



**League of Women Voters®
Austin Area**

Voter

October 2010 Volume 15 #3

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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.

October Calendar

General Meeting:

"Powers and Duties of the State Board of Education"

Sunday, Oct. 17th, 3 pm Trinity United Methodist Church, 4001 Speedway (this is a new address for them).

There has been a great deal of press coverage of the SBOE, and we think it is important for members to understand its purpose. Speakers include Kathy Miller with Texas Freedom Network who will discuss the SBOE's general authority, Lynn Moak of Moak & Casey who will speak on the SBOE's managing the Permanent School Fund, and George Rislov of Compass Learning who will discuss the SBOE curriculum guidelines process. Each speaker will talk for about 20 minutes and then there will be a Q&A session.

Unit Meetings

"County Government in Texas: Still Relevant?"

Bruce Elfant, Travis County Constable and League member, will lead our panel discussions on what counties do.

Central Unit.-- Monday, Oct. 11th, noon. Howson Library, 2500 Exposition Blvd.

North Unit.-- Tuesday, Oct. 12th, 7 pm. Judy Parken's, 7917 West Rim Drive.

South Unit -- Wednesday, Oct. 13th, 7pm. South Austin Senior Activity Center, 3911 Manchaca Road.

Mark your calendars -- Tuesday, November 16th

The Austin League's Legislative Reception. This event provides League members a chance to visit their state representatives and senators and ask questions about the upcoming session. Let's show our legislature that we are a force to be reckoned with. Come and tell your legislators what they should do and why.

!!!VOTE!!!

Final Day to Accept Applications to Vote by Mail: Tuesday, October 26.

Travis County Early Voting — October 18th - 29th.

Election Day: November 2nd.

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President's Report

- Frances McIntyre



Dear members,

Good grief! I feel like the Mama Grizzly for the Austin League. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought we would be maliciously accused of being partisan in our timeworn efforts to put on candidate forums. For

those who have not had a chance to follow this debacle, I will attempt to summarize what has happened so far. On September 1, 2010 the Republican Party of Texas Chairman, Steve Munisteri, put an article on his party's website where he "urged his party's nominees for State Board of Education in Districts 5 and 10 to not accept invitations to debate from the Austin Chapter of the League of Women Voters (LWV), citing their organization's leadership ties to the Democratic Party, to Democrat candidates in these races and to financially supporting the Democratic Party and its candidates." He went on to say: "How can the Austin chapter of the LWV claim to be non-partisan when there are no Republicans among their elected officers or on their debate committee?" After stating that "I respect the LWV's right to participate in the political process, but their liberal views and the ties of their leadership to the Democratic Party and Democrat candidates make them unsuitable and unqualified to serve as a neutral, non-partisan debate sponsor," he listed the names and positions of 5 Board members and 7 other members (some were not connected with the forum preparation). He also listed the voting and donation history from the primaries in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010.

We learned of this posting by accident when two candidates came to our office to

turn in their acceptance to participate in the forums. There were calls almost immediately from internet news blogs. Not being accustomed to the "turn on a dime" news cycles, I took a day to form my response to these groundless claims by Mr. Munisteri. Here is that response:

"The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization. We do not support candidates or parties. Our mission is to encourage citizen participation in the political process and promote informed voting. To that end, our all-volunteer organization sponsors candidate forums and a nonpartisan Voters Guide before every election. We contact all candidates who are in contested races and encourage them to join us in the effort to inform voters. Our membership, which includes men and women, is also encouraged to participate in the political process. We do not ask or know their party affiliation. We have informational meetings related to governmental issues which are open to the public and provide information for the public. We have always been held in high esteem because of our nonpartisan efforts.

"Groundless comments like those made by Republican Party of Texas Chairman Steve Munisteri are beneath the dignity of the state chair of a political party. Anyone who has seen a Voters Guide or knows the League is aware that such views are without merit. Texas voters know that providing a venue in which ALL candidates are invited is the textbook definition of 'non-partisan.' These are important races and we want voters to know their SBOE candidates as well as possible.

