

## President's Letter

Dear Members & Friends,

*Congratulations on 90 years of making a difference.... but here in Florida we're not there yet.*

We still need your help to move Florida to the fourth largest league in the United States, in keeping with our population ranking. We are just 200 members away — if each league brings in 7 new members, we will meet our goal!

And excitingly, by the time you receive this newsletter, you will have heard that our two Fair Districts amendments are on the ballot for November 2010. But we're not there yet!

Great minds discuss ideas;  
average minds discuss events;  
small minds discuss people.

— Eleanor Roosevelt

In our quest to increase the value of your League membership, the state league has added some **exciting new elements to Legislative Seminar while reducing the cost!** We've begun to add mini trips around the state to see the Florida's Seven Wonders which we help protect (Sandhill Cranes trip — sold out in two weeks), and engaged **Ben Wilcox, the most respected citizen lobbyist in the state.** Keep your eye on our new Voter Services Director, Pat Drago, as she works with local leagues to expand our voter education and increase our impact in 2010.

Applause for the local league presidents who are leading the way on dramatic membership increases, partnerships with media, and newsworthy and controversial Hot Topics. Also kudos to our Voter Service Chairs, busy cranking up efforts to provide **vital information to voters on local candidates and complex ballot amendments.**

With **your** continued help, we will be achieving important reforms in this critical election year, and we will get there!

In League,

Deirdre Macnab

P.S. **What happens on March 1?** Those who haven't registered yet will have to pay more for Legislative Seminar... it's the League experience attendees rave about, and return for year after year. We are looking for a sell-out crowd with representation from across the state...a crowd that includes you!



# THE FLORIDA VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF FLORIDA

[www.TheFloridaVoter.org](http://www.TheFloridaVoter.org)

Volume 58, Issue 1, Winter 2010

## Coastal Drilling: The League Position

by Marilyn Wills, Action Chair

For years Florida's coasts have been protected by a ban on state-controlled waters (0-10 miles off shore). However, new legislation was championed in the final days of the 2009 Legislative Session by Representative Cannon and Senator Haridopolos that would allow drilling in these previously protected waters. They did not get approval on the issue at that time, but it is currently working its way through committee with the possibility of being considered in the upcoming 2010 session.

The possibility that the offshore drilling ban would be lifted is currently being debated, and Leagues around the state are holding public forums. Here is an overview of the League's long history, study and action on this issue:

The League supported the establishment of the Florida Coastal Management Program and urged the Florida Congressional delegation to reauthorize the Coastal Zone Management Act, also supported the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, which supports limiting federal and state expenditures on undeveloped barrier islands.

In 1986 the League supported the establishment of the coastal building zone and the next year opposed elimination of the 30-mile buffer around Florida's coast for offshore oil drilling lease sales. In 1989 LWVF testified before the President's Task Force on Offshore Oil Drilling requesting a three-year moratorium on oil drilling in the areas south of Latitude 26, where the Everglades and the Florida Keys would be in great danger from an oil spill. In 1993 LWVF went on record in opposition to a proposal to drill for oil on American Indian land in the Everglades. The oil company withdrew its application the following year.

However, pressure to permit offshore natural gas drilling

in the eastern Gulf of Mexico intensified in Congress with the accelerating rise in energy prices in summer 2005. The League encouraged Floridians to submit online petitions and engaged LWVUS in issuing nationwide action alerts to help Florida protect its coasts. The bill was withdrawn.

Since 1993 LWVF has worked to urge the federal and state governments to oppose oil and gas drilling off Florida's coast.

For many years, Florida's elected leaders were united in their opposition to oil and gas drilling off Florida's world-famous coast but in 2006 this was no longer the case. In December 2006 a bipartisan compromise was reached that opened much of the eastern Gulf of Mexico to oil

and gas exploration, while providing significant protections for Florida's west coast over the next two decades. The compromise created a 125-mile, no-drilling zone off the Florida Panhandle, while the waters off Tampa Bay would be off-limits to drilling for 234 miles. The protections are to last through 2022.

## LWVUS POSITION

The League advocates a national energy policy emphasizing increased fuel-efficiency standards for automobiles, opposition to oil drilling in environmentally sensitive areas including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and support for government action in the development and use of energy conservation and renewable energy sources.

In the 108th Congress, the Senate voted twice not to open ANWR to destructive oil drilling. The House, however, included drilling in its version of the Energy Bill. The LWVUS sent three Grassroots Lobby Corps alerts urging action in opposition to oil drilling in ANWR. The League also contacted selected state Leagues to encourage grassroots lobbying to protect ANWR. •

## Leaders Council 2010 May 21-22 at Rollins College, Winter Park

Mark your calendars! Council is a time for league members from across the state to come together for business, trainings and fun! Stay tuned for more information!



# Don't Be Fooled by "Welfare for Politicians" Spin

by Ben Wilcox

There is an effort underway in the Florida legislature to repeal the language in our State Constitution that requires the legislature to maintain a system of public campaign financing for statewide elections. The measure, if passed by the legislature, would still have to be approved by Florida voters in 2010. Proponents of this repeal refer cynically to public campaign financing as "welfare for politicians." While admittedly catchy, this slogan over simplifies and obscures the real goal of public campaign financing which is to reduce the undue influence of wealthy special interests on public policy.

Florida's system of public financing for statewide campaigns is one of the oldest in the country. Other states have followed Florida's lead. Fourteen states now use a form of public funding of candidate campaigns as a critical tool for limiting the influence of special interest money on public policy.

In 1998, Florida voters enshrined our system of public campaign financing for statewide races in the constitution by a 64% vote. A good, well functioning public campaign financing system holds down the cost of campaigns through voluntary spending limits, levels the playing field so lesser known candidates without special interest support can still be competitive and reduces the influence of wealthy special interests. In the states that have working public campaign financing systems, it has proven to be popular with candidates and voters alike and it has increased voter choice at the polls and made elected officials more accountable to voters instead of wealthy donors.

