



The VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE PENSACOLA BAY AREA

Volume 56, Issue 4
November 2006

Santa Rosa Island: Past, Present and Future

The monthly League meeting will be held on **Saturday, November 18, 2006** in the **Noonan Center, First Presbyterian Church 33 East Gregory St.** Pensacola. Come for coffee at 9 AM and program at 9:30 AM

Join us to hear Attorney **MJ Menge** and Escambia County Commissioner **Mike Whitehead** discuss the history of Santa Rosa Island and its inclusion as a part of Escambia County. They will narrate the establishment of the Santa Rosa Island Authority and its responsibilities at the Beach. The talk will include the recent proposal to consider abolishment of the Authority and absorbing those duties into a county department. Financial aspects of the Island will be presented.

Vote NO on 3

What Does Amendment 3 Do?

Amendment 3 would require that future amendments to Florida's Constitution pass by 60 percent of the voters, imposing an unfair burden on citizens who place important issues on the ballot. Well-heeled opposition and lobby groups will pour millions into counter campaigns, calculating that a 40 percent NO vote can be bought and paid for.

"Amendment 3 is about exactly one thing. It is about taking power away from the citizens of Florida, so that it will be harder for the people to trump the Legislature, which is firmly in the pocket of business groups.

At its core, Amendment 3 is based on the "stupid voter" theory."

Howard Trosler, columnist, St. Petersburg Times, Sept. 26, 2006

Resolving City of Pensacola Election Law Issues

Sharon Barnett, Co-President

This week the our League is sending a letter to the Mayor and each City Council member concerning the election law problems revealed in the City of Pensacola's most recent referendum election. The League urges the City to take the necessary steps to amend its Charter to conform with the requirements of controlling state and federal law and to provide for the conduct of its own elections.

It is noted in the letter that the City Charter does not provide for the lawful verification of referendum petitions. It is further noted that the City of Pensacola needs to equip itself to conduct its own elections because the county Supervisor of Elections has announced that he will not conduct city elections within approximately 120 days of other elections.

The Pensacola Bay Area League offers to assist the City in developing appropriate amendments to the Charter and to help establish the election process which every municipality must have. It is important that the City of Pensacola resolve these issues now to provide for a secure process in the future. The problems with the Maritime Park Referendum were discovered too late to permit an effective remedy, but subsequent referendum elections conducted in the same manner are subject to timely injunction.

The City Clerk, Ms. Ericka Burnett, readily agreed to meet with the League's Co-Presidents to discuss the process of conducting city elections. The City Attorney, John Fleming, declined to meet with League representatives at this time and directed the League to submit any proposed Charter changes in writing. Mr. Fleming stated, by letter, that he strongly disagrees with the League's position concerning city referendum elections.

The Board and members of LWV Pensacola Bay Area extend heartfelt condolences to Susan Metzger on the death of her long time companion, George McGinnis.

Message from the Co-Presidents

October League Meeting

Despite on going road construction blocking normal access, 34 League members and 24 guests found their way to the Institute for Human and Machine Cognition to learn about the proposed amendments on the upcoming ballot. The Voter Service Committee presented background and pro/con information on the 6 issues. There was lively discussion following each topic. Speakers were: Ina Freeman, Sharon Barnett, Gene Feicht, Rosemary Hays-Thomas, Miriam Jennings, Vivian Faircloth and Janet deLorge. (Please refer to the abbreviated description of the amendments in this Voter.)

Following this program, the Florida League positions on the proposals were stated.

The League thanks the following members who provided refreshments for this meeting. They are: Elizabeth Andrews, Vivian Faircloth, Ina Freeman, Barbara Goggins, Carolann Holmes and Miriam Jennings.

Presentation of Proposed Amendments to Other Groups

The League has filled requests for speakers on the proposed amendments. Vivian Faircloth and Janet deLorge spoke to the Mental Health group in Pensacola and to the Santa Rosa Democratic Party in Milton. Sharon Barnett explained the ballot amendments at the Retired Teachers Association and to the audience on WUWF Radio. Two more meetings are scheduled prior to election day.