"Mr. Munisteri is obviously unaware that questions to SBOE candidates are coming from the public. He is welcome to submit any candidate question he chooses to our website. Indeed, we would welcome his

participation in any or all of the League's volunteer activities.

"The Austin Area League of Women Voters is willing to extend the deadline until September 10, 2010 for all candidates to participate in the SBOE forum, which is free to the candidates and will give them public exposure through KLRU's multiple broadcasts and will allow the public to compare and contrast the candidates and their positions on critical education issues.

"Unlike Mr. Munisteri, we have never looked up our members' primary voting records. We don't believe many volunteer organizations, churches, or businesses do that. Is he suggesting the League should write such a procedure into our bylaws?"

"If Mr. Munisteri is concerned about any kind of under-representation in the League, we suggest that he join the League himself, encourage others to do the same and participate. We are always looking for more volunteers. In fact, we encourage ALL political party officials to step up to the plate and ask their members to join the League and participate in our democracy."

Since that response, there have been many supportive emails and articles. Articles responding to this have come from

the Quorum Report, the Burka Blog (Texas Monthly), Texas Freedom Network, The Texas Independent, The Austin American-Statesman, the Houston Chronicle, The San Antonio Express-News and others. I have had email exchanges with LWV-Texas, LWV-US and from members in other states. All of these have been positive and encouraging.

I think one of the good things about all this press coverage is that more people will hear about the League and find out what we are really about. The League of Women Voters has been around so long and has been such a stickler for policies and procedures that we have a well-earned, excellent reputation for non-partisan services to voters and for non-partisan advocacy. Perhaps this fall, when voters are reading our Voters Guides, they will see this document as a product of volunteers who work extremely hard for no reward other than to have a better-informed electorate.

We do not care about and never have followed the lead of any political party (the meaning of partisan). We follow our own members' lead and can be proud of the services we provide to make our democracy work better.

Is it time to hibernate yet?

State Board of Education Candidates Forum

The SBOE forum on September 28th will proceed for District 5, which covers the southern half of Travis County. Unfortunately, only one candidate in District 10 agreed to participate, and League rules prohibit one-person forums. Please attend and plan to be at the KLRU studio (at Guadalupe and 26th St) by 6:30 p.m. The taping will run from 7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., with a 15-minute Web session to follow. The forum will be broadcast on KLRU on October 7 at 8 p.m. For more information, please call Anne Roussos at 441-3913, or the LWVAA office, 451-6710.

Honors and Memorials

The Austin League provides the opportunity for donations in honor of, or in memory of, League members. This month, Mary Finch donated in memory of Mary Sue Neilson. Phyllis Portnoy donated in memory of Mary Sue Neilson and Yvonne Khouri's brother.

"Good Neighbor" Program

...gives the Austin League a percentage of sales when they use Randall's "Remarkable" cards. Go to the Customer Service desk and tell them to designate the League as your choice. Our number is 465.

Membership

- Judy Parken, Membership (502-0278)

Points Scored at Sept. Kickoff

Fred Zipp, editor of the Austin American-Statesman, was a most informative speaker. He discussed a number of current economic and journalistic issues in the newspaper business. He talked about recent changes, alternative sources of news and the road ahead. We appreciate his frank and thorough answers to our probing questions..

Many, many thanks to all who helped with the Kickoff - especially Ed Parken, Jocelyn Doherty and Ann Stalnaker. Also thanks to Phyllis Portnoy for making her wonderful punch and thanks to Marina Grant, Jo Reichler, Nancy Neavel, Margit Orange, Carolyn Baker, Anne Clark, Sula Howell, and Anita Privett for all of the treats. (I hope I remembered everyone!)

Finally, sincere thanks to Congregation Beth Israel for hosting this event and to Blossom Zanger who made arrangements.

Welcome, New Members

We cordially welcome Austin City Council Member Sheryl Cole, Tanya Clemons, Debra Danbury, Heidi Gibbons,

and Karen Renick 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. If you have any questions about the League, please give us a call.