Florida's system of public financing is no longer accomplishing the goals it was meant to accomplish. Until 2005, the system worked as intended by reducing the cost of campaigns and encouraging competition. However, in 2005, the Florida Legislature voted to radically increase the voluntary spending limits; from \$6 million to \$20 mil-

lion for the Gubernatorial race and from \$2 million to \$10 million for Cabinet races. This was done as an amendment on the floor of both the House and Senate with no opportunity for public debate. That change has undermined the system and increased the cost of the program, more than doubling in the 2006 elections as a result of the legislature's action in 2005.

With these absurdly high spending limits, Florida's system of public campaign financing has become just another source of campaign cash. However, rather than strip it from the constitution, the legislature should fix the problems it created by returning Florida's voluntary spending limits to their pre-2005 levels. That is one of the recommendations contained in a recently released report by the Center for Governmental Studies, a national nonpartisan research organization. The report, titled "Public Campaign Financing: Florida – a program sours," also recommends closing the soft money loophole that allows special interests to make unlimited contributions to the political parties and putting strict limits on what the parties can spend on candidates.

Supporters of the repeal of the constitutional requirement will try to argue that we have other more pressing budget priorities. Not true, at least not this year. If the Joint Resolution does make it on to the ballot in 2010 and passes by the required 60% threshold, it would not actually save any taxpayer money until the 2014 election cycle.

And I think Floridians are savvy enough to know that "the people" end up paying more when campaigns are funded by lobbyists and special interests who view their campaign contributions as a front-end investment. These folks are not making huge campaign contributions in the interest of good government, but in the interest of government being good to them. Their campaign contributions buy access to elected officials and ultimately influence on public policy.

Don't let the slogan "welfare for politicians" fool you. We're better off having our elected officials beholden to us, the taxpaying public, than to the big money lobbyists and wealthy special interests. •

These folks are not making huge campaign contributions in the interest of good government, but in the interest of government being good to them.



**Ben Wilcox:**  
New LWVF  
Lobbyist

After years of League membership, Ben is now the

League's Government Consultant in 2009. One of the most respected citizen's advocates in the state of Florida, and a well recognized expert on subjects in the area of public campaign financing and ethics, Ben has a long history of both educating citizens and advocacy in Florida Government.

After graduation from Florida State University in 1976, Ben Wilcox worked as a reporter for the Florida Public Radio Network, providing reports on state government and the Florida legislature throughout the state. In 1978, he became the news director for the network and in 1994 he also became the news director for WFSU-FM, the public radio station in Tallahassee. As a journalist he covered 23 sessions of the Florida legislature and won awards from the Associated Press and the Society of Professional Journalists. He also hosted a statewide call-in program called Florida on the Line featuring the state's political leaders, including the Governor, legislative leadership and members of the state cabinet.

From 1999 to 2009, Wilcox was executive director of Common Cause Florida. He will represent the League of Women Voters of Florida before the Florida legislature in the 2010 legislative session. •

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**Katie Ross serves as Secretary for League of Women Voters Florida. She also serves as Vice President for League of Women Voters Jacksonville First Coast**

## Camp Wellstone: Where the Grassroots Grow

By Katie Ross, LWVF Secretary

I had the wonderful opportunity to attend Camp Wellstone, which provides training in grassroots politics for candidates, campaign workers and citizen activists. Named for the late Senator Paul Wellstone who was known for his successful grassroots election campaigns and being a true champion of the progressive movement, Camp Wellstone was created after his death to continue his work for progressive candidates and issue campaigns.

I chose the citizen activist track because of my board duties with LWVF. My weekend focused on publicity, volunteer recruitment, community organizing, lobbying and power mapping/political strategy. In addition to heralding from all over the country, including Atlanta, Chicago and D.C., my classmates came from various backgrounds: healthcare reform activists, labor union organizers and various other grassroots campaign, providing many valuable network opportunities.

I gained new skills at the training, and feel this new knowledge will help me better contribute to the League's mission. As an example, I learned more about the effective use of viral videos which can help spread our message to potential members and the community at-large. And I can't wait to use my new lobbying techniques at Legislative Session!

Many of the Wellstone attendees have gone on to run successful grassroots campaigns, nonprofit and advocacy organizations and have even been elected to office. I hope that I can join their ranks and help fight for the quality of life for Florida's citizens. Many thanks to board member Pam Goodman who sponsored me at the training. •

For more information on Camp Wellstone please visit <http://www.wellstone.org/our-programs/camp-wellstone>.

# Passenger Rail for Florida: A Special Session 2009 Victory

By Charlene Walker, Chair LWVF Transportation Committee

Following the special legislative session in December of 2009 and the approval of a broad-based passenger rail agreement, rail is transitioning from being a promise to finally being reality. Local leagues are being encouraged to play an active role.

Under the priorities approved at LWVF Convention, including the action to SUPPORT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION and the approved Study TRANSPORTATION STUDY under the leadership of the Transportation Committee, local leagues were asked to evaluate some positions that were reached by Orange, Seminole and Tallahassee Leagues to assess if their local members were interested in reaching concurrence, in order to use these to better position themselves to support public transportation in their local areas.

The recent passage of a Statewide Rail Transit Bill makes this discussion even more important. Here are some of the highlights of this bill as it was passed in special session:

**1. Creates a Florida Rail Enterprise within the Department of Transportation (DOT)** modeled after the existing Florida Turnpike Enterprise, that will be responsible for passenger rail systems, including high speed rail. This will facilitate statewide policymaking and funding on passenger rail. It will report to the Transportation Secretary and elevates passenger rail as a statewide transportation policy.

**2. Creates a Passenger Rail Commission to advise FLDOT** in the design, building, operating, financing and maintenance of all passenger rail systems. It will also monitor the efficiency and management of future rail systems, such as Sun Rail (Central Florida), TBARTA (Tampa) and high speed rail.

