

**89th Annual Meeting  
League of Women Voters of the Houston Area  
Thursday, May 14, 2009**

**Emerson Unitarian Church  
1900 Bering Drive (between Westheimer and San Felipe)  
Houston, Texas**

- 5:30 p.m. Wine Reception and Silent Auction**  
**6:15 p.m. Buffet Dinner**  
**7:00 p.m. Program – Speaker Leo Vasquez, Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector  
and Voter Registrar**  
**7:30 p.m. Awards Presentation and Annual Meeting**

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*Quorum (Art. VIII, Sec. 3): We need 37 members present to conduct business at this meeting.*

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**Order of Business**

<b>Call to Order</b>	Laura Blackburn
<b>Organization of Meeting</b>	Laura Blackburn
Appointment of Parliamentarian	
Appointment of Timekeeper	
Appointment of Committee to Approve Minutes	
Adoption of Order of Business	
Adoption of Rules	
<b>Secretary's Report</b>	Shirley Gibson
<b>Treasurer's Report</b>	Martha Murphree
<b>President's Report</b> —State of the League	Laura Blackburn
<b>Executive Director's Report</b>	Pat Downing
<b>Presentation of Local Program for 2009–2010</b>	Jan Wilbur
Discussion and Amendments to Proposed Program	
Non-Recommended Program Items	
<b>Adoption of Local Program</b>	Jan Wilbur
<b>Awards</b>	Gwen Essinger
<b>Adoption of 2009–2010 Dues</b>	Barbara McCormick
<b>Presentation of 2009–2010 Budget</b>	Barbara McCormick
<b>Discussion and Adoption of 2009–2010 Budget</b>	Barbara McCormick
<b>Nominating Committee Report</b>	Millie Whittington
<b>Election of Officers for 2009–2010</b>	Laura Blackburn
<b>Recognition of Outgoing Officers and Directors</b>	Laura Blackburn
<b>Presentation of New Board</b>	Nancy Parra
<b>President's Remarks</b>	Nancy Parra
<b>Direction to Board</b> (I wish the Board would...)	Nancy Parra
<b>Announcements</b>	Nancy Parra
<b>Adjourn</b>	

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## **Report to the Members 2008—2009**

### **Laura Blackburn, President**

The only difficulty in reporting what the LWV-Houston Area has done this year is where to begin! A presidential election year plus the Texas legislature is always the most challenging year for any League. And we met those challenges in an outstanding manner. A few highlights:

- Registering over 25,000 voters
- Co-sponsoring eight debates with Houston PBS-Ch. 8
- Many TV and radio interviews regarding voter registration, voting, and issues
- Publishing 155,500 Voter Guides
- Answering the telephones at Ch. 2 for both the primary and General Election as well as answering those hundreds of phone calls which come to our office, particularly during election time
- Sending 16 people to Lobby Day in Austin and doing our best ever lobbying in Austin on issues
- Undertaking two new local studies: Homeowner Associations and Building Codes in Coastal Areas
- Publishing monthly Facts & Issues or Updates on Issues
- Adding an Executive Director to our leadership team
- Moving to a new office, saving us \$1,000 per month!

Now for the challenges ahead: due to the economic downturn, we have to make some hard choices in two areas: membership and finances, both of which are declining. The budget for next year reflects those choices. Our Voter, Facts & Issues and Updates, and the Annual Meeting Workbook will have to go online, and we are going to have to rely more on grants to meet our basic needs. I know that we are going to meet those challenges with the support of all of you. And we will work very hard to raise our membership!

It has been my pleasure to be your president for the last two years. Thank you for the opportunity—and thanks to our board which is always creative and forward looking!

### **Executive Director Report**

#### **Pat Downing**

This first year of serving as the Executive Director has had many facets. It has been a learning experience for the Executive Committee, the Board, the members and me.

I have attended focus groups, unit briefing meetings, roundtable discussions and meetings with different chairs of committees to learn about the programs that the League supports or has an interest in. Every month I have attended the Board Meeting, the Executive Committee Meeting, the Finance Committee meeting, and the General Meeting. All of have given me a broader scope of the League. Another important venue that I attended as many times as possible was the Naturalization Ceremonies.

With this year being an election year, even more requirements and dimensions were added to the position. I had the opportunity to appear on several local televisions programs and interviews regarding the League and its Voter Guide. On Election Day, I along with several of the League volunteers worked at Channel 2 answering the public's questions.

I was given a goal of dollars to be raised while working with the Finance Committee. As of the end of February, I obtained and superseded that goal. That being said, my goal is to continue to raise funds for the League. I consider obtaining a donation for the entire printing of the Voter Key one of my most successful fund raising projects. The Public Relations duties of my job were and are still in the developing stage. I have prepared many press releases regarding events, publications, and issues. We have received printed and media coverage. I have also attended many events to network. These have been successful as well.

A large portion of the Executive Director position is to oversee the daily functions of the office. I have been successful in researching through the bid process, and finding a printer for all of the printing. They have come in under past suppliers' costs at each level, therefore saving the League a substantial amount of money, and they also get our materials to us in a timely manner. This affects the productivity level which I strive to reach.

I can honestly say that this has been an exciting year, and I look forward to the upcoming year and its challenges

and rewards for me personally and the League. I thank each and every one of you for your guidance and your support.

## **Reports on Special Projects**

### **A Repast with Political Pioneers 2009—Jackie Alfred, Chair; Judy Hollinger, CoChair**

Our 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Repast was held on Thursday, March 5, 2009. This was a year of many changes—a new location, a minor modification in the event name to allow us much more latitude in selecting honorees in the future, a new design for the invitations including a handy LWV bookmark, and an expanded selection committee to choose the honoree.

For the first time ever, we had a single honoree, Anna Russell, City Secretary for the City of Houston, who came to the Repast as City Secretary and left as an Official Sheriff's Deputy (hope you saw this special moment in the Chronicle).

We also welcomed new co-hosts this year, Councilmember Anne Clutterbuck and Councilmember-at-large Melissa Noriega. Both were wonderful and provided lots of help with the planning and execution of the event. We are also indebted to the staff members of our co-hosts—they were always responsive, helpful and delightful to work with.

Our longtime emcee/interviewer, Shara Fryer, returned for her fourth year. Shara did a great job of eliciting informative, humorous and poignant stories from our honoree. The program was filled with surprises for Anna and the audience. The honoree and co-hosts received the traditional engraved crystal Repast paperweight to commemorate their participation. Shara Fryer was presented with a year's membership in the LWV as a thank you.

Underwriting Chair Claudia Williamson, assisted by Martha Von Burg, Martha Murphree and Sherry Walshak did an excellent job of securing table sponsors and contributors in a most difficult fundraising environment. We added a Single Ticket Sales Chair, Linda Cohn, for the first time this year and offered some creative new incentives for single ticket buyers, including special pricing for LWV members *and* their guests and a special discount for people who purchased 10 or more individual tickets. Jan Wilbur also helped contact prospective ticket buyers. We were pleased that our single ticket sales reached an all time high this year.

Arrangements Chairs Barbara McCormick and Nancy Parra did a beautiful job with the hotel and luncheon arrangements. Thanks to a special sponsorship by LAN and HP, we able to provide a lovely pre-event reception for our underwriters and special guests. Even our individual ticket buyers were treated to some appetizers after being warmly greeted and checked in by Registration Chr. Sharon Cunningham and her excellent registration committee.

We had great TV and print coverage this year, thanks to the hard work of PR Chair, Sarah Schimmer. Records, databases, and the status of payments were expertly handled by Bette John, Judy Hollinger, ED Pat Downing and Office Secretary Yolanda Malonson-Johnson. Nearly 290 guests attended the Repast. Thanks to careful stewardship of expenses by all the committee chairs, net proceeds that will go to the LWV/Houston Education Fund were approximately \$30,000.

### **Development Committee—Ann Herbage**

This new committee was established to insure our financial health and stability. We will be involved in seeking grants and in fundraising of all types. We very much value member input for ideas and leads for sources of funding for our voter services and other projects.

## **Reports of the Vice Presidents and Their Committees**

### **Organization Vice President—Nancy Parra**

I have enjoyed working on the board this past year as Organization VP. I want to thank all of the volunteers who have helped with the organization, marketing, and distribution of our publications and to the volunteers who have helped with membership, unit direction, and office functions.

Gwen Essinger continued as coordinator of the Bulk Mailing Committee and has done an excellent job, ensuring that the VOTER and other publications are mailed in a timely manner every month.

Barb Swartz, editor of the VOTER, has done a great job in soliciting more articles from members on their activities for the Houston League.

Mary Lee Burris continued serving as Unit Discussion Leader, ensuring that the unit leaders were well-briefed on program discussion questions. Alice Mae Berthelsen served as Unit Coordinator, overseeing that all units had the necessary leadership and materials to function properly.

Margaret Kolodzie is to be commended as our membership recorder, responsible for recording new local and national members and for keeping abreast of when everyone's yearly membership is due.

Office management has been assumed by our new executive director, Pat Downing, who has done a remarkable job. The office has also been running smoothly thanks to our office assistant, Yolanda Malonson-Johnson.

