

# The Houston VOTER

League of Women Voters-Houston Area • October 2008

**October General Meeting  
Friday, October 10**

## **Homeowner Associations**

Friday, October 10 • 11:00 - 1:00 p.m.  
Emerson Unitarian Church, 1900 Bering Drive

**Speakers:**

**Marlene Gafrick**

*Director, Development and Planning Dept.  
and*

**David A. Kahne**

*author of A Bill of Rights for Homeowners  
in Associations, published by AARP Public  
Policy Institute*

**Box lunch – \$10  
Deadline is October 7.**

## **President's Message**

*By Laura Blackburn*

And the beat goes on—along with debates, programs, units, and hurricanes! This month, as you will see, we are focusing on Homeowner Associations, their pros and cons. We are fortunate to have Marlene Gafrick, Director of the City of Houston Development and Planning Dept. and David A. Kahne, an attorney and author, to be our speakers on October 10. Remember to make your reservations! Units are also on Homeowner Associations, and we will be taking consensus. Once again, we need to hear your views as we decide how we wish to address this topic.

It has been such a pleasure for me to work with Earnie Manouse of Houston PBS and our own Ann Wood in arranging for the eight (yes, 8) debates we are co-sponsoring with Ch. 8 beginning on Friday, September 26. Keep your Friday evenings open for these informative programs.

Lynn Walshak has had her hands full in writing the enclosed Facts and Issues as well as our Voters Guide. What a woman!

In that connection, I have some great news to report—we have received two wonderful grants for our Voter Education programs: one for \$9,000 from LWV-US funded by American Express and one for \$5,000 funded by the Tina E. Bangs Foundation. Thank you, Molly Shanks! We will use both of these grants for our Voters Guide so that we can now publish the 160,000 we had planned for. I just this minute learned that today we received \$1,000 from El Paso Energy. Ann Herbage, our Finance and Development Chair, and her committee have been working hard, and it is literally paying off!

I also want to thank the many of you who so generously contributed to our Voters Guide fund. You are incredible! It means so much to see how much everyone supports our Voters Education programs.

Our Voters Registration efforts continue with phenomenal results—we are up to more than 17,000! Our many thanks go to Linda Cohn and Ann Wood. They also registered voters in September at the Flying Saucer Pub, a new venue, and it was shown on BBC!

I was also interviewed by Ch. 13 regarding the Ethics Report which was submitted to Harris County Judge Ed Emmett. It is getting a great deal of press and TV coverage, as it should. I am very proud of the report, and I hope no matter who is elected that it goes forward.

While a presidential election year is always a busy season, this one is certainly special!

**October General Meeting  
Friday, October 10**

## **Homeowner Associations**

If you are a member of a Homeowners Association, you will not want to miss this program. Why are you living in an Association? Do you know your rights? Is your home safe from foreclosure by your Association? Do you think it is just a segment of homeowners who have their homes subject to foreclosable liens while a large portion of homeowners are free of such a threat? Has your experience as a member of an HOA been positive?

Maybe you don't live in an Association. You may want to know about this type of community living because your best friends do, and you need to know more about them and the facts and issues of such a life.

**FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS  
MISS THEIR OPPORTUNITY TO VOTE**

## **INSIDE**

- Observers
- Debates on Channel 8
- Unit Meetings

... and more

# The LWV-HA Observers

## Houston City Council

Shirley Gibson Reporting

### August 20

Today there was an ordinance in the agenda that set aside a sinking fund for the improvement of drainage in the neighborhoods. At present \$220 million is set aside out of the budget without passing any sort of rain tax permanently set aside for drainage. The committee that got this done is chaired by Councilmembers Khan and Clutterbuck. It is an off shoot of the committee that was previously headed up by Ada Edwards.

Mayor White was instrumental in the implementation and fore thought for this project and he was complemented by Councilmembers Holm and Lawrence.

The item was tagged by Councilmembers Holm and Clutterbuck pending notification of their constituents. The mayor mentioned that we could lobby congress for funds from areas that deal with flooding and we could also put this on the ballot next year because we now have a vehicle for funding.

