

The Mississippi Voter League of Women Voters of Mississippi

Mary Margaret Bollinger, Pres.

August, 2008

Ellen Russak, Editor

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



Engaging People Who Care; Caring for People Who Engage

Message from the President

I regret to tell you that I will be resigning as president due to health problems. It has been an honor to serve the Mississippi League this past year and I was looking forward to an exciting 2008-2009 year as well, particularly with Mississippi being selected to host the first presidential debate. Health permitting, I will help out where I can. Your Board members are very capable and they will keep you in the loop as to my replacement. I've enjoyed the challenges and the joys!

--Mary Margaret Bollinger

Report on LWVMS Council

May 17th's LWVMS Council theme was, "**Growing Our Leagues,**" and we had a choice of five workshops to help in this effort. **Stacy Callender** arranged to host Council at the MSU School of Architecture in Jackson. It was an unusual and lovely venue that well suited our needs. After registration, continental breakfast, and the welcome, we attended workshops: "*Your League on the web,*" moderated by Stacy Callender, "*Growing your League,*" moderated by Elisabeth MacNamara, our liaison to LWVUS, "*Elections,*" moderated by Fran Leber, "*Idea to Advocacy,*" moderated by Elisabeth MacNamara, and "*League 101,*" moderated by Stacy Callender.

We combined lunch with an awards ceremony where former Sec. of State, **Dr. Eric Clark**, was awarded **The Fran Leber Award for Voter Service** for his help and cooperation to the League and

because he was instrumental in making Mississippi compliant with HAVA, the *Help America Vote Act*, very early on.

After lunch **The Thelma Workman Award** was given to **Kay Brockman**, Voter Service VP from the Jackson Area League. This award is presented to a member who has influenced development of the League at the local level and has benefited citizens in Mississippi through Voter Service programs and/or advocacy.

We were honored to have **Elisabeth MacNamara** as our keynote speaker. She is past president of LWV-Dekalb County, GA and has also served as a Director with LWVUS since 2006 and was elected this year at the LWVUS Convention to the position of First Vice President. In her professional life, Ms. MacNamara is the Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney in the Juvenile Court for DeKalb County.

Ms. MacNamara, a dynamic speaker, reviewed the League's history to remind us about where we come from and then addressed the future of the League and its relevance in these changing times.

Following our speaker, there was a short business meeting led by **Pres. Mary Margaret Bollinger**, where we passed a budget and reviewed our progress. We drew for door prizes and then everyone went off to see what they had won at the silent auction which was coordinated by **Deloris Lee**. It was a fine day indeed and many thanks to **Stacy Callender** for chairing this event.

The League Has a New Immigration Position!

“After a lengthy and comprehensive study of this complex issue by our grassroots members,” said

National League President Mary G. Wilson, *“the*

League’s position calls for a path to citizenship for current unauthorized immigrants. As part of overall immigration reform, the League supports a system for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status, including citizenship, by paying taxes, learning English, studying civics and meeting other relevant criteria,” Wilson stated. *“We oppose deportations of current unauthorized immigrants who have no history of serious criminal activity,”* she added.

The full immigration policy approved by the National League’s Board of Directors in March was studied by the membership for more than eighteen months. The policy achieved member consensus through a survey of the nearly 850 local Leagues. **View the full position here: www.lwv.org/** and go to “Projects” on the bar and scroll down to “Immigration.”

Other elements of the League’s position include support for increased enforcement personnel at borders, more effective tracking of individuals who enter the U.S., and significant fines and penalties for employers who hire unauthorized workers. Furthermore, the League will champion due process for all persons, including the right to a fair



hearing, right to counsel, right of appeal and right to humane treatment. The League position sets criteria for legal admission to the U.S., including family reunification of spouses or minor children; economic, business and employment needs in the U.S.; political persecution or humanitarian crises; and students studying in the U.S.

The League will use this recently adopted position to guide its advocacy work on federal legislation introduced on this very important public policy issue.

To check all MS Senate and House bills: <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us>

This is a very user friendly site and if you know the number of the bill, go to “Quick lookup” at the bottom of the page and plug it in. If you click “Live Webcast,” you can watch the floor proceedings of the House & Senate when they are in session. ***If you would like to be alerted when there is a “call to action,” send your e-mail address to Fran Leber, Action Director, at FLeber@aol.com***



We Meet Visitors from South Africa



Once again the International Visitor Leadership Program at Jackson State University invited our League to visit with six citizens from Africa who wanted to learn how the League of Women Voters is active in the political process.

