May 2012

LWVAA Calendar

Wed., May 2, 6:30 pm, General Meeting, "Electing City Council Members: Two Alternatives," Ascension Lutheran Church, 6420 Hart Lane, Austin, TX 78731. Open to the public.

Mon., May 7, 6:30 - 9 pm, Board Meeting, Site TBA.

Wed. May 16, 6:00 pm, LWVAA Annual Meeting and Pot-Luck Dinner, Ascension Lutheran Church, 6420 Hart Lane, Austin, TX 78731.

Back issues of the LWVAA Voter can be found at this link.

Dates: Voters Guides and Elections

Sun., Apr. 29, LWVAA Voters Guide for May 12 General Election published in the Austin American-Statesman. Copies are available now for download on our homepage, lwvaustin.org, or directly at this link.

Mon., Apr. 30, Early Voting starts for May 12 General Election.

Tues., May 8, Last day of Early Voting for General Election.

Sat., May 12, Election day for General Election, 7 am - 7 pm.


Mon., May 14, Early Voting starts for May 29 Primary Election.

Fri., May 25, Last day of Early Voting for Primary Election.

Tues., May 29, Election day for Primary Election, 7 am - 7 pm.

Editors Note: Significant gratitude is owed to four Leaguers who’ve worked tirelessly for months to produce our two multicounty Voters Guides in May: Jaci Collins, Lenora DuBose, Frances McIntyre, and Donna Pauler.

The League shall not support or oppose any political party or candidates. It may take action on governmental measures and policies in the public interest.

The VOTER is partially funded by the League of Women Voters of Austin Area Education Fund.
General Meeting:

"Electing City Council Members: Two Alternatives"

Panel Discussion with Ann Kitchen and Fred Lewis - Members of the Charter Review Committee

Open to the Public

Wed., May 2, 6:30 pm, Ascension Lutheran Church
6420 Hart Lane, Austin, TX 78731
(Off Balcones between 2222 and Far West)

The Austin Charter Review Committee, after numerous hearings and discussions, has made a recommendation to City Council to amend the City Charter. By a vote of 14-1, the committee recommended that Austin change its method of electing city council members from at-large to geographic (single-member) districts. The committee considered a number of plans, but in the end narrowed the choice to 10-1 (ten districts and mayor at-large) and 10-2-1 (ten districts, two at-large council members, and the mayor at-large). When the Charter Review Committee voted on which plan to recommend to City Council, 10-1 won by one vote. City Council may soon be deciding which plan to offer to voters in November for a Charter Amendment vote.

To hear the pros and cons on each plan, we have invited two Charter Review Committee members to discuss this issue. Fred Lewis, an Austin attorney, and Ann Kitchen, a former state representative, have agreed to speak to the Austin League about the pros and cons of each plan.

MEMBERSHIP NOTE: As charged at last year's LWVAA Annual Meeting, held May 18, 2011, a committee was formed to review and update our position on how the Austin City Council is elected. This panel discussion is pertinent to a proposal the League will be voting on at our Annual Meeting on May 16, 2012.

~ Stewart Snider, s2snider@gmail.com

LWVAA Annual Meeting and Pot-Luck Dinner
Wed., May 16, 6 - 9 pm

Ascension Lutheran Church
6420 Hart Lane, Austin, TX 78731
(Off Balcones between 2222 and Far West)

Join your League family for our traditional end-of-the-year meeting that combines an enjoyable pot-luck supper and social hour with our annual business meeting. Bring a dish to share or $5, but a dish is strongly preferred.

We'll celebrate this year's accomplishments and those who have helped make it all possible. We'll salute Carolyn Baker for her decades of service to the LWVAA. And we'll vote on the

Honors and Memorials

Thanks to members for the following donations:

Jo Reicher, in memory of Betty Jean Pettit, sister of Frances McIntyre.

To make a donation in honor of or in memory of a League member, click here for the form. Then mail with your donation to the LWVAA Office, 1011 W. 31st St., Austin, TX 78705.

