

The Houston VOTER

League of Women Voters – Houston Area

▪ March/April 2010

MARCH GENERAL MEETING

Climate Change

March 12, 11:30 a.m. (luncheon)

Tracy Gee Community Center

3599 Westcenter Drive

(1 block east of West Belt)

Box lunch, \$10.00

Mail a check to the office

or phone 713-784-2923 with credit card

Climate Change Update

Laura Blackburn

Get ready for an update on climate change! This will be the topic of our General Meeting in March as well as March units.

Our speaker for the General Meeting will be Dr. Ron Sass, recognized for his work for the U.N. International Panel on Climate Change. The Panel, along with Al Gore, received a Nobel Prize for their work in this area. We are fortunate to have him. The meeting will be at 11:30 for lunch at the Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Drive, Houston.

Do you believe climate change is real or a myth? Is the surface temperature of the earth getting warmer or cooler? What are the arguments for climate change caused by man? What do the skeptics say? We should have entertaining discussions at both the General Meeting and units!

HELP WANTED!

Mike Rine who formatted the VOTER for years has resigned his position. Can you help? Once a month, from a plain Word document, can you make it so it looks pretty? Let me know, Barb Swartz, 713-467-3561, bmswartz@att.net.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Nancy Parra

We have not resolved our problem of finding someone to handle VOTER production. Kudos go to Barb Swartz for her efforts in formatting and producing the VOTER this month. See the Help Wanted add if you are interested in helping with this effort.

Included in this mailing are the Harris County *Voters Guide* for the March 2Primary and the 2010 *Voters Key*. Thanks to Sherle Frost Watson for again heading the Voters Guide Committee and to Sharon Cunningham and Judy Hollinger for their help in the production of the *Voters Guide*. Thanks are also due to Tony Sirvello for his work on the *Voters Key*.

Total membership was updated for the 2009 Per Member Payments for LWV US. Membership is down slightly to 374. At the Margarita Mixer, organized by Christina Gorczynski, we signed up ten new members, and Christina's goal is to continue adding new members to the roster.

We held our Repast last month and for the first time, we honored two men, William P. Hobby, Jr., and Jon Lindsay. After an unexpected change in the venue, everyone pulled together to make this a very successful event. Thanks to Linda Cohn and her committee for a great job.

Our website continues to evolve, and we have had a great response to people using PayPal to sign up for events, to renew their memberships and to contribute.

In March and April, our general meetings are on timely issues—climate change and transportation. Laura Blackburn is heading the program on climate change, and Carolyn Mata, the one on transportation. Be sure to attend these events to find out the latest information on climate change legislation and the latest scoop on Houston's public transportation plans. See you at the meetings.

Connecting Future Legislators with Civil Society: Colombia & Brazil

Nancy Parra

The LWV Houston Education Fund has received a two-year grant from the Office of Citizen Exchanges of the U.S. Department of State. The goal of this project is to host civil leaders from Brazil and Colombia in 2010 and 2011. In response, LWVUS Ed Fund is sponsoring an interchange program, Connecting Future Legislators with Civil Society: Colombia & Brazil.

Twelve fellows (3 Brazilian and 9 Colombian) will complete 4-week fellowships throughout the US; all 12 will receive an in depth orientation upon arrival in the US. At the end of the internship they will participate in a 2-day enrichment program in Washington, D.C. hosted by the League and the Dept. of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The Houston Area League is one of the six Leagues chosen to participate in the program along with San Diego, CA; Miami, FL; McLean County, IL; Johnson County, KS; and Duluth, MN.

Two fellows, women between the ages of 25 and 35, are arriving in Houston April 9 and departing for Washington, D.C. May 2. They will be completing internships with Council Members Gonzalez, Dist. H, and Rodriguez, Dist. I. We have several activities planned, such as a welcome reception and a young professional's mixer.

