

The Mississippi Voter

LWV of MS www.lwv-ms.org

[During website construction, use the temporary Web address: www.lwvnet.org/ms/state]

Fran Leber, Pres. 601-956-2507

January, 2007

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President's Corner



Mississippi's 2006 Voting Successes & Problems

Mississippi's Secretary of State's office gave over 1,000 demonstrations of the new

touch screen voting machines in order to prepare election officials and the public for the election. Additional demonstrations were given by many Circuit Clerks, Election Commissioners and other organizations throughout the state. We educated the public at our May LWVMS Council meeting and Local Leagues also had programs that included demonstrations. Citizens could also go to the ***Touch & Vote Mississippi*** website (www.touchandvote.ms.gov) to practice.

The federal ***Help America Vote Act*** required all states to buy touch screen computers. Mississippi spent \$22 million to purchase computers for 77 counties. Five counties already had purchased machines, however they will still receive some of the \$22 million for computer repairs, etc. This is not to say there were no problems. In one or two instances the paper in the voting machines became jammed. The problems were believed to be caused by damp or old paper rolls. This problem was quickly solved.

There were a few computers that were not functioning when the precincts opened and one report of the wrong computer card delivered to a poll location. There was another instance of a candidate not being on the ballot and also a candidate listed in the wrong race.

As these examples show, all of these were human, rather than machine, errors.

I took part in a conference call that **LWVUS President Mary Wilson** held the Thursday after the election for the purpose of acquiring information on successes and problems the states had during the election. I mentioned all of the above plus the following problems: handicapped direction signs were not always in a visible location; precincts were changed with some voters not being notified; and some voters were not offered an affidavit ballot when they had moved into a new precinct or were not on the poll books. I am proud to report that Mississippi had fewer problems than most states.

I also pointed out, and all the other six state presidents agreed, that it is essential that there be more, better trained poll workers. Also, some paper ballots were used because of a confusing state law. The deadline for qualifying legislative candidates was extended by a judge's ruling to September 24th. This date was past the deadline for ballots to be printed. This prevented some absentee voters from casting a vote for a legislator to represent them. These legislative seats were opened late because of deaths and an appointment to a Public Service Commission position. There will be legislation in the upcoming session to prevent these problems from happening again. Mississippi's experience with the touch screen machines this year has prepared us well for the big elections in 2007.

Happy New Year and Peace!

Fran

LOCAL LEAGUE PROGRAM PLANNING

The primary purpose of a League study is to reach member agreement on a SOLUTION to an issue and prepare the League to take ACTION to remedy the problem. Program Planning is the process by which the local and state Leagues decide what issues to study (if any) and what issue(s) that we already have positions on that will get top priority for action in the coming year.

The League program planning process, from doing a study on an issue to establishing a position and then taking action on it, should be clear and transparent. The way we establish our positions gives the League strong credibility and therefore must be revisited often so that members, both new and old are familiar with the positions and the process.

Every year Local Leagues hold Program Planning meetings, called ***Lively Issues***, in January, February or March to discuss local and state issues to study in the coming year. Examples of topics are school bond issues, transportation, new facilities for juvenile offenders, etc. **The topics that get the most support at *Lively Issues* go before the local Board which assesses timeliness, interest to members and the community, and the potential for the League to take effective action.** The Board recommends one of the proposals and then the proposed studies go to a vote of the entire local League at their Annual Meeting in May. The top vote-getter will be the topic studied. Local League suggestions for state issues are sent to the State LWV and they pursue the same process and their recommendation will be presented to the membership at convention.

Now the work begins. The board names a study chair who recruits other

members for the committee. The committee convenes to begin researching the issue in summer or fall. As they gather more information, they share it via newsletter articles, meetings, and guest speaker events. Towards the end of this process, the committee formulates a set of “consensus questions” to draw out member agreement on the wording for a new position on the issue. These questions are posed at a single meeting, and then the committee compiles members’ responses in order to draft a position, known as a “consensus.” The final League consensus position must be voted on and approved one final time by the membership at an annual meeting.

Consensus means that the vast majority of the group agrees with the position although it doesn’t have to be 100% agreement. Then the League position can be acted on by designated members through contacts with government officials, public meetings, and the media.

This process, at its heart, is what gives the League its reputation for being informed and reliable. The deliberation, the push to understand an issue fully, and the final decision by all members, are what set the League apart from many other grassroots organizations.

The Pearl River County Unit and MALs will send suggestions only on the State issues. You can find the LWV-MS program on temporary website: www.lwvnet.org/ms/state or www.lwv-ms.org. MALs will be sent a copy of the LWV-MS State program and the 2007-2008 *State Program Planning Recommendations* form.



ECE Proposals Heading to the Legislature – Stacy Callender

Early childhood is a critical time period for brain development when the provision of quality educational services can make dramatic and lasting changes. However, most states, including Mississippi, provide little or no monetary investments in improving the education of their youngest and most impressionable citizens.

This year that may change! In the coming legislative cycle, two new proposals will be presented to improve early childhood education in the state. The two proposals to improve pre-kindergarten programs include Governor Haley Barbour's ***The Early Childhood Enhancement Act (ECE) of 2007*** and a pre-kindergarten proposal submitted by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

The Governor's proposal would provide an additional \$5 million in state funds to support three initiatives administered by the Department of Human Services (DHS):

- Expansion of the ***Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System***, a rating system providing incentive bonuses to centers for meeting quality criteria (\$1 million for one year of funding)
- Funding for a statewide ***Child Care Resource and Referral System*** to provide training to early childhood providers and resources to parents across the state. This is an expansion of services currently provided by Mississippi State University's Extension Service (\$1 million for three years of funding).
- Funding for ***Early Learning Collaboration Grants*** to be awarded to as many as 60+ existing programs that form a collaboration between licensed child care facilities, Head Start programs, and public school districts to enhance existing services or extend educational opportunities to

four year old children (\$2.7 million plus \$200,000 to DHS for administrative costs and \$100,000 to MDE for evaluation services for three years of funding with consideration of future statewide implementation)



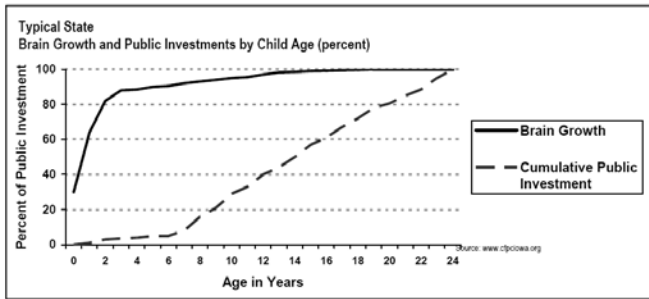
The MDE **Pilot Pre-K proposal** is to establish 88 pilot pre-K programs across the state awarded in a similar manner as the Governor's proposed *Early Learning Collaboration Grants*. The MDE proposal does not include any funding for expansion of the *Quality Step System* or *Resource and Referral System*, but would provide substantially more funding for pre-K programs to be housed within the school system (\$9.5 million plus \$500,000 to MDE for evaluation and administrative costs for three years of funding with consideration of future statewide implementation).

While both proposals would require funded programs to contribute local matching funds, to use research-based curricula, to follow the Early Learning Guidelines, and to abide by licensure requirements for teacher-child ratios and teacher certification, the MDE proposal would additionally require assessments for evaluative purposes and compensate teachers at the MDE teacher pay scale.

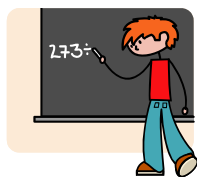
If funded, either proposal would be the first early childhood legislative proposal enacted since kindergarten legislation in the 1980s. In a recently adopted position statement (*see box on page 4*), LWV-MS

ECE Proposals Cont.

strongly supports funding for quality early childhood education programs that improve outcomes for all children.



