

# The Mississippi Voter

League of Women Voters of Mississippi

Mary Margaret Bollinger, President

January, 2008

Ellen Russak, Editor

<http://www.lwv-ms.org>



## President's Corner

Happy Holidays to all! And speaking of holidays, don't forget to put the *Legislative Calendar* on your gift list. It is a combination citizen handbook and calendar and it will be out as soon as the legislature finalizes its new member list. Stacy Callender and Fran Leber have spent many hours getting it ready, but there is so much work to be done in an election year that holiday gifts will have to be denoted by a gift certificate. The cost is \$10.00, plus \$1.50 shipping and handling (there is a coupon on page 8 for preorders).

A new fundraising project was discussed at the last board meeting. Harriett Tanzman has volunteered to investigate the possibility of producing LWV t-shirts that we hope to sell on our LWVUS website – we'll keep you posted.

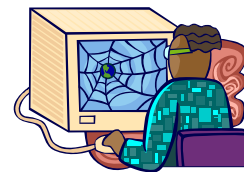
Legislative Day is March 6, 2008. We meet at 11 a.m. to eat and then there will be a speaker at noon followed by some of us going to the capitol to talk to legislators about bills on which we have a position. I hope we will see you there!

Thanks to David Hampton and *The Clarion-Ledger* for partnering with us to print the Candidates' Guides. Several of our earlier suggestions were incorporated into the Guides this year including printing the Guides two weeks before elections and printing them as a separate, smaller section.

2008 is a big year for elections. Our President and Vice President, U.S.

Senators and Representatives, Mississippi Supreme Court Justices and Court of Appeals Judges, Levee Commissioners, County Election Commissioners and School Board Members will all be elected in 2008. LWVUS is compiling a Guide for the Presidential Debates (one of which will be held at Ole Miss)! It will be available on the LWVUS website ([www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)). There is a great deal of work to be done to register voters before the March 3rd primary election. Please contact Minta Uzodinma at [muzocnm@aol.com](mailto:muzocnm@aol.com) or 601-354-1908 to volunteer to help with registration. We have some exciting times ahead of us!

-- Mary Margaret Bollinger, President



## LWVUS Convention Web Site

For the last few LWVUS Convention years, Barbara Wardenburg, LWV of Los Altos/Mountain View Area, CA, has put together an unofficial website with everything you need to know about the upcoming convention and then, during the convention itself, she posts a review of convention activities daily. Although it is unofficial, it is a wonderful resource and very accurate. Delegates and those who are unable to attend Convention give it rave reviews. Take a look.

<http://home.pacbell.net/barbward/unofficl.htm>

## First Call to LWVMS Council 2008

*From Council Chair, Stacy Callender*

WHAT: LWVMS State Council, 2008  
 WHEN: May 17, 2008 (tentative date, subject to change)  
 WHERE: To be decided, Jackson, MS

Council is our biennial meeting where League leaders and members have the opportunity to learn about topics and discuss important issues. This year, we will have a choice of workshops to help leagues grow and take action in their communities. We will also hold a brief meeting to adopt our yearly budget and assess progress on our program items and studies. Please invite your League members to attend!

9:00-9:30	Registration & Welcome
9:30-10:15	Workshop I
10:15-11:00	Workshop II
11:00-11:15	Break
11:15-12:00	Workshop III
12:00-1:00	Luncheon with Featured Speaker
1:00-1:15	Awards Ceremony
1:15-1:30	Break
1:30-2:30	Business Meeting
2:30-3:00	Silent Auction & Adjourn

### 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First National Women's Conference



From November 18 to 21, 1977, over 20,000 people gathered in Houston, Texas to celebrate International Women's Year and identify goals for women for the next decade. This was the first and only national women's conference to be sponsored by the federal government.

The impetus came from the United Nations, which proclaimed 1975 to be

International Women's Year -- later extended to a decade. On January 9, 1974, President Ford created a National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year "to promote equality between men and women." Numerous events were held over the next two years. In 1977 President Jimmy Carter chose a new Commission and appointed Bella Abzug to head it. For more information visit: <http://www.jofreeman.com/photos/IWY1977.html>



## Local League Reports

### **Gulf Coast League Forum**

On September 20, 2007, the Gulf Coast League hosted a forum featuring guests, State Rep. Hank Zuber and Senate candidates Jim Wilson and Ray Veccio. Affordable housing and home insurance were the main topics but the lively discussion included education, immigration, state tidelands and casinos as well. It was refreshing to hear both sides of the issues, with the audience participating with questions and opinions.

The meeting attendance was low but all that came stated they learned from and enjoyed the forum and a new member joined that night. Since then, members have been passing out the brochure, "411.org, Things to Know on Election Day," working with poll managers, and getting out the vote for the general election. We will do additional study on immigration in order to get ready for the consensus meeting and we will also make plans for the upcoming presidential primary.

- **Alma Lindsey, Pres. Gulf Coast League**

## **Jackson Area League Report**

The Jackson Area League has had enthusiastic attendance at our meetings this fall. In September we held our membership recruitment brunch with the program topic: *Environmentally Friendly Developments for the Jackson Area*. Energy efficiency, water conservation, and allowance for green space are integrated in this project.

We held a "Meet the Hinds County Candidates" night in October. It was fun and informative. The audience heard answers to questions from our League and we had a chance to speak personally with the candidates. Over 50 attended and WAPT TV covered the event.

Our December membership meeting focused on "Tax Reform in Mississippi." Ed Sivak, Director of Mississippi Economic Policy Center, and Rep. Cecil Brown, gave their insights about the need for tax reform. We expect this to be a major topic in the coming legislative session.

We look forward to our January meeting when our topic will be "Immigration Issues". Our speakers are not yet confirmed. We expect the National League will have a position statement on this issue sometime in January.

***Best Regards, Jackie Rollins, Pres.***

### **New LWVMS Committee Members Appointed**

**Budget** – Fran Leber, Bill Hawley, and Natalie Maynor.

**Legislative** – Fran Leber (Election Laws, Campaign Finance Reform, & Replacing Borrowed Tobacco Fund Money), Mary Margaret Bollinger (Judicial), Stacy Callender (Early Education & Children at Risk), Minta Uzodinma (Tobacco Tax), Barbara Powell & Neva Greenwald (Open Meetings & Records).

## **National Issues**

The LWVUS is urging Senators to co-sponsor presidential public financing legislation. This legislation is bipartisan and is introduced to repair the presidential public financing system and again make the system advantageous for the candidates to use. This will increase overall spending limits and the amount of public funds available for candidates who opt into the presidential system. It will also end the ineffective system of state-by-state spending limits.

Candidates who use the system will be able to compete financially with those candidates who reject the system and who choose instead to make expenditures that significantly exceed the spending limit.

An Action Alert has been issued for members to contact their Senators to insist they vote to **repeal the Protect America Act** and to limit the ability of government agencies to obtain information about American Citizens without the appropriate judicial constraints. Members are also asked to inform other concerned citizens of this alert and urge them to contact their Senators. Check at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) for an update on this legislation's status first.

You can watch or listen to the panel discussion on the Immigration Policy in the 21st Century held June 11, 2007 at LWVUS' Council meeting by going to [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) and using the links provided.

***Deloris Lee, National Issues Specialist***



## Tobacco Money and the Health Care Trust Fund



In 1994 Attorney General Mike Moore filed suit against the tobacco industry to recover Medicaid costs paid by the state in treating those made sick by smoking. A 4.1 billion settlement was made to be distributed over 25 years specifically for new and expanded health services. Money will continue as long as the tobacco companies are in business.

In 1998 The Healthcare Trust Fund was established (HB 529) which established in the State Treasury the Health Care Expendable Fund requiring deposits of \$50 M in 2000, \$55 M in 2001, \$60 M in 2002 and \$66,550.00 in 2003 into the fund. In the following years a sum equal to the average annual amount of the income from the investments of the Health Care Trust Fund since July 1, 1999 would be deposited. These interest funds were transferred to the Health Care Expendable Fund for distribution to state agencies. The interest from these funds ranges from minus \$36,962,250 in 2003 to plus \$43,874,051 in 2007.

