

BAY AREA

VOTER

League of Women Voters of the Bay Area

February 2011

President's Message

Barbara Murray

Civility seems to be the buzzword of today. Princeton University's Wordnet (<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>) defines civility as politeness: the act of showing regard for others. Until recently civility was in short supply with our state and national politicians. The recent tragedy in Arizona has caused us to re-examine the idea and benefits of civility. Hints of a more polite political dialogue have been seen in Washington and Austin. I hope it can continue.

However, civility in politics and life is nothing new. George Washington, when he was 15 years old, wrote down a list of 110 "Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation." An interesting op-ed from the Canon City (Colo.) Daily Record (I've been doing some research on civility!) states: *"by all accounts our first president believed deeply in civility and lived by these rules, from the most basic — don't talk with your mouth full — to the more philosophical — 'Labour to keep alive in your Breast that Little Spark of Celestial fire Called Conscience.'"*

The League has always valued civility. As an organization, we study issues and reach

consensus before we take action. We do not target or criticize individual politicians or parties.

We plan to discuss what has been happening in the Texas state legislature — in a very civil way, of course — at our next discussion meeting scheduled for March 26th. I hope you can join us. Our state is facing an unprecedented budget shortfall. Legislators have the difficult task of balancing the budget, making some very tough decisions in the process. A major priority of the LWV-Texas for this legislative session is a balanced approach to a balanced budget along with an open, transparent legislative budget process. Our March meeting will give us the opportunity to see how well we think the Legislature is doing.

Con't. on pg. 2

Save the Date!
Saturday, March 26
9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Discussion of
Texas Legislative Session

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Again quoting from the *Canon City Daily Record*, the op-ed ends:

"It might be too much to hope civility will become a permanent fixture in public discourse. Hyperbole and demagogic rhetoric, after all, are too profitable, both

fiscally and politically. But hope we shall. Perhaps the House (or Texas Legislature) could take a few minutes and let members take turns publicly reading "Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour In Company and Conversation." If the rules were good enough for the most well-known Founding Father, they should be good enough for today's politicians. "

LWV-Texas

LOBBY DAYS AT THE STATE CAPITOL, and more...

Monday, March 7 and Tuesday, March 8



The 82nd general session of the Texas Legislature signals discussion and action on key issues facing our state. League members can play a crucial role by advocating and lobbying our legislators on Lobby Days.

All League members from throughout the state are cordially invited to participate in **2011 Lobby Days** in Austin on Monday and Tuesday, March 7 and 8. This is a wonderful opportunity to visit the Capitol, network with fellow League members, learn about advocacy and lobbying, and talk with your respective state representatives and senators. LWV-TX will provide training for advocating on our priorities as well as a packet of tools to assist with lobbying efforts.

Specifics about costs and arrangements:

- Open house at the state office, 1212 Guadalupe #107, 10 a.m.-Noon, Monday, March 7.
- Lobby Days registration, 12:30 p.m. March 7 at the Capitol, \$10 per person which covers advocacy materials.
- Making Democracy Work Dinner, 6:30 p.m. March 7, honoring the Center for Public Policy Priorities, \$50 for League members and guests or \$60 for non-members. Deadline for reservations is February 22.
- Drury Inn & Suites Austin North, located at 6711 IH 35 North (Exit 239B) is the host hotel. Room cost is \$92.95 for either a single or double room, plus tax. The double can sleep two, three or four. Make reservations directly with the hotel by calling (512) 467-9500 and identifying yourself as an LWV-Texas member or going online to <http://www.druryhotels.com/Reservations.aspx?groupno=2109982>. If others will share your room, please let the hotel know their names so that lodging space can be maximized.
- Deadline to reserve a room and receive our group rate is Saturday, Feb. 19. Reservations made after this date will be subject to prevailing rate and availability.

Additional information can be found on the state League website, <http://lwvtexas.org>

The League of Women Voters through the Decades!



LWVUS celebrates its 91st birthday on February 14. The League history series prepared for last year's 90th birthday will continue for a few more issues of the Bay Area VOTER.

The 1980s: Organization

To broaden membership and address the issue of membership decline, the 1982 convention amended the bylaws to permit member recruitment by the national and state levels, as well as the local level. Convention delegates also called for the development of a long-range plan for the organization. The plan, which defined the League's mission and outlined goals and strategies for the future, was the subject of spirited debate at the convention. During the 1984-88 period the League's long-range plan was refined and updated, then adopted by the 1988 convention with some modifications. These steps, together with the restructuring and streamlining of League Boards, leadership training and an emphasis on modern techniques of management and communication, were evidence of the League's efforts to adapt to the realities of a changing world and to ensure its place as the leading civic organization in the United States.

The 1980s: Issues

The League was in the forefront of the struggle to pass the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1982 and contributed significantly to enactment of the historic Tax Reform Act of 1986. It also adopted a position on fiscal policy and one on US Relations with Developing Countries. In the arms control field, LWV pressure helped achieve Senate ratification of the groundbreaking Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) in 1988. In that same year the League also completed a study of U.S. agricultural policy. And through the Agenda for Security Projects in 1984, 1986 and 1988, the League underwrote some 150 debates focused on national security issues among congressional candidates. The League also sponsored Presidential Debates in 1980 and 1984, but withdrew as a sponsor of General Election debates in 1988. In 1983 the League adopted a position on public policy on reproductive choice.