### September 3

The first hearing concerned the TIRZs. It seems that the council wants an audit and management system for each TIRZ. The TIRZs are designated sections of our city established to funnel tax money from the area back into the area for improvements to enable commerce and residences to prosper. The difficulty is that the council has little control of the TIRZ after boards are appointed, and the funds being kept by the TIRZ deplete the taxes from general revenue. The problem has been brought up on various occasions with no solution.

The second item of interest is the growing problem of slum apartments ruining the neighborhoods throughout the city. The mayor spoke about the fact that the cost of energy for air conditioning and heating has gone up so much that the owners have little left for maintenance. The city council all seemed to have something to say but it was finally said that the problem is complex and will take work and time to solve.

Another issue that was spoken to by an officer of the Houston Police was the issue of the blockage in municipal courts. The police have to go down to court daily on traffic violations and wait around all day to finally be told that the trials are postponed. The police say that they are unable to be on the streets enforcing the law while sitting waiting for trials.

A letter was read by Councilmember Lawrence from a woman telling that her traffic trial had been postponed five times and she went to court expecting it to go to trial each time. She spent the better part of each day there. Her next possible trial is in 2009.

The mayor addressed the problem saying that it probably can never be helped because we have 1.5 million cases before

the court each year. Councilmember Kahn asked why we are issuing so many tickets when gangs and burglars are at hand. He said that we could easily solve the municipal court problem by not trying to catch so many traffic offenders. Again the problem is immense and possible technology and satellite courts would help.

### September 10

The council session began today with the Mayor's Report. Mayor White commended the legal department for its steady perseverance that resulted in the ruling by Judge Davidson concerning the SOB or sexually oriented businesses.

Judge Davidson ruled in favor of the ordinance that says SOBs can't be located within 1500 feet of homes, schools, churches, or synagogues. The morning's Houston Chronicle reported that a judgment was upheld by the courts. The Penthouse Club was closed pending trial.

Several Councilmembers also complimented the legal department.

The second item the Mayor was concerned about was the curb situation. Trucks run over curbs while turning and loading throughout the city. The city's policy is to be that curbs will not be repaired.

Councilmember Lawrence mentioned the shape of the

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## Harris County Commissioners Court

By Sharon and Harold Friedman

After picking up the agenda, we were interested to see that a Supplemental Notice of a Public Meeting was part of the information. A discussion was supposed to take place and possible action about the Katy Freeway. At this writing one meeting had taken place and there was a great deal of conflict. We understand that several meetings were to take place throughout the county about the amounts to be paid to use the road. Some lanes, at some hours, were to be free. We did not hear the full discussion at the court.

The court got involved in another discussion about funding a group that teaches young people how to solve problems by discussion rather than through conflict. We had to leave this discussion because our parking meter was about to run out. We will keep you informed if we get more information about the Katy Freeway. Many citizens have felt that details about the Katy road should have been discussed more with citizens before work began.

GRANTS: 1. Budget for the Ryan White Part F Minority AIDS Initiative Grant Program for HIV / AIDS Services in the amount of \$1,666,021.

2. Ryan White Special Projects of National Significance grant fund in the amount of \$300,000 from US Health & Human Services.

3. Extend positions funded by the TX Department of Health Services for the Women Infants Children Program through September 2009.

4. Submitted applications to the Tx Department of Health Services for \$150,000 for the "safe talk" HIV targeted prevention program and \$1,331,392 for the Refugee Health Screening Program.

## Police Advisory Committee

By Barb Swartz

There are seven cadet classes scheduled for this year. The goal is to have 70 cadets in each class. The city has now passed the goal of 5,000 HPD officers aiming to grow to 6,200. One can apply online and if you meet the minimum criteria, you will be placed immediately into a class. There is one every 6-8 weeks. Full information is on their website. A question was asked about the number of minorities, the last class had 60 percent minorities, mostly Asian.

