

APRIL
2008



THE VOTER

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LOS ANGELES

Members meet in units: Crenshaw • Culver City • Las Virgenes • Los Feliz/Silverlake • Pacific Palisades
San Fernando West/North Valley • Sunland/Tujunga • University/Westside • Westside Evening

Upcoming Events

March 29: LWV/LAC Convention
April 8: Local Elections (e.g., Culver City)
April 10: Housing & Homelessness League Day
April 15: Petition Deadline for California Voters First
May 17-18: LWVC Leadership Council
June 3: State Primary Election
June 7: LWVLA Annual Meeting
June 13-17: LWVUS Convention, Portland, Oregon

In This Issue

	Pg
President's Message.....	1-2
Annual Member's Meeting June 7	2
"OOOH! A Tangerine": Incarcerated Women	2-3
Election News and Blues	3-4
Call to LWVUS Convention June 13-17.....	4
Five Delegates Needed for National Convention	5
A 'Big Five' for June!	5-6
It's Hard Going Green	6-7
Someone Left the Wrestlers in the Rain	7
Tax Advantage for You and League	7
Memberships & Contributions.....	7

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization open to all men and women. The League's purpose is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government and to act on selected governmental issues.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

YOUR LEAGUE STORY IN BRIEF: LEAGU-OIRES

Perhaps you read *The New Yorker* article (2/25/08) featuring a concept (and a recently published book) about writing a six word memoir of your life. The idea is reminiscent of Ernest Hemingway's terse style and a purported tiny piece of fiction he wrote in six words: "For Sale: baby shoes, never worn." Evocative epigrams can be funny, poignant and weirdly true: The chef Mario Batali: "Brought it to a boil, often." Singer Aimee Mann: "Couldn't cope so I wrote songs." Unidentified: "Birth, childhood, adolescence, adolescence, adolescence."

I wondered what our League memoirs would look like; mine would be: *Joined the League: got new glasses*. What would yours be? With all the vigorous, engaged members that have gone before, the idea of collecting the histories of our predecessors is a wish but not yet an action. So in the meantime, a six-word League memoir from each of you could be a fascinating and boisterous start. Many aspects of League present themselves for memorializing. You could create Leagu-oires for the whole or the parts that most inspire or impact you.

Why did you join the League of Women Voters?
"Retired, then energized by civic engagement."

What have you experienced? *"Huskies love full sleds; sometimes stagger."*

What is your League dream? *"OMG chk-out Lg of Wmn Vtrs!"*

Send your League-oires to
President@LWVlosangeles.org (subject line
"Leagu-oires") or mail them to the office:
ATTN: Leagu-oires, LWVLA, 3250 Wilshire Blvd.

continued p. 2

continued from p. 1

Suite 1005, Los Angeles, CA 90010. The more the merrier. We'll post what we get.

-- Liza White

ANNUAL MEMBER'S MEETING

Who We Are

What We Are

What We Do

Have you been wondering what the League of Women Voters is all about? Or do you think it might be great to see old friends again?

Think you have enough elections on your plate for this year? Think again!

On June 7, you will have that chance to discover or re-discover *Who We Are, What We Are, and What We Do* by becoming a vital, integral part of the "grassroots" of the Los Angeles League.

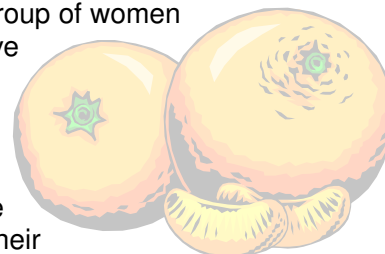
This annual meeting of members guides the Los Angeles League by determining its focus for the following year, and giving all members the chance to voice their concerns and interests. For all new members, it is an essential meeting to really understand how the League works as a grassroots organization. It is where members elect officers, approve the budget and determine the focus of the coming year's goals. We hope to have a rousing, enthusiastic crowd at the beautiful Sportsmen's Lodge in Studio City at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 7. The setting is spectacular; the food will be wonderful.

Our special luncheon keynote speaker will be **John Van de Kamp**, former Los Angeles County District Attorney and California Attorney General. Look for your Annual Meeting Kit next month in the VOTER for details.