**3. Establishes Indemnity Standards:** Under the guidelines the freight operator is liable for incidents where a freight train hits a trespasser on the track or a car at a crossing. In the case of a collision between two

trains, freight operator would be responsible for paying the insurance deductible (up to \$10m) when punitive damages are awarded due to a willful or wanton act of its employees. This is a change from the original plan which would have placed the state on the hook for all accidents, even those caused by a freight operator.

**4. Purchase of a Rail Corridor:** Makes the purchase of the Central Florida commuter rail corridor contingent upon Federal Full Funding Agreement. It allows the FL DOT to begin the process for purchasing the Central Florida rail corridor. Purchases can not be finalized until receipt of the Federal Full Funding Agreement.

**5. Impact of Increased Freight Movement:** Requires DOT to identify and address impacts of freight traffic. Directs DOT to work with communities impacted by increased freight traffic. Allows DOT to access doc stamp funding for projects via the work program that would address freight rail impacts.

**6. Dedicated Funding to Passenger Rail/Tri Rail Operations:** Provides the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority with necessary funding to operate their Tri-Rail system. It maintains the current funding level, continues to require local funding contributions, and earmarks a small portion of additional future transportation dollars to support the state priority of passenger rail.

**7. Provides a Sustainable Dedicated Funding Source to Passenger Rail:** Provides for part of the Documentary Stamp proceeds to be used for future passenger rail systems. The first \$60 million of TRIP funds will be administered by the Florida Rail Enterprise and dedicated to passenger rail. •

*Thanks to Kelly Teague of Metroplan Orlando, who contributed to the article above.*

## 2010 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

by Marilyn Wills, Action Chair

The LWVF board has selected Legislative Priorities for the 2010 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature. The priorities were selected using input from local Leagues, the LWVF Board and other sources. A summary statement of the LWVF's position on each priority is included.

**Government in Florida:** Promote an open government that is responsive to the people of the state.

**Equitable Taxation:** Support a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of the tax responsibility and responsive to public needs. Support the repeal of tax exemptions that do not fulfill a public purpose.

**Redistricting:** Support single-member election districts that are equal in population, provide access for minorities, and are not determined by the Legislature.

**Citizen Initiatives including the Statutory Initiative:** Support citizens' right to have both constitutional and statutory initiatives.

**Elections:** Promote election audits based on a statistically significant sample size and done before certification of election results. Support early voting and granting supervisors of elections greater flexibility in determining those sites.

Several bills that address some of the State League's priorities have been filed prior to the 2010 legislative session.

In the area of equitable taxation, SB 216 has been filed by Senator Lynn. The bill requires the Joint Legislative Sunset Committee to review (a) exemptions from the general state sales and use tax and (b) exclusions of sales of services from such taxation. The bill would eliminate exemptions on many other sales and rentals with the exception of groceries, medical expenses, guide dogs, household fuels, etc.

Senator Justice has filed SJR 402, addressing redistricting, and Senator Fasano has filed a bill requiring that each district school board and county supervisor of elections jointly provide a voter education program for high school students eligible to register or preregister to vote.

During the fall, the League, along with other like-minded groups, met with Senator Rich to discuss early voting and SB 828, which would expand the list of available early voting sites to include specified facilities or any other location designated by a supervisor of elections as meeting the requirements of state law. In 2008, supervisors were limited to using their office or libraries, proving to be a hardship for libraries. The bill also deletes a requirement that an early voting site be designated and used as such for at least 1 year before an election. There is also a formula that would determine the number of early voting sites a county must operate, based on population in said county.

There are over 1,000 Senate bills and almost 600 House bills filed thus far; all are available for your perusal on the Florida Sunshine website: [www.leg.state.fl.us](http://www.leg.state.fl.us). •



Sharon Helsby and Dede Caron

### Need your League photos!

To see your League featured in our upcoming editions, please forward high resolution photos to [newslettereditor@pepperheid.com](mailto:newslettereditor@pepperheid.com)

Thanks for including information for a caption.

# LWVF and Rights Restoration

by Chris Straton, Collier County LWV

The League of Women Voters of Florida is one of over 40 organizations that form the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition (FRRRC). It is the mission of the FRRRC to have Florida join the 40 states in the nation that automatically restore the civil rights of all individuals with past felony convictions upon completion of non-monetary terms of their sentences.

Florida is one of only three states that strip all individuals with past felony convictions of their civil rights, including their fundamental right to vote, even after completion of their sentences. Among the civil rights lost are not only the right to vote, but also the right to serve on a jury and to hold public office. Restoration of civil rights is also necessary to obtain certain occupational licenses. In response to this civil rights crisis, a broad non-partisan coalition was organized in March 2003 to launch a campaign for the restoration

Florida is one of only three states that strip all individuals with past felony convictions of their civil rights.

of civil rights for all Floridians with past felony convictions upon completion of their sentences.

A current issue being addressed by the Coalition is that ex-offenders who have their rights restored are mailed a letter to their last known address. Since many of these persons are no longer at that address, the letters are returned and stored in a box. Attempts are underway to determine the scope of this problem to develop a solution. There is now a database, which allows ex-offenders to find out if their rights have been restored. Workshops are available to inform ex-offenders of their rights and League members are invited to participate. To learn more about the FRRRC, go to [RestoreRights.org](http://RestoreRights.org). •

Milestones



## Fair Districts on the Ballot!

The race to get it on the ballot is complete. The next race: Educate voters for the November 2010 decision. Special thanks to Chair Caroline Emmons Schramm, Corinne Miller, and all the Fair Districts coordinators and volunteers around the state. Well done!



## 90th Birthday for LWV

Not coincidentally, the 19th amendment to the United States Constitution that gave women the right to vote celebrates its 90th anniversary in 2010, as well.