Special Election Edition of Florida Voter

Five thousand copies of this publication are being distributed throughout Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Thanks to all of you who have helped in this project to provide information to voters. This tabloid newspaper, published by LWV Florida, gives pro-con information on the state ballot issues as well as information on all statewide candidates on the November 7th ballot. Copies are available at the public libraries and the offices of the Supervisors of Elections in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Contact Vivian Faircloth, 438-5539 or vfaircloth@iname.com, for additional copies.

Presentation to Brown-Barge Middle School

Susan Watson of ACLU and Janet deLorge spoke on "Special Interest Groups" to approximately 120 middle school students at Brown Barge Magnet School. Protection of rights under the US Constitution was the focus of Ms. Watson's remarks. Ms. deLorge noted the League's special interest is open, honest government. Steps for establishing a special interest group were identified and suggestions for lobbying were presented. The students asked challenging questions and provided an opportunity for an explanation of the joint efforts of ACLU

and the League for the restoration of voting rights for felons who have completed their sentences and legal obligations.

Does Immigration Study Interest You?

We are looking for a Leaguer who is interested in the immigration issue to take the lead in the LWVUS study. Immigration 101: the Basis is the starting point of this study and can be found on the US League website in the 'For Members' section. The Immigration study materials will be found under Projects and Programs

December Holiday Social

Our holiday social will be held on the first week-end of December. Pam Schwartz will host the event at her home at 1125 Spring Street in North Hill. Watch for the details later in November. We look forward to enjoying a relaxing time with our League friends.

Janet deLorge & Sharon Barnett

International Relations: Turkey

Turkey, an Asian nation, will be the topic of the Great Decisions meeting in November. Ed Feicht will lead the discussion. Bill Goggins and other members who have previously lived in the country will provide additional insights to the questions being discussed on Monday, November 20th at 10:00 AM at Azalea Trace.

Turkey has long sought membership in the European Union. Roadblocks remain, as several European countries are wary of Turkey's candidacy. Could Turkey's membership in the EU help Western relations with the Islamic world? Or could the possible rejection of Turkey cause an even wider divide?

Featured topics for 2007 are: Middle East, Climate Change, Mexico, Migration, South Africa, War Crimes, Central Asia, and Childrens' rights. Great Decision members will choose a leader for each featured topic for 2007. Contact Gene Feicht to be a part of these impartial, thought-provoking analyses of issues of concern to U.S. policymakers today. ◇



“Rally 2006”

WSRE-TV

Candidate Forum

November 1, 2006 at 7 PM

**Questions from members of the
LWV Pensacola Bay Area and
LWV Okaloosa Counties**

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Barbara Goggins, 478-2953

At the present time, the League Education Committee is studying the impact on students of rezoning the schools in Escambia County. Committee members are attending all of the meetings of the Escambia County School Board and the School Attendance Zoning Advisory Committee (SAZAC). Other issues discussed at the September committee meeting for possible study after the first of the year are the following:

- + Examine the relationship between school uniform use and student performance..
- + Explore the effect of an extended school day on student performance.
- + Analyze the effect NCLB has had on the drop-out rate since its inception.
- + Probe the relationship between single sex classroom instruction and student performance.

Please join us as we undertake important educational issues. Call Barbara Goggins 478-2953 for details . ◇

League Fundraising

By Susan Metzger, 932-4039

In addition to dues and donations, fund-raising is an important source of income for non-profit organizations such as the League, and we are always looking for new ways to supplement the expenses the League incurs. This is how you can help the League without cost to our members.

For several years, the League has had an Advantage Account with Office Depot. Every three months the League is sent a rebate for purchases made by our members. Every time one of our members makes a purchase, orders printing or copies from Office Depot, it can be recorded in our Advantage Account. Just tell the cashier the League has an Advantage Account, give them my phone number, 932-4039, and you will help build a fund to support the League. Your family and friends may do the same. This year Office Depot has awarded the League more than \$100.