-- Jean Thomson, Co-chair
Program Committee

"OOOH! A TANGERINE": INCARCERATED WOMEN

The squeals of delight stopped us cold as we opened our lunches and pulled out the tangerines. "I haven't seen one of them for 26 years!" This came from one of the small group of women who have lived in the citrus belt of southern California for 20 to 45 years... as inmate "lifers" in the California Institution for Women in Corona. We were all attending the program "Wisdom Without Walls—Golden Girls and Reentry" sponsored by the Women and Criminal Justice Network. The Golden Girls is a group of women over 55 who have been incarcerated for so many years their young children have grown up and have had children of their own—or family members who have passed away.



This "cross-over" experience between those incarcerated and community members allowed us an unprecedented chance to relate to many of these women in personal dialog, sharing issues that elderly women in prison face regarding growing old in prison, as well as obstacles to parole and reentry.

Sister Suzanne Jabro first helped review why each of us had come, then changed the topic so that the inmates, seated in mixed circles with community attendees, could share their experiences with parole boards and governors. Very few of these Golden Girls have ever been paroled (less than one-tenth of 1%), and the obstacles to parole are nearly insurmountable. In preparation for their review before the board, they must be able to prove they have outside support, housing accommodations, financial assistance, and medical care. They amass letters of recommendation, letters from supporters indicating their housing and financial arrangements, and even then they are often told they must have a guarantee of a job awaiting them upon release, although some of these women are in their 80s. When they are given an "Approval of Parole" by the parole board, it is for a date four or five years ahead. Then a very complex calculation is made to reduce that time based upon their time served, their behavior, their work in the prison, etc. Although a few have been granted this approval,

continued p. 3

SAVE THE DATE
LWVLA Annual Meeting
Saturday, June 7, 2008

Sportsmen's Lodge
12833 Ventura Blvd
Studio City, CA 91604
9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

continued from p. 2

even up to six times, the governors have denied the parole, and move them back to square one.

Although reentry was not the most vital topic to these women because gaining parole is their first priority, they do know that it will be very difficult to get outside services such as medical insurance, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Unless they have supportive families, they will not be able to get housing, or medical assistance, food stamps, etc. And they know they will always face the stigma of being a felon.

One of the greatest fears of these women is to die in prison without ever being able to live with their families again. They feel as though they have totally changed from when they committed crimes in their youth and want to be able to participate in what is left of their lives. One woman with a 7-10 to life sentence had been there 33 years and is now disabled. There were many such experiences.

We ended the visit with their wish-list for "next steps":

- Change the parole board system: Make it consistent, fair, and not subject to the governor's veto. Perhaps have the board comprised of a panel of judges, even the original judge. Make rules clear so that when all requirements are met, prisoners are released. Allow observers at parole board hearings. Educate the public re: parole board procedures. The board often looks only at original court testimony and initial crime, not the changed person.
- Don't expand prisons; release those rehabilitated and already approved for parole by the board.
- Provide more cross-over facilities (half-way homes), assistance in getting Supplemental Security Income (SSI), health insurance, housing, mental health assistance and help with disabilities in prison and upon reentry.
- Contact legislators to review the indeterminate sentencing rules. Promote fair, clear, determinant sentences.
- Collaborate to get an initiative on the ballot to incarcerate for rehabilitation not punishment.
- Establish a class action lawsuit re lifers -- every day kept past their release date should cost government \$100.

- Prepare a resource book with information on housing, medical care, jobs, etc. geared to reentry.
- Recruit advocates - especially for those with no family left, and pro bono attorneys.
- Create media attention -- perhaps a documentary on the Golden Girls.
- Adopt a Golden Girl.

The women we met are willing to create a bridge to victims and/or families and victims rights groups, for their redemption and restoration. As we left this very meaningful day with the inmates, it seemed even more important than ever that the League of Women Voters should tackle a study of the California penal system. The aging prisoners are the fastest growing prison population and they cost twice as much to keep incarcerated.

Perhaps a review of who is in prison is in order. A group of LWV members is gathering from local Leagues throughout California to tackle the formidable process of preparing a recommendation for study at the 2009 State Convention. Please let us know if you want to participate in this project by calling the office at (213) 368-1616.

