



**League of Women Voters®
Austin Area**

Voter

March 2011 Volume 15 #8

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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.

March Calendar

General Meeting: "The New Federal Health Care Law": How Could the Texas Legislature Affect Implementation?

Sunday, March 27, 2 - 4 p.m. Congregation Beth Israel Chapel, 3901 Shoal Creek Blvd.

With all the claims swirling around the new federal health care law, how can we learn about the changes that will affect us? Many elected officials in Texas have been outspoken critics of the federal health care reform effort. What are the prospects for action during the current legislative session that could affect implementation of the federal health care law?

Come to hear Ed Berger, Vice President for Advocacy and Government Relations with the Seton Family of Hospitals in Austin--a position he has held since 1994. He will share his insight on critical health care issues and answer your questions. Berger has been with Seton since 1988. He has an extensive background in government, public relations, and marketing communication.

Unit Meetings:

"Taking the Temperature on Energy"

We will follow up on the vast amount of information delivered at the February General Meeting. Members of our League's Austin Energy Committee will lead the discussions. They will do a review of Austin Energy, give an update on current issues, and discuss and solicit members' opinions on energy priorities.

Monday, Mar. 14, 1:00 p.m. Central Unit — Old Quarry Library, 7051 Village Center Dr.
Discussion Leaders: Nan Clayton and Joann Robison, Questions: Carolyn Baker, 249-7012

Tuesday, Mar. 8, 7:00 p.m. North Unit — home of Judy Parken, 7917 West Rim Dr., 78731
Discussion Leaders: Nan Clayton and Gwen Santiago, Members, LWVAA Austin Energy Study Group.
Questions: Judy Parken, 502-0278.

Wednesday, Mar. 9, 7:00 p.m. South Unit — South Austin Sr Activity Ctr, 3911 Manchaca Rd. .
Discussion Leader: Joan Hilgers, Chair, LWVAA Austin Energy Study Group
Questions: Phyllis Portnoy, 280-7730; or Anne Roussos, 441-3913.

Upcoming Board Meeting -- All members are welcome

Tues., Mar. 1, 6:30 pm, Central Market North, Community Room

President's Report

- Frances McIntyre



Dear members,

February has been crazy (and I'm not just talking about the Texas Legislature). Really cold weather for what seemed like a long time (and my now dead plants agree), the blackouts for some of us, and then the warm, welcomed spring-like weather, along with the

international news of demonstrations exercising the rights of a democracy; the President and the US Congress at odds over NPR funding in the budget; the State Legislature more or less ignoring the tough job of balancing the budget; the test of our voting system in Travis County that has gone on ad infinitum; and our City Council members trying to figure out how to speak to each other without being accused of violating the Open Meetings Act. It's mind boggling. But, here we are, the calm, sane, good-government focused League of Women Voters learning about how the Federal Health Care law affects us here in Austin and learning about Austin Energy's trials and tribulations that will make a difference to our future energy needs.

We have some really exciting news. Our Voters Guide for the May 14th election will be published by the Austin American-Statesman and be included in the Sunday, May 1 edition. This will give us much wider distribution. This is the Sunday before early voting starts, which is about the same time we regularly get our Voters Guide out. If you do not have a subscription to the Statesman, please pick up that one at a news stand because we will not be mailing out the Voters Guide to members. We will have more information for you as we get further along in the process.

Because you are a member of the local, state and national Leagues, you are well represented in our advocacy at all three levels. Our own Anita Privett is heading up the advocacy for the LWV-Texas League, and you should be getting the "skinny" through her calls for advocacy and in the bi-weekly Legislative Newsletter during regular sessions of the Texas Legislature. See elsewhere in this issue for Testimony given by our own League members to the Texas Legislature.

The LWVUS is also busy setting priorities for this year. They are: Clean Air Defense; Health Care Defense; Money in Elections (campaign finance reform); and Voter Registration and Election Administration.

The LWVUS Legislative Watch List* is as follows: Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); Climate Change; Ethics; Immigration; and Safe Drilling and Mining ("Fracking"). *The Watch List means that if an opportunity arises on these issues and does not interfere with action on an advocacy priority, the LWVUS may take action. Aren't we lucky to have an influence in so many places?

We are also lucky to have such interesting local League meetings. I want to thank the committee members of the Austin Energy study (Joan Hilgers, Chair; Gwen Santiago, Nan Clayton, and Joann Robison). Also thanks to Maxine Barkan for her monthly column called "Maxine's Musings" in the Voter. It is a real treat to read her musings. March brings more than wind to the Austin League. As mentioned last month, Lobby Day at the Capitol is March 7 and 8 (check LWV-TX for details), the Unit meetings will focus on more Austin Energy information and the general meeting will focus on the future of Healthcare in Austin (see details elsewhere in this Voter). I'll be looking for you.

Honors and Memorials

The Austin League provides the opportunity for donations in honor of, or in memory of, League members. Please call the office if you need a donation/memorial form.

Randall's Donations

Randall's Good Neighbor Program gives the Austin League a percentage of sales from members who link the League to their Randall's "Remarkable" cards. Our account number is 465.

Maxine's Musings

-Maxine Barkan

A goal of the League has been to have a diverse membership. Diversity has often been roughly defined as between racial and ethnic groups. With all our efforts over the years, we are still largely composed of older white women. Yes, we have some men who are members. Shouldn't that come under the diversity umbrella since we started out for women only? In several national conventions I attended, efforts were made to change our name to be more inclusive. History, emotion, and the struggles of women to be recognized as equal partners won out to keep our current name. The League of Voters, one example mentioned, just didn't cut it. It neither fit in cadence or history. Should we revisit the idea? Would it broaden our membership base?

A few years ago LWVUS suggested trying to recruit women who were retiring from their jobs and would have time on their hands. This met with mixed opinions among Leaguers who were thinking we would be just the same. So who else should come under the diversity umbrella? To be truly diverse, we need to include not only those who are different racially and ethnically, encourage more men and younger women to join as well as those of differing sexual orientation, but also those with differing political opinions. The latter has been a soap box issue for me, but I have to confess, I am not sure how to go about it, especially in today's political climate. Many of our positions are controversial not only with our legislators but also among those voters who have vastly different opinions. This causes some to think that we are not truly nonpartisan probably due to the differing philosophies of the political parties. I know. At least one member of my family believes so.

Another thought. We have spent a good deal of discussion and energy to celebrate and honor differences among us. My thinking is that we are really more alike than we are different. I wonder if we were to celebrate our similarities as well as our differences some of the rancor and divisiveness would be reduced.

Maybe we need to engage Jeopardy's Watson to put his vast resources to the problem. Or maybe we just leave it as it is. We've been doing a great job for 91 years. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Membership

- Judy Parken (502-0278)

Welcome, New Members

We cordially welcome Dannor Padden 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: National League (National issues, State League (State government, election law, more), and the Local Austin League (Austin and Travis County policies and issues)

Volunteers are always needed in our office for a three-hour shift once a month. This is pleasant work and a good way to get to know your League a little better. Contact me, Judy Parken, at **512-502-0278** if you have questions or are able to help out. I hope to see you at the Unit and General Meetings.

Thank You, Renewing Members

Many thanks to the following renewing members: Nancy Bessent, Cecelia Burke, Pam Brown, Sonia Colorito, Lenora DuBose, Hope Dyson, Mary and Bill Finch, Lucy and Gary Gibbs, Eloise Harriss-Teas, Cheryl Hazeltine, Karen Huber, Martha Hudson, Virginia Kerbow-Moore, Yvonne Khouri, Ethel Kutac, Paul Labuda, Jane Elizabeth Madison and Judd Rogers, Donna Pauler, Anita Privett, Karen Rankin, Jo Reichler, Joann Robison, Gail Rothe and Myron Hess, Eleanor Sellstrom, Ann Stalnaker, Karen Sonleitner, Dorothy Wasserman, and Joyce Wilson. We do appreciate your support, and depend on it to keep functioning.

The Phonathon Alert

The major annual fundraiser for our League, the Phonathon, has a new dress this year. The LWVAA Board of Directors decided to change some of the methods in hopes of encouraging more members to contribute and to go as green as we can. Look for a letter in about a week with the details and please be as generous as you can. Thank you.

LWV Testifies at the Legislature

The League of Women Voters lobbies only on issues upon which it has reached a position following substantive grass-roots study. Following are position descriptions and excerpts from testimonies recently delivered to legislators:

On redistricting:

"One Person One Vote" is a basic tenet of our democracy. Redistricting every ten years based on census data to create voting districts approximately equal in population is a basic step in insuring that each citizen's vote carries the same weight in an election. This is especially important given the 20.6% population growth that Texas has experienced in the last ten years as well as the dramatic differences in where the growth occurred. Your work carrying out redistricting is vital in assuring one person one vote is a reality in Texas. We recognize this is a hard task.

"It will be hard to act in the best interest of all Texans but you can do it by insisting on transparency in your processes and making sure there are significant opportunities for public input. Last summer there were regional meetings where citizens were able to comment on the process. Now we are asking that you provide similar opportunities for public comment on the actual maps you are considering. You have choices to make. All Texans deserve an opportunity to assess the impact of your choices before they are final."

SB 16 (Patrick) would add to the informed consent to abortion statute a requirement that a woman seeking an abortion review with her physician an ultrasound image of the fetus, with the physician required to describe the image in detail and make audible the heartbeat (if present) for the woman to hear. LWV-TX is opposed to this bill because it conflicts our position on protecting women's access to health care, including all aspects of reproductive health. LWV-US Position, announced in January 1983: *The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that public policy in a pluralistic society must affirm the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices.* LWVTX testimony:

"Adding this provision into the existing law serves no useful purpose. Rather than protecting women's health, the measure seems to be aimed at intimidating and discouraging women from obtaining legal abortions. The decision to end a pregnancy is a private one that should be made by a woman in consultation with her doctor, and the proposed law would impose an insensitive and unnecessary intrusion upon the physician/patient relationship. It is ironic that the proponents of this bill have been outspoken opponents of health care reform, describing it as government interference in health care. Yet these same people, in their support of SB 16, are very eager to impose government regulations on women's reproductive health decisions."

