



**League of Women Voters®  
Austin Area**

# Voter

April 2011      Volume 15 #9

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"The League may take action on governmental measures and policies in the public interest. It shall not support or oppose any political party or candidates." The *VOTER* is partially funded by the League of Women Voters of Austin Education Fund.

## April Calendar

- Tues. **Apr. 5** ..6:30 pm.. Board Meeting, LWV-TX Board Room
- Fri. **Apr. 8** .....6-9 pm ... City Council Candidates Forum, City Council Chambers
- Sun. **Apr. 10** .2:15 pm.. General Meeting, Austin's Water Resources, Congregation Beth Israel Chapel
- Mon. **Apr. 11** .1 pm..... Central Unit, Texas Legislature Update by League Members
- Wed. **Apr, 13** .7 pm..... South Unit, Overview Texas Court System by Judge Jon Wisser
- Tues. **May 3** ..6:30 pm.. Board Meeting, LWV-TX Board Room
- Wed. **May 18** .TBA ..... LWV-AA Annual Meeting, time and place TBA

## April Unit Meetings

**Mon. Apr. 11, 1 p.m., Central Unit, State Legislative Update**

Meet at the Old Quarry Library, 7051 Village Center Dr. (west of MOPAC at Far West). Hear what the State Legislature has been doing on issues of concern to the League from a panel of Austin League experts (unless they are called at the last minute to testify at the Legislature): **Suzy Reid** (Natural Resources), **Karen Rankin** (County Authority and Land Use), **Stewart Snider** (Campaign Finance) and **Anita Privett** (LWV-TX Advocacy Vice President). **Questions:** Carolyn Baker, 249-7012.

**Tues. April 12, 7 p.m., North Unit, Cancelled**

The South and Central Units invite you to attend their meetings.

**Wed. Apr. 13, 7 p.m., South Unit, Judge Jon Wisser**

South Austin Senior Activity Center, 3911 Manchaca Rd. **"An Overview of the Court System from Justice of the Peace to the Texas Supreme Court"** by **Judge Jon Wisser**, Senior District Court Judge of Travis County. Judge Wisser has a unique perspective on the courts, having served as justice of the peace, county judge, and as judge of the District Court of Travis County. **Questions:** Phyllis Portnoy, 280-7730; or Anne Roussos, or 441-3913.

## President's Report *-Frances McIntyre*



It is amazing to me that the League manages to have such current topics for its programs when they are planned well in advance. Thanks to **Nan Clayton, Gwen Santiago and Joan Hilgers**, March unit meeting discussion leaders on Austin Energy issues. After the

earthquake and tsunami, Japan's experience with its nuclear reactors made the discussions more relevant when considering options for Austin Energy. Another critical issue was addressed at our March general meeting. Mr. Ed Berger from Seton Hospitals in Austin shared his knowledge of advocacy and governmental relations around the subject of the federal health care law and the current legislative session that could affect the law in Texas. Many thanks to **Phyllis Portnoy and Anne Roussos** for arranging this interesting program.

The **Voters Guide** for the May 14<sup>th</sup> election is well underway. Because the **Austin American-Statesman is publishing it**, we will not be mailing a copy to our members. You will be asked to **buy a copy** of the paper (scheduled right now for **Sunday, May 1**), if you are not a subscriber. It will also be on our web site, [www.lwvaustin.org](http://www.lwvaustin.org) by the time early voting starts. This **Voters Guide** will cover those small municipalities and independent school districts

(ISDs) that are having elections in the area, in addition to the Austin City Council races. This is quite a large undertaking for the Austin League, communicating with all these entities and getting reliable information, sending out packets with questions, and getting the information in a form that the *Austin American-Statesman* can publish. A very big thank-you goes to Jaci Collins for trudging through the maze to get the contact information for the candidates and thanks to those who helped her.

Also, look for the League members asking questions of the candidates for **City Council** when we moderate the Candidate **Forum** for the city Ethics Commission. That will be broadcast live starting at **6:00 p.m. on April 8 on Channel 6**, and will be repeated many times before the election. The Candidates Forum and *Voters Guide* provide voters with exposure to the candidates and their stands on issues. These continue to fulfill our mission of encouraging informed voting.

Mark your calendars. **Annual Meeting** (our only membership business meeting) will be coming up **May 18th**. You will receive the **Annual Meeting Workbook** in the middle of April. It will be sent electronically except for those who do not have email (to whom it will be mailed.) Please save this document so that you can reference it for our program positions, budget, bylaws and much more. This Annual Meeting will be **my last one as President** and I hope to see you there.

*~Frances*

### General Meeting: Austin's Water Resources

Sun., Apr. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2:15-4:15 pm, Congregation Beth Israel Chapel, 3901 Shoal Creek Blvd.

Water is a liquid asset we can not live without.

- Who has it?
- Who needs it?
- How can we protect it?
- How can we get our fair share?

This panel discussion will assist in our League's preparation for the LWV-TX Fall 2011 Water Study. One goal is to link the Region K (Lower Colorado River) planning process to the ground-water planning process in meeting desired fu-

ture conditions for our aquifers.