We also have an opportunity for income, which at the same time helps save the environment. The League is participating in a Cell Phone Drive, which turns used cell phones into cash. These working phones are collected at all meetings. The payment for each phone depends on its type and age and can range from \$2.00 to \$50.00. We have received more than \$300 for the program this year. If you cannot attend a meeting, call 932-4039 and a member will come to your home to pick up your used phone. ◇

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Ruth Smith, formerly Planning & Zoning of Escambia County
Ellen Roston, Natural Resources Chair, 453-0730

Every seven years, Florida counties are required to evaluate and appraise the effectiveness of their Comprehensive Plan, which is the foundation document for the growth and development regulations within the county. To produce the current Evaluation and Appraisal Report (EAR), the county has conducted five "Issue" workshops across the county. These workshops, together with State requirements and staff concerns, resulted in a list of 10 primary issues to be addressed. These range from a vision for the future growth and development of the county, to level of service standards, revisions of the future land use categories and land development code regulations. Staff will write reports on each of these issues.

The County has identified a group of citizens and organizational representatives to serve as a "Steering Committee." This committee will be asked to review the draft issue reports as each is completed. The League of Women Voters was asked to be part of this Steering Committee and Muriel Wagner will serve as the League representative. Meetings have been scheduled approximately every two weeks beginning October 17. They are to be held in the Longleaf Elementary School Cafeteria, beginning at 6 p.m., 2600 Longleaf Drive. All meetings except October 30 are on Tuesday evenings. The meetings should last approximately two hours and are open to the public.

The Steering Committee is advisory only and does not have the authority to remove any report with which members disagree. It will be encouraged to suggest changes, but the voting is strictly to determine whether a majority agrees on a recommendation. The recommendations then go to the Planning Board for comparison with the original version. Following their perusal of the draft EAR, it will go to the Committee of the Whole. It will then be sent to the State Department of Community Affairs (DCA) for a "courtesy review". Thirty days later it will be returned with comments from DCA, the suggested changes will be made and it will go to the Board of County Commissioners in July for adoption. It must be submitted to DCA by August 1, 2007.

Approximately two months later, DCA will rule on the document's compliance with the State Comprehensive Plan. If approved, the Comprehensive Plan amendments in the EAR must be adopted within 18 months by the Board of County Commissioners. ◇

Overview of Proposed Amendments on the Florida November 7, 2006 Ballot

1 State Planning and Budget Process - Provides that 3 % of non-recurring general revenue each year can be allocated by a Joint Legislative Budget Commission for particular needs of the State without a vote of the entire Legislature; Commission to issue long-range financial planning for Florida.

Pros:

- emphasizes long-range fiscal planning
- creates a governmental efficiency task force to recommend cost savings

Cons:

- caps on non-recurring funds too high (\$800 Million at present)
- commission, not entire Legislature, decides expenditure of tax dollars
- bad timing as the Taxation and Budget Commission will make its 20 yr. review of budget next year

League Supports this amendment because:

- fiscal structure should be responsive to public needs &
- should measure effectiveness of expenditures of tax dollars to provide fiscal accountability and responsibility

3 Broader Support for Constitutional Amendments Requires a 60% approval by voters, rather than a simple majority, for proposed amendments to the Constitution. This amendment would not change the current requirement that a proposal imposing a new tax or fee must be approved by a 2/3 vote for passage.

Pros:

- would reduce the number of amendments to the Constitution
- 60% shows broader consensus

Cons:

- if passed, Florida will be the only state requiring 60% for passage (23 states allow citizen initiatives by a simple majority.)
- weakens voice of citizens in their right to petition the government
- grassroots organizations will be adversely impacted by having to collect greater number of signatures on petitions
- greatest number of proposed amendments come from the Legislature rather than through citizen initiative process
- amendment is opposed by both gubernatorial candidates; bipartisan groups and many newspaper editorial boards across state.