*"Those who started the movement to give women the right to vote really didn't know where it would end, how it would end, or when it would end," said LWVUS president, Mary G. Wilson. "And yet they persevered. They worked against all odds — and succeeded."*

# Lessons From the Geese

by Ruth Schechter, Membership Chairman

When thinking about how to attract new members, it's necessary to look at your organization and evaluate how attractive it is. One of the prime illustrations of good organization is a flock of geese, from whom we can learn many lessons. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the bird following. By flying in a "V" formation the whole flock adds a 71% longer flying range than if each bird flew alone.

**Lesson:** People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier when they travel on the lift of one another. **Lesson:** Each must be a good "flapper." In other words for the team to fly higher and longer, each team member must not only carry their own weight, they must be a valuable contributor. When ever a goose falls out of formation it quickly feels the drag and resistance of

trying to fly alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front.

**Lesson:** If we have as much sense as a goose we will stay in formation with those who are headed where we want to go. The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

**Lesson:** We need to make sure our honking from behind is encouraging — not something less helpful! When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow him down to help protect him. They stay with him until he is able to fly again or dies. Then they launch out on their own, either with another formation or to catch up with the original flock.

**Lesson:** If we have as much sense as the geese, we'll stand by each other like they do and learn their valuable lessons! •

*Ruth is currently a director of the LWVF and President of the Space Coast LWV.*

# Sanibel MAL — 67 New Members in Six Months



Carla Benninga, founding Sanibel MAL president, announced that the Sanibel League now has 67 members and is the fastest growing League in the state.

Upcoming programs include informative Hot Topics presentations on off-shore drilling and the Fair Districts amendment.

Carla Benninga, the new founding president of the Sanibel MAL Unit and her husband, Benno Benninga, have interesting backgrounds and perspectives that they bring to their League involvement. They both spent time hiding from the Germans in WWII, in separate homes in Holland, much like Anne Frank. Carla's husband and fellow League member, Benno Benninga, just published his book "IN HIDING: Surviving an Abusive "Protector" and the Nazi Occupation of Holland," which is available on Amazon and in bookstores.

Carla and Benno, moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1951, and then to Sanibel in 1993. Carla served on the Boards of COTI (Committee of the Islands) for four years, of the former Pirate Playhouse/J. Howard Wood Theatre for six years and on the Board of BIG ARTS from 2003 till 2009. •



## THE VOTER

Editor and Creative Director: Kit Pepper, 407-628-5449, [NewsletterEditor@pepperheid.com](mailto:NewsletterEditor@pepperheid.com)

Please contact me with your newsletter suggestions, photos and article ideas!



Pat Schwartz, one of our generous matching fund donors.

## THANK YOU!

Your tax-deductible contribution to the **Education Fund** supports our non-partisan education activities, including our voter services programs, our conferences, our publications and our assistance to local Leagues.

Your contribution to the **Lobby Fund** supports engaging a professional to represent and advocate league program priorities to the Florida Legislature and Administration. The strength of our voice at the Capitol depends upon our finances.



"Just a few months ago, I added the League of Women Voters of Florida to my will. I urge all League members as they approach their estate planning to consider a bequest to the League of Women Voters of Florida. It's easy to do and a wonderful way to add to one's legacy of lifetime volunteer work that I believe does such important work for our state and our communities."

— Dianne S. Wheatley, former LWVF President and current LWVUS Board member.

We suggest the following wording: I bequeath (\$\_\_\_\_ or % of my residuary estate) to the League of Women Voters of Florida Education Fund, a charitable organization with principal offices located at 540 Beverly Court, Tallahassee, Florida 32301, for ongoing programs involving voter and citizen education.

For more information Sandra Colyer, LWVF Treasurer, 850/224-2545.

## LWV® Education Fund Donors

August 13-December 11, 2009

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**Give Today!** Donations can be made to either fund by credit card at our secure website: [www.lwvfla.org](http://www.lwvfla.org) or submitted by mail to 540 Beverly Court, Tallahassee, FL 32301

# 2010 LWVF LEGISLATIVE SEMINAR

*"Where you can make a difference!"*

March 22-24, 2010 • Tallahassee

**Low \$99 Registration Fee**

In honor of the League of Women Voters 90th Anniversary



League members from around the state gather with then-Senate President Tom Lee.

*"For me, Legislative Seminar made 'what happens in Tallahassee' come alive, much more so than articles I read in the newspaper. It was also a great way to meet leaders from other local Leagues, and learn from them. I highly recommend it, especially for those new to League."*

— Sandy Parker, President Collier County

*"Attending Legislative Seminar made me realize how important our work is, and the huge impact and respect the League has. I was proud to be part of the process, and found great inspiration in the activities and the people that I met."*

— Laurie Wack, Orange County

**Monday, March 22**

**Cocktails on Top of the Capitol,  
Welcome Reception & Dinner** — 5:00 p.m.

Enjoy the panoramic, breathtaking view of Tallahassee as we celebrate and toast 90 years of accomplishment and hear historical highlights of our organization. During dinner, our new lobbyist, Ben Wilcox, will brief us on our most current legislative issues as we prepare for our day of lobbying.

**Tuesday, March 23**

**Breakfast at the Governor's Club** — 7:30 a.m.

Key legislators, representing both parties and many perspectives, discuss how our legislative priorities will fare in the current legislative session, at the historic Governors Club.

**proclamation in Capitol Cabinet Room  
with the Governor** — 9:30 a.m.

Governor Crist and the members of the Cabinet will deliver the proclamation, as well as highlighting our historical achievements and announcing a week in August as Florida Voter Awareness Week in our name.

**Observe a Legislative Session** — 10:00 a.m.

We will gather to watch the legislature in session, and enjoy high-profile recognition for the League of Women Voters of Florida.

**Lobbying/Committee  
Meetings** — Noon-5:00 p.m.

All LWV members in attendance will be participating in lobbying efforts and legislative committee activity. Be a part of the process!

**Cocktails, Dinner & Hot Topics** — 5:00-8:00 p.m.

Cocktail hour, followed by dinner at 6:00 p.m. and a Hot Topics on Amendment 4 "Growth Management or Voter Mismanagement?" at 7:00 p.m., hosted by the Tallahassee League.