In the first quarter of 2008, burglaries were down nine percent and thefts were down 15 percent. In September-December, the department will concentrate on violent crimes. They now have overtime money in the budget to accomplish this. Due to the Alarm Ordinance there has been a 21 percent drop in crime at apartment complexes. Overall crime is down 6.5 percent.

## Important Election Information

By Wayne Derrick

The Nov. 4 election will have a long ballot and is expected to have a record voter turnout; expect long lines at the polls. I suggest Vote-by-Mail if 65 or older, or with a disability. It is helpful to have the ballot at home so you can study the Voters Guide and other sources at leisure. Best way to apply is through [www.harrisvotes.com](http://www.harrisvotes.com), but you can also phone County Clerk at 713.755.5792 and they will mail the application,

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## League Ed Fund and HoustonPBS team up for "The Great Debate Series: Election 2008"

By Ann Wood

It is election season once again and interest in the many important races facing area voters is high. In response to this and in an effort to provide Houston-area voters with the best information available the Houston Area League Education Fund and HoustonPBS will sponsor a series of 8 debates and forums to be broadcast over the coming weeks. "Red, White & Blue," the HoustonPBS public affairs program, will be the venue for 6 thirty-minute debates with candidates for U.S. House of Representative District 7, Texas Senate District 11, and Texas Representative District 22 as well as Harris County races for Judge, Sheriff, and DA. In addition to these programs there is a 60-minute prime time debate between the candidates for the U.S. Senate, John Cornyn, incumbent, Rick Noriega, and Yvonne Schick. This is the first of only two debates these candidates will have during the campaign. To round out the debate offering, the South Texas College of Law and HoustonPBS present the 2008 Supreme Court Forum sponsored by the League's Education Fund, the Houston Trial Lawyers Association and ABOTA. This forum will present candidates for three Supreme Court positions, Chief Justice and Positions 7 and 8. A complete schedule with dates and times is below.

Hosted by Gary Polland and David Jones, the regular hosts of "Red, White & Blue," the half-hour debates will have a conversational format with questions asked of each candidate and with an opportunity for rebuttal. If

you have never watched this locally produced program you should make an opportunity to do so. Mr. Polland and Mr. Jones represent opposite ends of the political spectrum so guests on their program are encouraged to respond to a broad range of issues. Ernie Manouse, HoustonPBS producer and host of "InnerViews with Ernie Manouse," will moderate the one-hour debate among candidates for the U.S. Senate. Three panelists will pose questions to Senator Cornyn, Mr. Noriega and Ms. Schick: Jones and Polland will be joined by the Chronicle's Austin journalist, R. J. Radcliff.

The 2008 Supreme Court Forum will offer a unique opportunity for citizens to learn about the function and purpose of the Texas Supreme Court while giving voters a view of the candidates for these important offices in action. Selecting judges is often very difficult for voters who feel ill equipped to choose candidates with little or no understanding of exactly what a specific court does, what qualifications they should look for in a judicial candidate, or how to evaluate a candidate's record of service. The forum is structured to offer this information so voters can go to the polls ready to make a choice. Questions for the judicial candidates were developed by a committee of the sponsors and reviewed by members of the College faculty. Mr. Manouse will moderate. This forum will be taped before a live audience on October 7<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m., at the STCL's Joe Green

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## The Great Debate Series: Election 2008

RACE	ON-AIR DAY	ON-AIR DATE	ON-AIR TIME	RE-RUN DATE/TIME
U.S. House of Representatives, Dist. 7	Friday	Sept. 26	7:30 p.m.	9/28 at 3 p.m.
Harris County Sheriff	Friday	Oct. 3	8:00 p.m.	10/5 at 3 p.m.
U.S. Senate	Thursday	Oct. 9	8:00 p.m.	
Texas Senate Dist. 11	Friday	Oct. 10	8:00 p.m.	10/12 at 5 p.m.
Texas Supreme Court: Chief, Positions 7 & 8	Sunday	Oct. 12	6:00 p.m.	
Texas House of Representatives, Dist. 22	Friday	Oct. 17	8:30 p.m.	10/19 at 5 p.m.
Harris County Judge	Friday	Oct. 24	8:30 p.m.	10/26 at 5 p.m.
Harris County District Attorney	Friday	Oct. 31	8:30 p.m.	11/2 at 5 p.m.