Contact Us

Stewart Snider
President
345-7047

Nancy Oelklaus
1st VP Program
431-4946

Carolyn Baker
2nd VP Comm Rels
249-7012

Judy Clack
3rd VP Organization
731-0280

Betty Williamson
3rd VP Organization
Advocacy
474-2130

Anne Shelby Clark
Secretary
347-0594

Carol Olewin
Treasurer
380-0088

Judy Parken
Membership
502-0278

Lenora DuBose
Voters Guide Editor
292-8201

Mescal Evler
budget, slate of officers, bylaws changes, and a proposed change in our local program that involves how Austin elects city council members.

This is your opportunity to have a voice in our League's programs and positions. Your presence is especially important because we need a quorum to make decisions. You will find details about the agenda, the local program, and items that are up for a vote in the Annual Meeting Workbook. Members without email were mailed a hard copy on April 12. Members with email were notified to download it on April 12. Click here to download now. Please print it and bring it to the meeting. See you there!

~Anne Roussos, Workbook Editor, roussos@swbell.net

President's Letter:
Volunteering in Moderation

If you have always been reticent to get involved with your League for fear of becoming over-committed, I understand. It can be hard to volunteer when you know you only have just so much time available. Since I think this keeps a lot of people on the sidelines, I want to suggest new ways of thinking about the challenges we've always faced.

I want to make it easier for you to say "no" or "not so much, please." My rationale is that if it's easier to say "no," it may also be easier to say "yes."

Let's get a fear we all have out on the table right now by reviewing a seldom-heard natural "law" from a guy named Hoffstetler. His law states: "Software development takes twice as long as anticipated, even when you take into account Hoffstetler's law."

I think the same thing applies to political advocacy. I also think that many people would volunteer their time but for the fear of being trapped in a project that expanded beyond everyone's early expectations. I think these same folks would be more willing to jump in if they were confident they could maintain control over their time commitment.

While we can't always control the scope of a project, we can make it easier to communicate what we're willing to do and what we're not willing to do. While I doubt League volunteers would be criticized for describing their own practical limits about the time and energy they're willing to expend, I think most of us still shy away from making such statements. I'm not suggesting that we now disrespect such limits. It's more like we just don't talk about them enough. In such a culture, most folks would rather over-extend themselves than announce that they are nearing their comfort limits. It doesn't have to be that way.

For any LWV event or project we initiate, we should consider the following:

- First discuss what kind of volunteer time might be needed.
- Disclose our own time and involvement limits.
- Ask how much time volunteers in the room are willing to donate.
- Ask new volunteers how much time they are willing to donate.
- Revisit this issue frequently during the project's deployment.

Making a legacy donation to the League of Women Voters of Austin Education Fund in your will is among the easiest ways to offer support of the LWVAEF's work for years to come.

We suggest the following language to include the Austin League Education Fund as a beneficiary of a will or trust:

"I give, devise, and bequeath to the League of Women Voters of the Austin Area Education Fund, a charitable organization formed in the State of Texas, with offices at 1011 W. 31st St, Austin, Texas 78705, (the sum of $___) {___ percentage of my residuary estate}." If you already have a will, you can have your attorney add a codicil to include the LWVAEF.

After you've added the League, please email the Austin League office at lwvaustin@lwvaustin.org so we can list you as a member of our Love-Your-League Legacy Society.

Randall's
Embrace the priorities of everyone involved.
Understand that some of us are still going to feel disappointed if others don't share our willingness to donate time. This is a culture change that sets a bar for behavior. Our individual reactions and responses will come along in due time.
Make it clear that we embrace a culture where volunteer time is considered precious and is never taken for granted.

As I mentioned last month, for every Alice Paul, there are hundreds of "mere mortals" like you and me who are absolutely essential in order for change to happen. They are in there year in and year out, perhaps because they do so well at managing their time.

My hope is for all of us to talk freely about our limits and our concerns about the quantity of human resources any new project may need.