**Additional Meetings and Gatherings** — 8 p.m.

Rooms are reserved for smaller meetings, subjects to include Voter Services, Redistricting, Membership and more. Locations and topics to be announced.

**Celebrate  
& Advocate!**

**EARLY BIRD \$99 Registration  
Deadline: March 1, 2010**

**Mail your registration today...**

# 2010 LWVF LEGISLATIVE SEMINAR

## Registration Form

League of Women Voters of: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ — \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this your first time at Seminar? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

**Registration Fee (Early Bird, by March 1)**

**\$99.00 (includes all events)**

Registration Fee (After March 1)

\$150

Additional Guest Meals:

Monday 3/22/10, Reception & Dinner

\$45.00 Guest Name \_\_\_\_\_

Tuesday 3/23/10, Breakfast

\$30.00 Guest Name \_\_\_\_\_

Tuesday 3/23/10, Dinner

\$45.00 Guest Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Amount Enclosed**

**\$ \_\_\_\_\_**

*(\$25 cancellation fee for cancellations after March 18)*

***Hotel reservations must be made directly with the***

Hilton Garden Inn, Tallahassee Central,

1330 Blairstone Rd, Tallahassee, FL 32301 by Monday, March 1, 2010.

Tel: 1-850 893-8300 *(Ask for in-house reservations and tell them you are with the League of Women Voters.)*

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# Sen. Thrasher: Tallahassee Veteran

by Katie Ross

Senator Thrasher feels as though he has never left Tallahassee. Serving in the House of Representatives from 1992 to 2000, he had a business located in the area so he was never far away for too long. Senator Thrasher was approached by friends about running for the seat when it was anticipated that Sen. Jim King would be term limited out of office. After Senator King passed away, Thrasher realized plans were being pushed up. The circumstances seemed to be aligned, as he continued his great passion for public policy.



When asked about what he hopes to accomplish during his term, Senator Thrasher believes you never know how long you will be in your seat. He realizes things are different this time, as he plans to continue to work on education reform, keeping taxes low and protecting the St. John's River.

Senator Thrasher feels strongly that public transportation will play a huge role in the economic recovery of Florida.

As Chair of the Ethics and Elections Committee, Senator Thrasher plans to review IRS 527 organizations. These groups have the opportunity to spend money during election time without disclosing who is behind them. According to Senator Thrasher, the right these groups have to not disclose who their donors are could lead to abuse, and such abuses would hurt the State of Florida. There needs to be greater transparency. In light of the upcoming 2010 elections, he believes now is an important time to review this topic in his committee. When asked if he would support legislation reinstating the Florida Electioneering laws that were recently struck down by a federal judge, Senator Thrasher responded that he is researching the issue. He believes it is a fundamental right for people to know who gave to these groups and how much they gave. He also believes it is important they know in real time, not 6 months after the election.

Senator Thrasher feels strongly that public transportation will play a huge role in the economic recovery of Florida, and sees state government as having a big role in that process. In support of his belief that this is a vital part of our financial recovery, he points out that public transportation will create private sector jobs and, in turn, stimulate the economy.

When asked about Florida's current financial health and whether the upcoming session would address that issue, Thrasher responded with an optimistic attitude. He believes Florida will get through this difficult economic time. If individuals have had to tighten their belts, government should have to do the same, while focusing on the fundamental parts of government including education, transportation and healthcare. Senator Thrasher thinks the government should stay out of the way and let the resiliency of the private sector take hold.

Senator Thrasher thinks stimulus dollars have acted as a kind of anesthesia for Florida, stopping the pain, however, temporarily. When asked how the legislature should make up for the inevitable budget shortfall, he was adamant in not wanting to raise taxes. Senator Thrasher stated that he did not want to place any additional burden on the backs of small businesses and families. He believes there is nothing wrong with government cutting back and really looking at priorities and funding only what can be funded.

In light of his membership on the Community Affairs Committee, Senator Thrasher was asked to comment on any possible long-term effects from Senate Bill 350 from last session (now law). He is sure the committee will be looking at the issue again, but it is too premature to speculate what the long-term effects would be.

Senator Thrasher encourages them to start looking ahead to the 2010 elections, when the Governor and the Cabinet will be up for election. "Find a candidate that fits your principles. It is an incredible time to be involved," he stated. "People are fired up and want to be involved in their government again."

When asked what he would most like League members to know about him, Senator Thrasher immediately responded that his family is the most important thing in his life. He is the father of 3 children and has 8 grandchildren. He has been married to his wife Jean for 45 years. •

## Florida Tax System: Second-Worst in U.S.

by John C. Hall, Executive Director,  
Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy

In only one state do low- and middle-income people have a more lopsided state and local tax burden than in Florida, according to a new report. A nationwide study of state tax systems called "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States" documents the unfairness of Florida's structure.

Low- and moderate-income families in Florida pay a far higher share of their income in state and local taxes than do the richest families in the state, according to the report by the Washington, D.C.-based Institute on Taxation and

A state's taxes should be both fair to the people who pay them and capable of producing enough revenue to meet public needs. Florida's system fails on both counts.

Economic Policy (ITEP). In fact, Florida families in the lowest income group pay over six times more of their income in state and local taxes than do those in the top 1%, based on income and taxes paid in 2007.

A state's taxes should be both fair to the people who pay them and capable of producing enough revenue to meet public needs. Florida's system fails on both counts.

Florida families in the lowest income group (about \$10,500 a year) pay an average of 13.5% of their income in state and local taxes. By comparison, families in the highest income group (about \$2.4 million a year) pay an average of 2.1% of their income in state and local taxes. Those in the middle income group (about \$37,400 a year) pay an average of 9% of their income in state and local taxes – over four times as much as those in the highest income group.

Florida's tax system was also ranked the second-worst in the country in an earlier study by ITEP based on 2002 income.