We shared ideas on how to get people interested in voting and then how to get them to actually vote. Some areas in Africa are still in the process of setting up democratic governments and many of their Countries are just starting to set up their voting processes. Some questions were: Should the process be non-partisan or Government run? And, who is responsible for setting up the elections? They wanted to discuss Government responsibility and intervention. All were interested in securing fair elections. I emphasized that our election system is not perfect and continually has to be improved and monitored.

Every time I am part of one of these visits, it reinforces the truth that wherever we are in our world, humans want and expect the same things in their lives and of their governments.

-- *Fran Leber*

Mississippi College Made History in 1831

Mississippi College is the oldest college in MS and the second oldest Baptist college in the world. Founded in 1826, "*U.S. News and World Report*" ranks Mississippi College in the "Top 10" category of best values. A private institution, the College in its early years was coeducational, and in 1831, Mississippi College became the first such college in the U.S. to grant a degree to a woman.

Barbara Powell, New Jackson Area League President



I grew up on a farm in Oklahoma. After receiving a Bachelor of Science and Education degree, I taught for three years in a Methodist Girl's School in Karachi, Pakistan. While there, Barry and I married and later returned to his home state of Mississippi.

We have a daughter and twin sons, all of whom are married. Since our granddaughter was born a year and a half ago, we are discovering the joys of being grandparents.

During the legislative session, I lobby for two nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations, MS Common Cause and the Mississippi Center for Freedom of Information. Both organizations are interested in keeping government open and accountable to the public - goals which are shared with LWV.

I was attracted to the League of Women Voters when we came to Jackson 40 years ago because it was one of the few integrated organizations and because of its study and advocacy on important issues. It is an honor to be a leader in such an organization.

Barbara is past president of the LWVMS and a recipient of the Thelma Workman Award.

Six Reasons Why a \$1 Cigarette Tax Increase Is the Best Option to Fund Medicaid -- MS Health Advocacy Program, 6-18-08



Mississippi's Medicaid program is in need of a long-term funding solution. The Governor has adamantly rejected any options of raising the cigarette tax to meet this need.

And, while some like to talk about finding a compromise to Medicaid's revenue problems, the fact is **SB 2013** - which passed only the Senate - is not the only compromise on the table. The House, after extraordinary compromise, proposed and voted on three separate plans to fund Medicaid, one of which was the Governor's plan. The other two proposals included cutting the hospital tax in half, while increasing the cigarette tax at increments of .50 cents and \$1.00. This was the only fair solution that would share the burden equally among hospitals and Big Tobacco. But, in fact, the only plan that would do no harm to hospitals or Medicaid beneficiaries was the **HB 18** that passed the House.

The Governor's answer? Laying the total cost of funding Medicaid's deficit at the hospitals' doorstep with a \$167.25 per day tax on every non-Medicare bed in the State - meaning a tax increase in the form of higher insurance costs for every Mississippian.

SB 2013 is not a simple tax adjustment as the Governor stated. The hospital tax would place unknown financial burdens on many rural hospitals and the Governor's own Medicaid Advisory Board has stated that the costs from the tax will likely lead to higher insurance rates for all Mississippians. The Medicaid

Advisory Board and the MS Hospital Assoc. continue to support the cigarette tax as the preferred funding option.

So, is an increase in tobacco tax necessary to fund Medicaid?

1. **Yes!** A \$1 cigarette tax increase would result in \$174 million in new revenue that would provide a long-term funding source for Medicaid.
2. **Yes!** *Significant tobacco tax increases always produce substantial net new revenues that last.* In every single instance where a state has passed a significant cigarette tax increase, the state has enjoyed a substantial, sustained increase to its state cigarette tax revenues.
3. **Yes!** Mississippi's Medicaid program spends \$264 million a year to treat tobacco related ailments while the current excise tax only generates \$44 million. Mississippi is essentially subsidizing the healthcare of smokers.
4. **Yes!** Smoking reductions among pregnant women and lower income households translate directly into reduced smoking-caused expenditures by the state's Medicaid program.
5. **Yes!** A \$1 cigarette tax increase is an investment in Mississippi's healthcare structure. Mississippi would save over 1 billion in long-term health expenditures, including \$208 million in Medicaid savings, due to declines in adult and youth smoking.
6. **Yes!** It makes more sense to tax a product that puts people in the hospital and costs the state millions than to tax establishments that take care of the sick.

