

The Mississippi Voter

League of Women Voters of Mississippi

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President's Corner

The **LWVMS Council 2006** will take place at the Edison Walthall Hotel on May 13th. Enclosed in this issue is the registration form (deadline May 2nd). Our guest speaker will be the **Mississippi Secretary of State, Eric Clark**, speaking on "*The Implementation of HAVA and After-Katrina Developments and Issues.*" (There also will be a demonstration of the state's new voting machines)! Council is a great opportunity to visit with old League friends and meet new members from all over the state. Every League and MAL member is encouraged to attend!

Council delegates will be voting to concur (or not) with the LWV Texas position on **Judicial Merit** as a method of selecting Supreme Court and Appellate Court Judges.

The LWVMS Board at their March meeting voted to propose that Council delegates concur with the Texas position instead of having the membership as a whole do a more conventional study and consensus which usually takes at least a year and requires dedicated study committees in each local League.

This is an effort on the State League's part to save time and effort by not reinventing the wheel. The Texas State League did a full study that is applicable to Mississippi's situation. Enclosed is the concurrence position that you will be asked to vote on at Council. Please read it and come prepared to discuss its pros and cons. We want to thank **Mary Margaret Bollinger** and **Judy Lacy** for their work on this project!

Our other official business at council will be to approve a budget for the coming year and plan for the upcoming elections.

Our traditions include recognizing League members whose outstanding services have influenced the development of the League in Mississippi. Do you know a League or League member who should be recognized? If so, submit names to the State Board for the **Thelma Workman** and **Katherine Rea Awards** on the enclosed form (deadline May 3rd).

Bring and share all your League successes, projects, and new ideas. Networking is not only fun, it helps energize our members. There will be a table available for items that you would like to display.

Bring any "White Elephants" for the **silent auction** and be ready to bid. Money raised helps support our mission.

LWVMS has again been invited to talk to a group of international visitors through a program sponsored by Jackson State University. We will provide information on our voting system and women's issues.

The League, along with many other groups, helped distribute flyers in an effort to reach as many Louisiana Voters as possible to let them know that if they had not registered in their new location, they could still vote in their home state's election.

"How to hold a debate" information was shared with a group having a debate in the primaries.

Minta Uzodinma and I made a trip to the coast to work with the LWV Gulf

Coast and we are excited about our next trip to Starkville to help with the startup of a new League Unit.

The LWVUS invited the MS State Board to the conference, **“Rethinking Strategies for Judicial Selection Reform,”** at the Cumberland School of Law in Birmingham, Alabama. The LWVUS was a co-sponsor of the meeting along with The American Judicature Society (AJS). **Mary Margaret Bollinger**, our Judicial Justice Specialist, and I attended all the meetings from **“Issues in Judicial Selection Reform,”** **“Recent Developments in Judicial Election Reform,”** to **“designing an Action Plan,”** and others. Future work on the judicial system will be presented at Council. Our thanks to the National League for funding this conference for us.

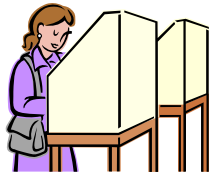
See you at Council and Peace!

Fran Leber

ACTION! ACTION! ACTION! **Wrap Up on 2006 Legislative Priorities**

ELECTIONS

The needed funding for implementing **The 2002 Voters Right Act (HAVA), HB 562**, passed and was signed by Governor Barbour in February. Because the U.S. Congress did not follow through with this year’s promised funding, it was necessary for the Secretary of State to ask the legislature to appropriate \$6 million to comply with the Federal mandate. Requirements included acquiring voting machines and implementing a statewide voter’s database.



Both the House and Senate’s **Campaign Finance bills** died again this year. The Senate bill would have expanded the disclosure requirements for loans to candidates. Both houses would have required reporting any individual making

a loan or extending credit to a candidate and that included all parties to the loan; how the money was used; and all details as to repayment of political campaigns.

Hurricane Katrina brought about awareness of the need for **emergency election legislation**. The League supported **HB 221** which would have rescheduled elections in case of emergencies.

EDUCATION

MEAP Funding: Once again our Legislature and Governor **have not** kept their promises and have short changed the children of Mississippi by compromising on full funding of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program (**MAEP**).



MEAP is the funding formula passed in 1997 designed to ensure that every district receives enough money to meet mid-level accreditation standards. The original bill asked for \$259,466,404.00, which included money that wasn’t funded in previous years.