Previous legislation related to early childhood was limited to feasibility studies, changes to licensure requirements, and provision of voluntary guidelines. In 2003, the Mississippi State Legislature mandated a study to determine the costs of increasing the level of expectations in early childcare programs. This study recommended the development of a quality rating system. In 2005, the legislature mandated the use of a curriculum in all licensed child care programs and training to ensure that it would be implemented appropriately. As a result, MDE revised the *Early Learning Guidelines*, originally developed in 2001, which list expectations for the instruction of and outcomes for young children, and DHS is currently developing training modules for the guidelines to be provided in the spring. Further legislation established **The Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System**, a rating system that provides incentive bonuses to voluntarily participating licensed child care centers which serve children receiving child care subsidies for meeting specific quality criteria. *The Quality Step System* is currently being piloted in nine counties in east central Mississippi.




In 2005, the LWV-MS State Board approved the following position statement on early childhood education developed by consensus with participation of local leagues and members at large:

The League of Women Voters of Mississippi believes that:

- *There is a great need for quality early childhood education (ECE) programs in Mississippi. Given the few private resources, the rural nature of the state, and the widespread need for services for children from families of all socioeconomic levels, the provision of public ECE programs is an important goal for the state.*
- *The provision of high quality ECE programs may best be achieved by ensuring that licensure requirements are based upon the accreditation standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children as these standards denote key program features necessary for the successful education of young children.*
- *Given the choice between supporting fewer programs of high quality or more programs of lower quality, we support the provision of high quality ECE programs.*
- *Public assistance to attend ECE programs should be directed first to low-income families due to their special needs (e.g., providing services on a sliding scale according to income level). However, we strongly believe that ECE programs should be available to all children in Mississippi.*
- *Any public financing or subsidies provided for ECE programs should be used primarily to fund public programs available for all children rather than private programs.*

MEAP Must be Funded! **Fran Leber**

 A major focus in this year's legislative session will be the funding of **Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP)**. The program passed in 1997 mandates a quality education for every child. It is designed to ensure that each school district receives enough money to meet midlevel accreditation standards. As I write this article, the MS Legislative Joint Budget Committee members are at odds on whether to fully fund or partly fund MEAP in their budget report. Most of the Democrats support full funding and all the Republicans want to include partial funding. The Republicans claim that to fully fund MEAP, it would be necessary to use some rainy day fund money causing an unbalanced budget report. The Governor's budget item for MEAP also does not include full funding. Most of the Democrats feel that if everyone agrees that they support education, that full funding should be included in the budget. Many would like to see passage of the MEAP funding bill be the first of the legislative expenditure items to be voted on. MAEP has been fully funded only once and that was in 1993 in a pre-legislative election year. Superintendent Hank Bounds is requesting \$158 million over what was appropriated for FY 07. This amount would include a 3% teacher raise.

The League of Women Voters of MS feels it is essential that MAEP full funding be passed. One has only to look at the following facts:

- In 2003, per-pupil expenditures in the school districts ranged from \$6,200 to \$4,600 between affluent districts and poor districts. *
- From 1992–2002, only 13 out of every 100 ninth-grade students in

MS graduated from college - the worst rate in the nation. *

- Of Mississippians over age 25, 17% have a bachelor's or graduate college degree while 27% have some college but no degree. 29% are high school graduates or earned their equivalency while 27% did not finish high school. *
- Mississippi's 50,000 public school students are 50.3% black, 47% white and 2.8 % other races. 64.3% of those students are from low-income families who qualify for free or reduced cost lunches. *

*Source: "**Miles to Go Mississippi**" report, Southern Education Foundation"

Delaying full funding will result in the following:

- Delaying the purchase of new textbooks
- Fewer teachers hired & teacher assistants cut
- larger classes
- Forgoing adding courses
- Fewer buses added to replace aging fleets and an increase in breakdowns.
- Building maintenance delays and an increase in maintenance needs such as leaky roofs and sometimes unsafe conditions.

"Education is Mississippi's most important investment," states a report in the *Southern Education Foundation's* study funded by Entergy. It is Mississippi's responsibility and moral obligation to provide the opportunity for every child to develop to their full potential.