Bee Franks-Walker, who did an outstanding job as Meeting Arrangements coordinator and Membership Chair, had to resign due to health reasons. We certainly miss her enthusiasm and efficiency in planning our meetings.

Thanks also go to Karl Essinger for maintaining our computer system and to Marty Gay for updating and maintaining our very informative website.

### **Voter Bulk Mailing Committee—Gwen Essinger**

Your bulk mailing committee has been hard at work every month getting our valuable publications in the mail and on their way to your homes. I hope that you have been receiving your LWV mail in a timely manner. Please let the League office know, if you do not receive your mail in good condition. We always welcome new volunteers to help with our work. We usually meet at the League office on the third or the fourth Wednesday of the month to do our work. While stuffing envelopes and folding Voters we engage in some lively discussions. Our regular crew members are Lynn Walshak, Millie & Louis Whittington, Ellen Goins, Lila Lerner and Shirley Gibson. Thank you to each of my volunteers, plus Barb Swartz for her editor work and Mike Rine for getting the printing done and delivered to the League office.

### **Advocacy Vice President – Jan Wilbur**

In contrast to last year, which was a relatively quiet year for advocacy, this year has seen a whirlwind of activities, some of which are detailed below.

#### **Legislative Interviews**

Every two years, just before the Legislature convenes, Leagues across Texas interview their legislators in

preparation for advocacy during the session. LWVHA has 32 legislators to Interview – 25 State Representatives and 7 State Senators. In doing the interviews, our goal was to involve as many first- and second-year members and as many who have never done a legislative interview as possible. Two members were assigned to each interview team. Twenty-six different members took assignments; twenty-two had not done a League interview before, and nine were first- or second-year members. We held two training sessions and fifteen members attended. Following the interviews, those who had done or tried to do an interview gathered to evaluate the process and to reflect on how we felt about the interviews, what we could do better, and what we need to do for the remaining three months of the 81st Legislature. Shirley Gibson, Lynn Walshak, Ernestine Dansby, Mary Morgan, Sharon Cunningham, Gwen Essinger, Marlene Lobberecht, Pat Downing, Laura Blackburn, Ann Herbage, Beanie Adolph, and Judy Hollinger attended.

How we did

- The materials SO provided were good; number of questions and background material were helpful
- SO got interview packets out in a timely fashion
- Those who succeeded in getting an interview enjoyed doing it
- Favorable legislation should be acknowledged and the appropriate legislator thanked or recognized
- Training for legislative interviewers was helpful
- Report of legislative interviews sent to both SO and interviewers, who appreciated seeing the responses
- Inviting new League members to do legislative interviews is a good way to get them involved

Suggestions for improvement

- Start earlier
- Focus more on the middle-ground teachable legislators rather than on the unreachable
- Need to know history of our advocacy and in some cases establish a relationship with the legislator
- What we need to do in the remaining three months of the 81st Legislature
- Build relationships with individual legislators and with their staff
- Get to know the legislators priorities and use that information to tailor how to approach them

Legislative Lobby Corps

All League members are encouraged to respond in their own name to Action Alerts from State League. But this year we wanted to organize and systematize that effort and get feedback on how many contacts are made. We started with November General Meeting and units on Advocacy. Rep. Scott Hochberg and Karen Rankin from the State League spoke at the General Meeting. At the units, members were encouraged to sign up for one or more of the four Legislative Lobby Corps teams.

Judy Hollinger chaired the Government team, Gwen Essinger the Social Policy/Human resources team, Alice May Berthelsen the Natural Resources team, and Louis Whittington the Administration of Justice Team. When Action Alerts are sent out, the Team Captains take note of Action Alerts that fall under their portfolio and alert their team members to respond in their own name and to send a copy of their response to the Team Captain. The Team Captains keep a record of how many contacts are made and reported monthly to the Advocacy Vice President. We hope to make advocacy more enjoyable and more relational by building the groups into teams.

Response to Action Alerts

Letters in response to LWVUS Action Alerts were sent in support of Representations for citizens of the District of Columbia, against warrantless wiretapping in the Protect America Act and in support of strengthening America's Climate Security Act on global warming.

Statewide Conference/Lobby Day

Sixteen members went to Austin on March 9 for the statewide conference to vote on changes to the Death Penalty and the Child Abuse position and for Lobby Day. Sen. Jeff Wentworth spoke about his redistricting bill and Capitol corps briefed us on the state League's legislative priorities. In the afternoon, we fanned out to meet with our legislators.

Congressional Interviews

At the time of this writing, we had submitted requests for meetings with John Culberson, Al Green, and Gene Green and have left messages for Michael McCaul and Sheila Jackson Lee. Bay Area League is interviewing Pete Olson. Meetings with Gene Green and John Culberson's staff person, Ellie Essalih, have been scheduled.

#### Greater Houston Partnership Committees

Currently the following League members serve on the named GHP Committees: Michael Fjetland, Business Leadership Council; Jan Wilbur, Transit Planning and State Relations; Shirley Gibson, Education Policy/Strategic Planning; Peggy Hill, Workforce Development; Laura Blackburn, Clean Air; Martha Murphree, Local Relations; Gwen Essinger, Health Care Emerging Issues.

#### **Community Relations Vice President—Lula Blake**

Appreciation goes to all the Chair persons and their workers who made 2008 a successful year for the League. They are as follows:

- City Council Observer—Shirley Gibson
- Commissioners Court Observers—Sharon and Harold Freedman
- Debates and Forums—Ann Wood
- Public Relations—Pat Downing
- Speakers Bureau—
- Voter Guide—Lynn Walshak
- Voter Guide Marketing—Ann Herbage
- Voters Key—Tony Sirvello
- Voter Registration—Linda Cohn and Ann Wood
- Voter Service—Tony Sirvello
- Moderator—Alice May Bertleson

They are looking forward to the 2008—2009 year, but some of them will need volunteers to help with Voter Registration, Speakers Bureau, Debates and Forums, and the Voter Guide. If you are interested in helping in any of these activities, please contact the Chair person of that committee.

#### **Debates and Forums Committee—Ann Wood**

Three new members have joined the committee: Peggy Hill, Bob Singleton and Judy Viebig. They join existing members Barbara Swartz, Gwen Robberson, Ann Herbage, Alice May Berthelsen and supporting members Gwen Essinger and Lula Blake. The Debate and Forum Committee undertook several projects in 2008.

#### Houston Housing Authority Elections

Volunteers from the team continued the League's supervision of Houston Housing Authority elections again this year. We oversaw elections of officers at 12 facilities. Ann Herbage, Alice May Berthelsen, Barb Swartz, Bob Singleton and I facilitated these elections.

#### Oasis Program

We taught a class at the Oasis, a school for senior adults, on June 18th on the topic of "What Really Happens at Political Conventions." A lively and informative panel discussion was the outcome. Linda Cohn invited Bill Scruggs and Bill Calhoun to represent the Democratic and Republican parties respectively with Ann Wood moderating and providing historical context. It was a very successful program and one we may try to replicate.

#### Candidate Debates and Forums

The League co-hosted eight Candidate Debates and Forums in the weeks preceding the November, 2008 elections. Our responsibilities varied with the event.

The 2008 Supreme Court Forum: The South Texas School of Law and Houston PBS hosted this forum with cosponsors included the Houston Area League of Women Voters, the Houston Trial Lawyers Association and the American Board of Advocates. Three positions were contested, Chief Justice and Positions 7 and 8. Our involvement included participation on the Question Development, and Rules and Format Sub-committees. Being state-wide races, the forum was broadcast on the public television network across the state.

The Great Debate Series" Co-sponsored by Houston PBS and The Houston Area League of Women Voters: The U.S. Senate debate was an hour long live broadcast to a state-wide audience. The rest of the series presented 30-minute candidate debates broadcast on Houston PBS' "Red White and Blue" program and offered voters an

opportunity to hear candidates for the District 22 U.S. Representative, Texas Senate District 11 and 17, and the Harris County Sheriff, Judge and District Attorney races. The League was responsible for inviting all candidates, coordinating schedules, and working with Houston PBS personnel with all aspects of the debates.

We enjoyed a cooperative relationship with Houston PBS during the course of these debates and look forward to further opportunities to work together in the future.

The Committee will look for opportunities to host further candidate debates during the November 2009 local elections of Mayor and City Council members.

#### **Voters Guide—Lynn Walshak, Coordinator**

The Voters Guide went to press by target date. Thankfully, we had all candidate responses delivered to the graphic artist, Sherry Collier, the night before Hurricane Ike made land. She was able to back up the file on two servers for safety. Collier was able to work the following week with limited access to electricity. We received the draft and proof read it so that the printer, Ad-Vanced Web Printing, received the copy on Wednesday Oct. 1. They ran off 100,000 copies by Friday, Oct 3. (60,000 Voters Guides were also printed and distributed in Ft. Bend County at an additional cost). Most of the copies were distributed, delivered or picked up from the printing plant. The Houston Sun distributed 5,000 copies as inserts. The city and county library systems took 45,000 copies between them. The printer has been very cooperative in holding our copies for pick up. This is especially appreciated because their plant is quite small and holding pallets of publications takes up space they need for their other customers. Ad-Vanced was fortunate in that they did not lose power and had no physical storm damage.