Texas Public School Finance

- Nan Clayton, LWV-TX Issue Chair for Education

This is a particularly thorny issue since the budget shortfall is projected to be \$27 billion. Last session, the Legislature passed the budget with federal economic-recovery aid and sidestepped public school finance reform. Governor Perry has expressed his commitment to addressing the state budget shortfall by cutting programs and without raising taxes or using the state's \$9.4 billion Rainy Day Fund. Since education has been reported to account for as much as one-third of the Texas budget, many programs that address state priorities are in jeopardy -- for example, dropout reduction, community services for schools in low-income neighborhoods, summer programs for at-risk students, teacher mentoring, and science labs. These are the kinds of programs that are designed

to improve academic achievement levels for Texas' nearly five million students, 60% of whom are economically disadvantaged. And they are among the programs that the Texas Education Agency proposed cutting to slash their 2012-2013 budgets by 10% in response to a directive from state leaders in light of the budget crisis. The League will advocate for using the Rainy Day Fund, in combination with other approaches to balance the budget that would explore new revenue potential, eliminate tax breaks, and carefully evaluate cuts that would jeopardize already lean services. The Comptroller has proposed increasing class sizes in lower grades as one way to save money. The League would oppose a change in the current *(continued on next page)*

LWV-TX Lobby Days, March 7-8

LWV-TX can help steer public policy, and your presence does make a difference. Please join us as we:

- Influence public policy through education and active public participation.
- Learn the details of LWV-TX legislative priorities on Monday afternoon, March 7.
- Learn lobbying tips Tuesday morning, March 8, and then visit our legislators to share our views on crucial decisions that will affect Texas well into our future.

All League members are cordially invited. Fee (for materials) is \$10. Schedule:

Monday, March 7

10:30 am-Noon, Open House at LWV-TX office, 1212 Guadalupe #107.

12:30 pm- registration at the Capitol

1:00-4:45 pm- Key Issue sessions: Senator Kel Seliger on redistricting, LWV issue chairs on transparency in government and campaign finance, plus an exercise on balancing the budget.

6:30-9:00 pm- Making Democracy Work Celebration and Dinner, UT Alumni Center, 2110 San Jacinto Blvd

Tuesday, March 8

8:15 am-Coffee and briefing by Rep. Rafael Anchía's staff at the Capitol, House Members Lounge E2-1002

(School Finance, continued) state law that limits class size to no more than 22 students per classroom for grades K-4. Schools across the state have experienced increasing budget woes since the 2006 tax swap that cut school property taxes without fully replacing the lost revenue from alternative tax sources, as promised. The business franchise tax has produced far less revenue than forecast when it was enacted in 2006. Sen. Steve Ogden, is president pro tempore and Senate Finance Committee Chair, with direct responsibility for drafting the state budget. He has raised the issue of reworking the business finance tax.

Observer Corps: Travis County Commissioners Court

This month Karen Rankin reports on the February 8 meeting of the Travis County Commissioners Court.

Item 13—Commissioners discussed details of a new document they propose to include at the sale of property in a newly developed plat. The document would notify buyers of the county's limited land use authority in the unincorporated county area.

Item 17—Deece Eckstein, Intragovernmental Relations Coordinator, updated commissioners on legislative activities, including:

HB 662 sponsored by Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, which would grant additional authority in unincorporated areas of Travis County, allowing buffer zones to be created between incompatible land uses.

Status of the state budgeting process, which would cut state funding to Travis County for health and human services by \$762 million.

The pending lawsuit over the outcome of the election in House District 48. If a new election is required, it would cost Travis County approximately \$250,000.

HJR 64 sponsored by Rep. Joe Pickett, which would require all but 25% of the state gasoline sales tax proceeds (sometimes called Fund 6) be spent for transportation. Although the fund was initially intended to be spent entirely on transportation, currently 1/3 of the fund is diverted both for education and to fill other gaps in the budget. This bill would allow only the diversion for education. It is projected that future proceeds will not allow for any new roads, but will be adequate only for maintenance of existing roads.

Commissioner Davis voiced concern that HB 990, sponsored by Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, would take income off the county property tax rolls. This bill relates to homestead preservation reinvestment zones.

Item 19—A proposal to amend the county's economic development program policy in order to provide incentives for businesses to employ people who are unemployed or underemployed was discussed. Because of the probability of lay-offs of state employees due to budget cuts, commissioners expect the Travis County unemployment to rise. For that reason, it was agreed that incentives such as those under discussion will be necessary.

**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 or at 257-9636. This will save time and expense in sending follow-up reminders. Thank you .

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.

	Individual	Household	Student
Dues	\$ 60.00	\$ 90.00	\$ 20.00
Additional Donation	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Total	\$ _____	\$ _____	\$ _____

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 PayPal dues to lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org