LWVMS Does Voter Service

LWVMS Board members registered voters with students at Jackson State University. LWVMS also cosponsored a primary election candidates' guide with the *Clarion Ledger*.

The Gulf Coast League Has Been Busy!

The LWVMGC has been busy since January. We sent out newsletters monthly to our members and had 2 general meetings. The April 12, 2008 meeting was held at the Ocean Springs Library in their large meeting room. Our guest speaker was **Melton Harris, Jr.**, a supervisor from Jackson County, speaking about the Electoral College, and what a great speaker he was - making a somewhat dull subject come alive! He explained how the Electoral College began and added many other details that most of us had forgotten. The Electoral College is made up of people appointed from each state; that number equals the number of senators and representatives each state is allowed.

Many people, including the LWVUS, would like a different system. The League's position is that the direct-popular-vote method for electing a President and Vice-president is essential for a truly representative government. He also told us that it is very difficult to change the Electoral College since it requires a Constitutional amendment and that it had been tried more than 600 times and failed. A lively discussion followed and Melton Harris joined the League!

On June 11, 2008, we held our Annual



Meeting in Biloxi. After lunch, the business meeting was called to order and members and guests were welcomed. One of our new members, **Ship Giffin**, attended the meeting and said he will be able to be more active when his present obligations end in a year. Our speaker was **Jacqueline Washington**, an activist who regularly walks her neighborhood and calls the police when she sees drug deals going down. She spoke to us about the continuing need for affordable Housing that is a serious problem on the coast following hurricane Katrina. Members were asked about study items and Program Priorities. Many issues were discussed and it was decided that our priorities would be changing the way Appellate Judges are chosen, affordable Housing and affordable insurance, and the 2008 and 2009 elections.

Our Officers will remain the same although **Dr. Alan Eickelman** promised to assist the Vice President of Program by asking his fellow professors at USM Gulf Coast College to assist in finding speakers and information about judges.

We were unable to send a delegate to the LWVUS Convention in Portland, OR this June but were asked by **Sandra Smith Gangle**, a very enthusiastic OR League member, if she could use our delegate seat. We agreed and she plans to send us a convention report.

Alma Lindsey, President LWVMGC



“The future belongs to those who believe in their dreams.”

--

Eleanor Roosevelt

LWVMS Legislative Report, Fran Leber, Legislative Director
We supported these bills: ALL PASSED

EDUCATION

Children at Risk: SB 266: Addresses low performing schools and school districts; defines “Schools at Risk,” and commits adequate education funds for assistance.

K-12:

HB 513: Fully funds the state’s education program (MAP) for the first time in a non-election year.

SB 2176: Gives teachers with 26 to 30 years’ experience a raise and funds a mentoring program for first-year educators.

SB 2149: Removes superintendents of districts that have been under-performing for two consecutive years under that superintendent’s leadership (whether they are elected or not). Elected superintendents removed from office cannot seek re-election for one term. This bill has to be approved by the U.S Department of Justice.



GOOD GOVERNMENT

Election Laws: SB 2910: Creates a task force to review Mississippi’s election laws, including those pertaining to early voting, computer training courses for election officials and circuit clerks, curbside voting for the physically handicapped, and it prohibits the solicitation of absentee ballots in nursing homes.

ETHICS & CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Mississippi ethics laws have received a failing grade from the Center for Public Integrity, an ethics watchdog group. The Executive director of the Ethics Commission said the group could give the state a “C” in response to this new law.

SB 2983: Reforms ethics in government laws in Mississippi, including putting elected officials’ financial disclosure forms online; doubles the maximum fine to \$10,000 for conflict-of-interest violations or for filing a false statement of economic interests; and creates regulations for establishing a blind trust. This bill has to be approved by the U.S. Department of Justice. The law does not include all of the guidelines originally suggested by the Mississippi Ethics Commission, such as mandating that officials disclose gifts, travel and the sources of loans from individuals.

PUBLIC RECORDS

HB 474: Requires minimum information in incident reports: name, identification of each person charged & arrested, when & where alleged offense occurred. It penalizes agencies that deny access to the reports \$25 each day. It clarifies law enforcement exemptions.