Costs of the November 2008 Voters Guide: (1) Graphic Artist, layout, \$2,040.00 (2) Ad-Vanced Web Printing, \$12,380 including delivery to the League office of 5,000 copies (3) Insertion by the Houston Sun, \$305 (4) Ft Bend County Voters Guide, \$6082. The total was \$20,807.

Other distributions: Copies were distributed from the campuses of the University of Houston, Rice University, and the University of St. Thomas. A number of corporations distributed copies, and others were distributed by LWV members to organizations. Copies (3100) were distributed through two Randalls grocers and one Kroger grocer. Also, 300 copies were distributed by the new LWV unit at Eagles Trace (Joan Golding), 200 copies at Tremont Retirement off Westheimer, 100 copies at Village Retirement, Augusta off San Felipe, and 300 copies were distributed at the general meeting Oct 10, 2008.

The Fox 26 TV station devised a game of questions that linked to the LWV web page Voters Guide to verify answers. Tomball, TX Chamber of Commerce distributed 100 copies. The Potpourri newspaper of Tomball, extracted the portion of our Voters Guide that pertained to the Tomball area and reprinted in their newspaper. They also distributed 300 copies of our Voters Guide. According to our webmaster, there were about 11,000 hits on the online Voters Guide during the month of October.

#### **Voters Guide Marketing Committee—Ann Herbage**

Our Voters Guide for the presidential election of 2008 was distributed to more than 100,000 people, via corporate sponsors, non-profit organizations and schools and libraries. These copies are provided free of charge to the schools and libraries requesting them. We do charge a small fee to our corporate sponsors and non-profits. We are constantly refining our list of recipients of the Voters Guide and depend on our members' feedback for new contacts. Email contact seems to be the most effective at this point although we do still use some letters and many phone calls as well. Many members take copies to their meetings of other organizations and to their churches and that is an essential part of our distributions process.

#### **Voters Key—Tony J. Sirvello III, Chair**

In consultation with Pat Downing and Lula Blake, the 2009 Voters Key was proofed for format and content. There were many changes this year, as is often the case in a major election year. This year we decided to go back

to the longer, narrower format, which is easier to handle and mail. The 2009 Voter Key was underwritten by a generous contribution from Leo Vasquez. It was distributed at the State of the County luncheon and at the Repast and was mailed to the membership. It is now available at the League office and on the Internet and is being distributed to libraries, schools and buyers.

**Voter Registration—Linda Cohn and Ann Wood**

In 2008, over 24,000 citizens entered the electorate with our assistance.

Twenty-three thousand two hundred and two of those new voters—the largest block by far—represent sign-ups at our Naturalization Ceremony on-the-spot voter registration service. Fourteen Naturalization Ceremonies were held; our rate of response averages out to 79%. At one memorable ceremony held after Hurricane Ike and just in advance of the registration deadline for the November elections, an astounding 99.1% of those newly eligible signed up within minutes of their oath.

These numbers reflect our established and high-profile participation in the Naturalization Ceremony.

Of course our efforts at hospitals, schools, colleges, and events about town continue. Voter Registration has now expanded to become voter education and community engagement.

Our scrupulous commitment to ideological, policy and partisan neutrality provides the foundation for all voter registration / education work.

**Program Vice President**

The 2008-2009 LWV-HA year was successful in spite of a problematic beginning. Our luncheon in September with Dr. Robert M. Stein was cancelled due to Hurricane Ike, which arrived the same day as our scheduled meeting. In October, our general meeting was on HOAs. In November both the general meeting and the unit discussion focused on Advocacy. December we welcomed the newly elected officials at a luncheon; the units planned their own holiday celebration.

January 2009 we had dinner at the Briar Club, followed by local planning for the up-coming year. Unit meetings discussed the new comprehensive LWVUS position on immigration.

In February, the general and unit meetings discussed education. In March, the topic for both the general and unit meetings was Building Codes in Coastal Areas. In April, air quality was the topic at both the unit and general meetings. Speakers on these topics addressed the luncheon meetings.

Each of the committees and their chairs, Jo Ann Peschel on Health Care, Millie and Louise Whittington for Immigration, Lynn Walshak on HOAs, Peggy Hill on Education and Testing, Laura Blackburn and Michael Fjetland on Building Codes in Coastal Areas, Carolyn Mata on Water/Natural Resources provided us with the needed Facts and Issues and are hereby applauded. Mary Lee Burrus is recognized for her unit-discussion planning meetings each month.

**Child Abuse and Neglect—Betty Oertel**

The League is a member of One Voice, a network of public, private and non-profit organizations in the Greater Houston Area, working together to ensure that the health and human service needs of all Texans are attended in legislative, regulatory, funding and other public policy initiatives. League members serve on the Child Welfare and Early Childhood Education Committees.

**Domestic Violence—Betty Oertel**

This committee was not active this year.

**Education—Margaret (Peggy) Hill**

Keeping updated on the education issues at the local, state, and national levels has been the goal of the education committee this year. Peggy Hill and the LWV-TX education chairs submitted testimony at the Texas State Board of Education meetings in '08 and '09 regarding the state standards for both English/reading/language arts and science where the LWV-TX supported the work of the English and science experts and the teacher writing teams for both documents. The February LWV-Houston Area General Meeting and the Unit Meetings were devoted to a discussion of the education issues at both the state and local level. While this 81st legislative session will not deal broadly with public school finance, it will certainly discuss issues that are of importance to all children: full day kindergarten, affordability of higher education tuition, financial aid for public universities and colleges, and

public school accountability. LWV- Houston Area has a position statement which supports quality bilingual education where the transition into English proficiency is emphasized. LWV-TX has position statements on public school finance and public school testing and accountability. LWV-Houston Area published “Education Facts” and distributed this publication to legislators and LWV members in February.

#### **Health Committee—Jo Ann Peschel**

Members: Gwen Essinger, Diane Long, Ellen Martin, Ada Montare, Celia Morgan, and Sandra Walsh. Committee members active in coalition organizations are Jo Ann Peschel – Care for Elders and Gwen Essinger – Mental health Association of Houston and Health Care for All Texans.

The health Committee met during the summer to plan for the September General Meeting on Health Care. Gwen Essinger prepared a Facts and Issues paper entitled “Health Care Update.” Unit Questions were developed by the committee. Because of Hurricane Ike, the September meetings were canceled.

#### **International Affairs Committee—Millie Whittington**

This past year the committee has focused on immigration. We prepared an immigration background, and we acted as resource people in the examination of the new comprehensive LWVUS position on immigration at the January Unit meetings. For the next two years, we will be working with Mary Finch, LWVUS Advocacy Vice President, as the state watchdogs of the 81st Texas Legislative actions affecting immigration. Our mission is to see that our national position is upheld.

Our priorities are supporting state services for undocumented immigrants, especially in the areas of education and health care, and monitoring any attempt to curtail civil rights of immigrants.

Our committee members continue to be active members and supporters of international organizations including The World Affairs Council of Houston, The United Nations Association, The Institute of International Education and the Great Decisions discussions groups.

#### **Natural Resources—Carolyn Mata**

The Natural Resources Committee members continued their involvement in several community environmental groups.

##### **Programs**

- April General Meeting, which featured a talk on Clean Air and other City Initiatives by Carl Pepple, Head of the Mayor’s Office of Environmental Programs.

##### **Meetings and Conferences Attended**

- Monthly RAQPAC (Regional Air Quality Planning Committee) at Houston Galveston Area Council
- Monthly meetings of the Harris County Flood Control District
- Annual CEC meeting
- Quarterly meetings of the Galveston Bay Council
- Quarterly meetings of the Public Participation & Education Subcommittee and the Budget & Priorities Subcommittee of the Galveston Bay Council
- Ninth Biennial State of the Bay Symposium

#### **Homeowner Associations Study—Lynn Walshak, Study Chair**

The League of Women Voters Houston Area undertook a study published as Facts and Issues: “Homeowner Associations - American Dream or Nightmare?”

Copies were distributed to all League members, members of the Houston City Council and all Harris County legislators. President Laura Blackburn was interviewed for a Channel 11 television program by Dave Fahlin.

Consensus was reached by the Units following a study of the Homeowners Associations Facts and Issues. A Position Statement was approved as follows: The League of Women Voters of the Houston Area supports changes in Texas law governing mandatory homeowner associations which would provide:

- protection against foreclosure on homesteads
- priority of payments so that assessment payments apply first to assessments and then to non-assessment items

- secret ballots in homeowner elections
- adequate safeguards against fraud to assure uniform, honest and accurate election results
- that the Texas Open Meetings Act and the Texas Open Records Act cover homeowner associations

### **League of Women Voters 2009 Long Range Planning Committee Report**

Members Present: Louise Greely-Copley, Nancy Parra, Shirley Gibson

#### Communication

The board will analyze, publish, and distribute publications according to the most efficient way we can serve our target audience.

The board will evaluate our current web-site and propose ways to keep it constantly updated; and explore the use of Constant Contact and E-Vite as a possibility.

#### Public Relations

The board and members will become more visible in the community and create contacts with the media.

The board and members will make the Speakers Bureau more active.

The board and members will make the League's positions more public.

The board and membership will meet with corporate organizations to be able to increase issue awareness.