In 2005 Legislation was passed to borrow not only the interest money but also an additional \$240,000 from the Health Care Trust Fund and put it into the Health Care Expendable Fund for Medicaid because of a shortfall. The legislation also required repayment to the fund from the General Fund starting in 2008. Repayment of \$38,000,000 should be made during fiscal years 2008 through 2014 with the balance to be paid in 2015. **The League of Women Voters of Mississippi opposed this transfer and it is one of our priorities during the 2007 Legislative session to be sure that the proposed 2008 budget includes repayment.**

These Expendable Funds in 2007 have been given to following state agencies in the following amounts:

Department of Rehabilitation Services	\$5,071,118
Department of Mental Health	\$19,216.582
Department of Health	\$9,859.513
Institution of Higher Learning	\$3,278,678
(UMC & Student Financial Aid)	
Veterans Affair Board	\$487,750
Department of Education (eye screening)	\$174,196
Division of Medicaid:	\$107,836,907
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$146,003,320</b>

League has opposed money transfers from the principal over the years to pay Medicaid deficits. The League also opposes the tobacco income payment being deposited into the Health Care Expendable fund instead of the The Health Care Trust Fund. Mississippi has received \$1,491,643,186 in payments from tobacco companies and has a remaining balance of \$490,071,050 as of June 30, 2007 because of the above actions.

***The tobacco settlement was a once-in-a-life time opportunity to provide a pool of money that could provide public health care in perpetuity.***

Continually taking money from the principal results in a decrease in interest, providing less money for medical needs being funded now and eventually will provide no money for health care at all.

***--Fran Leber, Legislative Director***

## 2008 Candidates' Guides

The LWVMS will again sponsor candidates' guides with the *Clarion Ledger* for the 2008 elections. They will be featured in the newspaper & on both our and the *Clarion Ledger's* websites.

## How Do We Decide to Study an Issue and Then Lobby for It?



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. On even numbered years, LWVUS and local program items are reviewed. On the odd numbered years it will be State and local program items. This year it will be National and local issues and the deadline for presidents to return the report is March 1, 2008. E-mail to [progplan@lww.org](mailto:progplan@lww.org)/

Local Leagues hold annual Program Planning meetings, called **Lively Issues**, in January or February to discuss local and either LWVMS or LWVUS program issues. Local League presidents will have received instructions from LWVUS on how to do the National portion of Program Planning. Examples of local 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 (or none) of the proposals and then the proposed studies go for a vote of the entire local League membership at their Annual Meeting: usually in May. The top vote-getter will be the topic studied. Local League suggestions for National issues are sent to the LWVUS and National pursues the same process and their

recommendation will be presented to the membership at convention.

Now the work begins. The local 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 LWVUS' positions on issues can be found on their website: [www.lww.org/](http://www.lww.org/) Even if you are not participating in a Program Planning (Lively Issues) meeting, it is good to be familiar with these policy positions since all League action (lobbying & education) is based on them.



## Immigration Study

*The deadline to return the consensus form to LWVUS is February 1, 2008. Forms from individuals will not be accepted – only one response form can be submitted from each League and the form is only available online. MALs interested in participating in the consensus process should contact Fran Leber, the LWVMS Legislative Director, at [lobby@lwg-ms.org/](mailto:lobby@lwg-ms.org/)*



The Consensus Questions are available on the LWVUS web site at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) in the *For Members* section (no password needed). They are listed there as the *Preview Consensus Questions* and they are

also part of the *LWVUS Immigration Study Consensus Kit*.

Because discussion is the best way to reach consensus, face-to-face consensus meetings are preferred, but local Leagues may take consensus in other ways - such as forms in their *Voters*, emails, telephone, etc. But these responses must be combined with the results of any consensus meetings and submitted as one report from that League.

To access the LWVUS Website, go to [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) and click on “Immigration Policy” located on the left side of the home page. There are links to many papers written on the immigration subject as background information. *The National Voter* magazine you all get from the LWVUS has been printing a lot of immigration background material as well and that can also be accessed online.

The questions (in more detail on the LWVUS Website) are as follows:

1. What criteria should Federal immigration laws take into consideration?

2. How should unauthorized immigrants currently in the U.S. be treated?
3. What immigrants should be given priority for entrance into the U.S.?
4. How are we going to deal with unauthorized immigrants who are presently here?
  - a. How do we want to enforce our federal immigration laws?
5. Examine the financial impact of immigrants; what should be the balance between federal and state responsibility?
6. How can federal foreign policy help the immigration situation?



### **LWVMS 2008** **Legislative Priorities**

*The Board will monitor and lobby for the following issues using an informed membership and*

*our Lobby Corps. If need arises (and there is time and woman power) action may be taken on other issues.*

### **EDUCATION**

#### **Early Education**

**Position** – Supports quality, early childhood, education programs serving children from all socioeconomic levels and implementing high quality ECE goals.



#### **Children at Risk**

**Position** - Supports early intervention and preventive measures that are effective in helping children reach their full potential. Supports policy programs that promote the well-being, full development, and ensure the safety of all children.

## --Legislative Priorities Cont.

### HEALTH ISSUES

#### **Cigarette Tax Increase**

**Position** – Supports controlling health care costs by raising the excise tax on cigarettes by \$1.00 in order to decrease smoking levels and significantly decrease smoking attributable illnesses.

### GOOD GOVERNMENT ISSUES

#### **Campaign Finance**

**Position** – Supports improving the methods used for financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office, and allow maximum citizen participation in the public process.

#### **Opposes Voter ID**

**Position** – Supports the right of every citizen to vote. Believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.

### JUDICIARY

#### **Judiciary Selection for Supreme Court and Court of Appeals**

**Position** – Supports Merit Selection/Election Retention as the means of selecting justices for the Mississippi Supreme Court and judges for the Mississippi Court of Appeals. Selection would be by a nonpartisan committee. The retention election would be later in order to indicate if the public feels the judge has been doing a good job.

### STATE MONEY & TAXES

#### **Remove the tax on food**

**Position** - Supports eliminating Mississippi's regressive tax on food.

#### **Tobacco Trust Fund**

**Position** – To replace the \$240 million taken from the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund in 2005 to cover a Medicaid shortage. This is already required by law.

### IMMIGRATION

LWVMS will start advocating for this issue as soon as the LWVUS study position is completed at LWVUS Convention in June.

Other program items are listed under "Program" on the LWVMS's home page: [www.lwv-ms.org](http://www.lwv-ms.org).

#### **Poverty in Mississippi**



"USA Today" reported Aug. 29<sup>th</sup> on poverty in the US and ranked the states. Again, Mississippi was number one with the highest poverty rate of 21.1%. Our mean income came in at \$34,473 for a family of four. Following us in rank were #2 – Washington, D.C., #3 Louisiana, #4 New Mexico, and #5 (tied) Arkansas & West Virginia. These rankings are for 2006 – the most recent numbers available. 21.1% is a rather sterile statistic but stamp that poverty label on the faces of more than one out of five men, women, and children that you pass on the street or see in the grocery store and it becomes much more personal.

Most of Mississippi's other bad rankings, i.e. low birthrate babies, infant and child death rate, high school dropout rate, unemployment, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, #1 in deaths by fire, high teen pregnancy and suicide rate, etc., etc., can all be traced back to the fallout from poverty. Many things contribute to this poverty but one of them is Mississippi's regressive tax structure that depends so heavily on sales and property taxes. On the bright side, we are #1 in charitable giving!!

## 2008 Citizens' Handbook & Calendar Get your preorders in!!

***Looking for the perfect gift for your local politicians, co-workers, or anyone interested in making our state and communities better places?*** The LWVMS 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. There have been many changes since the last general election and the League must wait on the legislature to finalize the list of new members but the calendar will be ready as soon as humanly possible.*

**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 reduced postage and handling.**

### Citizen's 2008 Handbook & Calendar

**Preorder your guide and support the League today!**

**Cost: \$10.00 each plus \$1.50 P&H if mailed**

Please provide the following information to pre-order your 2008 Calendar:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to order \_\_\_\_\_ 2008 calendar(s) for \$\_\_\_\_\_ Total

Make checks payable to **LWVMS**.

**Mail requests to:**

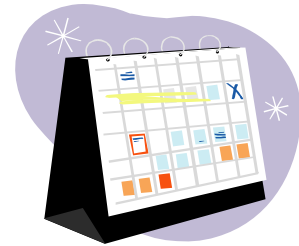
**League Calendar**

**LWVMS**

**P.O. Box 55505**

**Jackson, MS 39296-5505**

Proceeds help support League programs and activities including voter service and citizen education projects.