League Opposes this amendment because:

- reduces the right of citizens to propose amendments through the citizen initiative process by requiring greater number of signatures
- Florida does not allow statutory initiatives; if that were available, the League would favor requiring a supermajority to pass a constitutional amendment.

4 Protect Youth from Hazards of Tobacco Addiction Requires that 15 % of the annual amount from the tobacco settlement be spent on education and prevention of smoking by young people; and an additional 5 % to be spent on advertising. This amendment was proposed through the citizen initiative process and is supported by health-related groups.

Pros:

- would increase funding from 1 % to 15 % to educate youth on dangers of smoking (\$57 million as opposed to current \$1 million)
- ensure adequate advertising budget each year (\$19 M)
- could reduce illness and death from smoking related causes

Cons:

- does not belong in the Constitution; should be a statute
- can funds be spent effectively each year?
- specifying amounts in Constitution reduces budget flexibility

League Opposes this amendment because:

- issue should be addressed by statute rather than by amending the Constitution
- no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution.

6 Increased Homestead Exemption - Increases the homestead exemption of low income Florida residents from \$25,000 to \$50,000.

Pros:

- provides relief for household incomes up to \$23,700 for seniors (65 and older)
- individual counties can decide whether to implement the increase

Cons:

- local governments already have option to provide additional exemption for low-income seniors, up to \$25000 (Escambia provides this option.)
- loss of ad valorem revenue
- possible shifting of tax burden to young people and renters

League Opposes this amendment because:

Continued on page next page.

- there should be no increase or extension of the homestead exemption
- no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution.

7 Homestead Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans Provides a discount on ad valorem taxes for a partially or totally disabled veteran who is 65 years or older, entered military from Florida, has disability that is combat related, and was honorably discharged. (This is in addition to the \$5000 exemption currently provided for service connected disabilities.)

Pros:

- way to thank veterans for their service
- increases exemption based on percentage of disability
- wheelchair-bound veterans are exempted totally from property taxes

Cons:

- limits exemption to enlistees from Florida
- must be at least 65 years of age
- disability must be combat related
- estimated revenue loss of \$20 million
- creates greater imbalance in property tax liability between age groups, nature of disability, past residence, where disability was incurred.

League Opposes this amendment because:

- there should be no increase or extension of the homestead exemption
- no source of revenue should be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the Constitution.

8 Eminent Domain - Prohibits the taking by eminent domain of private property for economic development to a private person or private entity. However, the Legislature may, with a vote of 3/5 of the members of each house, pass a law to permit exceptions to this amendment. Currently, Florida law prohibits taking private property by eminent domain for economic development. The law was passed in response to the Supreme Court ruling in *Kelo v. New London, CT*.

Pros:

- limits circumstances under which private property may be taken through eminent domain
- provides property taken by eminent domain must be retained for 5 years before it can be transferred to private entity

Cons:

- the exceptions to the amendment are not identified
- should not be included in the Constitution

League has No Position on this amendment because:

- it has not been studied

League Launches VOTE411.org Voting Information the Public Needs

Election Day is fast approaching, and the League of Women Voters has proudly joined forces with Yahoo! to provide www.VOTE411.org, a one-stop source for election information! This easy-to-use, nonpartisan national Web site features some of the most sought-after information about Election Day, including state by state data on:

- registration and absentee ballot rules
- early voting provisions
- ID requirements
- voting machine information
- tools for overseas citizens
- contact information for elections officials.

