

The Houston VOTER

League of Women Voters-Houston Area • April 2009

April General Meeting

Update on Air Quality

Friday • April 3

11:30 to 1:00

St. Paul's United Methodist Church
5401 Fannin

Speakers:

Karl Pepple

Director of Environmental Programming,
Mayor's Office, City of Houston

Paul Hobby

Board Member, NRG Energy, Inc.
Chair, Task Force on Electric Reliability, City of Houston

Box Lunch • \$10

Deadline is March 31

**Send a check, call the office with your credit card,
or bring a brown-bag lunch**

President's Message

By Laura Blackburn

Our last General Meeting of the year is on air quality. We have two wonderful guests as you will see on this page:

- Karl Pepple, Director of Environmental Programming in the Mayor's Office, who will give us an update on air quality issues in Houston, Texas and the U.S.

- Paul Hobby, Board Member of NRG Energy, Inc. and chair of the Mayor's Task Force on Electric Reliability, who will give us an industry perspective on environmental issues. You will be enormously impressed with both of them

Units are also on these issues, and an Update on air quality is being sent with this Voter.

I'm sure we will be having some Action Alerts on the state level as the legislative session progresses. Please call, e-mail, or fax your legislators!



LWVH President Laura Blackburn welcomes attendees to the annual Repast with a Political Pioneer. See page 3 for more photos on the event.

April General Meeting An Update on Air Quality

Is Houston's air better today than it was 10 years ago? What are the problems? How will we make it better in the future? Will President Obama's proposed "cap and trade" system work? Will it even be passed? And are there any pro-environment industries?

These are questions we will be examining at our General Meeting and Units this month. They are timely in many ways—both the Texas Legislature and the U.S. Congress are considering these questions NOW!

Come to our meetings, voice your opinions, and become better informed!

INSIDE

- Legislative Day
- Repast photos
- Unit Meetings & Questions

... and more

We Are Moving!

As of April 1 the League office will be moving to a new, larger and attractive new space. The address is 4001 N. Shepherd, Suite 213, Houston, Texas 77018.

The office is located north of 610 N. on the corner of North Shepherd and Garden Oaks. LWVH President

It is a much larger space than we are now occupying. There is a reception area, office/storage area, an office for each the President and Executive Director.

For all of the great things we are receiving, we will be paying a greatly reduced rent amount!

Please make plans to come by and visit once the dust settles!

The LWV-HA Observers

Houston City Council

Shirley Gibson Reporting

February 18

Matters Held Number 56 reads as follows: Ordinance determining the population of the City and the population of each of the Council Districts and determining that populations of the existing City Council Districts are not materially unbalanced; making various findings and provisions related to the subject by motion #2009-54, 2/04/09.

Councilmember Rodriguez proposed an amendment that a committee be appointed to facilitate the gathering of data for a decennial census. That data is to be collected for redistricting purposes. Several people spoke for the census taking. Councilmember Brown said that it would be an opportunity for communities to come together.

Councilmember Lawrence said there would be a dividing of communities since the census will divide the people along precinct lines. She also said that this is a very arduous task as can be seen from the past redistricting.

Councilmember Jones said this is a process that will have to be legal and she is not for a new census. She said there are other population distribution data that would be legal but we would not have to take a new census. She planned to vote against this amendment and ordinance.

Other councilmembers wanted to know how we were going to accomplish this and how it is to be funded.

Councilmember Lovell said that it is going to be done and it is going to be out in the open and not behind closed doors.

The vote was taken and passed with Councilmembers Jones and Noriega voting no.

March 4

The first item of business was the Financial Report ending February 27, 2009. Annise Parker began by giving a letter of transmittal. She said that we are currently experiencing a shortfall of \$64 million. This is up by \$11 million from last month. The change is the net effect of a decrease of \$12 million in overall projection and a \$929,000 decrease in projected expenditures.

Michelle Mitchell, Director of finance said that the General Fund revenue is \$13 million lower than last month principally due to the following: our Property Tax projection is unchanged from the prior month pending receipt in March of the report from the Harris County Assessor showing collections for the 2008 tax role; our sales tax projection is unchanged from the prior month; year to date collections through six months are \$267.2 million, 6.78% ahead of the same period for last month; our projection for Direct Interfund Services increased by \$415,000 due to higher labor billing rates; our projection for Industrial Assessments decreased by \$7.8 million due to possible delay in payment from Lyondell Chemical Company as a result of their bankruptcy; our projection for Licenses and Permits decreased by \$600,000 mainly due to second

Condolences

The Houston Area League lost a dear friend last month. Harold Friedman, half of the Commissioners Court reporting team, died. Our sympathy is extended to his wife, Sharon, the family, and his many friends.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization which promotes informed and active participation of citizens in government.