**-- Carryl Carter and Jean Thomson
LWVLA Members**



ELECTION NEWS AND BLUES

This had been a busy month for those of us who watch the election beat. First there was the statewide primary and a local Los Angeles County problem you may have heard about that came to be known as 'bubble trouble'. Both the Democratic (Dem) and American Independent (AmInd) parties opened their primaries to nonpartisan voters for the February 5 primary election. This caused considerable confusion at the polls and at election headquarters at counting time. The confusion at the polls stemmed from the way the crossover voting was structured. Nonpartisan (NP) voters were given NP ballots but were directed to vote in the booth of the party of their choice (Dem or AmInd). In that booth, NP voters had to mark an extra bubble which would then tell the computer to count the next bubble it found as either Democrat or AmInd. But the directions within the booth did

continued p. 4

continued from p. 3

not clearly state that, and not all ballot clerks were telling voters about this extra bubble.

Then there were problems counting because the same set of bubble numbers was used to represent the first three Dem candidates and the three (total) AmInd candidates. If this was the first election of this sort that used the same numbered bubbles for different primary party candidates, that would be understandable, but it was not the first election. Both the 2004 and 2006 primaries used the same method, generated confusion and resulted in uncounted ballots. The 2008 election garnered considerably more attention (initial reports claimed 94,000 NP ballots would not be counted) and calls to find a way to count those ballots. The number of uncounted ballots was later reduced to 49,500.

The calls to find a way to count those NP ballots without filled-in party-designated bubbles continued. Because four of the candidate positions were only for Dem candidates and because the order of candidates is randomly assigned for each precinct, the Registrar of Voters sought and received approval from the County Counsel to count the NP ballots with marks in those four positions for the Dem candidates. That count was conducted the first weekend in March. The raw data is available on the County Registrar of Voters website. A first glance seems to show trends similar to the overall votes cast in the county.

Along with other voting advocacy organizations, we will continue to follow this issue and participate in efforts to correct this problem so that in the next primary season all votes will be counted as cast.

Also on our election watch is the action requested by the City Council to evaluate and recommend changes to the voting procedures for Los Angeles city. The City Clerk issued a final report recommending changes in a range of areas concerning the conduct of our municipal elections. Among the recommendations is a proposal to conduct special elections using instant runoff voting. We were at the Rules and Elections hearing March 4 to voice our support of IRV and other elements of the plan. LWVLA members concurred with the Pasadena League position that supports instant run off voting. This is our first opportunity to act on our IRV position.

**-- Margie Engel
Election Integrity Committee**

CALL TO LWVUS CONVENTION JUNE 13-17, 2008 IN PORTLAND, OREGON

The League of Women Voters of Los Angeles is seeking delegates and participants for the 48th National Convention June 13-17, 2008 in Portland, Oregon. The Convention theme, "**Reaching New Heights Together**," is indicative of the opportunity to meet and learn from LWV members throughout United States and around the world!

Convention participants can look forward to four exciting days in a city proclaimed to be North America's "Best Big City" by *Money Magazine*. In Portland you will find unmatched natural beauty, a bustling art and cultural scene, delectable dining and first-rate accommodations. Access to all of Portland's attractions will be effortless, thanks to the famous light-rail system that will take visitors from the convention, in the center of downtown, to the farthest outskirts of the city.

For LWV members, there is simply no other place to be in June, except at the convention. No matter if this is your first time, or if you've been to many of the 47 other conventions, there is something for everyone in Portland!

On June 13 the festivities begin with a great seminar, "THE LEAGUE - How to Be Great in 2008!" Some of the other workshop topics include: fundraising, global democracy, membership recruitment, increasing visibility and media relations.

There are also exciting activities planned for each evening including a one-woman musical comedy, "*Chocolate Confessions*," which includes a chocolate tasting during the performance!

All LWV members are encouraged to get involved, whether as a convention participant or serving as a LWVLA delegate. The 2008 Convention promises to be one of the best yet! The convention is on the west coast this year, and we want to have a sizable showing from California, and a good number from Los Angeles. So pack your bags and join us in Portland this June!

The deadline for participant registration is May 23, 2008. A late fee applies after that date.

**-- Wilma Willis
LWVLA Board Member**



FIVE DELEGATES NEEDED FOR THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

LWVLA needs **five members** to serve as delegates at the National Convention, June 13-17, 2008 in Portland, Oregon.

If you are planning to attend the conference, why not be a delegate? Delegates represent LWVLA by voting on issues important to our national organization, as well as the local chapter.