The board will create a Brand.

#### Participation

The board and membership will increase participation by various activities such as brown bag luncheons.

The board and membership will identify membership concerns and encourage new members.

The board will develop ways to use the internet to involve and communicate with the membership, i.e. blogs.

The board will form creative partnerships with sister civic organizations.

#### Leadership

The board will use the Leadership Development Plan to train the membership in Leadership skills.

This plan includes mentoring new members, getting them involved in their areas of interest, and providing support on an ongoing basis.

#### Finance

The board will encourage the membership to identify contributors both from the membership and population at large.

The board and membership will seek resources for funding.

The board will accept as their responsibility to raise funds.

#### Administration

The board will enhance office space which will be centrally located with adequate parking.

The board and individual members will properly utilize the Office Assistant and the Executive Director

## **Proposed Rules for the Annual Meeting**

### **Composition**

Admission to the Annual Meeting is open to voting members, associate members and guests. Only voting members may vote.

**Quorum** (ART VIII, SEC 3, LWV-HA BYLAWS)

### **Debate**

Only voting members have the privilege of the floor. No person may speak twice until all who wish to speak have had an opportunity to do so. Each speaker shall identify herself or himself. Each debate speaker shall be limited to one minute, plus the time required to complete a sentence.

### **Closing Debate**

A motion to halt debate is stated as "I move the previous question." This motion, which must be seconded, is not debatable and must be put to an immediate vote. A two-thirds vote is necessary to adopt this motion. If adopted, debate is immediately ended, and the motion under debate is voted upon.

### **Voting Procedures**

A majority of those qualified to vote and voting shall constitute an election of officers. Nominations for officers may be made from the floor by any voting member at the appropriate time, provided the consent of the nominee has been secured.

### **Bylaws**

Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting, provided the amendments have been submitted to the membership in writing at least one month in advance.

### **Annual dues**

Annual dues are determined by a three-fifths vote of those present and voting.

### **Budget**

The budget requires a majority vote.

### **Voting Procedures**

Voting procedures for program adoption are described in "Adoption of Program."

### **Governing Rules**

The Rules contained in "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised" shall govern in all cases to which they are applicable and not inconsistent with the Bylaws.

## 2008–2009 Adoption of Local Program

### **Adoption of Program**

Program adoption consists of presentation, discussion and debate, and voting. Presentation will be in three parts:

1. Recommended retained program -- support and action positions carried forward from past years to be retained or dropped.
2. Recommended new program -- new items suggested by the members and recommended by the board.
3. Non-recommended items -- issues suggested by the members but not recommended by the board...

Some board guidelines for recommending items are member interest and potential for active involvement; local scope; timeliness in terms of community interest and political climate; impact of League involvement.

**Recommended Retained Program:** Presentation of retained local program will be by category, that is “Social Policy,” “Natural Resources,” and “Government.” The specifics under each category appear in the Workbook and full details are in the Local Program for Study and Action. Following presentation questions for clarification may be asked. Debate and discussion will not occur until all other program items have been presented. Each program item will be debated and voted on in the order of original presentation.

**Recommended New Program:** Presentation will be by item, following which questions for clarification may be asked. Debate and discussion will not occur until all program items have been presented, as indicated in the agenda. Each program item will be debated and voted on in the order of original presentation.

**Non-Recommended Program:** Following presentation of the above recommended new program, any member may move consideration of a non-recommended item provided *the president has been notified prior to the presentation of the recommended new program*. Only items previously proposed to the Board may be presented. Two copies of the motion of consideration should be given to the secretary. The member moving consideration is allowed three minutes in which to state the reasons. Questions for clarification may then be asked. The vote on the motion to consider will follow immediately. A majority vote is required to order consideration of the non-recommended item. Items voted consideration will be allotted time in the period set aside for discussion and debate of proposed new program items.

**Amendments:** Amendments to the wording may be made for the purpose of clarification, emphasis, or editorial change. Amendments may not enlarge the scope or change the meaning of the item. Further action will be postponed until the time set for adoption.

**Debate & Voting:** Unless there is a motion to the contrary, debate on the program items will be held in the order in 11-21 in the Annual Meeting Workbook – 2008.)

### **Recommended New Program and Action Items**

The following issues and areas of concern were presented at program planning for study or action:

- electric grid
- term limit opposition
- four-year terms for city officials
- special elections if ten months remaining for county elected officials
- property sales price transparency
- election administration reform
- TIRZ
- bill boards
- environmentally sensitive transportation
- recycling promotion and education; air quality
- energy efficiency and conservation
- Harris County public defender
- county jail conditions
- prison privatization

- bilingual education
- domestic violence
- evaluation of public school testing
- education models such as vocational education
- CHIP funding
- elimination of red tape
- sex education in schools
- women- and minority-owned business programs

#### **Recommended New Programs**

The board recommends two new local program studies: Election administration reform (fast track – by concurrence) and Public Defender for Harris County.

The Board recommends: four-year terms for City Council with an escape clause be recommended for priority, concerted action in 2009 – 2010.

#### **Non-recommended items**

The Board does not recommend: electric grid, property sales price transparency, county jail conditions, and prison privatization.

#### **Action Items**

The other items are ones on which action can and will be taken if the opportunity presents itself and if there are members interested in pursuing action.

#### **LWV-HA BYLAWS**

Since LWV-US made a change in their Bylaws at the National Convention in 2006, we must follow suit as our Bylaws are required to be in accord with those of the LWV-US.

This change will not require a discussion or vote because it is mandatory.

Article II. PURPOSES AND POLICY Sec. 1 will now read, "The purposes of the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area are to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of individuals in government and to act on selected governmental issues."

Article III, MEMBERSHIP Sec.2.a. will now read, "Voting Members. Persons at least 18 years of age who join the League shall be voting members of LWV-HA, LWV-TX and of the LWV-US."

## **Current Positions**

### **Government**

#### **City Government (1993)**

1. Support a strong Mayor/Council form of government with the following components:
  - elected Mayor who is chief administrative officer of the city; who appoints all department heads subject to approval of Council; who has the power to remove department heads and staff members; who presides over Council and votes on all Council business but does not have the power of the veto.
  - a City Council which functions as a strong legislative branch; has direct input into the formulation of the agenda for Council meetings; participates fully in goal setting for and in the development of the annual budget; can independently establish standing committees; has access to a centralized council research staff which can research issues for Council as a whole; and has adequate access to legal counsel and services of the legal department.
  - an elected City Controller who is independent of the Mayor and City Council.
2. Support a City Council electoral structure that provides for:
  - members elected both at-large and by single-member districts.
  - a majority of the members elected from single-member districts
3. Support a City Council of optimal size that is determined by criteria which insure:
  - representation of all citizens
  - accountability
  - accessibility
  - effectiveness
  - affordability
4. Support of single-member district lines based substantially on population and which also:
  - ensure that minority rights are not diluted.
  - reflect geographic common sense.
  - maintain the integrity of neighborhoods.
  - create districts which are compact, contiguous, and continuous in shape.
5. Support 4-year terms for the offices of Mayor, Controller, and City Council with staggered terms for Council.
6. Support for a special election to be called to fill a Council vacancy when ten months remain in a two-year term or twenty months remain in a four-year term.
7. Oppose term limitations for elected officials. Support of appropriate measures, or “escape clauses,” which will enable citizens to vote for candidates of their choice if term limitations are in effect. (1991/1992)

**History:** The City Government Committee undertook its extensive two-year study of Houston’s City Government in May 1991. In recognition of the substantial growth and change in the City of Houston and city governance since the 1980 consensus position, the Committee re-evaluated its current relevancy, efficiency, and political effectiveness. The first year addressed representation. The second year addressed political structure, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency of the strong mayor council form of government.

**Action:** Use this position to oppose term limits for elected officials; oppose elimination of at-large council seats during the court challenge by a Hispanic group; support Council efforts to get special elections for filling council vacancy; advocate 4-year terms for elected officials with staggered terms for Council members; and advocate rewriting of city charter.

#### **City Charter**

Support a complete revision of the city charter of Houston. (1974)

#### **Financing City Government**

1. Support financial policies that:
  - are guided by sound principles of fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency;
  - provide current revenues sufficient to support expenditures;
  - are based on concepts of appropriate long range planning methods;

- are based on diversified sources of revenue.
2. Specifically support:
- the use by the city of additional sources of revenues in order to decrease the reliance on property taxes for funding the General Fund Budget;
  - the maintenance of debt service costs for all types of financing at a level not to exceed 20% of the General Fund revenues;
  - the maintenance of a General Fund undesignated ending fund balance whose level will be a minimum of 5% of the total expenditures less debt service costs;
  - the setting of user fees and charges by the city at levels sufficient to recover the costs of providing those services, except for those services associated with provision for the general welfare and common good;
  - the development of financial and management processes and systems which result in operational efficiency and cost containment. (1989)

**History:** The study was undertaken to formulate a position on the policies and principles basic to financing City Government, beyond the budget process, and give the LWV-HA the means to address such concerns as the city's over-dependence on property taxes for funding the operating budget, its need to maintain a healthy emergency fund balance, the level of city indebtedness beyond investment in capital improvements, and others.

