



The Voter

League of Women Voters of Clermont County www.LWVClermont.com February 2006

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Happy New Year,

Can you believe it is 2006?? Seems like we were just worried about all our computers crashing because they couldn't turn from 1999 to 2000.

The last few months have been very busy for the League. Both local and state.

We had a very successful Suffragist Dinner thanks to Cyn Macke and her wonderful committee. Congratulations to our nominees and also to winner Mia Supe. Such a giving group of ladies.

Recent elections proved successful for several of our members. We have Amy Brewer elected to Milford City Council, Mary Wolf re-elected to Miami Township Trustees, and Barb Wiedenbein re-elected to Union Township Trustees. Also Jane Sonenshein is a State School Board Member and Jean Schmidt US Congresswoman!!! Boy, do our Leaguers get involved!!!

We had 11 participants in the Marketing Survey in November bringing in \$435.00 in additional funds for the league. Thanks to all who attended. It was a lot of fun.

Thanks again to Sondra Katkin and her wonderful husband who opened their home for our Holiday party. Lots of friends, good food, and great conversation.

Jane Sonenshein gave a wonderful presentation to the league and several visitors who came to the January meeting hear her discuss some P-16 and other directions our education system is taking.

We will be updating our membership with LWVUS by the end of January and our membership has dropped quite a lot since last year. I would like to encourage each member to 'Ask a Friend to Join". Nothing brings in new members like a personal invitation. