



THE OKALOOSA VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Okaloosa County

May / June 2011

"I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise that control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion."

Thomas Jefferson
American Founding Father



Important News for Local Leagues

LWVF's board voted May 8th to cease all voter registration upon implementation of the Elections Bill just passed by the Legislature, unless Governor Scott vetoes it. Discussion has begun regarding possible legal avenues to fight this bill and mitigate its impact, particularly the voter registration components that will directly affect our work.

Given the ambiguity and red tape involved in the new law, the Board determined that League could not risk its reputation or that of its members.

A conference call to discuss the issue will be held at 4PM, Thursday, May 12th. Watch the website for details.



League's Mission:

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

Message from the President

In March I spent nearly a week in Tallahassee, first attending the Florida Women's Hall of Fame induction ceremony, then lobbying our representatives during Legislative Seminar, and then representing our Local League at the Biennial State League Convention. Best of all, our youngest members, Steven and Beth Pepper, joined me at Seminar and Convention.

Our time in the capital was a terrific experience, showcasing all that's best about League. Our purpose is to encourage active and informed participation in government through education and advocacy, and it was exhilarating to be a part of those important efforts. League may not always be on the "winning" side of

every issue, but we keep citizens informed and we let our legislators know we are paying attention.

My euphoria in March was tempered by subsequent developments, as this legislative session has not been a great one for League (see sidebar and article below). Well, when the world says, "Give up!" Hope whispers, "Try it one more time." Your League has not and will not give up, no matter how many times we have to try again.

So this issue is dedicated to all those who won't give up in their quest to build better communities and a better future by making democracy work for all of us.

Mary Blackwell

State of the County Report Scheduled for May 14th

The 12th annual SOTC will be held from 10:00-noon on Saturday, May 14th, at the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce, 34 Miracle Strip Pkwy in FWB.

This annual event showcases a panel of local elected officials who discuss what's going on in their areas of responsibility and answer your questions.

This year's panel features County Commissioner Dave Parisot, School Board Member Melissa Thrush and Supervisor of Elections Paul Lux.

The meeting is free and open to the public, so please join us and bring a friend on May 14th to learn firsthand from your public servants what is going on in Okaloosa County. Coffee will be served.

Redistricting process begins

Florida House Redistricting Committee Chair Will Weatherford (R-Wesley Chapel) and his Vice Chair Stephen Precourt (F-Orlando) have announced 24-30 joint House and Senate public hearings to be held from 12 Jul-17 Oct, including one each in Pensacola and Panama City. Meetings will be scheduled every other week in a specific region, and the Florida Channel will webcast as many as possible.

Check out the House website at

www.floridaredistricting.org. You may need to download some free software to use *MyDistrictBuilder*.

The Senate's district builder software was beta-tested from Feb-May, and will launched in June. The Senate's 23-member Committee on Reapportionment is chaired by our own Senator Don Gaetz, and boasts two other Panhandle Senators. The House Redistricting Committee has no Panhandle representation. Find out more on our website.

2011 Legislative Session

According to the Daily News, the Legislative session ended "in chaos" after a budget deal fell apart late Friday night, just before the scheduled close of session. Speaker Cannon kept House members on the job until the wee hours and Senate President Haridopolos had to round up a quorum of senators literally in the middle of the night to finally approve the budget.

League had little success persuading Legislators to support our priorities this year, but that is the essence of democracy: we **are** heard, even when we don't get our way. League will continue to engage our elected representatives, because we must be prepared to work together whenever there is common ground.

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2011 Legislative Session (cont'd)

According to League lobbyist Ben Wilcox, the budget agreement was reached "during secret talks between top legislators and Governor Scott. Ultimately the governor got only a fraction of the corporate tax cuts he wanted, but these will still total over \$300M.

To achieve a balanced budget, Medicaid reimbursements will be cut 12%; public schools will be cut 8%; and the Everglades restoration effort will barely have enough funds to continue. Thousands of state jobs will be eliminated; state workers who keep their jobs will now contribute 3% of their pay to their pensions for the first time; and unemployment coverage was cut from 26 weeks to 23.