## HOA Conference

By Lynn Walshak

The Texas Homeowners for Homeowner Association Reform Education Fund, Inc. will sponsor a conference at the University of St. Thomas titled "Legislative Solutions for HOA Reform." It is from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 11, in the Scanlan Room of Jerabek Center on the University of St. Thomas campus. The University of St. Thomas Social Justice Committee and the Houston Area LWV is a co-sponsor. The conference cost is \$25 and will include coffee in the morning and a boxed lunch at noon.

Attendees of the event may park in the University of St. Thomas parking garage at the corner of Graustark and Alabama (entrance on Graustark).

Please get your registration information in as early as possible so that a head count and lunches may be made available.

Registration packets are available by contacting: [contact@texashoareform.org](mailto:contact@texashoareform.org)

or by mailing a request to:  
Texas Homeowners  
for HOA Reform  
P.O. Box 590626  
Houston, TX 77259-0626

## "Who is in Charge of Flooding in Your Neighborhood?"

By Alice May Berthelsen

The answer is : The Harris County Flood Control District and the City of Houston, or the city in Harris County where you live. The District, which operates on county and federal funds, works on detention facilities and flooding from the many streams and bayous in our area. There are 34 flood-plain management agencies in Harris County, in various governmental entities (mostly cities.) These agencies are allowed to make decisions that are more extensive than FEMA rules, but not less than FEMA rules.

The City of Houston has dedicated \$13 million in the 2009 budget for flooding and drainage projects. Houston has flooding some distance from any bayou in many areas. Our geography is against our area – flat with heavy rainfall at times.

A regional approach is needed, but the District and the City of Houston do communicate. M.J. Khan is the Councilmember heading the flood committee for the City.

## City Hall Observer

*continued from page 2*

esplanades where trucks have to make a left hand turn; they are poorly designed since the eighteen wheelers can't turn without running over the curb. She suggested that the shape be rounded off like TxDot does so the trucks can turn.

The mayor asked for feedback about whether the city should have a department that could be called by the property owner to allow them to pay to have their curbs repaired. He said that he was not interested in what had been done in the past but he was open to other solutions to the curb problem.

The discussion moved to sidewalk ordinances. Councilmember Lawrence and Councilmember Sullivan both had cases of homeowners not being able to park in their driveways because a sidewalk for school children was added to an already short driveway. They asked if the ordinance about not parking on a sidewalk be overlooked in these cases. Councilmember Adams said that if an ordinance is on the books it isn't fair to city employees to tell them not to enforce it.

The final part of the Mayor's Report concerned the sale of the Convention Hotel. He said that in the 90's Mayor Brown wanted to bring conventions to Houston after the George R. Brown Convention Center was built and there weren't enough hotel rooms downtown. It was decided that a hotel could be financed by the city and the city could use the revenue from the use of the hotel to compensate the employee's pension fund. It was very successful and now the hotel is in fine shape and will bring a good profit. The Mayor isn't saying what final offer he is willing to take for this purchase.

**Friends don't let friends miss their opportunity to vote.**

## Election info

*continued from page 2*

but you still have to mail it back. An alternate is to Vote Early from 10/20 to 10/31. Avoid early and late hours; some people stood in line for 30 minutes to vote early in the Primary.

## Voter Registration: It's now or ...

By Ann Wood

Voter Registration applications must be in by October 6<sup>th</sup> for citizens who want to vote on November 4<sup>th</sup>. If you have a parent, child, friend, co-worker or neighbor who is new to the city, recently turned 18, at a new address or with a name change, please remind them to register to vote. Remind your college-aged children to register either at home or at their college addresses. It is easy and quick to do. Download an application at [www.hcvoter.com](http://www.hcvoter.com) or pick up a self-mailer application at any Harris County courthouse, most libraries, and DMV offices. There are applications at the League office as well.