Thank You, Renewing Members

Carole Buckman, Nan Clayton, Joe & Jane Dibrell, Sarah Eckhardt, Ada Engler, Linda Friedman, Belia Greek Nichols, Janet Hamilton, Donna Howard, Patricia La-Combe, Karen Lorenzini, Melanie Malewitz, Judy Moore, Catherine and Joseph Nall, Nancy Neavel, Judi Nudelman, Pat Oakes, Mary Patrick, Velva Price, Anne Roussos, Sonja Suessenbach, and Blossom Zanger.

We appreciate your prompt membership renewal. If you made a tax-deductible contribution to the League, we thank you for your much-needed support, but this is not the same as paying membership dues. When renewing, please specify that your \$60 is for membership. Checks may be made out to Austin League of Women Voters. Call me (Judy) if you have questions.

Redistricting in the next Legislative Session

The number of Texas Congressional districts will likely be known from Census data by mid-January. Due to population gains, Texas is expected to gain several districts, and boundaries are likely to change dramatically.

The Legislature is expected to begin to focus on redistricting in February, at the earliest. But we expect to see some preliminary hearings this fall. Some of these hearings will provide an opportunity for citizens to present relevant testimony concerning local preferences, communities

of interest, local voting patterns, and other issues that the Legislature may consider when redrawing district lines. Public hearings are also held during the Legislative Session when proposed redistricting plans come under consideration.

Partisan gerrymandering undermines the basic principles of representative government. The Capitol Corps will encourage every bit of grassroots and press attention it can muster. Transparency and public input will improve the process.

Stay tuned...

Observer Corps

- Betty Williamson , Advocacy (474-2130)

The Observer Corps is the Austin League's monitoring program of local government. League members attend local governmental board and commission meetings and report on anything that is pertinent to an issue on which the League has a position. In some cases, League positions have ORIGINATED from something reported by a League Observer. For a general idea of what to watch for, you may wish to refer to the League's WE SUPPORT brochure.

We provide this service to the community because it is part of the League's mission to educate the public. Is this important? Well, the U.S. Congress thought so when it passed the Sunshine Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

I know you will find this volunteer job interesting and educational. I also think you will find it fulfilling to see how your efforts add heft to the League's mission.

Some examples of governing bodies that the League has watched are: County Commissioners Court, City Council, LCRA, CAMPO, and AISD. You may wish to

consult the Austin Connections Calendar to find other meetings to observe.

If these or any other governing bodies are making decisions that affect our lives, we need to know how they are making those decisions before they become law. We therefore need YOU as another of the League's WATCHDOGS.

What is YOUR passion? Is there a cause or need that you care about and think others should, too? Do you have personal experience with a governmental body that perhaps made a decision with insufficient public input? If so, please join us.

I am holding an orientation/training session on Wed. Oct. 20th 10:30 AM at my home (call for address). This will give you a chance to meet other Corps members and learn about making a difference in our community. We'll discuss what we're covering now along with ways to make our reports more meaningful to our readers and membership. Please call me (Betty) if you think you might be interested.

Star Observer: Karen Rankin



including St.Louis, Boston and Johannesburg, South Africa, but I consider Texas my home. In my spare time, I love to read, do

"I graduated from the University of Houston with a BBA in Marketing. I spent several years as a manager at a telecommunications company, then briefly owned my own small business. I've lived in many places

Sunday crossword puzzles, and travel abroad to visit my children and grandchildren.

"After working as a Capitol Corps volunteer, I decided that I wanted to continue to be involved in an active way, so I agreed to observe the Travis County Commissioners Court on a regular basis (see next page). I go downtown once a month, listen to the proceeding, and write up a short report. This proved to be much more interesting than I had expected; in fact, it led to my being an Issue Chair for the state League in addition to continuing my Observer Corps duties."

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE AUSTIN AREA**
1011 West 31st Street
Austin, TX 78705

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 _____

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

I'm an existing member and this is a change to my information.
You can also PayPal dues to lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org

(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