LWV-Texas Legislative Newsletter

Want to know what bills the League of Women Voters of Texas is following in the Texas legislative session underway in Austin? This link will take you to the state League website—and news you can use to contact your legislator as an individual. League policy says only the president speaks in the name of the League, but the advocacy of individual citizens bolsters the effectiveness of state League action.

http://www.lwvtexas.org/legislative_newsletter.php

Galveston Bay Foundation Speaks on Status of Ike Dike and Other Hurricane Surge Suppression Concepts

Scott Jones, Environmental Policy and Outreach Specialist for the Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF), provided an update on the Ike Dike and other hurricane surge suppression ideas at the January 29 LWV-Bay Area issue discussion meeting. A year or so ago, the League heard Dan Seale of the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership describe the Ike Dike concept and the economic benefits of preventing surge damage to local industry and cities. GBF was asked to highlight some of the environmental issues to be addressed as surge suppression projects are explored.

The Ike Dike concept was suggested by Dr. William Merrell of Texas A&M – Galveston. To date, it has been the most discussed option for suppressing the impacts of hurricane surge, but it remains just a concept.

In the year after Hurricane Ike, six coastal counties formed the Gulf Coast Community Protection and Recovery District, which met for the first time in April 2010. The counties are Harris, Galveston, Brazoria, Chambers, Jefferson, and Orange. The county judge sits on the district board, and former Harris County Judge Robert Eckels serves as president. This board will look at potential solutions to hurricane damage, not just the Ike Dike concept. The board retained Dannenbaum Engineering to study options; however, no studies have taken place yet, presumably because the hoped for state and federal funding has not materialized.

Jones said GBF is pleased that a variety of options will be studied but, like others, is frustrated that no studies are underway. Until there is something more than a

concept, it is difficult for their organization or others to comment on the merits of the Ike Dike or any other proposal.

Jones spoke of a number of factors that GBF would consider as it reviews proposals, believing that whatever we do, we must do right. While surge protection is important, wind also does significant hurricane damage, so projects should consider wind as well as water damage. They should also account for rising sea level and shoreline change. Sea level is rising because we are still coming out of the last ice age. The earth is warming, which accelerates sea level rise. Charts in Jones' slides show how the shoreline is changing; for example, the levees along the Mississippi River now drive sediments that once came to Galveston into the deeper Gulf of Mexico. Aerial photos of Galveston Island show ancient ridges and swales. Wetlands are critical to habitat and are the nursery for the shrimping and fishing industry. Studies of surge suppression options should account for factors like these and determine whether *unintended* consequences could result from both structural and nonstructural options.

Jones recommended a resource for tracking progress on hurricane damage protection efforts: the Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters (SSPEED) Center at Rice University. The SSPEED website says it was established in 2007 as a university-based research and education organization. Led by Rice University, the center organizes leading universities, researchers, emergency managers, and private and public entities to better address severe storm prediction and its impact on the Gulf Coast area. <http://sspeed.rice.edu/sspeed/> In May

2010, SSPEED issued a report on lessons learned from Hurricane Ike, which Jones highly recommended.

http://sspeed.rice.edu/sspeed/downloads/SPEED_Interim_Report_2010.pdf

Jones said that GBF is continuing its habitat restoration projects. While they cannot dramatically buffer the region from hurricane surge, wetlands do help significantly. With one exception, the wetlands GBF has restored over the years

fared well in Hurricane Ike. Jones urged us all to develop a “bay ethic,” avoiding harm to the bay ecosystem when we take steps to protect the area from hurricane surge. While environmentalists understand that hurricanes are natural events, humans have altered the land in ways that put people and resources in harm’s way when a serious hurricane occurs. So GBF will continue to follow options for addressing storm surge.

League Calendar

February 2011

Youth Voter Month

- 12 1st day to file for a place on the ballot for the May 14 local election (for cities and school board seats)
- 14 LWVUS 91st Birthday
- 21 Presidents Day

March 2011

Women’s History Month

- 13-19 Sunshine Week
- 26 LWV-BA Discussion Meeting on Texas Legislature. 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. at home of Diane Sheridan, 1107 Live Oak Lane, Taylor Lake Village

LWV-BA Publishes Guide to Elected Officials

Annually, LWV-BA publishes a *Guide to Elected Officials in the Bay Area*. It lists federal, state, and local officials and their addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. A list of precinct numbers in the Harris and Galveston County parts of the Bay Area guides voters to the district numbers for their elected representatives. With this information, voters may contact governmental officials to provide the kind of input that makes democracy work.

The 2011 edition will soon be available. It will be mailed to League members. Thanks to Elizabeth Glenn for again updating the guide, to Ethel Patton for proofreading, and to the many members who will hand carry packets of guides to libraries, city halls, colleges, some senior centers, and other locations where interested citizens may pick them up.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

www.lwv.org
www.lwvtexas.org
www.lwvtexas.org/local/bayarea