**Action:** Used the position to oppose restructuring Public Revenue bonds in 1991; oppose the issuance of bonds to repay judgments against the City; oppose transfer of funds from Water and Sewer Funds to the General Fund to cover increased health care costs of city employees; support adequate funding for the Planning and Development Department following the defeat of the zoning ordinance; and express concern that the 93-94 annual budget was predicated on the debt-extended structure, Metro funds and anticipated revenue projections.

### **Budget Process**

1. Support a budget process that meets these criteria:
  - is based on long range planning;
  - provides for thorough budget review and evaluation;
  - has well defined channels for citizen input and review.
2. Specifically support:
  - a budget format that provides for budget controls and accountability and provides for analysis that reflects policy goals and directions;
  - a budget process that is regulated by well defined timelines for each step of the budget process, and that these timelines are written into the city's code of ordinances, and that these timelines should provide for adequate timing for public study and input with each step;
  - a budget process that encourages public participation by such specific means as:
    - public meetings on budget policy and issues held by the mayor and council members in different sections of the city;
    - publishing a brief budget summary in newspapers that would include important budget revenues and expenditures and highlights of major policy changes;
    - availability of the proposed budget when given to council with provision for a number of copies available to the public at cost;
    - giving adequate notice of all proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making all public records accessible.
    - notice of all hearing dates.
  - a budget process that provides for testimony by the individual citizen at the public hearing or as provided for by state law prior to the adoption of the proposed budget. (1988)

**History:** Focus #47 (December 1976), entitled "Financing City Government," outlined LWV-HA's consensus position on the budget process which was reached in spring, 1975. The Committee chose to study the budget process in 1987 chiefly to reassess the progress achieved in over a decade of change in city government. As in 1975, the 1988 consensus emphasized public input, long range planning, availability of budget documents, a budget calendar, and support for integrating the Capital Improvement Budget with the Operating Budget.

**Action:** Advocated for the adoption of the budget calendar (since achieved); passage of the Capital Improvement Budget integrated with the Operating Budget; earlier inclusion of council members in budget process; more

reasonable time between public hearing on the annual budget and its placement on the council agenda for approval; and following the timelines of the budget calendar as adopted.

### **Capital Improvement Budget**

Support the consideration of the capital improvement budget along with the operating budget. (1988)

### **Libraries**

Support measures to insure adequate library facilities for Houston area residents, including merger of city and county systems and the regional library concept. (1969)

**History:** When this study began in the late 1960's, libraries were few and of low quality. Library budgets were politically easy to cut.

**Action:** Since 1969 this position has been used to lobby City Council for needed funding. We have also worked with other groups seeking increased library hours and personnel. There have been significant improvements. Although merger of the city and county library systems has been politically impossible, the two systems do cooperate. In 2002 wrote letter to Houston mayor and council members opposing the shortening of service hours for city libraries. Our monitoring is on-going.

### **Annexation/Disannexation**

1. Support annexation by Houston of the Ship Channel Industrial Districts, with negotiation of short-term contracts in the interim. (1977) The LWV-HA recognizes the importance to the city of Houston of the power to annex additional geographic territory in order to protect its economic base and to provide a government which addresses regional needs. However the League feels that Houston should exercise this power within the following guidelines: (1979)
  - Checkerboard patterns should be avoided;
  - No unincorporated areas should be left surrounded by the city (except those within the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) of another city);
  - Houston should not pass over economically depressed areas as it proceeds with annexation;
  - Houston should plan annexation in advance in order to make sure that city departments are prepared for expanded services;
  - Houston should notify residents of areas to be annexed in advance and give them the opportunity to help plan how needed services will be provided and/or coordinated with facilities already in place;
  - Houston should provide services related to public health and safety services immediately upon annexation, and set a schedule to provide other services within a reasonable time;
  - Houston should provide adequate levels of services to all annexed areas, and this should be done without extra assessments to residents of areas where such assessments would be a severe burden. These should include: improving streets and drainage to a level at which services can be provided to people living on those streets; and provision of city water and wastewater service within a reasonable time if the area has no adequate facilities;
  - establishes an impartial board to weigh the importance of annexation to the health of the city and the ability of the city to accommodate the needs of the area. (1979)
2. Support a comprehensive planning process for growth, open spaces, and capital investment in the ETJ, recognizing the possibility of eventual annexation of these areas. (1979)
3. Support the adoption of a subdivision ordinance for the city and the ETJ. (1979)
4. Support policies encouraging development within the city limits. (1979)
5. Support a policy encouraging water districts to consist of a single parcel of land. (1979)
6. Support a long-range policy of annexation and the adoption of a policy for annexation and disannexation to include:
  - legal clarification of circumstances under which disannexation would be permitted;
  - a review board, preferably at the state level, to hear cases of disputed annexations and disannexations;
  - a requirement for an annexing city to establish a baseline for the provision of municipal services to be maintained in all parts of the city and provided to newly annexed areas at the same level. (1983)

**History:** The first use of this position has been with the recent annexation of Kingwood and others.

**Action:** In addition to the general meeting on annexation, the Houston League has issued a press release and written to Houston's elected state officials urging their support for maintaining the city's annexation powers. Testimony was given before a state legislative committee against a bill seeking to weaken Houston's annexation powers.

### **Comprehensive Planning**

1. Support planning in Houston's extraterritorial jurisdiction through:
  - the development of goals and priorities for Harris County by assessing the needs of the total community with maximum public participation;
  - central planning coordination and implementation tools for the unincorporated areas of Harris County;
  - development of a uniform performance building code for the unincorporated areas of Harris County;
  - feasibility studies for the consolidation of planning services between municipalities and Harris County;
  - increased use of Harris County of the planning services of the Houston-Galveston Area Council, and the development by H-GAC of practical services reflecting the planning needs of Harris County. (1976)
2. Support the development and adoption of a long-range flexible, constantly updated, comprehensive plan, developed with adequate citizen input. This plan should include:
  - the coordination and centralization of the planning process in Houston, with the strengthening of a central planning authority;
  - the development of goals, objectives, and priorities for Houston through a process which assures maximum public participation;
  - a broad-based planning commission with members with diverse backgrounds and expertise;
  - a comprehensive plan which includes economic, social, and environmental concerns as well as physical development;
  - public involvement in the planning process at the neighborhood level, and public hearings on proposed plans;
  - an explanation to the public by the City Council of why any given plan is or is not adopted; (1976)
  - a strong role for the City Planning Commission, committed to the full range of powers granted it by the city charter, and to the coordination of its work with an equally strong Planning Department; cooperation between the private and public planning entities, with public participation throughout the process;
  - vigorous enforcement of current regulations, and the enactment of additional ordinances which focus on civic concerns such as traffic congestion and storm water runoff; preserve and improve the quality of life in Houston neighborhoods;
  - the use of growth management techniques such as performance standards, impact fees, and both short-term and long-term capital improvements budget planning;
  - a city ordinance requiring the setting aside of land for open space and parks. (1984)

**History:** League members thought there was a lack of long-range planning in both the City of Houston and Harris County. The League wished to expedite better planning and coordination both in and between city and county. Studies in 1976 and 1984 addressed these issues.

**Action:** This position was used between 1990 and 1993 by LWV-HA to lobby for a zoning ordinance for the City of Houston. In 2003 joined with the Blueprint Houston project to promote public participation in comprehensive city planning.

### **Tax Abatement & TIRZ**

The LWV-HA supports the use of tax abatements and tax increment reinvestment zones in the Houston region with appropriate oversight and public input

The League of Women Voters of the Houston Area supports tax abatements as an economic development tool in competitive siting situations to attract new "magnet industries" and to retain existing businesses and encourage them to upgrade and provide new jobs.

The League also supports tax abatement as an environmental incentive, for historic preservation, and to revitalize blighted areas. Tax abatement contracts should be analyzed for public benefit and rigidly monitored for compliance and should be terminated if contract terms are not met.

The League of Women Voters of the Houston Area supports Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZs) with appropriate oversight and analysis by the governmental jurisdiction(s) involved and community input, to develop or redevelop blighted areas, for land use management, and for economic growth in tax base.

For both tax abatements and TIRZs, the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area supports:

1. Annual collection and dissemination of objective data.
2. Regional cooperation.
3. A mandatory public hearing for meaningful and timely input on whether a proposed contract should be granted.
4. Regular re-evaluation of criteria in light of broader community planning goals. (2006)

**History:** The League originally studied tax abatements in 1996. Our position was restudied and TIRZs were added to the study in 2006.

**Action:** No action has been taken under our new position.

**Ethics:** Support of effective ethics regulation with strong enforcement.

**History:** This position was adopted in 2007.

**Action:** Laura Blackburn has been appointed to the Citizens Task Force on Ethics established by County Judge Ed Emmett.