ENVIRONMENT

SB 3007: Requires a 30% increase in energy performance in state construction projects.

HEALTH ISSUES

CHIP Program: HB 1601: The CHIP Program is included in this funding bill but is required to be separate from the Medicaid Services Program and to submit as a separate program. Performance reports are to include an unduplicated case count of individuals served by eligibility status and the number and costs of ER visits. Appropriation: \$3,541,227.

Action We Have Taken



Fran Leber, Legislative Dir. and **Mary Margaret Bollinger**, Pres. met with the Speaker of the House concerning LWVMS priorities. They also met with many of the newly elected legislators and the committee chairs of the House's Election Comm., Ethics Comm., and Sen. Tollison about judicial legislation. Mary Margaret wrote a letter to the editor opposing Voter ID.

Literature about the importance of early education was sent to the House Education Comm. Chair. Emails were sent and legislators lobbied in support of the ethics bills.

We held a League Legislative Visit Day on March 11th. The guest speaker was **Tom Hood**, Director of the Ethics Comm. There was a presentation on lobbying "do's and don'ts," plus an update on our issues by the lobby corps members.

Many meetings were attended: 1) The fall luncheon coalition meeting of CCBJ (Communities for a Clean Bill of Health. 2) A conference on preventing the school drop out rate. 3) A rally on the CHIP program. 4) A rally on the tobacco tax. 5) Presented our positions on Election Laws in the Appropriation and Elections committee hearing; plus attended many other conference and committee meetings.

Calls to action: 1) In support of appointing, rather than electing, school superintendents. 2) In support of a tax increase on tobacco. 3) Campaign finance laws should require disclosure of all loans and contributions. 4) Candidates should be held accountable for open government. 5) Fees charged to access public records should be kept low.

The League is effective because of the many hours the Lobby Corps members give in covering the legislative session and doing research. Many thanks to members: **Fran Leber, Dir., Mary Margaret Bollinger, Barbara Powell, Minta Uzodinma, Stacy Callender, Harriet Tanzman, Deloris Lee, and Jackie Rollins**, for all their hard work!!

LWVUS Election Audits Taskforce Established

President Mary Wilson announced that a new **Election Audits Taskforce** has been established that will focus on what the features of an election auditing process should be in order to best protect the voters and provide confidence in the voting process. The taskforce will spend the next months reviewing and researching a number of questions related to election audits, and will provide information to the LWVUS Board. This is an area that needs to be looked into in Mississippi where random audits are not mandated and rarely, if ever, done.



New LWVMS First Vice President Appointed

It was with deep regret that the LWVMS Board accepted the resignation of **Bill Hawley**, First Vice President of Membership. The Pearl River Unit had been struggling since the Katrina disaster and was unable to rebound. We are very sad to lose both a valued State Board member and to also lose a Unit that continued doing voter service even after sustaining such a devastating blow. We are glad to hear that the Hawleys plan to continue to be active members of our League as MALs (Members at Large). **William Lindsey**, from the Gulf Port League, has stepped up to the plate and will be the LWVMS's new First Vice President of Membership. We welcome him aboard and look forward to his valuable input.



National Convention
“Reaching New Heights Together”
June 13-17, 2008

Three Mississippi delegates traveled to the LWVUS Convention held at the Hilton Hotel in Portland, Oregon. We also gave one of our unused delegate slots to **Sandra Smith Gangle**, a member of the Oregon League, because they had more members going than they had delegate slots. **Kay Brodbeck**, Jackson League Voter Service VP, **Barbara Powell**, the incoming Jackson Area League President, and I, **Ellen Russak**, LWVMS Voter Editor, were the delegates from MS.

I arrived a day early to attend a workshop titled, ***“The League – How to Stand Out and be Great in 2008.”*** We sat at tables of 6 to 8 and participated in exercises geared to get us thinking about creating opportunities to make our Leagues more visible and to market our talents in order to attract new members. Of course, you need to ask people to join!

If you have never been to a National convention, it is an experience you ought to treat yourself to at least once but be careful, it's like eating popcorn – you can't stop at just one! The women are so dynamic and savvy. Watching them in action, promoting agendas and planning strategy, is amazing! Every trick in Robert's Rules of Order has been tried at least once but if they go too far, the delegates will put a stop to it. There are no shrinking violets among Leaguers!