The Delegate Body Will:

- Adopt the national program for 2008-2010
- Elect Officers, Directors and a Nominating Committee
- Decide the Per Member Payment for the biennium
- Adopt the LWVUS Budget for Fiscal Year 2008-2009 (July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009)
- Vote on Proposed Amendments to the LWVUS Bylaws

LWVLA will sponsor the cost of registration (\$295.00) for each delegate. However, each delegate will be responsible for his/her travel expenses and accommodation costs.

If you haven't attended a convention, this is your chance to get involved on a national level. You will be invigorated by all that local chapters have accomplished and excited to share what you've learned with our members here in Los Angeles.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

If you are interested in attending the convention and representing LWVLA in Portland as a delegate please contact Nima at (213) 368-1616. **To serve as a delegate, please call before May 19, 2008.**

*-- Wilma Willis
LWVLA Board Member*

A 'BIG FIVE' FOR JUNE!

Unless you live in Culver City, which will elect three new City Council Members and decide a utility-user tax measure on April 8, your next chance to vote will probably be on June 3, at the Statewide Primary Election. Here's a brief rundown of what will be on your ballot:



1. Nominees for partisan offices other than President and U.S. Senator:
 - a. ALL seats in the State Assembly and U.S. Congress;
 - b. State Senate seats in all odd-numbered districts;
 - c. ALL members of your party's County Committee.
2. Countywide offices
 - a. Up to 17 seats on the California Superior Court, in and for the County of Los Angeles;
 - b. District Attorney
3. L.A. County Supervisors in the 2nd, 4th, & 5th Districts.
4. Statewide Ballot Measures (both are Initiative Constitutional Amendments):
 - a. Prop 98: Government Acquisition, Regulation of Private Property;
 - b. Prop 99: Eminent Domain. Acquisition of Owner-Occupied Residence.
5. Possible last-minute surprises:
 - a. state, county or local ballot measures;
 - b. special elections for vacant legislative seats.

Now, some footnotes on these 'Big Five' factors in June's election:

1. A party primary is what we're used to in June, but we're also accustomed to seeing candidates for President on our June ballots every four years. The February 2008 Presidential Primary was a 'first', leading to high levels of confusion. This confusion may turn to apathy or burnout in June, when the excitement of a Presidential race will be missing, and competition will be low or nonexistent for many legislative seats.

continued p. 6

continued from p. 5

2. Seventeen judicial seats will take up a lot of space on the ballot, but these are a fraction of the 155 that automatically come up every six years, when one third of our Superior Court judges (whether elected or appointed) are required to seek voter confirmation. When a sitting judge's seat comes up for confirmation, s/he may decide to retire, creating a 'feeding frenzy' for the open seat. Any seats with three or more candidates, of course, could require runoffs in November.
3. With Supervisor Yvonne Burke retiring, the 2nd District is the one to watch. Ten candidates have filed for this office; if none of them gets a majority (50% plus 1 vote) in June, there will be a runoff in November.
4. Props 98 and 99 are the 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee' of state politics, with a long list of organizations lined up for one and against the other. Our task in Voter Service will be to help voters understand which is which and rise above the din of partisan advertising.
5. At this point last fall, we thought we were set to go with three statewide ballot measures (Props 91-93). Then along came Props 94-97, the Indian Gaming Referenda, and the election's climate heated up.

To meet the challenge of June's 'Big Five', LWVLA has an arsenal of five proactive Voter Service activities:

1. **Voter Registration**
Staff a table at a public event or canvass your neighborhood.
2. **Candidate Contact**
Call candidates and invite them to post their campaign material on Smart Voter. A script is available.
3. **Candidate Forums**
Be a timer, question sorter or moderator (training provided). Work with community groups to plan forums.
4. **Pros & Cons Speaking**
Learn about the ballot measures and explain them to community groups or your Unit.

5. Hotline Support

Handle phones in the LWVLA office, where the bulk of questions can be answered easily, and the tough ones can be routed to experts.

2008 is a unique year in California politics -- a fascinating time to launch or expand **YOUR** involvement in Voter Service. Give me a call at (310) 397-4970 or e-mail voterservice@lwwlosangeles.org.