ACTION – Call you legislators during the Holiday season and let them know how important it is to pass full funding for MAEP.

Replenishing the Tobacco Trust Fund



The Tobacco Trust Fund currently contains \$250 million. In June of 2004, it had a \$670 million balance.

If the fund had never been touched, the fund would now contain \$1.3 billion. Replenishing the fund will provide money for health needs now and in the future.

LWVMS supports an increase in the MS cigarette tax

The legislature passed a law increasing the cigarette tax but it was vetoed.

Here are a few facts:

- Mississippi has the third lowest cigarette tax in the United States. Mississippi also has one of the highest rates {24%} of adult smokers in the nation.
- Mississippi's health costs from tobacco-related illnesses are \$719 million each year. More than 4,700 Mississippians die from tobacco-related illnesses each year.
- Increasing the cigarette tax to reduce tobacco consumption will lower healthcare costs and deaths from smoking.
- Increasing the tax on cigarettes will reduce youth smoking by 19.7%
- The level of nicotine found in American cigarettes is making it harder to quit smoking and easier to get addicted.

Senators who voted NO on the override of the Governor's Veto of the cigarette tax increase (**SB-3084**) last session are:

Republicans: Sidney Albritton, Mike Chaney, Eugene Clarke, Doug Davis, Ralph Doxey, Billy Hewes, Dean Kirby, Perry Lee, Walter Michel, Tommy Moffatt, Ed Morgan, Charlie Ross, Stacey Pickering, Richard White, Merle Flowers

Democrats: Scottie Cuevas, John Horne, Willie Simmons, Shannon Walley, and J.P.Wilemon

LWV members should call their legislators and tell them to raise the cigarette tax. Friends of the League can also call but in their own names, not in the League's name. As a retired nurse & midwife, I plan to continue to support all efforts to reduce smoking in MS so that we will be able live long healthy lives.

- **Minta Uzodinma**

New LWV Natural Resources Listserve

Those interested in keeping up with breaking information on Natural Resource issues and discussing them with other League members, can sign up on the new listserv by sending a blank subject email to **LWVTopics-subscribe@yahoogroups.com** with a name in the message area.

LEGISLATIVE VISIT DAY

Tuesday, February 13, 2007, 11 a.m., at the Old Capitol Inn in Jackson
***(note change in time and place).**

Legislative Visit Day is the day LWV-MS members visit their Legislators and/or other state officials at the Capitol to advocate (lobby) for priority issues. Guests are invited to participate if they support the LWV-MS positions but they can't do it in the League name unless they join. The day also includes visiting committee meetings and house and senate sessions.



Agenda:

- **11:00 a.m.** Old Capitol Inn- an *Update on Issues* will be presented.
- **12:00 noon** Speaker: **Senator Alan Nunnelee "Health Department problems and Legislative Solutions"** (Each attendee is responsible for the cost of their lunch)
- **1:15 p.m.** Capitol Visits

To RSVP and get directions, call or E-mail President Fran Leber - 601-352-4616 or filwv@aol.com

First Call to LWV-MS Convention
Saturday May 19, 2007
Edison Walthall Hotel,
225 East Capitol St., Jackson, MS
10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

The LWV-MS Convention is held every-other-year on the odd numbered years. Agenda items include, adopting new program items, the election of officers, approving a budget (including dues) for 2007-08, bylaw changes and presenting awards. As a grassroots organization, Local Leagues and Members at Large send suggestions of all the above (except suggestions for the Nominating Committee) to LWV-MS P.O. Box 55505, Jackson, MS 39296. The submission deadline is March 1, 2007.

- **Nomination of members for the State Board** – State Board members and elected directors are elected for two years and can be elected for a second term of two years. The positions to be filled are President, Membership Vice President, Voter Service, Treasurer, Secretary, and five other Directors plus the nominating committee. Individuals, Local Leagues and Units, can suggest nominations. Send suggestions to Doris Barwick, 537, Launcelot Rd., Jackson, MS 39206.
- **Program Planning** – In January or February each year, the State League, Local Leagues and Units gather to discuss and determine what topic or topics to study for the next one or two years at the State and Local levels. These meetings are often called ***Lively Issues meetings*** (see the article on Local Program, page 2). The proposed program(s) will be presented in the next *MS Voter*. The topic(s) chosen for the State League level will be presented at Convention as LWV-MS's proposed program(s).

