

The Houston VOTER

League of Women Voters-Houston Area • February 2009

February General Meeting

Education Issues

Friday, February 13

11:30am to 1:30pm

United Way Building
50 Waugh Dr.

Box Lunch • \$10

Deadline is February 10 – send a check
or call the office with your credit card.

Speakers:

Dr. Alma Allen

Appropriations Committee for the Texas House

Rep. Scott Hochberg

Education Committee for the Texas House

Dianne Johnson

HISD School Board and Legislative Committee

The League of Women Voters is Celebrating the 89th Birthday of the League

and we want to

Invite You to Celebrate with Us
With a Birthday Cake and Punch!!

We Invite You to Bring
All You Can Gather
to Become New Members
to Honor the Occasion.

February 12, 2009

United Way of Texas Gulf Coast
50 Waugh Drive, 77007

From 3:00 till 5:00 PM

Newly signed members free • All others \$5 per person

RSVP: lww@lwohouston.org
or call 713-784-2923

February General Meeting

Education in Texas

The League of Women Voters – Houston Area will focus on local and state educational issues for the February General Meeting to be held, Friday, February 13, at the United way Building on Waugh Drive.

With the 81st legislative session just beginning there is much to discuss from funding higher education and helping with tuition for colleges and universities to how to support quality public schools for all children in Texas.

Included in the Facts and Issues this month are the local and state LWV education positions along with a discussion of topics and concerns that most likely will be the center of legislative discussions and bills for Texas. Recommended reading includes the 2007 LWV Texas publication Mandated Achievement Testing in the Public Schools of Texas which is on the LWVTX website.

Scheduled to speak are Dr. Alma Allen, who is on the House appropriations committee; Mr. Scott Hochberg, a member of the House education committee; and, Dianne Johnson, legislative expert, from the Houston ISD School Board.

Please RSVP the League office by Tuesday, February 10.

New name for Saturday Unit

The New Member Unit has a new name-- it is now called the New Member/Saturday Unit. If you are an "old" LWV member who finds the Saturday time more convenient for you, please join us!

The Saturday unit follows the designated unit discussion topic each month and in addition has a short "orientation to the League" module to acquaint members with League organization and activities. It's a great group, and we welcome visitors!

For more information call Unit Chair Judy Holinger at 713-665-4458 or just come to the LWV office on the third Saturday from 10am to noon.

INSIDE

- Observers
- Repast coming soon
- Unit Meetings & Questions

... and more

The LWV-HA Observers

Harris County Commissioners Court

By Sharon and Harold Friedman

November 4

Your observers have stated that many times we heard discussions on subjects that seemed to be very important to the commissioners, but never heard of again in open court. At the first meeting in December the subject again came up of where the control of the Commissioners Court legislative agenda should be. After brief discussion, it was decided that a new office of legislation would be established with Commissioners Garcia and Franco Lee as co-executives to see that all is going well. How was this accomplished so easily after the conflict several weeks ago?

The Harris County Tax Assessor Paul Bettencourt decided, after being re-elected and serving several terms, that it was time to work in the private sector. There would be nothing strange about this if he hadn't run for this position and won immediately before he resigned. The person who took his job will be a Republican. Mr. Bettencourt knew that the Republican majority on the court would appoint a Republican as his successor. Is this ethical? It might be better if the job of tax assessor is appointed by another group which is more representative of the general public.

Other Actions:

Toll Road Authority: It was recommended that officials take necessary actions to complete the transactions and for the County Judge to execute agreements/amendments with:

a. TxDot for advance funding in the amount of \$5,476,620 for construction, operations, and maintenance of the main lanes and entrance and exit ramps on a section of the Sam Houston Tollway from east of Old Humble Road to south of US90 in Precincts 1, 2, and 4;

b. C. J. Hensch and Associates, Inc. in the amount of \$100,000 for traffic data collection in connection with various toll road projects.

Public Health and Environmental Services:

a. Request for approval of additional mileage reimbursements in amounts of \$108, \$212, \$261, \$384, \$420, \$641, and \$750 for TB outreach workers who exceeded the monthly limit in October and November 2008. Approval was given.

b. Request for approval of an agreement with the federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention for a CDC public health apprentice to work with the county for an 18 month period and for the county to provide in-kind support and \$2,500 for annual travel and other related expenses. Approval was given.

Congratulations to our latest Honorary Life Member. We celebrate 50 years of membership in the League with Alice May Berthelsen. She joins our other eight "Lifers." They are Betty Jane Baker, Olga Bennett, Hana Ginzburg, Kay Guenther, Gloria Herman, Marjorie Love, and Bunny Mason.

Houston City Council

Shirley Gibson Reporting

Today at Council meeting there was a public hearing. The first speaker was Vidal G. Martinez, an attorney who has served for many years on various boards and commissions in the city and the state. He has represented the Hispanic element in Houston many years. He addressed the Special Election that the Council has scheduled on May 9, 2009 to replace the District H position of Adrian Garcia the new Harris County Sheriff. Mr. Martinez wants to either have the election sooner or have an interim District H Councilmember. He pointed out that the Hispanic population of the Heights would not be represented for five months.

Councilmembers Brown, Johnson, and Khan stated that the council works together to represent all the people and that they will pull together to take care of District H's business. Council-member Rodriguez said that the city is in compliance with the law but that an interim council member who couldn't raise money or run for election was a possibility.

Councilmember Lawrence stated that if an interim council member was appointed the person would not be familiar with the budget so he or she might vote as a friend on the council would vote. By the time the interim council member was ready to conduct business it would be time for the election.

Councilmember Lovell wants to lobby the state senate to change the election law that requires us to have a special election which will cost up to \$200,000.

The Mayor said that he would not put that on the agenda until he is sure that a consensus can be reached. The Mayor does not want to take a position that would enhance his position more than the Mayor's office is allowed.

Finally, Councilmember Brown said the Heights will be faced with many issues that no one else on the council can solve so he is in favor of an interim council member.

New Year - New Members • Ask a friend to join!

Voter Participation Committee

by Wayne Derrick

In the November election, Texas ranked 47th in percent of registered voters who voted.

Several things could be done.

- Allow anyone to vote by mail, as is done in 28 states.
- Allow permanent registration to vote by mail, so you don't have to apply for each election.
- Allow persons to vote at any precinct in the county, as is done for early voting.

In the last legislative session, the bill to require Voter picture ID was narrowly defeated. Another attempt is slated for this session. This is an overt attempt to discourage poor and minority voters from voting, an end-run around the poll tax which was declared illegal.

Local Program Planning Meeting

An enthusiastic crowd suggested a number of items for study or action in 2009, ranging from getting rid of term limits (or at least going to four-year terms) for city officials, electric grid, public defender for Harris County, and election system reform to billboards, recycling, and environmentally sensitive transportation.

These suggestions will be discussed, refined and either recommended or

not recommended by the Board and presented at the Annual Meeting in May for final approval. If, and only if, an item was suggested at the local program planning meeting can it be considered at Annual Meeting whether it is recommended by the board or not.

The full list of recommended and not recommended items will be in your Annual Meeting Workbook. That will be the time for members to lobby for adoption of a particular item or issue.

MEMBERS WANTED

The League of Women Voters of the Houston Area, a nonpartisan political organization, is open to both women and men and encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in local, state and national government.

Members of the League study public issues related to government, international relations, natural resources, and social policy. Facts on issues are clearly and concisely presented to citizens and decision-makers. Effective action results when informed citizens participate in government.

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities. The League acts to achieve solutions in the public interest on key issues at all levels of government, builds citizen participation in the democratic process and engages communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy.