ITEP's latest study found that nearly every state and local tax system in the country takes a much greater share of income from the low- and middle-income groups than from the wealthy – but only one state does so to a greater extent than Florida: the state of Washington. Nationally, the state and local tax obligation for all states averages 10.9% for those in the lowest income group, 9.4% for those in the middle, and 5.2% for those in the top income bracket.

Like Florida, six of the worst ten tax systems are in states with no state personal income tax. A heavy reliance on sales tax is another characteristic shared among states whose tax systems place the heaviest percentage burden on the lowest income households. By contrast, states with the best

see **FLORIDA TAX SYSTEM**, continued on page 9

balanced state and local tax systems have graduated personal income taxes and they rely less on sales and excise taxes.

Legislators should be mindful of the unfairness in Florida's current tax structure and not add to the disproportional tax obligation already experienced by lower income families.

What does all this mean? Of the three primary taxes used by states – income, sales, and local property taxes – only the personal income tax is based on ability to pay. Florida, with no state personal income tax, does not draw revenue from the fairest tax. By comparison, property taxes typically take a larger percentage of low- or middle-income households' yearly earnings than they take from the wealthiest. Property taxes are used to fund public education, law enforcement and other critical local services. The third major tax source, the sales tax – which constitutes almost three-fourths of Florida's general fund – also hits lower-income people the hardest. While wealthy people are likely to spend more money in a year so the percentage of their income that goes to sales tax is lower and they can save more.

A tax system should not be designed with lower tax rates for the most affluent than those whose families are poor or in the middle income group.

The ITEP report is yet more evidence that Florida's tax structure is antiquated with major loopholes and unwarranted exemptions that reduce its capacity to respond to the need for public services. For the past several years, Florida's revenue has fallen well below the level needed to meet requirements for critical and high priority needs. Thousands of people remain on waiting lists year after year, while programs vital to the state's economy and well being – public education and our health system, for example – are underfunded and achieve poor results.

As the Legislature debates the sizable gap between growing public needs and available revenue for next year's budget, a balanced approach is needed – one that not only considers budget cuts in inefficient and ineffective programs but includes options for increasing revenues. Legislators should be mindful of the unfairness in Florida's current tax structure and not add to the disproportional tax obligation already experienced by lower income families. Although many of Florida's political leaders are proud that our state is a "low-tax" state and work feverishly to keep it that way, the results of this study raise an important question: low taxes for whom? Florida's tax system should be changed to make it fairer and adequate to meet the need for public services. •

## It's Not Easy Being Green... In Fact, It Can Be Downright Uncomfortable

By Adrienne E. Katz Katz

I take justifiable pride in recycling faithfully, buying greeting cards made with recycled paper or sending e-cards, having never worn fur and owning a car that gets 35 mpg. However, some environmentally-driven options have not been so quickly embraced, and I will admit to using (somewhat ignorantly) disposable diapers in the 70s, and then again with my grandson in 1997, (not so ignorantly, being fully aware of the landfill problems), with only minor pangs of guilt.

Now, as we are all faced with even more facts, "inconvenient truths," global warming and dire predictions of the lasting results of our indulgence and personal convenience, I am conflicted... what's a responsible consumer to do?

American preference for and consumption of soft toilet paper for the perceived tenderness of the delicate American buttock has now been declared "worse than driving a Hummer!"

"Extra-soft, quilted and multi-ply toilet roll made from virgin forest causes more damage than gas-guzzlers, fast food or McMansions," say campaigners from Greenpeace. (Quote Suzanne Goldenberg, US environment correspondent, 26 Feb. 2009).

"This is a product that we use for less than three seconds and the ecological consequences of manufacturing it from virgin forests are enormous," said Allen Hershkowitz, a senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Future generations are going to look at the way we make toilet paper as one of the greatest excesses of our age."

Making toilet paper has a significant impact because of chemicals used in pulp manufacture and cutting down virgin forests. Although brands differ, only 25 percent to 50 percent of the pulp used to make toilet paper in this country comes from tree farms in South America and the United States. The rest, environmental groups say, comes mostly from old, second-growth forests that serve as valuable absorbers of carbon dioxide, which is the main heat-trapping gas linked to global warming. Even worse, some of the pulp comes from the last virgin North

American forests, which are an irreplaceable habitat for a variety of endangered species, environmental groups say.

A campaign by Greenpeace seeks to raise consciousness about the environmental costs of American toilet habits and counter an aggressive new push by the paper industry giants to market so-called luxury brands.

Americans already consume vastly more paper than any other country — about three times more per person than the average European, and 100 times more than the average person in China.

"We have this myth in the US that recycled is just so low quality, it's like cardboard and is impossible to use," said Lindsey Allen, the forestry campaigner of Greenpeace.

*The New York Times* reported a

40% rise in sales of luxury brands of toilet paper in 2008. Paper companies are anxious to keep those percentages up, even as the recession bites. And Reuters reported that Kimberly-Clark spent \$25 million in its third quarter on advertising to persuade Americans against trusting their bottoms to cheaper brands.

Touting its green credentials on its website, Kimberly-Clark rejects the idea that it is pushing destructive products on an unwitting American public. Dave Dixon, a company spokesman, said toilet paper and tissue from recycled fiber had been on the market for years. If Americans wanted to buy them, they could.

"I really do think it is overwhelmingly an American phenomenon," said Hershkowitz. "People just don't understand that softness equals ecological destruction."

*Adrienne E. Katz Katz is a board member of the League of Women Voters of Orange County, FL and admits that she doesn't know yet if this environmental information is going to change her own buying habits, but she is certainly thinking about it more.*

Future generations are going to look at the way we make toilet paper as one of the greatest excesses of our age.



Our new Sanibel MAL – Flying the LWV Colors!

# Spotlight on Florida Leagues

compiled by Adrienne E. Katz Katz, LWVF Spotlight Editor

We indisputably live in interesting times (this is not a Chinese curse; it became popular after Robert Kennedy used it in a speech in 1966.) The accounting below describes how some of our Florida Leagues are meeting the challenges facing League members and their communities. Please note that by offering opportunities for productive involvement, our membership flourishes.