HB 2604, which passed, is a phase-in bill that would take effect if there is not enough money to fully fund the program. The bill calls for \$68 million in additional dollars next year and an additional \$65 million for each of the next three years. At the end of that time, the program should be fully funded and in future years the basic MAEP formula would be used to fund our public schools.

Rep. Cecil Brown (Dist. 66), Chair of the Education committee, has said he would fight for every dollar when negotiating the school budget with the senators but he stated another option was needed because the state is \$188 million short of fully funding the \$2 billion program. He felt the Legislature had not shown the Will power to take the steps that would be needed to fully fund MAEP. Even though the state will have more money

this year, it is committed to an overall shortfall of \$500 million.

Senate Education Committee member **Hob Bryan**, D-Amory, feels the bill that passed “*dismantles the education formula*” and that it is a great setback in public education. The legislature and the Governor must appropriate money for the children as they have promised as soon as it is available.

Full funding occurred only once and that was during the state election year of 2003. The legislation passed allows more money for the program if the state has the money. Backers of education need to join together to advocate for full funding of MAEP and to hold our Governor and Legislators accountable for their pledges that education is their number one issue.

Dropout Prevention: The passage of **HB 213**, creating the **Office of Dropout Prevention**, hopefully will succeed in decreasing the number of children dropping out of our Mississippi schools each year.

A new report from the Alliance for Excellence in Education (AEE) says that roughly 16,500 Mississippi students didn't graduate in 2004. This calculation does not include students who received a General Education Diploma (GED) or took more than the standard four years to earn a high school degree. AEE says that Mississippi has the sixth lowest graduation rate in the country. The state will lose more than \$4 billion over the lifetimes of those kids who didn't graduate in 2004. Mississippi's dropout rate is 40%!

The first objective of the newly formed office will be to compile data on dropouts and to do research on its root causes. It is important to identify as early as third grade, those children at risk and those who fall behind due to their lack of reading abilities. Slow readers need

additional help and at risk children need additional encouragement.

Superintendent Hank Bounds says “*the problem with dropouts is they don't fit into any one category. In race, gender and academic ability level, they're across the board.*”

The League supported **HB 214** that would design a curriculum for students interested in direct entry into the workforce after they graduate. The courses would still be rigorous and comply with all federal *No Child Left Behind* standards.

Civil & Human Rights Curriculum: Legislation passed that allows the state to make civil rights and human rights education a part of the K-12 curriculum and to create a commission to assist in the development of the courses.

Universities and Junior College Raises: Staff will receive a 5% pay increase which is an increase of 26% above the current year. Total education spending, from K-12 through the university level, accounts for 66.3% of all state appropriated dollars.

REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

Abortion legislation returned again this year. The issue was not one of the Leagues priorities but it called for a lot of action activity anyway. LWV has a long-standing position supporting a woman's right to make personal reproductive choices.



The measure would have banned all abortions in the state except to save a mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. The issue was an attempt to close the only abortion clinic in the state and to provoke a challenge in the courts leading to a Supreme Court decision.

LWVMS opposed the bills and sent an email to the conferees urging them to let the bill die in the conference committee,

stating that the bill would be held up in the courts and Mississippi could not afford the law suites.

Senator Alan Nunnelee, (R) Tupelo, introduced the first bill (SB 2922) that called for any patient seeking an abortion to first see a sonogram of the developing infant and to hear the fetal heartbeat. **Rep. Steve Holland** of Plantersville, struck the sonogram and heartbeat language from the bill and replaced it with a bill outlawing all abortions. He said *"I looked at this thing and just said to hell with it. It's time for this issue to be voted on."* You can imagine the emotional meeting that followed from supporters and non-supporters of the bill.

The Senate and House could not agree on their bills so the bills were sent to a conference committee. Over the next weeks, meetings were called and adjourned quickly because not enough members showed up. Finally a meeting took place and it was indicated that at the next meeting an opportunity for medical facts would be presented. The pro-choice people were not invited to participate until they made an issue about being excluded.

Many meeting again were announced with some conferees not showing. Twelve minutes to 8:00 pm, the time deadline for a bill to be agreed on by the conferees, Rep. Holland presented the house's final version of the bill. *"The language in the bill basically says that the law will take effect when the United States Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade."* Holland said. The bill died in committee.