Plus: a one-of-a-kind nationwide polling place locator! VOTE411.org ensures that voters have the information they need to make sure their votes count! ♦

League Calls on House Leaders to Pledge Support for Real Ethics Reform

The LWVUS joined other national reform organizations in letters to House leaders urging each of them to support an independent fact-finding function as part of the ethics process. The performance of the House Ethics Committee in this Congress has been a complete failure and the House ethics enforcement process today has no credibility with the American people. Regardless of which party controls the House in the next Congress, it is essential to fundamentally overhaul the process for enforcing the House ethics rules. ♦

What Do You Want Escambia County Look Like in 2020?

A survey is currently underway to identify the most important issues facing Escambia County residents. This is an effort to find out what citizens consider significant and will serve as a planning tool for the future. League members are vitally interested and involved in our community and this is an opportunity to include your input. Please take a few minutes to respond to this survey at <http://www.escambiainitiative.org/>

Affordable Housing Panel Kicks off Fall Programs

League members and guests were presented a broad-based perspective on local affordable housing with presentations by four speakers at the September meeting. **Dr. Rick Harper**, UWF Director of the Haas Center, stated that between 2002-2005 housing costs in Escambia County increased by 65%; however wages did not rise comparably, with the median income of \$55,000 for Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. This reduced opportunities for many local residents to become homeowners. The good news is that the housing bubble has burst and a greater percentage of the population will be able to purchase houses.

Al Muller of Market Trends collects data locally on real estate, compiles the information and offers it to businesses involved with property issues. One highlight of his remarks was that approximately 5000 local homeowners left the area two years ago following Ivan's destruction. The second dramatic change is that average housing costs in Atlanta are lower than in Pensacola at the present time.

Randy Wilkerson, longtime director of Neighborhood Enterprise Foundation, pointed out that as a County employee he and Pat Hubbard of the City of Pensacola work closely together to coordinate efforts to provide housing for lower income groups. They cooperate with Habitat for Humanity, CEI and other non-profit groups whose focus is housing. Prior to the recent devastating hurricanes, small clusters of subsidized housing were built in scattered neighborhoods. However, with the loss of two large apartment complexes this trend changed so that large complexes are being built to meet the housing demand for renters.

Robert Strickland, Circle Inc, described a unique program underway in Escambia County. Under the auspices of Calvary Center Church, this group is cooperating with private developers to redevelop a community on Massachusetts Avenue. The four components to qualify for tax credits include: housing, a health care facility, a grocery store and educational opportunities. Both a grocery store and a health clinic have opened. Alabaster Gardens, a 147 unit complex for seniors, is under construction and will provide affordable housing for the elderly.

The League offers special thanks to Joan Allen and Carolann Holmes for successfully bringing together a panel to present a broad perspective on the local housing picture.



Calendar

November

November

- 1 Wednesday, 7-9 PM, WSRE-TV **Rally '06** Candidate Forum for Escambia, Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties.
- 2 Thursday 8 PM CST, HBO's new documentary "**Hacking Democracy**" featuring Leon County's Supervisor of Election *Ion Sancho* who presided over a trial 'mini-election' using Diebold voting machines.
- 7 Tuesday, **General Election - Vote!**
- 7 Tuesday, 5:30 PM **Board Meeting** Tryon Branch Library, 9th Avenue & College Blvd.
- 9 Thursday, 5:30 PM **Natural Resources Committee** meeting. Perdido Key Association will update committee on growth issues. Call Ellen Roston, 453-0730 for location.
- 14 Tuesday, 2 PM **Domestic Violence Coalition** will meet at Pensacola Police Department, 711 N. Hayne St. Contact Vivian Faircloth, 438-5539 for more information.

General Meeting

November 18, 2006

9 AM Coffee 9:30 AM Program

Santa Rosa Island: Past, Present and Future

Attorney **MJ Menge** & Commissioner **Mike Whitehead**

First Presbyterian Church Noonan Center at

33 E. Gregory St. (Note location for this meeting)

- 20 Monday, 10:00 AM **Great Decisions** Azalea Trace, *Ed Feicht* will lead discussion on Turkey. Contact Gene Feicht, 479-3352 for more information.