We need members to help us provide other activities on the weekends and/or week nights. If you have tickets to events in Houston in April and would like to donate them to the fellows or if you would like to participate in an activity with the fellows, please contact me at nparra@parradesigngoup.com or at 713-528-2678.

WATCHING THE HARRIS COUNTY BUDGET

Leslie Taylor

Through the local positions adopted by the Houston Area League, we support local governmental efforts to acquire and maintain public lands, avoid flood damage, protect the public from toxic substances, rehabilitate offenders, provide public health and family planning services, improve mobility, and increase the availability of low-cost housing. Of course, all of these efforts cost money. If League members want to advocate effectively, we should be keeping an eye on how our government budgets and spends our tax money. Harris County's fiscal year 2009-2010 closes the last day of February. The FY 2010-11 budget process is well underway. In November and December of 2009 the various county departments were required to submit target figures and budget requests to the Office of Budget Management. The Budget Review Committee met with department heads in mid January 2010. Commissioners Court will reconvene hearings at 9 a.m. February 23 to consider the report of the Budget Officer. Public hearings and formal adoption of the budgets for Harris County and the Flood Control District are set for March 9, 2010. The Harris County Auditor should be issuing in March a 2010-2011 final statement of estimated available resources.

It appears that the county is already tightening its belt and adjusting staffing in areas of concern to the League. At the January 26 commissioners court meeting five grant-funded positions in the Health Education and Promotion Division were deleted. Community Services deleted 14 positions effective February 26.

On a more hopeful note, commissioners court is taking measures to improve administration of justice. The court approved expenditure of \$86,700 so that the Justice Center, Council of State Governments, can give technical assistance and research support to implement evidence-based practices for Community Supervision & Corrections. Also, earlier in January, the county accepted a \$50,000 in grant funds from the Texas Task Force on Indigent Defense to provide court appointed counseling services in support of the Veterans Court Pilot Program. It also accepted \$64,570 in grants from the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor to support the Family Intervention Court Program.

Past county budgets are available online at <http://www.co.harris.tx.us/budget>.

CITY COUNCIL REPORT

January 13, 2010

Shirley Gibson

Mayor Parker opened the session with her report: She is organizing eight subject groups that will report to her. The first new hire will be the director of the legal department. This person not only needs to be an able litigator but must be able to manage the equivalent of a large law firm.

The next group is the Housing and Community Development Group headed by Peter Brown, former councilmember, and Rudy Rasmus who is the pastor of St. John's Methodist Church, a downtown church.

A group for Neighborhood Protection has also been formed. This group deals with abandoned property, weeds, and dumping among other things.

A group to look into the actions of Metro is also being formed with Mr. Greanias as head.

Council Member Sullivan asked if he could be informed as to when these groups would meet so his constituents could be informed. Mayor Parker said these groups are for her benefit and she would report back as to their findings.

Mayor Parker spoke about the Emergency Management Department and how efficiently that department handled the big freeze last week. The only problem that caused difficulty was the boiler at the city jail.

January 20, 2010

Shirley Gibson

The council chamber was filled with the aroma of Loblolly Pines as I came in. The Houston Area Urban Forestry Council brought one Loblolly Pine for each City Council Member to plant in his or her district to celebrate Arbor Day. Walter Hambrick was the representative for the group.

The council began by complimenting Stephen C. Costello, Council Member for position 1, for finishing the Marathon this last weekend.

Council Member Clutterbuck opened the nominations for new board members for the

Houston Galveston Area council for this year. Council Member Clutterbuck nominated Annise Parker for position 1. Council Member Hoang nominated Ann Clutterbuck for position 2. Council Member Costello nominated Sue Lovell. Council Member Gonzales nominated Melissa Noriega for alternate. Council Member Hoang closed the nominations.

Council Member Pennington stated that most businesses do not have street numbers. He wanted something done about this. Mayor Parker noted that there is an ordinance concerning this but enforcing it is difficult.

Council Member Costello said he is chair of the committee on drainage and flooding, and committee is meeting the 26th and will have a member of public works as speaker.