The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

quarter receipts being lower than anticipated for Cable TV; our projection for Licenses and Permits decreased \$300,000 to reflect lower than anticipated special fire permits; our projection for Charges for Services decreased \$1.9 million as a result of demolition, weed cutting, and platting fees being less anticipated; our projection for Other Fines and Forfeit decreased by \$885,000. To lower than anticipated interest on liens; our projection decreased by \$2 million as a result of lower cash balances and lowers rates.

Annise Parker said nearly the same thing that Ms. Mitchell said.

Mayor White said that each department will have to go through its budget projection and cut costs where ever they can be cut. The water and sewer bills will have to be raised due to the cost of energy and chemicals over the last year.

Both Councilmembers Holm and Clutterbuck agreed with the mayor that the water and sewer rates needs to be raised. Councilmember Jones said that she wanted to see that out sourcing be looked at. She wants to cut out as much out sourcing as possible.

Councilmember Kahn wants to increase the issuance of building permits by speeding up the process. The Mayor agreed with him.

Councilmember Clutterbuck reminded the council that meetings of her Finance Committee would inform the council if they would attend.

Councilmember Brown seconded what Councilmember Clutterbuck said and suggested that we streamline the permit system. The Mayor agreed.

Councilmember Green said that we can cut out rubber bands and paper clips but we have to increase the sewer and water rates.

After Mayor Bill White said that as we have no idea how long this recession is going to last, we have to act as if it is to be a long period of time. Councilmember Holm moved that the council adopt the financial report. It was seconded and passed.

Police Advisory Committee, February 2009

By Barb Swartz

Chief Hurtt's representative reported that mentoring in HISD has begun. He also gave some statistics on crime in Houston, noting that overall it is down 8.4 percent. A large percentage of aggravated and sexual assault cases are not stranger on stranger.

The department has been studying the reaction to Ike last year and is beginning hurricane preparedness earlier. All plans will be in place and ready for implementation by June 1.

As of January 31, they have 5,060 officers with two more classes in this fiscal year. Next year's budget may only have three classes for the year. With an expected high attrition rate in FY 2010 and 2011, the department hopes to get some money from the stimulus package for more classes.

There was also a presentation by the HPD SWAT Team (Special Weapons & Tactics). This was begun in the late 1960's and is composed of full time officers, unusual in other cities. They are on call 24 hours a day and are trained negotiators. A question was asked about the use of deadly force; why not shoot in the arm or leg? The response was that no officer is trained to shoot in arm or leg; aim for the center mass. Either a knife or a gun is considered a deadly weapon. Over 80 percent of incidents end peacefully; the others are the ones that get publicity.



Above, Repast Chair Jackie Alfred

At right, tickets mean money for the LWV Education Fund



March 2009

Repast for a Political Pioneer

City Secretary Anna Russell was honored by the Houston League last month. It was a gala affair and even garnered a front page picture in the *Houston Chronicle*. The venue was lovely and Shara Fryer elicited many comments from Ms. Russell about past mayors and other officials.

It was obvious this is a city election year as candidates were circulating throughout. I caught three mayoral candidates crossing paths. The event wound up with a picture of "Anna Russell's Family," all present and past city officials who were there posed together (photo below).



LWVH members enjoy the food and company.



LWVH President Laura Blackburn, Repast host Shara Fryer, and Michael Fjetland.



Three Houston mayoral candidates cross paths at Repast.



LWVH members get name tags and table assignments

LWV-TX Lobby Day and Statewide Conference



LWV-TX President Karen Nicholson (left) and Houston Leaguer Barb Swartz serving as the Secretary. We were honored to have Barb able to fill such an important position.



Houston Leaguers enjoy lunch and the opportunity to exchange notes about the morning's happenings.



State Senator Jeff Wentworth (R-San Antonio) talks to League members (above and right). Sen. Wentworth is serving his sixth term in the Texas Senate where he was president pro tem in 2004-2005. Senator Wentworth, a fourth-generation Texan, was first elected to the Texas Senate in 1992 after serving nearly five years in the Texas House of Representatives. He is the chairman of the Senate Committee on Jurisprudence and serves on the Administration; Transportation and Homeland Security; and Intergovernmental Relations Committees.



Top photo and above left and right — Houston Leaguers were well represented and in the audience at the Statewide Conference and Lobby Day in Austin.



March 8 was LWV-TX Statewide Conference and Lobby Day. Leaguers from across the state met to make a change in the positions on Judicial Selection and on Child Abuse & Neglect. Then they received information on lobbying and heard a presentation from Sen. Wentworth on his Redistricting Bill (which the League supports). After lunch in the Capitol cafeteria, we all dispersed to lobby the legislators on County Authority, Redistricting, the Death Penalty Moratorium, and Voter ID. It was a great day!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 3:	General Meeting, Air Quality, 11:30 a.m.
April 14	Briefing, League office, 2 p.m.
April 15	VOTER Deadline
April 16-21	Units—Discussion on Air Quality
April 24	Board Meeting, League office, 10 a.m.
April 29	VOTER Mailing

LWV Education Report

By Peggy Hill

At the National Level

Economic Stimulus—An economic stimulus package was passed by the Congress and signed into law by the president in February, 2009. Basically, it is designed to send money from the federal government into a wide range of activities that are designed to save jobs, create jobs, and build capacity for the economy to expand. Specifically, there are almost \$900 billion in program funds and tax reductions. Of this amount, about \$100 billion is for education. The largest part is for governors to use to support schools (it is called the economic stabilization fund). Money flows to k-12 and institutes of higher education to try to offset the loss of state revenues that had been used for these purposes. All of these funds are to be spent by 2011 and are not part of the usual appropriations process.

Funding for Education - \$13 billion is to go to Title I of which about \$3 billion is for school improvement. These funds are to be used for professional development activities such as summer workshops, courses, and in-depth programs. They can also be used for summer school, extended day

programs, and longer school year programs. In addition, many districts are expected to be able to send Title I funds to school buildings that have eligible students who have never been served. This could mean that there will be more Title I programs in the middle and high schools, a point that many have been talking about as a goal for Title I. There are other funds and programs for IDEA, Head Start, teacher enhancement, technology and other areas. Of particular interest is an additional \$5 billion for the Secretary of Education to administer school reform.

Announced Goals for Federal Education are:

1. the development of an emphasis on early childhood education;
2. a \$500 million program to improve graduation rates;
3. an emphasis on supporting innovative programs to improve schools;
4. an increase in funds for educational research; and
5. an increase in attention on teacher education programs.

continued on page 6

We welcome these new and returning members:

Nancy Huntschel

Teresa Terry

Councilmember Jolanda Jones

Linda Williams-Willis

Coole Speight

Note this change

Clara & Keith Caldwell

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Janet Frost
May Walker
Lee Kobayashi
Matilda Melnick
Charlotte Bowers
Jeanette Bednar
John Copeland

in memory of
Harold Friedman
Barbara Swartz, Novelle
Doherty, Alice May
Berthelsen, Bette John,
and Bobby Young

in memory of
Herman Maass
United Space Alliance

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**Democracy is
NOT a
Spectator Sport!**

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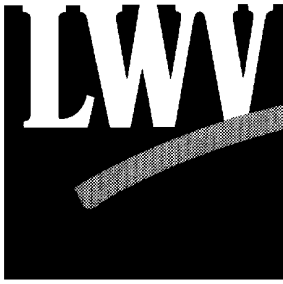
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April Unit Meetings

Monday, April 20
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

Pick a unit!
Attend
and
Participate

Tuesday, April 21
Spring Branch, 9:30 a.m.
Home of Lynn Walshak
14207 Misty Meadow
Kay Guenther
(713) 464-6870

Thursday, April 16
Midwest, 10 a.m.
Gerald Womack Building
4412 Alameda
Yvette Calloway
(713) 747-6555
Millie Whittington
(281) 752-0446

Saturday, April 18
New Member/Saturday Unit, 10 a.m.
League office – note new location!
4001 N. Shepherd, Suite 213
Houston, 77018
Judy Hollinger
(713) 665-4458

April Discussion Questions
Be sure to read the Update on Air Quality included with this VOTER and come prepared to discuss air quality in the Houston area.

Need instant information?

Click on: <http://www.lwvhouston.org/>

LWV Education Report

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At the State Level

The LWV-Texas has positions on both public school finance (opposing vouchers because they limit equal access to quality education) and accountability (testing) that speaks to fairness, manageability, and equitability. Deadlines for filing new bills will be the middle of March. Currently, there are bills that limit higher education tuition, reforms providing for the delivery of education to special needs students, and finance bills that would help school districts that have rapid growth constraints.

It will be important to monitor both the state and federal levels throughout the spring as changes occur.