- **Budget Planning** – Because LWVUS dues have gone up, it is important that State and Local Leagues consider raising their membership dues. The portion of your dues that is sent to support LWVUS will be increased to \$26.30 for FY 2007-2008 and will be increased again to \$26.80 for FY 2008-2009. Part of this increase is because general expenses have gone up and part is to fund the three-year study of immigration.
- **Awards:** the following awards will be presented. **The Thelma Workman Award, The Fran Leber Leadership Award, and The LWV Membership Award.** Forms for nominations will be sent in the next *Voter* or you can make copies from our temporary website: **www.lwvnet.org/ms/state or www.lwv-ms.org**

LWVMS Program Priorities for FY 2007-2008

Each year, the LWVMS selects public policy priorities and advocates for these positions through an informed membership and a volunteer lobby corps. The following issues comprise the proposed advocacy agenda for the coming year.

K-12 Education Package

- Fully fund MS Adequate Education Program (MEAP)
- Decrease the drop out rate
- Raise Teacher Pay

Early Education

A Cigarette Tax Increase and Grocery Tax Decrease

Good Government

- Election Laws & Campaign Finance Reform
- Open Meetings & Open Records

Restoring Tobacco Trust Fund Money

Program Priorities Continued

Action may be taken on non-priority items as time allows. Action is also taken on threats to our long held LWV-MS positions when necessary. **Other Program items are listed under "Program" on the temporary home page: www.lwvnet.org/ms/state or www.lwv-ms.org**

VOTER SERVICE

News from the MS Gulf Coast LWV

By Jane Lindsey, Vice Pres. MSGCLWV

On Saturday, September 30, 2006, the MSGCLWV hosted a "**Safeguarding the Vote - Informing the Voter**" Forum. Jane Lindsey, Vice President of Membership, welcomed the speakers and audience. The audience included College students from a nearby college and a teacher who recorded the meeting for her class. League member, Attorney Karen Sawyer, was the moderator. League member, Gayle Parker, (Harrison County Circuit Clerk) was one of the speakers. Election Commissioner Ben Sandford, Election Commissioner Christine Brice, and Poll worker Hewitt Barton were the other speakers. Samantha Lewis, Secretary of State Eric Clark's representative, set up an electronic voting machine and people at the meeting were invited to vote on it and learn how it works. The forum was in the paper before and after the Forum with good exposure for the League.

Jackson LWV Holds Two Good-Government Meetings

"Upcoming Elections : Safeguarding Your Vote" – A meeting featuring the new voting machines was held Oct. 26th, in the Eudora Welty Library. Two different types of electronic machines were available for practice and two election commissioners were present to explain them; Connie Cochran from

Hinds Co. and Kakey Chaney from Madison Co.

The entire state has changed to the new voting machines in response to federal requirements under the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). Questions such as, *Are the machines reliable? Are there back-up procedures in place? Are poll workers trained? Can Florida happen here?* were answered.

"Good Government: Ethics and Checks and Balances" – was their Nov. 28th meeting held at the beautiful Old Capitol Inn on State Street. The speaker was Sen. Alan Nunnelee, Chair of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee.



Election Day Hot Line and Candidates' Questionnaire

League volunteers took two-hour shifts answering voter questions on a hot line set up from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 7th. *The Clarion Ledger* also printed the League's Candidate Questionnaire prior to the primary and general elections in order to familiarize voters with the candidates.



We Send Our Condolences

We were saddened by the death of six-term representative, **Mary Whittington**, a league member who represented Carroll, Holmes, Humphreys, LeFlore, Montgomery, and Washington Counties. While continuing cancer treatments, Mary continued to serve in the Capitol, helping the citizens in her district. She was a strong supporter of League issues and we will miss her.