December

First weekend of December, Pam Schwartz, 1125 Spring Street in North Hill will host the League **Holiday Social**. Watch for complete details in the coming weeks.

- 5 Tuesday, 5:30 PM **Board Meeting** Tryon Branch Library, 9th Avenue & College Blvd

Welcome To Our New and Returning Members!

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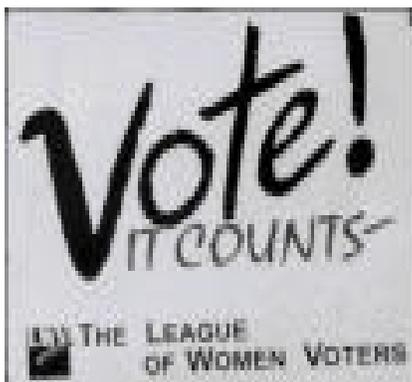
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OCTOBER MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By Susan Metzger, 932-403 9

In January, 2006, we filed our annual report to the National League listing 167 members. However, our community was still suffering from the impact of several recent hurricanes, and many members have found homes outside of Florida. Therefore, the sad news is we have lost many members this year.

But we also have good news to report: The League has made many new friends during this year. As a result, our current membership enrollment stands at 161 and our new members are bringing with them fresh enthusiasm and energy which will increase the impact of the League in our community.

Volunteer Needed

Your local League is seeking a volunteer to coordinate participation in the LWVUS study on Immigration which will begin in early 2007. The study will allow the League to take a position on national immigration issues as well as provide a well considered position statement that local Leagues may adopt.

If interested, contact Janet deLorge, 478-2581.

Message From the Editor

It is increasingly important to communicate with our members electronically. Email (by which we can now distribute our Voter) and our website are helping us to do that. Web technology allows The Voter to be supplemented with fuller content than is currently available.

If you would like to receive your copy of The Voter electronically, contact [Vivian Faircloth](#), 438-5539

Florida Death Penalty System Broken

A blue-ribbon assessment panel appointed by the American Bar Association (ABA), has concluded that Florida's capital punishment policies fail to meet basic standards established by the ABA, findings that capital punishment critics say underscore the need for a moratorium on executions.

Using the ABA's protocols for examining the administration of capital punishment, the nine-member Florida assessment team extensively researched the state's capital punishment laws and closely examined eight key issues of death penalty administration, including defense services; jury instructions; procedural restrictions and limitations on habeas corpus; clemency proceedings; an independent judiciary; racial and ethnic minorities; juvenile offenders; and the mentally ill.

The panel's key findings were:

- ◆ Florida lacks adequate procedures in place to prevent the possibility of executing innocent persons. Twenty-two Florida inmates have been released from death row after evidence proved their innocence.
- ◆ Death penalty lawyers are untrained and underfunded. Some lawyers have little or no experience in death penalty cases and do not raise the correct issues in trials.
- ◆ Florida's process prevents jurors from being fully engaged in carrying out their duties. Florida is the only state not requiring a unanimous decision in recommending the death penalty.

[excerpted from St. Petersburg Nov 2006 Voter]

The LWVUS is a Death Penalty Abolition advocate. The LWVUS issued a plea for a moratorium on the death penalty in Florida in 2003.

Join the League of Women Voters Today!

It's easy! Just send your check to :
Treasurer, LWVPBA, P.O. Box 2023, Pensacola, FL 32513

I'm renewing my membership

- \$45 individual Employed PT/Full
- \$22.50 each additional household member Prior Member
- \$22.50 student Please do not call
- Contribution _____

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Membership entitles you to subscriptions to the *National Voter*, the *Florida Voter* and the *Pensacola Bay Area Voter*.

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The VOTER
 Volume 56, Issue 4
 November 2006

Established in 1949, the Pensacola Bay Area League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization that encourages citizens to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a member. All members receive the *National Voter*, the *Florida Voter* and this publication.

Co-presidents: Sharon Barnett
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