## **Natural Resources**

### **Parks and Recreation**

Support measures to insure acquisition, maintenance, and development of public lands in the Houston area by:

- comprehensive planning for public lands in Harris County to meet National Parks and Recreation Association standards;
- adequate funding;
- adoption of an objective priority planning policy;
- investigation of legal ordinances to facilitate parkland acquisition and contribution of land and money by developers;
- maximum cooperation and coordination of park services and planning between city and county;
- maximum use of schools and churches for program development;
- opposition to long-term private and public leasing of public lands. (1970)

**Action:** In 2002, we joined the Houston Quality of Life Coalition, and we support the coalition's goals. In 2003 wrote letter to Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept supporting more aggressive land acquisition and water conservation policies. In 2004-05 we supported additional funding for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

### **Transportation**

Support comprehensive transportation plans which include:

- best land use of land and access to employment, cultural, civic, medical, educational, and other facilities;
- public participation in the early planning stages; (1971)
- a well-balanced, environmentally sensitive, multi-modal transportation system which includes buses, rail, and well-regulated paratransit (jitneys, etc.);
- cooperation and funding of joint ventures among the different transportation agencies – Highway Department, Metro, and city and county;
- use of highway funds in the following order of priority:
  1. maintenance
  2. new construction

- 3. public mass transit
- limited use of user fees such as toll roads to help fund development and/or construction of a transportation system. (1985)

**History:** The League has historically been concerned about mobility. Impetus for study began when the city purchased a local bus company and set up an agency to run it.

**Action:** League members monitored transit use and served on state transportation committees. LWV-HA and Houston-Galveston Area Council lobbied with other groups to pass enabling state legislation for a city referendum to establish a transit authority.

### **Flood Control**

Support comprehensive long-range planning for flood damage avoidance in Harris County by considering:

- all alternative methods for flood damage avoidance;
- the effect of future development on flooding patterns;
- the full effects of stream modifications;
- the flood plain as a multiple use resource, especially its role as a natural retention system which reduces and delays peak flows;
- economic, social, and environmental factors, especially water quality. (1978)

**History:** At 11 feet above sea level, there is no place in the Houston area that might not be under water in a 5 inch rain. New flood maps are being finalized in 2005 Some areas (e.g., Bellaire) have been expanded; others reduced.

**Action:** The League has a member on the citizen Harris County Flood Control Task Force (the chairperson is the League representative). Several League members representing other organizations are also members of the Task Force, which meets quarterly. The Harris County Flood Control District does a good job planning as defined by our position except, perhaps, in considering “the effect of future development on flooding patterns” which is governed by Houston and Harris County, not the Flood Control District.

### **Solid Waste**

Support a long-range solid waste management plan which emphasizes:

- recycling and development of new technology;
- separation of solid waste at the source;
- judicious use of incineration and land fills;
- effective land use principles;
- control of air and water pollution;
- regional planning;
- promotion of public education efforts;
- citizen participation. (1972)

**History:** The League began studying solid waste issues in response to federal, state, and local statutes, and because of controversy arising from the operation of the Holmes Road incinerator.

**Action:** LWV-HA continues to lobby on this topic, urging reduction in packaging so less waste is generated, greater use of recycled materials, and economic incentives which enable recycled materials to compete effectively with “virgin” materials. In October 1997, the League held an all-day workshop on waste reduction and recycling

### **Toxic Substances**

Support:

- the protection of public health with special concern for sensitive populations as the primary factor in determining regulatory action and decision-making involving toxic substances, with economic costs a secondary consideration;
- a policy requiring industry and unions to fully inform employees and the public of potential risks of toxic substances, both in the work place and the community;
- informing the public of any possibility of adverse effect of toxic substances via clear labeling, public forums, public access to information, and articles and programs in all media to help make informed choices;

- regulating the transportation of toxic substances by:
  1. enforcement of safety, speed, and inspection regulations;
  2. establishment of realistic schedules, routes, and work practices to protect the public health;
  3. requirement of complete and informative labeling on the transporting vehicle, whether hazardous product or waste;
- stronger regulatory efforts to control hazardous pollutants in air and water by frequent re-examination of laws and regulations as new information is developed through research, and by enlarging existing regulatory agencies, as necessary, even at increased costs to the taxpayers. (1983)

**History:** Passage of the Toxic Substances Control Act in 1976 spurred LWV-HA's examination of the hazards of toxic substances in Texas' Gulf Coast region. A backgrounder was published in January 1980. After several general meetings, the 1983 consensus was reached.

**Action:** Shortly after the passage of the act, League members served on the Toxic Substances Task Force and as chair and vice chair of the Houston Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). Members now serve on the Regional Air Quality Planning committee, the Clean Air Coalition, the LEPC, and the Environment Committee of the Greater Houston Partnership. They also monitor state and local legislation and work to educate the public about toxic substance issues. In 2003 wrote letters to U.S. senators opposing the loosening of pollution controls. In 2005, we testified before Houston City Council and at a town hall meeting about air quality in the Milby Park area, and we testified before the Texas Senate Natural Resources Committee concerning proposed air toxics legislation. We also wrote letters to federal, state and city officials urging stronger laws and enforcement of laws on air quality.

## **Social Policy**

### **Administration of Justice**

Support the removal of certain areas of human behavior from criminal prosecution: sexual activity between legally competent consenting adults, gambling, adult access to pornography, use of alcohol. (1975)

Support measures for rehabilitation of offenders, which would include:

- punishment or penalties which fit the crime;
- more equitable punishment;
- alternative arrangements to placement of juveniles in state schools which would include small, family type units close to home with effective supervision and qualified personnel;
- provisions for pre-trial release such as are incorporated in the present (1974) Harris County Pretrial Release Program.

**Action:** Lobbied for repeal of Penal Code 21.06 to decriminalize consensual sexual activity between adults. LWV-HA sponsored a Conference at the UH Law School in September 1991 on Criminal Justice that was broadcast on the Community Access Channel. In 2002 participated with the Texas Criminal Justice Reform Coalition in programs to educate the public about voting rights of ex-felons. In 2002 held general meeting on capital punishment.

### **Bilingual Education**

- Support educational legislation, policies, and programs that take into consideration the following:
- The purpose of bilingual education should be to teach every limited-English proficient (LEP) student to read, write, and speak English as soon as possible while maintaining academic achievement.
- The basis on which the effectiveness of bilingual education should be determined are:
  1. how quickly transition into English is made;
  2. standardized testing results of academic achievement, using valid data that can be confirmed.
- Factors that negatively influence the academic achievement of LEP students are:
  1. limited supply of qualified, committed teachers;
  2. high mobility of students' families;
  3. economic hardships;
  4. the low educational expectations of the teachers, family, and the children.

- The factors can be mitigated by:
  1. consistency of curriculum among school districts;
  2. adequate resources available from the Texas Education Agency;
  3. working with families and teachers to raise educational expectations;
  4. creating new avenues for recruiting additional teachers who are qualified and committed.
- Because of the preservation of ethnic cultures is the responsibility of the home and other institutions, funding for bilingual education should be focused on the acquisition of English proficiency.

**History:** In May, 1998, The League of Women Voters of Houston adopted a two-year study of bilingual education in the Greater Houston Area to review and evaluate the federal and state laws, funding mechanisms, and policies relating to bilingual education; how programs are being implemented in the Greater Houston Area, criteria used for evaluating the success or effectiveness of the programs, and who makes the evaluations. After study and consensus, the position was adopted on April 24, 2000, by the League of Women Voters of Houston.

### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Support the requirement for schools to honor parental written requests not to use corporal punishment on their children. (1989) Support the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools. This is a local position only.

**History:** The Child Abuse and Neglect study was begun in Houston in 1988. The Committee soon discovered that child abuse and neglect should be a state issue. At the LWVT convention held in Houston in 1990, the study was adopted as a non-recommended item and was studied locally by LWV-HA members under the guidelines of the LWVT. The child care issue was studied that same year as a recommended LWVT item.

**Action:** The 79<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session now underway is very important for Child Abuse and Neglect reform. Prevention programs need to be restored with health care provided for all our children in protective care. Caseworker caseloads need to reflect the national standard of 12 to 18 cases per worker. CPS needs to be adequately funded with the latest technology.

### **Domestic Violence**

Support efforts to:

- increase community awareness of the incidence of domestic violence;
- establish a process for keeping records on domestic violence calls, responses, charges, and dispositions;
- provide special training of police and special squads to deal with domestic violence;
- establish crisis intervention teams and provide aid to the victims;
- encourage the District Attorney's office to prosecute charges of domestic violence;
- encourage sensitivity to the problem of domestic violence throughout the justice system;
- encourage increased cooperation between agencies that deal with the problem;
- make counseling available for all members of a household involved in domestic violence. (1983)

**History:** We have had a position on domestic violence since 1983.

**Action:** Anti-stalking law was revisited and revised in the 1997 Texas Legislative session. The new law was signed and took effect immediately after the Governor signed the bill. Also a concern is the Federal Welfare Reform Bill with heavy focus on welfare-to-work programs. This poses several challenges to survivors of family violence. The 15% cut in the Social Services Block Grant (which in the 96/97 biennium comprised 97% of the budget for family violence programs), coupled with mounting need for services, threatens the funding level of state family violence programs. We are members of CADA (Coalition Against Domestic Abuse).

### **Education**

1. Support measures to improve educational accountability program in the school districts of the greater Houston area, with:
  - shared responsibility of educational accountability at all levels of the educational process, including the Texas Legislature, the Texas Education Agency, local school boards, administrators, teachers, pupils, parents, and the community.