Four individuals will speak to us: (1) **Karen Haschke**, LWV-Austin member and Lower Colorado Regional Planning Group Member (Region K); (2) **John Dubnik**, Geoscientist, Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District; (3) **Teresa Lutes**, City of Austin Water/Waste Water Department's Planning Division, and (4) an Austin Water Department Conservation Office representative.

## Maxine's Musings

-Maxine Barkan, 231-8523



Something often triggers something else. This time it was a call from Joann Lovelace to discuss By-laws. She, Karen Haschke, and I are committee members. That got me to thinking about our League volunteers. Volunteering itself

seems rather unique to the American culture. I remember a League member in San Antonio a few years ago who was telling us about the attitude of her Russian husband who could not understand how she could spend so much time working in a civic or community organization and not get paid. In Soviet Russia, apparently, it was not standard operating procedure. In the League, we count on members who are able to volunteer their time.

The current Texas legislative session is about halfway through and, for the first time in 15-20 years, I have not been involved in it. I began to think back on the volunteer time in which so many League members have participated with me before, during, and after the legislative sessions. Because the legislature meets in the capital city, many members of the Austin League have been called upon to help statewide issue chairs by presenting testimony in public hearings or just by gathering information at the hearings. In some cases, in order to present testimony, Leaguers have had to stay far into the night before they were called upon to testify by the committee chair. **Julia Marsden, Anita Privett, and Karen Rankin** are three Austin

members who are examples of those who have done so.

Writing and presenting testimony is not the only time spent by our Capitol Corps and State Issue Chair volunteers. League members have visited their legislators and have had meetings with legislative aides. They also met with other groups to strengthen our positions. Sometimes we were the only unpaid volunteers at these meetings. Some of us have become experts others look to for insight into the issues we have been working on. As examples, **Nan Clayton** comes to mind for her knowledge of education issues; **Marjorie Loehlin** is without peer for her in-depth knowledge of capital punishment; and **Rose Lancaster** has been the go-to person on health issues in Travis County.

League government volunteering covers more than just the legislature. Some of our local members have spent hours sitting as observers during city council, school board, and county commissioners' court meetings to bring information to League members. **Frances McIntyre** has appeared before City Council to advocate for local League positions on city issues. League presidents are often invited to represent the League on various civic committees.

So many have continued the legacy of our 92-year history in Texas of volunteering for good government. Let every one of us give ourselves a good round of applause and hope our legacy continues for another 92 years.

~Maxine

## Austin City Council Candidates Forum Friday, April 9, 6—9 pm

The League of Women Voters of the Austin Area will moderate a forum for candidates for Austin City Council for the City Ethics Commission. It will be held on Friday, April 8 from 6 - 9 p.m. in the City Council Chambers. There's free parking under City Hall. The forum will be **broadcast live on Channel 6**, and rebroadcast many times before the election. One hour is allotted for each of the three contested council seats: 1, 3, and 4.

# The Sunshine Law and League's Observer Corps

Betty Williamson (474-2130 )

The **Freedom of Information Act** (FOIA), passed by our federal government in 1966, was defined as the public's right to know. The oldest act of this nature was passed in Sweden in 1766 and known as Freedom of the Press Act. Ralph Nader was one of the early pioneers to push for the U.S. legislation.

The FOIA was followed by passage of the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 and the Sunshine Act of 1976. These three acts are often known as "**sunshine laws**" or "**public access laws**," and provide public access not only to records but to meetings. In 1996 the Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments were established applying to Federal agencies, but similar statutes apply to state and local governments. Some states attempt to get around this by claiming copyright. **Texas is one of them.** In 2005, **Sunshine Week** was established as the time to celebrate citizen's right to know. This year it was celebrated nationwide in mid-March from March 13 - 19.

The **Observer Corps of the League of Women Voters** was established to encourage our members attend public meetings. The League considers this one of our more important functions. Observer Corps members are watchdogs to insure transparency and to make certain the sun is shining on these public meetings and their records. Some examples of governing bodies that our League's Observer Corps has watched are the County Commissioners Court, Austin City Council, LCRA, CAMPO, and AISD.

The importance of having Observer Corps members on the local level (and Capitol Corps members on the state level) has been reflected in current events. There has been a lot in the press recently regarding the Austin City Council and emails, adding a new dimension to the sunshine laws due to new technology. A second

"sunshine" issue of concern to the League is whether serving on boards could create a conflict of interest for city council members. Another bill that is pending before the state legislature is whether oversight of the state's Enterprise and Emerging Technology funds will be transferred from the governor to appointed committees.

Celebrate and enforce the Sunshine Law by joining the League's Observer Corps!!!!

## Observer Corps: Travis County Commissioners Court


Karen Rankin (506-8549)



What is the Commissioners Court? Four commissioners and one county judge make up the Travis County Commissioners Court. They are charged with setting the budget for all county departments, adopting a tax rate, and maintaining county roads. Two issues discussed at the March 8 meeting:

Item 23—One portion of the legislative update by Deece Eckstein, Travis County Intra-governmental Relations Coordinator, pertained to 9-1-1 funding. The funds dedicated for this service by the state are not scheduled to be cut, but they are being held up because legislators are working on other business, particularly on the budget. It was agreed that county and city officials should contact legislators and request release of the funds so that 9-1-1 services will not be interrupted.

