saving the trouble and expense of applying to vote by mail for each election.

Election Day registration is allowed by 9 states, and Minnesota has allowed it for 33 years.

Election Day centralized voting: Texas allows voters to vote at any early voting location, but on election day, voters must vote in one designated precinct. Many people work many miles from their homes, and may have moved to another area by election day. This causes significant problems, and lost votes.

Instant runoff: The individual votes rank the candidates in order of preference. If nobody gets a majority, the last choice candidate is eliminated. Those votes are distributed to the others. This saves the expense of a runoff election in which few people vote.

Internet voting allows voting by internet. At this time, some states allow internet voting by persons who are out of the US on election day.

Go to www.lwvtexas.org to download the Facts and Issues on each of these proposals. In addition, there are brief Summary Sheets on each of these topics.

City Council Observer

continued from page 2

fire or storms. He does not want the city government to kick a citizen in the teeth.

Council Member Adams tagged the ordinance about the demolition of property that is a blight on the neighborhood. She said that it is not that she is opposed but she has not been apprised of which property and how much we are spending for each piece of property. Council Member Johnson tried to explain that the piece of property depends on the lenders and legal action that will enable the city to demolish. The mayor said that he would get information to Council

Member Adams. He also said that the city needs criteria to trigger the reclamation. Council Member Jones said that the mayor had been trying to get rid of these blighted apartments build in the 70's for his entire terms of office. Council Member Wanda Adams tagged the ordinance because she was not sure the people concerned would be notified. Mayor White said that the way the citizenry is usually informed is by looking at the council agenda, an archaic method. We have to be able to get out the meeting dates some other way.

Next was an ordinance about increasing the rate for natural gas by 40 percent for residences. If no action

Congratulations!

The Department of Multicultural Services at Texas A&M University announced the recipients of the 2009 Diversity Awards. Included this year is a new award honoring civil rights pioneer and the grandmother of the transgender movement in America, Phyllis Frye who graduated from A&M in 1970 with a BS Degree in Civil Engineering and in 1971 with an MS Degree in Mechanical Engineering.

League member Maureen Mulrooney has also been honored. The Joe and Maureen Mulrooney Park was recently created in the Spring Branch area.



Special Tour

Fifteen LWV members were given a behind the scenes tour of voter registration and election administration in Harris County on August 6. Of particular interest was the up-to-date information about provisional balloting, vote by mail, voter registration processing, and the many steps involved in setting up an efficient and fair voting system. Even we "old hands" learned a lot of new facts!

Special thanks to Voter Registrar Leo Vasquez, Election Administrator John German and Marty Morrison for arranging it all.

is taken, the rate will automatically increase. Council member Jones wanted to know why just residences are involved. Jones was for suspending the rate increase. She wanted residents to be informed by meetings about the possible increase. This was tagged by Council Member Sullivan.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

| | |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sept. 4 | First day to request ballot by mail |
| Sept. 11 | General Meeting Ethics, 11:30 a.m. |
| Sept. 15-21 | Unit Meetings <i>Ethics Discussion</i> |
| Sept. 25 | Board Meeting 10 a.m., League Office |
| Sept. 30 | VOTER Deadline |
| Oct. 4 | Rally on the Green, 2-5 p.m. |
| Oct. 5 | Last day to register to vote |
| Oct. 9 | General Meeting Voter Participation |
| Oct. 14 | VOTER Mailing |
| Oct. 15-20 | Unit Meetings <i>Concurrence on Voter Participation</i> |
| Oct. 19 | First day for Early Voting |
| Oct. 23 | Board Meeting, 10 a.m., League Office |

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| Katherine Guenther | Mary N. Morgan |
| Barbara Swartz | Martha Selzman |
| Janell Baker | Ann Wier Jones |
| Mary B. Dyson | Ada Montare |
| Gwen Essinger | Marge O'Connor |
| Shirley Gibson | |

October General Meeting

Increasing Voter Participation

The October General monthly meeting of the League of Women Voters Houston Area will meet October 9th at Emerson UU Church, 1900 Bering Drive. The topic, Increasing Voter Participation, will be addressed by Wayne Derrick, member of the Board of Directors LWV-HA.

Registration at 11:00 a.m., box lunch served at 11:30, speakers at 12:00. Cost of lunch, \$10. Make pre-pay reservation for box lunch through the League office by Oct. 7th. Phone 713-784-2923.