National Items ***Deloris Lee***

The National League has issued an Election Follow-up Alert. Any and all Election Day experiences are welcomed. Go to the League home page at www.lwv.org and click on "Election Follow-up Alert."

National League President **Mary Wilson**, joined five coalition partners at an event on November 17, 2006 urging the new congress to enact timely and meaningful ethics and lobbying reform.

President Wilson also issued a statement on Election Night (November 7, 2006) urging elections officials to count all eligible ballots.

The League joined coalition partners November 17, 2006 in releasing a report that calls for a national redistricting reform movement and offers guidance for state-level redistricting reform efforts.

Washington DC Voting Rights Action

The National League called for action in support of voting representation for Washington, DC. This is an issue that has come up again in the legislature.

All citizens deserve to have voting representation in the body that makes

their laws, taxes them, and can call them to war.

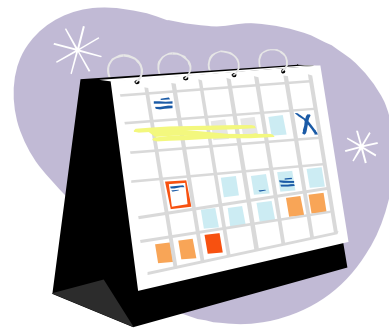
The Davis-Norton legislation (HR-5388, the DC Fair and Equal House Voting Rights Act of 2006) is a bipartisan approach to DC voting rights.

Some had concerns that the redistricting process in Utah might jeopardize the political neutrality of the bill. That has been rectified now that Utah has approved a map that guarantees the DC VRA will not favor either party.

2007 Citizens' Handbook & Calendar **It's Not too Late to Order!!**

Looking for the perfect gift for your local politicians, co-workers, or anyone interested in making our state and communities better places? The LWV-MS has produced an invaluable combination citizen handbook and calendar for sale. Each calendar contains the addresses and phone numbers of public officials, tips on contacting them, election and legislative deadlines, district maps, and much, much more. The 8 1/2" x 11" calendar also contains a space each day for you to note your appointments. Proceeds help support the League's activities including candidate debates, voter registration drives, and citizen education projects.

To order: send a check for \$10 per citizen handbook/calendar made out to LWVMS and mail to Fran Leber, 1026 Briarwood Dr., Jackson, MS 39211-4234. Include your name, address and phone number. For quantity orders of 10 or more, call or E-mail Fran at 601-956-2507 or FLLWV@aol.com. If ordering a large number of calendars, ask about postage and handling.



We Say Thank You

We sadly say good-bye to **Kirt & Kelly Bush** who served the League faithfully. Kirt was our Webmaster for the last 6 years and Kelly was the D-Net Director among other things. Our loss is Virginia's gain and we will miss them.

LWVMS 2007 Calendar



January – Happy Holidays!!

February 13, 2007 (Tuesday)-**Legislative Visit Day** **** (Note change in time and place)**
11 a.m. Meet at the Old Capital Restaurant on State Street, Jackson, for a Dutch lunch. Speaker, **Senator Alan Nunnelee**. We will review issues and prepare to lobby at the Capitol Building for those that wish. **All members encouraged to attend.**

February 14, 2007 – Happy Valentine’s Day & Happy 87th Birthday LWV!

March 10, 2007 (Saturday) - **Board Meeting**, 10 a.m., Jackson. Call Fran Leber, President: 601-956 -2507 for directions to her house. **All members are welcome to attend.**

March 7, 2007 (Thursday ***note change in date**) – Article deadline for the March 30th **Mississippi Voter**. E-mail articles to Ellen Russak at erussak@aol.com; mail to: 205 King Richard Rd., Starkville, MS 39759; or call 662-324-1800. We want everyone to know the fabulous things our local Leagues, Unit, and MALs are doing!

May 19, 2007 (Saturday) – **LWV-MS Convention**. Walthal Hotel, Jackson. You will be given more information on this in the March *MS Voter*.

June 2007 – **LWVUS** Council in Washington, D.C.



**NON-PROFIT ORG.
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Mission:

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