### ***Our League in the Year 2008 and Beyond!***



Have you become a member of the **League of Women Voters Endowment Trust?** By contributing to the Trust, you provide continuous benefits to the LWVMS. Is there someone you wish to celebrate or remember? Send your contributions to the

**LWVMS Endowment Trust, PO Box 55505, Jackson, MS 39296-5505.** The interest from the trust may be used to take action on issues or support other League projects and therefore is not tax deductible.

**!!It's time to join or renew your dues!!**

**LWVMS MAL (Member at Large) Dues Renewal or New Member Coupon**

This coupon is for those wishing to join the State League because they are not near a local League or those MALs who wish to renew their memberships for the 7-1-07 through 6-30-08 FY. ***Your dues cover memberships in the state and national Leagues. MALs are welcome to attend any local and/or state League meeting.***

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$35. Members at the same address pay \$35 for the first member and half price (\$17.50) for each additional member at that household. Students pay \$20.

**Make your check out to: LWVMS** and return to **LWVMS, Attn. Natalie Maynor, Treasurer, PO Box 55505, Jackson, MS 39296-5505**

**LWV Jackson Area Dues and New Member Coupon**

(Hinds, Madison and Rankin Counties)

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$45. For multiple, non-student, members, at the same address, the first one pays \$45 and any additional ones pay half price (\$22.50). Student dues are \$20.

**Make your check out to: LWV-Jackson** and mail to **LWV-Jackson, Attn: Dary Shenefelt, Treas., PO Box 68214, Jackson, MS 39286-8214.**

**LWV Gulf Coast Dues and New Member Coupon**

(Jackson, Harrison and Hancock Counties)

***Your dues cover membership in the local, state and national Leagues.***

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$40. Members at the same address pay \$40 for the first member and half price (\$20) for each additional member at that household. Students are \$20.

**Make your check out to: LWV-Gulf Coast** and return to **William R. Lindsey, Treasurer, 12195 Oaklawn Road, Biloxi, MS 39532**

**Pearl River Unit Dues and New Member Coupon**

***Your dues cover membership in your state and national Leagues.***

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$35. Members at the same address pay \$35 for the first member and half price (\$17.50) for each additional member at that household. Students pay \$20.

**Make your check out to: LWVMS** and return to **Dr. Bill Hawley, P.O Box 1188, Picayune, MS**

## LWVMS 2008 Calendar



**Feb. 14 (Thurs.) – Congratulations on the League’s 88<sup>th</sup> birthday!!**

**March 6 (Thurs.) – Legislative Visit Day, You Can Make a Difference!** Where: Dennery's Restaurant, 330 Graymont Ave., Jackson (Phone - 601-354-2527). When: 11:00 a.m. Registration, 12:00 Noon Speaker, ***“Lobbying Do's and Don'ts,”*** 1:15 p.m. Legislative, committee & session visits. Cost: \$15, RSVP and return payment by March 1, 2008. **Make checks out to: LWVMS and send to Fran Leber, 1026 Briarwood Dr. Jackson MS 39211**, Phone 601-956-2507 email [FLeber@aol.com](mailto:FLeber@aol.com)  
**\*\*There will be a Board Meeting starting at 10 a.m. prior to lunch (see above).\*\***

**March 10 – Deadline for the April “MS Voter.”** E-mail articles to Ellen Russak at [editor.lwv-ms.org](mailto:editor.lwv-ms.org) or mail to 205 King Richard Rd., Starkville, MS 39759

**March 11 (Tues.) – Primary Election Day** for federal offices & the MS Yazoo-Delta Levee District. Polls open from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

**May 17 (Sat.) – LWVMS 2008 Council**, Jackson (place to be announced), 9 to 3 p.m.

**June 13-17 – LWVUS Convention 2008: “Reaching New Heights Together.”** In Portland, OR at the Hilton Portland & Executive Tower. All members encouraged to attend. Go to [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org) for info.

**July 10 - Deadline for the August “MS Voter.”** E-mail articles to Ellen Russak at [editor.lwv-ms.org](mailto:editor.lwv-ms.org) or mail to 205 King Richard Rd., Starkville, MS 39759



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**Mission:**

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