Item 26—A representative of landowners in southwest Travis county encouraged the county to join with the city in order to purchase 3 tracts of land totaling 582 acres. The land is located in the area surrounding a possible future extension of SH 45. A similar presentation will be made to the city. No action was taken.

<p align="center"><b>Membership</b> - Judy Parken (502-0278)</p>	<p align="center"><b>Austin LWV Phonathon</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>Welcome, Julia Kirby</b></p> <p>We cordially welcome Julia Kirby to the Austin League. We are delighted you have joined us. Your membership includes the national (LWVUS), state (LWVTX) and local (Austin) Leagues. We study and advocate issues at all three levels. We hope you will become involved this year as your schedule permits. Volunteers are always needed in our office for a three-hour shift once a month. Many Leaguers are busy with the Texas Legislature, so others' help in staffing the office is needed. Contact me, Judy Parken, at 502-0278 or Jo Reichler 479-4003 if you are able to help out. We hope to see you at the April Unit Meetings and General Meeting.</p> <p align="center"><b>Thank You, Renewing Members</b></p> <p>Many thanks to the following renewing members: Barbara Allen, Nancy Busbey, Edmund and Jo Ann Farrell, Veronica Johnson, Ellen Loeb, Diane Radin, Mary Ann Rivera, Edward Silha, and Deborah Tucker. We do appreciate your support, and depend on it to keep us functioning.</p>	<p>The Austin League of Women Voters is in the midst of its annual Phonathon, our primary source of annual income. Our financial needs are now as great as they have ever been. For a reminder of only a fraction of what we do, please refer to the list at the end of my letter. The Austin League is powered 100% by volunteers, which makes every donation go a long way.</p> <p>Not every member is in position to volunteer in person, so we <b>count on</b> our time-constrained members to support our efforts financially. We've been at this for more than 90 years, and we can safely say that the League has never been more needed than it is today.</p> <p>You should each have received in March a mailed Phonathon packet with pledge cards and an envelope. Please mail your donation as soon as possible. If you have misplaced your packet, mail your donation to <b>LWVAA, 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705</b>. Enclose a note saying whether your donation is for the LWVAA Education Fund (tax deductible) or the LWVAA General Fund (not tax deductible).</p>
<p align="center"><b>Letter to the Editor</b></p> <p>A Letter to the Editor by <b>Suzy Reid</b>, LWVAA member, published in the Mar. 19, 2011 edition of the <i>Austin American-Statesman</i>, was entitled "Passing the Buck." Suzy refuted Governor Rick Perry's contention that teacher layoffs are a local choice. She asserted that local districts did not turn town \$863 million in federal funds, nor put a cap on revenue they can raise, nor misjudge the margins tax. These were all gubernatorial or legislative decisions.</p>	<p><b>We very much need your donation.</b> Thank you for your consideration of our request. With best regards,</p> <p align="center"></p> <p>Frances McIntyre, President, League of Women Voters Austin Area</p> <p align="center"><b>By the way, your donation:</b></p>
<p align="center"><b>Campaign Finance Reform</b></p> <p>Stewart Snider, LWV-TX Issue Chair for Campaign Finance Reform (and LWVAA member), reported no state activity on this issue this month. However, in the US Congress, S. 194 (Senate Bill 194) threatens to eliminate the public financing system for presidential election campaigns. The LWVUS and coalition partners sent a letter to Senators urging them to oppose legislation to repeal the public financing .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides nonpartisan information about candidates before elections (Voters Guides)</li> <li>• Provides logistical support for studies that get at the core of important public policy problems. (Study Groups)</li> <li>• Informs members and the public on all sides of the issues our members have chosen to pursue. (General and Unit Meetings, the Website and the monthly Voter newsletter)</li> <li>• Fuels action on public policy issues that are under consideration by government agencies. (Advocacy)</li> </ul>

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF THE AUSTIN AREA**  
1011 West 31st Street  
Austin, TX 78705  
(512) 451-6710

Are your dues paid?

**ATTENTION MEMBERS:** Please fill out the form below and send with your dues renewal and/or any changes to the LWV-AA Office, 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705. **The League is grateful for your support!** If you do not wish to renew, please notify Jaci Collins, Member Records, at [jacic@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jacic@sbcglobal.net) or at 257-9636.

**For new and renewing members and for address changes:**

**\*\*\* Not for Women Only \*\*\***

Name \_\_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_

Name of household member (if applicable)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ I'm an existing member and this is a change to my information.

	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Household</b>	<b>Student</b>
<b>Dues</b>	\$ 60.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 20.00
<b>Additional Donation</b>	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____
<b>Total</b>	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____

Dues allocation:  
National \$29.15; State \$22.80; **Local \$8.05**; Total \$60.00  
MAIL TO LWV-AA OFFICE: 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705

You can also use PayPal to pay your dues at  
[lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org](mailto:lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org)