Membership Application (Membership includes local state, and national affiliation)

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone—Home _____ Work _____

E-mail _____ Fax _____

- One Year Individual Membership \$58
- One Year Household (Two members who share the same address) \$87
- Student Membership (With ID) \$25 School _____ ID# _____

December meeting greets elected officials

A number of LWVH members turned out at the December General Meeting to hear from and talk with various elected officials. Channel 8's Ernie Manouse was on hand to emcee the program.



Repast with Political Pioneers VIII

Honoring Anna Russell, City Secretary, City of Houston

NEW THIS YEAR—LWV members may buy up to 5 additional tickets for relatives or friends at the member cost of \$60 per ticket!!!! Get your group together, order now, and SAVE. This year's Repast promises to be an entertaining and educational afternoon with a Houston political legend. Anna Russell, City Secretary of the City of Houston, will be our honoree. After reviewing many possible candidates, Anna was the unanimous recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Selection Committee. She was selected for her long and exemplary service to the city. The official website of the City of Houston describes Anna's job in the following manner: "The City Secretary shall be the clerk or secretary of the council, whose duty it shall be to act as reading and recording clerk to the council and to certify the correctness of the minutes and the journals and to perform such other duties as may be required by the city council and the mayor. The duties of the City Secretary shall be to keep, record and preserve the minutes and proceedings of the City Council, and to be custodian of all the papers and records of the council proceedings of the city, with power to make certificates of any proceedings of the City Council, to affix the city seal thereto, and to do and perform all things and acts usually done or necessary to be performed by secretaries or clerks of cities in connection with the business thereof. In addition to the duties herein mentioned, the City Secretary shall do and perform such other duties, acts and things as may be required of him or her by the mayor or City Council." Anna Russell began work with the City of Houston in 1950. Oscar Holcombe was mayor and Houston was emerging as a growing industrial center and major petrochemical products supplier. With a population of around 500,000 residents, Houston was not even among the 20 largest cities in the United States.

Anna joined in the City Secretary's office in 1957, assuming the role of City Secretary in 1972. In her work with the City, she has helped to facilitate the work of nine mayors as well as enumerable city officials and civic activists who

have taken our city into the twenty-first century as a major international city and the fourth largest city in the United States. It is safe to say that from her vantage point in City Hall, Anna has "seen it all." We look forward to hearing her many stories and her reflections on her years of service to our city.

Plan to join us for this very special event. You're sure to have a great time and you'll be supporting the wonderful voter service work of the LWV Houston Education Fund, too.

Special Repast Note

In our continuing effort to keep the cost of individual tickets for LWV members as low as possible, your invitation and reservation form are in this Voter mailing. Please respond with your reservation by Monday, March 2.

Jackie Alfred
Chair, Repast 2009

Judy Hollinger
Co-Chair, Repast 2009

Would you like to help with the Repast?

We still need people to help with the registration table, table decorations, ticket sales and pre-event set-up at the Omni. Please contact Jackie Alfred (281 531 7298 or jaalfred@flash.net) or Judy Hollinger (713 665 4458 or jbolhol@hotmail.com) if you would like to help.

LWV Legislative Day

On March 9, League members from all over the state will gather in Austin to get the latest on how our priorities are doing and then to lobby their own legislators on League issues.

This year, in addition to lobbying, the State League has called a special statewide conference on that day to consider minor changes to two of our program positions so we may lobby more effectively. The changes are needed in the areas of Judicial Selection and Child Abuse and Neglect. Attendance from a majority of local Leagues is required to have a quorum to do this business.

The statewide conference will be open to all League members, although only two members from each League may vote on the items.

Mark your calendar now to save the date to accompany the Houston Area delegation to this event. If you want to go, please call the League office or Advocacy VP Jan Wilbur for the latest information about times and places for carpooling.

The 81st Texas Legislature

The 81st Legislature convened on January 13 and we know you will want to keep up with what is being considered and debated in Austin between now and the end of May. Here are some helpful websites to help you do that:

www.ethics.state.tx.us/php/cesearch.html -- Site for campaign contributions

www.legis.state.tx.us/ -- Texas Legislature Online.