Many of our Leagues are addressing the health care reform and environmental issues; others are continuing the endless process of improving our democracy through education about redistricting, the Census, hometown democracy and the Legislative Priorities in the upcoming session in Tallahassee. We encourage you to learn from each other by reading the newsletters of other Leagues and calling the League members who have created activities and programs that interest you.

## Alachua County/Gainesville

The School Board of Alachua County honored the League at its November 2009 School Board meeting for supporting the "Fund the Bus Campaign." For the past three years, the League has been instrumental in making sure that the students can participate in the annual "Celebrate City Government Week" Field Trip. The 5th grade students visit different city government sites as well as City Hall where they get to "meet as" the City Council and are addressed by the mayor.

## Collier County

At our last General Meeting, Joyce Fletcher gave an update on the Fair Districts efforts, talked about the need to raise \$0.10 per petition for signature verification, and passed the hat (actually, a gold-colored basket) for contributions. Joyce is co-chair of the Government Committee and, with Kathleen Slebodnik, leads our League's redistricting reform efforts. She collected \$90, which she forwarded to FairDistrictsFlorida.org on our behalf.

Members of the Collier County League contributed their time and effort to update Our Florida Government. Other members contributed personally to make copies of the book available to each of the public libraries in the state.

LWVCC 1st VP Lydia Galton and member John Snyder are representing the League on the Collier County Complete Count Committee for the 2010 Census. The Committee is chaired by County Commissioner Donna Fiala.

## Duval County (Jacksonville)

Kathy Carithers was elected as the new president of the Jacksonville First Coast League.

The Jacksonville First Coast has formed a partnership with the US Census and is forming a Census Education and Public-

ity Group that will hold events and otherwise educate citizens on the importance an accurate census to Northeast Florida. The 2010 Census affects us all!

## Hillsborough County

On November 17, the League of Women Voters of Hillsborough County, Tomorrow Matters!, Hillsborough Health Care Coalition, Tampa Bay Health Care Collaborative, AARP, LULAC FL Districts 1 & 9, and Tampa Digital Studios, among others, conducted two consecutive Community Conversations on Health Care. One was conducted in Tampa at the Hyde Park United Methodist Church and the other was held at Suncoast Hospice in Pinellas County.

Participants were randomly seated at tables of up to 10 people with a trained facilitator and a note taker. The event, which linked both sites with audio and video, began with introductions and a presentation by Carol Gentry, of Health News Florida.

Carol's talk was an informative and thought-provoking overview of health care, followed by discussions, which were initiated by answering three questions: 1) What's currently right with the healthcare system? 2) What's currently wrong with the healthcare system? and 3) What would you change in the current system?

Once everyone at the table finished speaking, the facilitators then asked the table members to summarize the responses into one page of concise recommendations.

Summaries were then presented by each facilitator to the entire audience, and then posted around the room. Participants were given three stickers to highlight the three items they thought were most pressing. Interestingly, the audience was a diverse crowd comprised of doctors and laypeople, business people and retirees, young and not so young. Despite these differences, or maybe because of them, the number one recommendation was for universal healthcare. As it happens, that is also the consensus position previously adopted by the League of Women Voters of the United States.

## Orange County

Proving the old adage that if you have a good program they'll come, LWVOC Hot Topics luncheons have been attracting healthy audiences and helping to recruit new members. There was a full house for the October Health Care debate and members also had plenty of questions for a

panel of experts that debated Central Florida Transportation Issues at the November session.

In February we'll mark the League's 90th anniversary with a Salute to Women: Breaking Barriers. Among the speakers helping us celebrate the occasion will be former U.S. Rep. Pat Schroeder, the first woman to sit on the House Armed Services Committee; retired Judge Winifred Sharp of the 5th District



The Wack family (all LWVF members) worked tirelessly to gather hundreds of petitions to put Fair Districts on the ballot.

Court of Appeals and former Orange County Chair and League member Linda Chapin.

A natural resources committee has been formed, headed by Board members Leah Shepherd and Sara Segal and the Local Government Committee is recruiting members for its Observer Corps. Update on our membership: of our 352 members, 48 are male.

Co-president Ann Hellmuth and League member Nelson Bantancourt were among eight immigrants who received ACLU leadership awards. Three LWVOC members, Orange County Comptroller Martha Haynie, philanthropist Harriett Lake and executive director of the Healthy Start coalition Linda Sutherland, received Silver Summit Awards from the Central Florida Women's Resource Center for 25 years of service or more to Central Florida. The Orange County School Board has voted to keep its chairwoman Joie Cadle, a League member, at the helm of the nation's 10th largest district until an at-large chairman is elected in 2010.

## Palm Beach County

We are pleased that we can add to our list of accomplishments Completion of 2008 Local Program, Evaluation of the Recruitment, Training and Retention of PBC Poll Workers. Consensus was reached at unit discussion meetings. The committee's report and the League's Position was published in our December VOTER. Susan Bucher, PBC Supervisor of Elections has listened to this committee and incorporated many of its recommendations. The Position on this Program was announced at our November Hot Topics where Susan Bucher was our guest speaker.

LWVPBC registered the homeless and offered information on rights restoration at an event sponsored by the Homeless Coalition of PBC on November 20th. Project Connect offered

see **SPOTLIGHT**, continued on page 11

direct services from haircuts to state ID's as well as a hot lunch to the homeless.