Friends don't let friends miss their opportunity to vote.

**Do you search the web? Here's a way to help the League.**

**Use [www.Goodsearch.com](http://www.Goodsearch.com) and enter League of Women Voters as the charity, then search away.**

**Each time, the National League receives a small contribution.**

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Oct. 1	VOTER Deadline
Oct. 6	Last day to register to vote
Oct. 7	TX Supreme Court Debate, 7 p.m.
Oct. 10	General Meeting, 11:00 a.m.
Oct. 14	Briefing, League office, 2 p.m.
Oct. 15	VOTER Mailing
Oct. 16-21	Units on HOAs
Oct. 20	First Day of Early Voting
Oct. 24	Board Meeting, League office, 10 a.m.
Oct. 31	Last Day of Early Voting
Nov. 4	GENERAL ELECTION DAY

### Thanks to the following for their contributions:

Ellen Cohen Campaign  
Karen Getty  
Molly Shanks "The Tina Bangs Foundation"  
Barbara Swartz

### The Great Debate 2008 on PBS

*continued from page 2*

Auditorium, 1303 San Jacinto St., Houston. A limited number of tickets will be available to League members. Contact the office if you are interested in attending.

We have had very good response from candidates and expect most debates will include all of those asking for your votes. The League is best known for its work in the areas of voter information and education. This series of debates follows in that proud tradition. Every voter can be informed and ready to cast her/his ballot at the polls. Please plan to watch these debates and share the schedule with your family, friends and other organizations.

## Condolances

Our sympathy to Judy Viebig on the death of her son David Boyd.

**NEW UNIT?** Do you live in far west Harris County or Katy? Are unit meetings too far away for you? We are starting a new unit on Highway 6 between Memorial and IH-10. If you are interested, please call Joan Golding, 281/596-0935, and she will give you time, place, and full information. Join us!

## Democracy is NOT a Spectator Sport!

Need instant information?  
Click on: <http://www.lwvhouston.org/>

## We welcome these new and returning members:

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## Fall Travel with the League

These tours benefit  
participating State and Local Leagues  
Make sure you are participating!

[www.travelwiththeleague.com](http://www.travelwiththeleague.com)  
or call 1-800-762-4216

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## October Unit Meetings

### **Monday, Oct. 20**

#### **Southwest Day, 1 p.m.**

Alief Library  
7979 South Kirkwood  
Rhoda Haddox  
(713)667-5952

#### **West Harris Co., 1:30 p.m.**

Eagles Trace, unit# PW 117  
Joan Golding, 281-596-0935

#### **Citywide Evening, 6 p.m.**

Black Lab Pub  
4100 Montrose  
Jackie Friedman  
(713)521-0702

### **Tuesday, Oct. 21**

#### **Spring Branch, 9:30 a.m.**

Community Room  
Lakeview Place Apts.  
(Agnes Davis residence)  
8950 Hammerly Blvd  
Kay Guenther  
(713)464-6870

### **Thursday, Oct. 16**

#### **Midwest, 10 a.m.**

Gerald Womack Building  
4412 Almeda  
Yvette Calloway  
(713)747-6555  
Millie Whittington  
(281)752-0446

### **Saturday, Oct. 18**

#### **New Member Unit, 10 a.m.**

League office  
2650 Fountain View, #328  
Judy Hollinger  
(713)465-4458

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization which promotes informed and active participation of citizens in government.

The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

The League of Women Voters of the Houston Area, a nonpartisan political organization, is open to both women and men and encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in local, state and national government.

Members of the League study public issues related to government, international relations, natural resources, and social policy. Facts on issues are clearly and concisely presented to citizens and decision-makers. Effective action results when informed citizens participate in government.

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities. The League acts to achieve solutions in the public interest on key issues at all levels of government, builds citizen participation in the democratic process and engages communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy.

One Year Individual Membership \$58

One Year Household

(Two members who share the same address) \$87

Student Membership (With ID) \$25