Council Member Bradford thanked Chief Boriski for the fine job he did with the Fire Department. He also spoke against the new biodegradable yard bags the city is asking Houstonians to start using. He said that this is an imposition on business and believes that businesses should have few restrictions.

Council Member Sullivan agreed, saying that business is presently under a strain. He also mentioned the new Kingwood Library will open soon with the county's support. He showed 30 Humble ISD Librarians through the library.

Council Member Lovell congratulated Chief, Boriski for decreasing the response time for fire trucks and ambulances. She is also concerned that the investigation of the sexist scandal is taking too long. She wants the OIG to complete the investigation soon.

Council Member Clutterbuck spoke in favor of the biodegradable bags. She said that by allowing a firm to buy the grass clippings the city would save 1.5 million a year by diverting them from the landfill. Not only would we save the landfill space, we would provide the area with reusable soil.

February 3, 2010

Shirley Gibson

The Council meeting zipped past and before I knew it, we were going around the table hearing each Council Member's comments.

Council Member Jones was concerned about the Brunswick Lakes subdivision, which seems to be passed by in the annexing process. Mayor Parker said that the Planning Department would get back to her.

Council Member Lovell said that the Housing Department reported that 90,000 homes still had blue tarps after 18 months. They are still waiting for the governor's office to release the information to the FEMA for release of funds.

Council Members Adams and Costello met with the Coalition for Homeless/Harris County in January. With 200 volunteers, from 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., they took the census among the homeless on our downtown streets. It was quite successful.

Council Member Clutterbuck said that she went to a Chicken Soup Cook Off at Temple Emmanuel with 40 restaurants participating.

THE CENSUS IS IMPORTANT

Barb Swartz

TWO MONTHS UNTIL CENSUS DAY!

A successful Census depends on you. Make it your duty this week to tell 10 friends or clients why the Census is important to our community. Mayor Parker said it best: "the Census is about money, power, and pride."

Census questionnaire assistance available in multiple languages

For the first time, bilingual English/Spanish Census forms will be mailed to households in areas with high concentrations of Spanish-speaking residents. Spanish speakers living outside the designated area can obtain a Spanish-language form by visiting a *Be Counted* site. In addition, bilingual forms are available upon request in four other languages: Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Russian. As Census Day approaches, *Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC)* will assist those unable to read or understand the form. Language assistance guides in 59 languages will be available at all QAC locations.

PRIMARY VOTERS GUIDE

Judy Hollinger

The Harris County *Voters Guide* for the March 2, 2010 Primary Election is included in this mailing. Kudos to VG Chair Sherle Frost Watson, Sharon Cunningham and Sherry Collier for producing such a complete and readable guide. We are distributing 20,000 free copies to public schools and libraries and selling the rest at a nominal cost to corporations, individuals and community organizations. If you would like to pick up copies for your church or civic club, contact the LWV-HA office 713-784-2923 or secretary@lwvhouston.org. We were also able to print 10,000 *Voters Guides* for Fort Bend County. These will be printed and distributed in the Herald Coaster newspaper and will also be available at libraries in Ft Bend County. Thanks to Nellie and Marty Gay for supplying the information on the Fort Bend races and candidates and for arranging the publication and distribution of the guides.

Both the Harris County and Fort Bend guides will be on the lwvhouston.org website and can be downloaded and printed.

VOTERS KEY

Judy Hollinger

The 2010 version of the *Voters Key* (Directory of Elected Officials for Harris County) is a part of this mailing. Many thanks to long time Voters Key Chair Tony Sirvello who was responsible for updating and compiling the VK for several years. This handy booklet is one you want to keep nearby all year long to look up names and contact information for all officials from the President to Justice of the Peace.

There is also a printed 2010 Directory of Elected Officials for Fort Bend County compiled by Nellie and Marty Gay and funded by CenterPoint Energy. Both of these publications will be available on the website, lwvhouston.org, or can be obtained from the LWV-HA office.