-- Frances Talbott-White
Chair, Voter Service

IT'S HARD GOING GREEN

With a leadership vacuum at the national level, cities across the country have been establishing their own solutions to the challenge of global warming/climate change. In May 2007, Los Angeles published *Green LA: An Action Plan to Lead the Nation In Fighting Global Warming*, announcing the city's commitment to reducing our carbon emissions (contribution to global warming) through a range of major initiatives. The plan announced a commitment to increase our use of renewable energy, make LA a leader in constructing green buildings, decrease our per capita water use, lower the environmental impact of our transportation network, green the airports and harbors, etc. The Plan sets many worthy goals but as always the devil is in the details. The LWVLA Green Committee has been following the progress of one of these goals from concept to code.

In a city, the built environment represents roughly 40% of the energy consumed and therefore 40% of carbon emissions. This is a major opportunity for cities because they control building standards. The City Planning Department has been coordinating the process of developing a new and greener set of building codes for the city. It has conducted multiple stakeholder meetings which were attended by architects, builders, developers, trade unions, all city departments and community and environmental advocates. It presented its plan to the Planning and Land Use committee of the City Council in January. The plan recommends:

- An ongoing committee made up of representatives from all city departments to be known as the Green Building Team and

continued p. 7

continued from p. 6

responsible for overseeing continued policy development.

- A Standard of Sustainability, which will require that all new non-residential structures of over 50,000 square feet and new residential construction involving 50 or more units of housing must comply with the **intent** of the most basic level of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. The LEED program was developed by the US Green Building Council and sets standards for siting, internal environmental safety and materials reuse, as well as energy saving.
- A Standard of Sustainable Excellence program, which will provide incentives for projects of any size that are designed to meet a standard of sustainability higher than LEED Silver. (For reference, there are also Gold and Platinum levels.)

The details: Planning staff was unable to provide any information about what percent of new construction in the city would fall under these new regulations. The guess (by staff) at the hearing was not much. It is interesting observing the people who come to testify at the hearings. They come representing all the interest groups listed above that have participated in forming the regulations. For the most part they strongly support it – maybe because the cutoffs are such that it is not likely to touch them and/or some large developers. They have discovered that energy efficient buildings are profitable, a point made by more than one industry representative. Both staff and Council members were quick to point out this is just the first step. The Plan is expected to go before the full Council sometime in March.

The LWVLA Green Committee will be watching and reporting on future steps.

*-- Margie Engel
Member, LWVLA Green Committee*

SOMEONE LEFT THE WRESTLERS IN THE RAIN

LWVUS surprised LWVLA with an invitation to provide Voter Registration at WrestleMania Fan Axxess, a well-attended special event held at Universal City Walk during the weekend of February 23-24. LWV Glendale-Burbank and the L.A. County Registrar of Voters helped with staffing.

Due to rainy weather, we were only able to participate for five of the event's sixteen hours, but precipitation didn't stop the Wrestling fans. Leaguers Gwen Cochran, Joan Hardie, Xandra Kayden, and Frances Talbott-White registered voters with help from "Half" Nelson Fernandez and Cindy Wang from the Registrar's Office. Monica Marquez and Anna Rundle were among those rained out, but they helped with damage control.

A change of pace and venue for Voter Service can't be bad once in a while.

*-- Frances Talbott-White
Chair, Voter Service*

TAX ADVANTAGE FOR YOU AND LEAGUE

Last year in 2007, there was a one-time opportunity to contribute to charitable groups from your IRA accounts. Fortunately some members took advantage of this and LWVLA received significant contributions from this source. That one-time availability to use IRA account funds to donate to the LWVLA or LWVLA ED FUND has expired. But it is never too late to make a donation to the LWVLA ED FUND. Any contribution will be tax deductible if you itemize your contributions in your tax return.

There are other ways to plan your future support of LWVLA which we would encourage all to find out about. Please call the office at (213) 368-1616 to find out more.

*-- Gerry Sallus
Caryl Carter
LWVLA Education Fund*

<p>MEMBERSHIPS & CONTRIBUTIONS</p> <p>NEW MEMBERS Bobbe Frankenberg (BH)</p> <p>EDUCATION FUND CONTRIBUTIONS Sandy Wolber</p>
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WAS THIS NEWSLETTER LATE TO YOUR MAILBOX? Please report very late delivery of your VOTER newsletter to LWVLA at (213) 368-1616. Help us track late deliveries.