~Stewart Snider, s2snider@gmail.com

Making Democracy Work:
Community Conversations about
Public Education in Austin

Saturday morning, June 30, is the target date for the first of a series of community conversations about public education in Austin convened by the League of Women Voters of the Austin Area.

This is a new venture for the League and a new way for people to be involved in democracy -- through roundtable conversations facilitated and recorded by League members and then conveyed to school officials.

Since school board elections are coming up in the fall, the topic for the first conversation will focus on the board's responsibility to the children/community, and the community's responsibility to the children/board.

Anticipated outcomes are to:

- Increase voter turnout through increased understanding.
- Design forum for school board candidates around the substance of the conversation.
- Make results available to public education leaders for their use in responsible community and public engagement processes.

League members who are interested in participating in this effort should contact Stewart Snider (s2snider@gmail.com), Carol Olewin (c.olewin@gmail.com), or Nancy Oelklaus (nancy@headtoheart.com).

~ Nancy Oelklaus, nancy@headtoheart.com

LWVUS Concurrence:
Alternatives to Imprisonment and Mandatory Drug Sentences

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

Compass Bank Donates to LWVAA
Have you opened an account at BBVA Compass Bank in the last 12 months? If so, they will make a $50 contribution to the Austin League of Women Voters. Just email your name (no account numbers) to our treasurer, Carol Olewin, c.olewin@gmail.com.

Compass Bank also pays the League a small percentage for Internet and phone transactions. For information, contact Paul Sicotte at Compass Bank, 512-421-5741.

Charitable Giving
IRA Charitable Distributions
Persons aged 70½ or older can again enjoy tax savings by making charitable gifts directly from their Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) to the LWV Education Fund. Contact Lauren Frank of LWVUS at 202-263-1355 or lfrank@lwv.org for additional information.

Gift to League at All Three Levels!
At the LWVUS Convention in June 2012, the LWVUS will recommend adopting by concurrence the following positions:

1. **The LWVUS believes alternatives to imprisonment should be explored and utilized, taking into consideration the circumstances and nature of the crime.**

2. **The LWVUS opposes mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses.**

Arguments that support alternatives to imprisonment:

- Sentencing alternatives, including drug and mental health courts, probation, restorative justice, halfway houses, and fines, give judges more options to tailor cost-effective sentences that fit each unique offender and crime, protect the public, and provide rehabilitation.
- Alternatives are, less costly, save taxpayers money, and help prevent jail and prison overcrowding.
- Alternatives keep families together and, through rehabilitation and treatment, allow offenders to earn a living, pay taxes, and contribute to their communities.

Arguments that oppose alternatives to imprisonment:

- Alternatives to incarceration treat offenders too easily by not punishing them sufficiently.
- Offenders see community sentences as a lenient option and are not deterred from offending again.
- Society is protected while offenders are in prison.

Arguments that oppose mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses:

- Harsh mandatory minimums for drug offenses have led to huge increases in prison populations, many of whom are low-level and nonviolent offenders.
- To date there is no evidence that tougher sentences deter drug crimes, and mandatory penalties are particularly ineffective in preventing drug crimes.
- Mandatory penalty laws shift power from judges to prosecutors, and remove the judge's discretion to consider mitigating circumstances. Restoring judicial discretion would ensure that defendants receive punishments proportional to the offenses committed, taking into account individual circumstances without ignoring culpability and the safety of the public.

Arguments that support mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses:

- The certainty of mandatory minimums sends a message to offenders that specified behaviors would be met with harsh and certain punishment, and provides consistent and uniform sentences for all defendants.
- Mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenses keeps dealers off the streets and discourages illegal drug use.
- The law also aids prosecutors and police, who use the threat of lengthy prison terms to persuade low-level dealers to testify against dealers higher up in the chain of command.

The full LWVUS memo about this proposition, definition of concurrence, and links to research articles can be found [here](http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?llr=49l8dbda...).
News Briefs

Luv-Your-League Campaign
Formerly known as our Annual Phonathon, the LWVAA Luv-Your-League Campaign is raising funds to support our voter education and local program efforts for the coming year. Thanks to each of you who have donated already.