Wayne Derrick is a retired engineering graduate of Rice University. He has been interested in voter participation for several years. His service as an election judge seven times, usually in precincts with low voter participation, has fostered his interest in research as to how voter participation can be increased. His studies include vote-by-mail in Oregon, Washington state, and elsewhere, as well as other methods of increasing participation. A representative of the Center for Houston's Future will also make a brief presentation about their Center's interests and efforts to increase Voter Participation. LWV TX has taken up this issue to study. They seek a concurrence by Leagues across the state to form a position for the State LWV. The Houston Area League will discuss this at our October unit meetings.

We welcome these new and returning members:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Diane Cates | Kaye Hardy |
| Margaret Curtis | Jeanne Jones |
| JoAnn Egeland | Penny Milbouer & Shep Glass |
| Jean Fefer | |

Your new Directory included in this mailing contains many personal information changes. Please check it out before contacting a member.

Welcome

Celia Chipman is our new membership recorder. Celia moved to Houston three years ago from Corpus Christi where she lived for 20 years. Her home state is Kentucky.

Celia obtained her Medical Technology, biology and chemistry, degree from A&M-Corpus Christi. She has a Masters degree in Career and Technology Education from Georgetown College and is on the way toward a Masters in Geographical Information Systems from A&M-CC.

Celia is retired from the Corpus Christi ISD where she was the department chair for Medical Science Education in a magnet school at Moody High School.

This fall Celia will be signing her name to your renewal letters. Give her a big welcome. The best way is by keeping those renewals coming.

**Democracy is
NOT a
Spectator Sport!**

The Houston VOTER is published 5 times per year by the League of Women Voters-Houston Area in a hard copy form and 5 times as a web-only edition. This newsletter is provided as part of yearly membership dues. Non-members may purchase a subscription. Contact the office for details.

Nancy Parra • President
Pat Downing • Executive Director
Barb Swartz • Editor
Mike Rine • Production Manager

League of Women Voters-Houston Area
4001 N. Shepherd • Suite 213
Houston, Texas 77018
(713) 784-2923 FAX (713) 784-2984

Web Site • <http://www.lwvhouston.org>
Email • lwv@lwvhouston.org



*This issue of
The Houston
VOTER
is printed on
recycled paper.
Vol. 09 #6*



The Houston VOTER
League of Women Voters - Houston
4001 N. Shepherd • Suite 213
Houston, Texas
77018

Non - Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
P A I D
Permit #7643
Houston, TX

September & October Unit Meetings

Third Monday

Southwest Day, 1 p.m.

Alief Library
7979 South Kirkwood
Rhoda Haddox
(713)667-5952

West Harris Co., 2:30 p.m.

Eagles Trace, unit PW 117
Joan Golding
(281)596-0935

Citywide Evening, 6 p.m.

Black Lab Pub
4100 Montrose
Jackie Friedman
(713)521-0702

Third Tuesday

Spring Branch, 9:30 a.m.

9/15 ...
Home of Lynn Walshak
14207 Misty Meadow
10/20 ...
Home of Betty Mooney
9529 Kerrwood Lane
Margaret Kolodzie
(713)465-1068

Third Thursday

Midwest, 10 a.m.

Gerald Womack Building
4412 Almeda
Yvette Calloway
(713)747-6555
Millie Whittington
(281)752-0446

Third Saturday

New Member/Saturday Unit, 10 a.m.

League Office
4001 N. Shepherd
Suite 213
Judy Hollinger
(713)665-4458

September

Ethics

October

Increasing Voter Participation

**Pick a Unit Meeting that is
convenient and attend. It's the
League at its grass roots best!**



Summer Program Tour

We had an excellent turnout for our summer program at the Willow Water Hole. Curtis Lampley, Project Coordinator for the Harris County Flood Control District, spoke on the project's development and scope. The Willow Water Hole Greenway Project includes a storm water detention basin as well as a park with approximately 280 acres of usable green space. Features include walking paths and bridges, benches, picnic tables, a picnic pavilion and a gazebo. Rauf Farid, Project Brays Manager, also attended our meeting and spoke about the project. He and Curtis Lampley led us on a caravan to see the areas under development at the Willow Water Hole. Afterward, we enjoyed a picnic lunch under the Live Oak tree.