- state legislative accountability for fair and equitable funding;
  - teacher accountability for knowledge of competency in the subjects they teach;
  - student accountability for conduct and attitude;
  - community accountability for knowledge of election issues;
  - community involvement in accountability programs;
  - comprehensive student evaluations including methods other than standardized testing;
  - parental input in the evaluation process of the school district personnel. (1978)
2. Support equal access to quality education, including:
- providing opportunities for students to learn to function in our pluralistic community;
  - offering and encouraging the achievement of academic skills which enable each child to function at his/her highest potential;
  - providing superior programs and teaching which take into account the needs of the individual pupil;
  - offering superior programs in college preparatory and occupational/vocational training;
  - providing free transportation as an integrative tool for those requesting it;
  - student transfer policies which preserve existing integration;
  - magnet-alternative schools;
  - closing under-utilized schools;
  - combinations of the above. (1976)

**History:** LWV-HA adopted its education positions in the mid-1970's in response to perceived inequities in school funding and educational opportunities.

**Action:** Recent activities include monitoring state legislation on school finance (especially vouchers), and the impact of the religious right through affiliation with the Texas Freedom Network and Let Freedom Ring. The school tax base impact of tax abatements was considered in the recent LWV-HA Tax Abatement study. Lobbied House Education Committee members opposing pro-voucher bill. Committee members monitored Comptroller Sharp's performance review of HISD. In 2002-03 committee members began a restudy of the LWV-HA position on education. We wrote many letters in 2004-05 opposing vouchers and supporting adequate education funding. We attended the presentations before the Texas Supreme Court regarding education and will be monitoring the Special Session on education.

## Health

1. Support the establishment of comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and inclusive public health services for Houston Area residents. These services should be accessible to the public in terms of cost and location. Clients should understand available services. Emphasis should be given to preventive and primary care.
2. Support joint planning and coordination to eliminate duplication and gaps in health services and to improve the availability and quality of care including:
  - Centralized regional governance to pool resources and increase effectiveness;
  - Collaborative efforts by city, county, and non-profit public health care providers including programs to disseminate information enabling users to better manage their care; and
  - Channels for consumer input into health planning.
3. Support measures to control the escalation of health care costs including:
  - Increasing the insured population;
  - Accessing all available matching funds;
  - Utilization of local public and private funds to pay Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) premiums/Medicare Part B premiums for indigent elderly;
  - Increasing the number of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), school clinics, and other clinics that deliver comprehensive medical services so that care is delivered in the most appropriate setting, thus lowering the use of expensive emergency room services;
  - Area-wide coordination of electronic health records including immunizations to be accessible by all health care facilities;
  - Area-wide coordination of highly specialized care involving expensive equipment; and
  - Utilization of para-professionals such as nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, and dental hygienists.

**History:** LWV-HA determined the need to evaluate the existing health care providers, distribution, and services in light of increases in the number of uninsured residents, over-crowding in public hospitals, and ever increasing reliance on emergency rooms to provide primary care services at prohibitive cost.

**Action:** LWV-HA has lobbied and given testimony at Harris County Commissioners Court to prevent cuts in the Hospital District budget. In 2002, LWV-HA wrote a letter to the Houston mayor and council members opposing shortened hours for city clinics. In 2004, a League member served on the public health sub-committee of the Greater Houston Partnership study.

League members served on a committee to study public health care in Houston and issued a report in 2005. Also in 2005, LWV-HA lobbied for a Hospital District budget that realistically addressed the demand for services.

## **Housing**

1. Support equal opportunities for all Houstonians with emphasis on additional well-managed, low-cost housing and continued support of existing positions:
  - a minimum housing code used in conjunction with existing building, fire, health, and sanitation codes;
  - adequate provisions for enforcing these codes, and any relocation of families necessary through such enforcement, to be the obligation of the city;
  - completion of a workable program for land use and housing for more orderly growth of the city, thus leading to qualification for federal assistance;
  - encouragement of private investment in low-cost housing and the use of private initiative to seek new ways of housing the needy. (1971)
2. Support a substantial increase in low and moderate-income housing stock expenditures for Houston and Harris County above the 26% and 30% of Community Development Block Grant funds allocated in 1990. The League believes that Housing Assistance should be the top priority of Community Development Block Grant funding. We support equal priority for Capital Improvements and Economic Development.

**History:** Our housing position was prompted by serious rental housing quality deficiencies. The Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) position arose from concerns that insufficient funds were being devoted to low and moderate housing as opposed to economic development.

**Action:** The LWV used its position to work with Houston City Council to create a housing code, which led to improvements in rental housing stock. The League also supported the City's 1993 stricter revisions to the Housing Code. At present, the City does not generally provide relocation help for displaced low-income families other than providing lists of other available housing.

## **Sexuality Education and Reproductive Services**

1. Support comprehensive sex education in all public schools in Harris County, including:
  - greater parental involvement;
  - broadening curricula;
  - student access to specifically educated nurses, counselors, and teachers;
  - greater use of city and county educational programs;
  - programs to help parents open discussions with their children. (1982)
2. Support adequate, easily accessible, publicly funded family planning services to meet the community's needs, including:
  - confidentiality of all clients;
  - efficient scheduling of family planning services;
  - advertising;
  - adequate funding;
  - adequate, accessible facilities. (1982)
3. Support equal access to legal and medically sound pregnancy termination services for all residents of Houston and Harris County, with government funding and/or a combination of government/private funding available for low and moderate income residents. (1982)

**History:** This position was adopted in 1982.

**Action:** The LWV cooperates with Planned Parenthood at all levels to keep Roe v. Wade, or freedom of choice, the law of the land. The Texas Legislature regularly considers measures aimed at regulating abortion services. In

1997, parental notification and licensing standards bills were on the agenda. The League also supports providing foreign aid for family planning. Congress has authorized family planning foreign aid, but stipulated that no funds be used for abortions. In 2002 wrote letter to US senators urging ratification of CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) treaty.

**88<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Minutes**  
**League of Women Voters of the Houston Area**  
**Thursday May 8<sup>th</sup> 2008**

Call to Order: President Laura Blackburn called the meeting to order at 7 pm. The 88th annual Meeting was held at the Emerson Unitarian Church at 1900 Bering Drive

Quorum: There were 65 members present, and a quorum was met.

Speaker: Laura Blackburn introduced the speaker, Dr. Renu Khator, President of The University of Houston.

Call to Order and Adoption of Order of Business: Following the speaker, Laura called the meeting to order by adopting the order of business as presented on page 1 of the Annual Meeting Workbook. Barbara McCormick moved and it was seconded that we adopt the order of business.

Adoption of Rules: Next the rules were presented as they were written on page 10 of the workbook. Barbara McCormick moved and it was seconded that the rules be adopted.

Organization of Meeting: Madeleine Appel was appointed parliamentarian, Alice May Berthelesen as time keeper, and Shirley Gibson as secretary.

Secretary's Report: The minutes for the last annual meeting, on page 23 of the Annual Meeting Workbook, were approved by the committee.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer's Report was given by Martha Murphree. It was approved.

President's Report: The President, Laura Blackburn spoke on all of the accomplishments as listed on page 3 of the Workbook.

Membership Report: The Membership report was given by Bee Franks-Walker. She stated that there were 415 members at present and that a brochure is going out in the fall.

Community Relations and Advocacy Report: Advocacy Vice President, Jan Wilbur, reported on the number of voters we have registered. She said that we have registered 10,000 this year and that Linda Cohn and Ann Woods need to be commended. She said that next year we would be able to distribute 200,000 Voter's Guides and for the fall we were putting out 160,000. We had been involved with Channel 2 and 8 for our community outreach. We had also sought out, interviewed and hired an Executive Director, Pat Downing.

Presentation and Adoption of Local Program for 2007-2008: Joan Golding, Program Vice President, reported on the program on page 11 of the Workbook. The existing program for adoption was moved by Madeleine Appel and seconded by Lula Blake.

The first new program was recommended as the study of Homeowners Associations: Purpose, Powers and Performance and the second program to be suggested was Building Codes in Coastal Areas: Purpose, Adequacy, and Enforcement.

The first speaker was Lynn Walshak for studying Homeowner's Associations.

Carolyn Mata moved that we adopt the first program and Betty Oertel seconded it. Discussion followed, and it was suggested that the study include both sides of the issue. The question was called, and the motion was approved.

The second program on Coastal building codes was presented by Michael Fjetland. The motion to accept the study was made by Barb Swartz and seconded by Millie Whittington. Discussion followed; the question was called and the motion passed.

Joan discussed current positions held by the league, and commended the Chairs for their good work.

**Awards:** Awards were presented by Gwen Essinger. Judy Hollinger was not there to receive the Helen Hunter award. Awards were to be presented to Ann wood and Linda Cohn, but they were not present. Several certificates were also awarded.

**Presentation and Adoption of 2007-2008 Budget and Dues:** Barbara McCormick presented the budget. Lula Blake, Martha Murphree, Jan Wilbur and Laura Blackburn worked on the budget. Barbara presented the budget proposed in the Annual Meeting Workbook for 2008 on pages 29, 30 and 31 and moved that it be adopted with \$60 a year dues. Madeleine Appel seconded.