We are among the sponsors of the Everglades Coalition Conference in Palm Beach Gardens, January 7 through 10, 2010, providing Meet & Greet volunteers and a League exhibit table. The Everglades Coalition is an alliance of 51 local, state and national conservation and environmentally concerned organizations dedicated to full restoration of the greater Everglades ecosystem. As far back as 1981, the LWVF endorsed the restoration of the Everglades, and joined the Coalition in 1992. (evergladescoalition.org)

## Sanibel

Fifty Sanibel residents and guests gathered in the meeting room at the Sanibel Library on November 10 to celebrate the official organization of the Sanibel unit of the League of Women Voters (LWV). Among other dignitaries, state president Deirdre Macnab and state executive director Peg McGarity were on hand to welcome the new unit and explain the history and policies of the League.

Since our initial meeting, we have increased our membership to over 67 and our Board has six members (a president, VP, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Chair and Local Government Chair (who will be attending council and planning commission meetings). We have chosen topics for our January, February and March meetings. Our Annual Meeting will be in April, at which time we hope to become the Sanibel League of Women Voters.

In her official remarks, Deirdre MacNab explained that the LWV is non-partisan and focuses on educating the electorate on issues. The League's legislative priorities for 2010, selected using input from local Leagues, include: supporting a state fiscal structure that is equitable in its distribution of tax revenues and responsive to public needs; supporting the repeal of tax exemptions that do not fulfill a public purpose; supporting single-member election districts that are equal in population, provide access for minorities, and are not determined by the Legislature; and protection of voters' rights.

Ms. MacNab added that 2010 is already shaping up to be a major election year, in which Florida will elect a new Governor; she stressed the importance of having a fair and open

**Local Leagues are encouraged to send their news and photos to [adriennekatzkatz@hotmail.com](mailto:adriennekatzkatz@hotmail.com)**

system for voting, and an educated electorate. She also challenged the Sanibel unit to strive for diversity in its membership, one based on age, gender, ethnic background, interests, etc. The LWV consistently polls as the most respected and credible organization involved in political education, and this works because of its diverse membership.

## Seminole

Starting in October 2009, the Seminole League kicked off a collaboration with *Central Florida Matters*, a radio program which now records all Hot Topics and public forums and makes them available on the web as a replay. The website is [www.CFM.org](http://www.CFM.org).

## Space Coast League

Bonnie Orban and the members of the Health committee co-sponsored with AAUW a Public Health Forum, with panelists representing medical, pharmaceutical and insurance interests.

Chairman of the Children's Committee Marilza Novaes Card and her committee have been visiting facilities that serve children, including the new Children's Advocacy Center of Brevard in Rockledge and Brevard's Children's Home Society of Florida in Melbourne.

The International Relations committee continues their study of world issues. Maureen Rupe keeps us informed on issues that have an impact on our environment in Brevard County. Ayn Samuelson, Voter Services Chair, served as moderator, along with other League members, as timers prior to local elections in November.

A TIMELY TOPICS was held on a Saturday, giving some of our working members an opportunity to attend one of our meetings. At that event, we received more information on Fair Districts. Jim Phillips, League member and president of the local chapter of the United Nations, spoke to us.

## Tidbits from Tallahassee

by Peg McGarity,  
LWVF Executive Director



The League of Women Voters of Florida State Office is the "GO TO" place for information. Below please find answers to some of the most asked questions received at the state office:

**Q: What is the structure of the League?** The League of Women Voters works at the local, state and national levels, paralleling the levels of the United States government. Most people know us through the local League of Women Voters in their community. The enduring vitality and resonance of the League as a trusted force for change and good government comes from its unique decentralized structure.

**Q: I just moved to Florida and would like to transfer my League membership to a local Florida League. How do I do that?** The state office will put you in contact with the local League closest to the city in which you live. Your new League will contact the LWVUS Membership/Field Support and make your membership transfer for you.

**Q: How are the League Legislative Priorities selected?** Legislative Priorities are selected each year largely based on recommendations from local Leagues. These items will be given special emphasis by the lobbyist, local Leagues and State Board for action during the ensuing legislative session. The strength and credibility of the League of Women Voters is based on strong grassroots membership understanding and involvement in the entire program and action process.

**Q: How can I extend special recognition to someone that has gone above and beyond in support of our League?** The LWVF Commemorative Tree is a way to recognize that special someone. For a minimum contribution of \$50 to the LWVF, we will have the person's name engraved on a plaque and add it to the Commemorative Tree located in our League of Women Voters of Florida State Office. Make a check payable to the LWVF and mail it to 540 Beverly Court, Tallahassee, Florida 32301. We will send a personalized letter and certificate of appreciation for you to present to your recipient.

**Q: Where can I find more information about the League?** Go to the state website at [www.lwvfla.org](http://www.lwvfla.org) and you will find a wealth of information. While there, take a few minutes to meet the Board of Directors, read the Voter, find how to become involved. You can even make a donation to the Lobby Fund or Education Fund.

Do you have a question? Contact the League of Women Voters of Florida State Office at 850-224-2545 or by e-mail [lwvf1@comcast.net](mailto:lwvf1@comcast.net). If we don't know the answer, we promise to find someone who does. •

**State Office hours are Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM and Friday, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM.**



## LWVF Board: New Voter Services Director

Pat Drago is a Florida native who became active in the League in the 1980s. She served as local league natural resources chair, the local league president of Volusia County League, and served a term on the State Board as natural resources chair. She credits her league activity and real estate background for her eventual hiring by her school district and just recently retired after 21 years service with 15 of those as Executive Director of Facilities for Volusia County Schools. She is enjoying retirement and reactivating her league service both at the local and the state level. Her hobbies, in addition to citizen activism, are cooking, gardening, reading, sewing and travel. •

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## Inside: Everything you need to know about Legislative Seminar, pages 6&7



*Mark your calendar and call in from anywhere! This promises to be a great and easy way to stay informed.*

A N N O U N C I N G

### Members Only: Florida On the Line

*Conference calls for League members, on controversial subjects with people in the know.*

**First Call: Thursday Feb 18 @ 5:00 pm**

Ben Wilcox, LWVF Lobbyist, will give his insider's view of the upcoming 2010 Legislative Session.

**Watch your email for instructions on how to call in, or contact Peg McGarity at 850-224-2545.**

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