The Convention hosted a climate change panel discussion at the beginning of Monday's plenary and former Oregon Governors **Barbara Roberts** and **John Kitzhaber** were speakers during the weekend meetings. The keynote speaker was **Rebecca Love Kourlis**, Justice of the CO Supreme Court for 11 years. Her area of expertise is judicial performance.

Some of the highlights of the plenary sessions are as follows:

1. The delegates adopted a change to the League's principles to include: ***“The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.”***
2. They passed a LWVUS Board recommended program to adopt a Health Care program to educate members and communities in order to be better prepared to do health care advocacy as needed.
3. They adopted ***“a Multi-Level Education and Advocacy Campaign to promote solutions to global climate change”*** as an amendment to the proposed program.
4. They adopted a non-recommended study, ***“The advisability of using the National Popular Vote compact among the states as a method for electing the President.”***
5. The delegation approved with little discussion an increase in the portion of our dues that goes to LWVUS. In FY 2008-2009 it will be \$28 and in FY 2009-2010 it will be \$29.20.
6. The new LWVUS officers are: **Mary Wilson**, Pres., elected for a second term, **Elisabeth MacNamara**, 1st vice president, **Judy Duffy**, 2nd vice president, and **Elaine Wiant**, secretary/treasurer.

Looks like we've got our work cut out for us!!

--Editor



**!!!Sign up a friend or two!!!
Renew your dues or sign up as a new member**



LWVMS MAL (Member at Large) Membership Coupon

This coupon is for those wishing to join the State League because they are not near a local League. **Your dues cover memberships in the state and national Leagues. MALs are welcome to attend any local, state, or national 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 Membership Coupon

(Hinds, Madison and Rankin Counties)

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

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 Membership 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.**



T-Shirt Order Form - Show your League Colors!!

Tees are white, Hanes, 100% cotton, preshrunk & tagless for extra comfort
Front: LWV logo on the upper left ~ Rear: **"If you don't VOTE, don't complain!"** (Blue)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State & Zip Code: _____

Phone Number _____ **E-mail:** _____

Qty	Description	Price	Size	Amount Enclosed
	LWV T-shirt (small, medium, large, XL)	\$12.00		
	LWV T-shirt (XXL, XXXL)	\$14.00		
	SHIPPING & HANDLING	\$3.00		
	TOTAL ENCLOSED	-----	-----	

Please make all checks payable to **LWV-MS** & Mail to **LWVMS, PO Box 55505, Jackson, MS 39296-5505**

LWVMS 2008 - 2009 Calendar

- Aug. 23, 2008 (Sat.) – LWVMS Board Meeting, Jackson.** 736 Congress St., Jackson. (the house next to Brown Alternative School). 10:30 a.m.
- Sept. 4 (Thurs.) – Women in Politics Brown Bag Lunch panel.** 12 noon. Faulkner Room of Williams Library, Jackson. Fran Leber talks about the LWVUS Presidential Debates.
- Sept. 4 (Thurs.) – Judicial Selection Forum in p.m.** (Place & time TBA) – LWVMS and Common Cause.
- Sept. 26, 2008 (Fri.) – Presidential Debate** broadcast live from the Ole Miss campus. LWVMS will have an election booth set up.
- Oct 3 (Fri.) – Voter Registration Deadline**
- Nov. 4, 2008 (Tues.) – General Election Day** 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. *Get out the vote!!!*
- Nov. 22, 2008 (Sat.) – LWVMS Board Meeting, Jackson.** 736 Congress St., Jackson. 10:30 a.m.
- Dec. 10, 2008 (Wed.) – Deadline to submit articles for the Jan. 2009 “MS Voter.”** E-mail articles to Ellen Russak at editor.lwv-ms.org or mail to 205 King Richard Rd., Starkville, MS 39759
- March 19, 2009 – Sunshine Week/Legislative Visit Day** at the Capitol. Time & activities TBA.
LWVMS Board Meeting, same day: 736 Congress St., Jackson. Details TBA.
- March 20, 2009 - Deadline to submit articles for the April “MS Voter.”** editor.lwv-ms.org
- May 16, 2009 – LWVMS Convention**, Jackson. Time & place TBA. **LWVMS Board Meeting** to follow.
- Aug. 25, 2009 - Deadline to submit articles for the Sept. “MS Voter.”** editor.lwv-ms.org



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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.