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

The Hershey Foundation
Ron Drees
Ellen Goins
Celia Morgan
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Frances Harmon
Louise Greeley-Copley
Patricia Logue
Janet Frost
Paula Saizan
Joan Lamnek
Lynne Johnson
Doris Pryzant

CALENDAR

March 2 Primary Election
March 9 Briefing, 2:00 p.m., League Office
March 12 General Meeting, Climate Change, 11:30 a.m.
March 15-20 Units—Climate Change
March 24 Deadline for April online VOTER
March 26 Board Meeting, 10:00 a.m., League Office
April 9 General Meeting, Transportation, 11:30 a.m.
April 13 Briefing, 2:00 p.m., League Office
April 14 May VOTER Deadline
April 15-20 Units
April 16 Board Meeting, 10:00 a.m., League Office
April 23-25 LWVTX Convention, San Marcos
April 28 VOTER Mailing

The Houston VOTER is published 10 times per year by the League of women Voters-Houston Area. This newsletter is provided as part of yearly membership dues. Non-members may purchase a subscription. Contact the office for details.

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Christine Gorzynski – Executive Director
Barb Swartz – Editor

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Welcome to these new and returning members:

Sydney Abbott
4530 Briar Hollow Place #301
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214-914-4288
abbottsydneyk@aol.com

Jan Watts
104 Plum Tree Terrace #129
Houston, 77077
281-556-8571
janiswatts@sbcglobal.net



Mayor Parker at the December Luncheon



*Lynn Walshak & Shirley Gibson
January Program Planning Meeting*

The League sends condolences to the family and friends of Bonnie Cassidy who died in January. She was an active Houston Area League member in the '90's.

UNIT MEETINGS

Third Monday

Southwest Day, 1:00 p.m.

Alief Library

7979 South Kirkwood

Rhoda Haddox

(713)667-5952

West Harris Co., 2:00 p.m.

Eagles Trace, unit PW 117

Joan Golding, 281-596-0935

Citywide Evening, 6:00 p.m.

Black Lab Pub

4100 Montrose

Jackie Friedman

(713)521-0702

Third Tuesday

Spring Branch, 9:30 a.m.

Location to be determined, call

Margaret Kolodzie

(713)465-1068

Third Thursday

Midwest, 9:30 a.m.

Gerald Womack Building

4412 Almeda

Yvette Calloway

(713)747-6555

Millie Whittington

(281)752-0446

Third Saturday

New Member/Saturday Unit, 10:00 a.m.

League office

4001 N. Shepherd, Suite 213

Houston, 77018

Shirley Gibson

281-493-2875

Pick the unit of your choice and join the discussion on Climate Change with the following questions:

1. What does climate change mean to you?
2. Name some greenhouse gases and tell how they work.
3. How do we measure climate change?
4. What are some causes for climate change?
5. What are the possible consequences of climate change?
6. Is the earth cooling now or warming?
7. What is the significance of glaciers melting?
8. Who would be affected by rising sea levels? What is thermal expansion?
9. Why are rainforests so important?
10. Was the Copenhagen Climate Accord important? Why?

Transportation Update for April General Meeting

Carolyn Mata

David Crossley, president of Houston Tomorrow, will be the speaker at the General Meeting on Friday, April 9 at noon at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 5501 Main St. Houston Tomorrow, formerly known as the Gulf Coast Institute, was founded in 1998 to explore urban issues and to inform the discussion of growth in the Houston Gulf Coast Region.

Mr. Crossley will bring us up to date on livability and transportation issues in the Houston area.

The church is located at 5501 Main St.

A box lunch is available for \$10 per person.

Please mail a check to the League or call the office, 713-784-2923 with your credit card.

Friday, April 9, 12-1:30

COME TO THE LWVTX
CONVENTION IN SAN
MARCOS – APRIL 23-25!
lwvtexas.org for details