- Members of House and Senate
- Committees
- Bills
- MY TLO to follow bills, committees, and get alerts

www.lwvtexas.org -- Check LWV-T Legislative Newsletters

www.goodsearch.com -- Check news of your legislator

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Feb. 10	Briefing, League office, 2 p.m.
Feb. 11	VOTER Deadline
Feb. 12	LWVH Birthday Party
Feb. 13	General Meeting, United way Bldg., 11 a.m.
Feb. 16-21	Units on Education
Feb. 25	VOTER Mailing
Feb. 27	Board Meeting, League office, 10 a.m.

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Ellen Goins
Elizabeth Simpson
Pamela Berendt
Kathleen Gammill
Shelia Pratt
Paul Wilson
Mary Fairchild
Wayne Derrick
Nancy Parra
Barb Swartz

Hero of the Month

In January the League instituted a "Hero of the Month" award recognizing a member who went above and beyond in carrying out their duties. The January Hero of the Month is Peggy Hill who agreed to present an item at the Local Program Planning meeting even though she was in California caring for an ill relative and returned to Houston at 5:00 before the meeting at 6:00. Kudos to you, Peggy.

Peggy's name will be appropriately displayed on a red ribbon in the League office along with future recipients of the Hero of the Month award.

If you have nominees for future awards, please submit the name to the League office or to Jan Wilbur, 713-465-7289 or janwgadfly@comcast.net.

Do you search the web? Here's a way to help the League. Use www.Goodsearch.com and enter League of Women Voters as the charity, then search away. Each time, the National League receives a small contribution.

Need instant information?

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

We welcome these new and returning members:

Priscilla Huston	Note these changes:
	Ernestine Dansby
Susan E. Krauter	Percival Gibbs
	Margaret Kolodzie
Hooker Wood	Lynn P. Mathews

Education Questions

continued from page 6

5. With discussions remaining from the 80th legislative session, how will "end of course" tests help us achieve a better educational system and at what cost? There will be many more tests and the costs will be tremendous in comparison to our current TAKS structure.

6. Given the current multiple state level administrative organization of boards and agencies, is there any way to improve upon the efficiency of the organization of state public education?

7. Is Houston ISD still considered to be one of the wealthier districts who must give away some of its resources to poorer districts? Is there a chance they will be exempted?

Plan your Spring Travel with the League

These tours benefit
participating State and Local Leagues
Make sure you are participating!

www.travelwiththeleague.com
or call 1-800-762-4216

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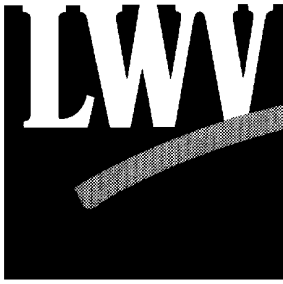
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February Unit Meetings

Monday, Feb. 16
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

Tuesday, Feb. 17
Spring Branch, 9:30 a.m.
Home of Betty Mooney
9529 Kerrwood Lane
Kay Guenther
(713) 464-6870

Thursday, Feb. 19
Midwest, 10 a.m.
Gerald Womack Building
4412 Alameda
Yvette Calloway
(713) 747-6555
Millie Whittington
(281) 752-0446

Saturday, Feb. 21
New Member/Saturday Unit, 10 a.m.
League office
2650 Fountain View, #328
Judy Hollinger
(713) 665-4458

Pick a unit!
Attend
and
Participate

Questions for Units relevant to the 81st Legislative session:

1. How can the 81st legislature ensure quality teachers in every classroom in Texas?

2. How can education accountability become meaningful and remain within reasonable financial requirements?

3. With tougher economic times and property values dropping in many places, how will the 81st legislature address this issue, specifically in regards to educational state mandates that may be too expensive for school districts?

4. How can higher education be funded at reasonable levels that will ensure Texas graduates strong preparation for leadership and the workplace, include funding for necessary research, and remain competitive in academic circles within the US and globally?

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