A constitutional amendment was approved to put TABOR – which would place a formula to limit revenue growth in Florida in the state constitution – on the 2012 ballot. In Colorado, the only state that has tried TABOR, it forced drastic cuts in education, health, public safety and infrastructure.

Environmentalists were surprised when the legislature voted to

reverse a 30-year-old guiding concept of Florida environmental law. The "burden of proof" that now requires developers to prove construction projects won't harm the environment will shift under the new law. In future concerned citizens will have to prove a project **will** cause harm.

The legislature appears poised to undo the 1985 Growth Management Act. Their plan would virtually eliminate state growth management oversight for cities and counties, deregulate developers, and make it harder for citizens to go to court to block local growth decisions.

The legislature also agreed on a major plan to overhaul Medicaid that will push most of the state's 2.9 million low-income and elderly recipients into an HMO or patient service network to cut costs.

On the plus side, Speaker Cannon's plan to re-shape Florida's Supreme Court was greatly watered down before passage, after the Senate refused to split the high court into two five-justice divisions.

*Excerpted from LWVF Capitol Report
Filed by Ben Wilcox, 6 May 11*

LWVF 33rd Biennial Convention

The State League's Convention was held in Tallahassee on March 25-26. To save money and encourage greater attendance, the 2011 Convention was combined with the Legislative Seminar for the first time. The move was prompted by member suggestions after the 2009 Convention, and proved to be a resounding success!

Over 120 members from across the state – including Mary Blackwell and Steven and Beth Pepper from Okaloosa County – attended both events, resulting in a Convention quorum of 79 this year, compared to 54 in 2009. The price was kept at a very reasonable level due to corporate sponsorships.

Besides approving the budgets for LWVF and the LWVF Education fund, we approved two By-laws amendments to permit future budgets to be disseminated "via electronic means" to each local League "at least four weeks" in advance of Convention/Council; and to include possible co-officers in any By-laws reference to "officers." Additionally, the expected 2011 increase in State Per Member Payment was canceled, again thanks to corporate sponsorships.

Members also accepted several recommended changes to the Issues

for Action in the recommended Program for 2011-2013. Under "Government in Florida," measures to strengthen the Florida Commission on Ethics were expanded to include local governments. Under "Social Policy in Florida/Libraries," the issue for action was amended to read: "Support the continued funding of public libraries in the state to a level sufficient to obtain matching federal funds." Attendees also discussed adding a new study item on "nuclear energy as an alternative energy source," but after spirited debate, this initiative failed to garner enough votes to be added.

Finally, the Convention approved the new slate of State officers.

New LWVF Officers & Board

President: Deirdre Macnab
1st Vice President: Pamela Goodman
2nd Vice President: Marilynn Wills
Secretary: Lisa Meyers
Treasurer: Sandra Colyer
Director: Annie Betancourt
Director: Kit Pepper
Director: Katie Ross
Director: Charley Williams
Director: Lydia Galton

Nominating Committee 2012

Chair: Pat Drago
Member: Rebecca Sager
Member: Mickey Castor

Study & Consensus

League is a nonpartisan organization that engages communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy. In other words, League advocacy focuses on "making a difference" in public policymaking.

Before League acts on an issue, we figure out how our members feel about it through the Study & Consensus process. First, League members across the nation examine all sides of an issue and study the facts, alternative solutions, impacts, costs and benefits. Then consensus questions are developed to spark a discourse on all facets of the issue. Local Leagues convene to study the issue, discuss the consensus questions, and reach consensus – or not. Positions are only adopted and acted on if consensus is reached.

Our League will be participating in the consensus process for several issues over the next year. Watch our website and the Voter for details on study and consensus meetings.

Transportation

LWVF is currently studying standards for assessing proposed transportation projects in Florida.

Education

LWVUS is studying the federal role in pre-K through grade 12 public education, limited to issues of equity, funding, standards and assessment.

Privatization

LWVUS approved a new study to identify parameters and policy issues to be considered regarding proposals to transfer federal, state or local government services, assets and/or functions to the private sector. It will review the stated goals and the community impact of such transfers, and identify strategies to ensure transparency, accountability and preservation of the common good.