Jan Wilbur moved that the dues be \$65 instead, with Madeleine Appel seconding. The Parliamentarian spoke to the issue. She ruled the motion to amend was to be voted on before the original motion. The dues of \$65 were passed with a vote by 3/5 of the attendees.

The budget as amended was moved by Barbara McCormick and seconded by Michael Fjetland and adopted as the 2008-2009 Budget.

#### **Election of Officers for 2008-2009**

**Nomination Committee Report:** Barb Swartz, chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the nominees for the 2008-2009 year:

As Organization VP, Nancy Parra; as Treasurer, Martha Murphree; as Community Relations VP, Lula Blake  
As Directors, Gwen Essinger; Bee Franks-Walker; Ann Herbage; Lynn Wolshak; and Maryanne Barthelmy

Nominating committee, Millie Whittington, chairman; Joan Golding; and Barb Swartz

Officers returning, President, Laura Blackburn; Advocacy VP, Jan Wilbur; Secretary, Shirley Gibson

Directors, Linda Cohn; Wayne Derrick; and Betty Oertel

Submitted by the nominating committee, Barb Swartz, Carolyn Mata, Alice May Berthelsen, Linda Cohn, and Jan Wilbur

Barb Swartz asked for any nominations from the floor and finding none moved that the slate be accepted as nominated. It was accepted.

Laura Blackburn gave additional awards to Linda Cohn and Ann Wood from the state League.

Laura Blackburn called the board to the front to be photographed and congratulated.

Laura Blackburn introduced off board chairs, Alice May Berthelsen, Celia Chapman, Sharon and Harold Friedman, Marty Gay, Margaret Gulousie, Carolyn Mata, Joan Peschel, Tony Sirvello, Barb Swartz, Millie Whittington, Mary Ellen Whitworth, Ann Wood, and Michael Fjetland.

**Presentation of New Executive Director:** Laura Blackburn introduced Pat Downing who will become our Executive Director on June 2, 2008.

**Direction to the Board:** After Mrs. Downing spoke, Laura Blackburn asked for wishes from the membership to the board. Joan Golding said she would like to see more communication from the board to the membership. Laura said that many leagues did that and that she would see if that could be arranged. Barbara McCormick said that she would like to see a development committee.

**Recognition of Outgoing Officers:** Joan Golding and Leslie Ann Taylor were recognized.

The meeting was adjourned.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Shirley Gibson, Secretary  
League of Women Voters - Houston

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS - HOUSTON  
2009-2010 PROPOSED BUDGET**

<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>	<b>Actual 2007-2008</b>	<b>Budget 2008-2009</b>	<b>Actual 3/25/09</b>	<b>Proposed 2009-2010</b>
<b>Income</b>				
Contributions				
Memorials	45		310	
Restricted	50			
Unrestricted	4859	4500	2884	4000
Other	42		415	
Total Contributions	4996	4500	3609	4000
Ed Fund Share	33656	40000	29055	
Membership Dues	16729	27000	14812	20000
Miscellaneous	4699	200	-1985	
Program Fees				
Annual Meeting	1982	2000		1200
General Meeting	3748	4000	2294	3200
Holiday Luncheon	1050	2000	955	1000
Program Planning	260	1000	385	700
Program Action				
Fall Fund Raiser	745			15000
Total Program	7785	9000	3634	21100
Sales	156	200	109	100
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>68021</b>	<b>80900</b>	<b>49234</b>	<b>45200</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Payroll Expenses	19400	26900	13332	26900
Automobile Expense	32	300	278	
Bank Service Charges	499	300	1358	500
Board Expenses		100		200
Convention/Council	1297	3000	3000	0
Dues				
LWVTXPMP	3925	4000	3643	3500
LUVUSPMP	4612			0
Total Dues	8537	4000	3643	3500
Equipment	160		100	
Office Supplies	987	1000	1401	1000
Insurance				
General Liability	921	2000	772	150
D&O				0
Total Insurance	921	2000	772	150

LWV Items for Resale	238	200		
Membership				
Membership Assistance		100	22	0
Finance Drive		250		250
Other	105			
Total Membership	105	350	22	250
Contingency	1721	100	86	0
Petty Cash	263			
Postage and Delivery	1460	1750	1642	300
Printing and Reproduction				
Voter	2063		1875	450
Annual Meeting Workbook				400
Directory			573	600
Other	2363		2005	
Total Printing and Reproduction	4426	5600	4453	1450
Program Expense				
Annual Meeting	1140	2000	250	1200
General Meeting	3523	4000	1665	3200
Holiday Luncheon	1193	2000	1313	1000
Program Action		500		100
Program Planning	617	1000	619	700
Total Program Expense	6473	9500	3847	6200
Professional Services			1000	500
Public Relations	292	200	65	100
Rent	13189	18700	16986	1440
Repairs				
Telephone	2898	3000	2888	400
Web Support	258		139	200
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>63156</b>	<b>77000</b>	<b>55012</b>	<b>43090</b>
<b>Beginning Balance</b>				<b>13623</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>4865</b>	<b>3900</b>	<b>-5778</b>	<b>15733</b>

Barbara McCormick, Chair; Laura Blackburn, Pat Downing, Ann Herbage, Martha Murphree, Nancy Parra, Jan Wilbur

## LWV Houston Education Fund 2009-2010 PROPOSED BUDGET

This budget is presented for information only; it is approved at the June Board meeting.

<b>Income/Expense</b>	<b>Actual 2007-2008</b>	<b>Budget 2008-2009</b>	<b>Actual 3/23/09</b>	<b>Proposed 2009-2010</b>
<b>Income</b>				
Repast	64364	65000	48000	55000
Silent Auction		1500		1500
Contributions				
Corporate Donations	1922	5000	2649	4000
Member Donations	2680	4300	3260	3500
Memorials	672		150	
Non Members Donations	90	100	350	400
Voter Guide Contributions	2778	3000	11500	10000
Voter Key			4000	4000
Voter Guide Corporate				4000
<b>Total Contributions</b>	<b>8142</b>	<b>12400</b>	<b>21909</b>	<b>25900</b>
Grants				
Hershey Foundation	1500	1500	1500	1500
Houston Endowment	80000	60000	60000	40000
Other			5250	25000
<b>Total Grants</b>	<b>81500</b>	<b>61500</b>	<b>66750</b>	<b>66500</b>
Legacies & Bequests				
Miscellaneous	737	150	3320	
Program				
General Meetings				800
Annual Meeting				800
Other				
<b>Total Program</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1600</b>
Publication Sales				
Voters Key	13		4	100
Voters Guide	100			
Other	20	50	8	
<b>Total Publication Sales</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>
Reimbursed Expenses				
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>154876</b>	<b>140600</b>	<b>139991</b>	<b>150600</b>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Automobile Expenses				400
Bank Service Charges	206	150	80	150
Contingency	58	250	24	
Contribution to Reserve				
Dues				
LWVTXPMP	3925	4000	3643	3500
LWVUSPMP	4611	9200	8906	8500

Total Dues	8536	13200	12549	12000
Fundraising Expenses		300	190	200
Hershey Fund Expense	850	1500	500	1500
Houston Endowment Grant				
Staff Development			70	100
Payroll Expenses		57640	50214	58216
Office Furniture			1250	
Equipment		5000	2509	
Other				
Total HEI Expense	0	62640	54043	58316
Insurance				
General Liability				850
Other				
Total Insurance	0	0	0	850
Meals and Entertainment				
Office Supplies				1500
Postage and Delivery				1500
Printing and Reproduction				
Annual Report				250
Voter				450
Other			2220	
Total P&R	0	0	2220	700
Professional Fees				
Accounting			1500	500
Total Professional Fees	0	0	1500	500
Program Expenses				
General Meetings				800
Annual Meeting				800
Other				
Total Program Expenses	0	0	0	1600
Public Relations				200
Rent				8160
Repairs				
Repast	23278	24000	20545	21000
Telephone				1600
Voter Service				
Voter Registration				250
Voters Guide	30160	10000	19375	10000
Voters Key	762		3441	3500
Voter Guide Corporate	375	500	228	
Total Voter Service	31297	10500	23044	13750
<b>Total Expenses</b>	104058	198880	208051	211642
<b>Beginning Balance</b>				108280
<b>Net Revenue</b>	50818	-58280	-68060	47238

## Report of the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee presents the following slate for the Annual Meeting Election:

### **Officers (2009-2011)**

President	Nancy Parra
Program Vice President	Lynn Walshak
Advocacy Vice President	Jan Wilbur
Secretary	Shirley Gibson

### **Officers (2009-2010)**

Organization Vice President	Betty Oertel
Community Relations VP	Judy Hollinger

### **Directors (2009-2011)**

Linda Cohn  
Wayne Derrick  
Louise Greeley-Copley  
Leslie Taylor

### **Directors (2009-2010)**

Lula Blake  
Mary Lee Burris

Officers and Directors continuing for the year 2009-2010

### **Officers**

Treasurer	Martha Murphree
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### **Directors**

Gwen Essinger  
Ann Herbage

### **Nominating Committee 2009-2010**

Laura Blackburn, Chair  
Alice May Berthelsen  
Millie Whittington

Submitted by the Nominating Committee

Millie Whittington, Chair  
Joan Golding  
Gwen Essinger  
Lynn Walshak  
Barbara Schwartz