If you haven't contributed yet, please show your love for your League by donating today. Either mail in your contribution to the League office: LWVAA, 1011 W. 31st Street, Austin, TX 78705. Indicate whether you want your contribution to go to the tax-deductible Education Fund or the AA Fund.

Or, click here to donate by credit card via PayPal. Click "update" after entering your amount. Thank you.

~Ann Stalnaker, astalnaker@austin.rr.com; Adriana Cox, adrianacox@austin.rr.com

More Office Volunteers Needed
We need several additional League members who'd be willing to volunteer in the League office one day a month for three hours from 11 am - 2 pm, Monday through Friday. The office is located at 1011 W. 31st St. near the corner of N. Lamar. Duties include answering the phone, opening the mail, and processing dues and donations. I will provide training and am available by phone to answer any questions that come up during your shift. This is a great way to help the League and your community.

It is very important to the community that the League maintain this public presence by keeping the office open three hours a day. If you are interested in volunteering, call or email me. I found it's a great way to dip your toe in the water, learn a bit about the League, and serve your community.

~ Judy Clack, 512-731-0280, jbclack@yahoo.com

Observer Corps: Travis County Commissioners Court
April 17, 2012
Public comment was taken on continuing use of central voting places for Travis County. LWVAA President Stewart Snider testified in support of the concept with the caveat that there should be consistency, and we will need to advocate for broadening this to all elections to avoid voter confusion. Travis County reported a 1.5% increase in voter turnout for the constitutional elections last fall in which this system was first rolled out. There was no report on how this system fiscally impacted Travis County. There was consideration of not opening some new polling stations as people used the more central stations instead of their precinct location. Council will vote on this next week.

Major actions were taken following executive session. Travis County Commissioners voted to offer Apple, Inc tax abatements for bringing jobs to the county, and agreed to pay for road improvements to facilitate access for the F1 events. Commissioner Sarah Eckhardt was the lone vote against these proposals.

~Joann Robison, jrobison@austin.rr.com
Membership

~Judy Parken

Membership Directories will be distributed at our Annual Meeting on May 16. If you have recently moved, or changed your phone or email, please let me know immediately. Also, if your membership renewal is due, please mail in your dues or use the links below to pay via credit card. Thank you.

Welcome, New Members!

We cordially welcome two new members to the Austin League: Sheri Hicks and Susan Moffat. We are delighted you have joined us. As a member of the Austin League, you are also a member of the national (LWVUS) and state (LWVTX) Leagues. See the links below for an abundance of educational information. Call me with your League questions anytime: 512-502-0278.

Thank You, Sustaining Members

Special thanks to this month's renewing sustaining member: Barbara Werth. We are grateful for your additional financial support for our local League's activities.

Thank You, Renewing Members

Many thanks to the following members who also renewed this month: Nancy Busbey, Verna Grice, Catherine and Joseph Nall, Gail Rothe and Myron Hess, Sonia Santana, Gwen and Joseph Santiago, and Jan Williams. We depend on your support and appreciate your timely renewals.

New Membership, Renewal Dues Payment, Address Changes

Please send your name, address, phone number, email address, household member (if applicable), along with your dues payment and/or any changes to the LWVAA office, 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705. Checks may be made out to the Austin League of Women Voters. Or you may instead click here to pay your annual dues online while providing all the above information. Of your regular dues, $52 goes to the LWVTX and the LWVUS, and only $8 is left to support our Austin League. Paying at the sustaining level greatly benefits the Austin League because the extra money stays in Austin and supports our local League's activities. In either case, the League is grateful for your support!

You may renew or join, using PayPal by clicking on the amount that applies to you.

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League Websites

There is an ABUNDANCE of excellent information on the three League websites. Do check them out: www.lwvaustin.org  www.lwvtexas.org  www.lwv.org

~Judy Parken, japarken@aol.com, 512-502-0278.