A Pew research poll states only 29% of Americans support overturning Roe v. Wade yet eleven other state legislatures are considering abortion bans with South Dakota already having passed a law. Mississippi presently has some of the strictest abortion laws in the nation and it has only one clinic that allows abortions.

Our action successes are the result of each of you who responded to Calls to Action by discussing the issues with legislators, friends, and family and then sending letters, e-mails, or making phone calls.



**We can and do make a difference.
THANK YOU!!**

In Memoriam



**Betty Friedan: Feminist, Social Activist
and Writer
(1921 - 2006)**

Betty Friedan, whose manifesto, The Feminine Mystique, became a best seller in the 1960s and laid the groundwork for the modern feminist movement, died February 4, 2006 on her birthday. She was 85.

For more information on this remarkable life, go to:

<http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/02/04/friedan.obit.ap/index.html>

Just for Fun...

Suffrage Movement Quiz

Answers follow below all the questions. Don't peek!

- 1) Who was the first woman on U.S. soil to publicly demand the vote?
 - a) Mary Wollstonecraft, author of Vindication of the Rights of Woman
 - b) Margaret Brent, a southern landowner
 - c) Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a northern abolitionist and suffragist
- 2) What U.S. document defined voters as male?
 - a) The Declaration of Independence
 - b) The Bill of Rights
 - c) The Fourteenth Amendment
- 3) In 1893, this country became the first to grant women the vote on the same terms as men:
 - a) Australia
 - b) New Zealand
 - c) Norway
- 4) U.S. suffragists were inspired by the militant suffrage movement in this country:
 - a) Great Britain
 - b) Canada
 - c) France
- 5) Which Constitutional Amendment granted U.S. women suffrage?
 - a) The Fifteenth Amendment
 - b) The Twenty-sixth Amendment
 - c) The Nineteenth Amendment
- 6) When was the amendment ratified?
 - a) 1904
 - b) 1914
 - c) 1920
- 7) When did women in Puerto Rico and the Philippines - then both U.S. territories - achieve suffrage?
 - a) Before U.S. women
 - b) At the same time as U.S. women
 - c) About 15 years after U.S. women
- 8) The National Woman's Party, the U.S. militant suffrage organization founded in 1913,
 - a) Disbanded after suffrage was achieved
 - b) Became the League of Women Voters
 - c) Still advocates for women's legal equality
- 9) Which European country was the last to grant women suffrage?
 - a) Liechtenstein
 - b) Belgium
 - c) Switzerland

Answers:

- 1) Margaret Brent, a southern landowner. In 1647, Brent, who owned extensive properties in Maryland, demanded the right to vote in the colonial assembly. Wollstonecraft, a Brit, supported woman suffrage in her 1792 *Vindication*. Stanton included the demand for woman suffrage in the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, which she read at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848.
- 2) The Fourteenth Amendment - Originally, voting was a privilege that could be limited by such factors as property ownership, condition of servitude, and length of residency. Laws varied greatly by state. In this manner, by 1776, all propertied women in New Jersey could vote, while in the 1840s less than half the men in Rhode Island were enfranchised. The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) both defined the vote as a right of citizenship and limited it to men.
- 3) New Zealand - Women achieved suffrage in New Zealand in 1893. The right was extended to women in Australia in 1902 and in Norway in 1913.
- 4) Great Britain - Militant British suffragists destroyed property, heckled politicians, and incited riots in their quest for the vote. Women in Great Britain received limited suffrage in 1918 and equal suffrage in 1928. Most Canadian women received national suffrage in 1918 (women in Quebec could not vote until 1940). French women were enfranchised in 1944.
- 5) The Nineteenth Amendment - The Nineteenth Amendment enfranchised American women. The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) granted the vote to men regardless of race, though violence, poll taxes, and literacy tests disenfranchised most black southerners until the 1960s. The Twenty-sixth Amendment (1971) lowered the voting age to 18 (it had been 21).
- 6) 1920 - The Nineteenth Amendment was approved by Congress in 1919 and ratified by the states in 1920.
- 7) About 15 years after U.S. women - Suffrage was achieved by Puerto Rican women in 1936 and Philippine women in 1937.
- 8) Still advocates for women's legal equality -The National Woman's Party, which in 1923 launched the fight for an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), is a nonpartisan equal rights organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 by the former leaders of the North American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), which also led the suffrage movement.
- 9) Liechtenstein - Women could not vote in national elections in Liechtenstein until 1984. Belgian women received the vote in 1946. Swiss women could not vote until 1971.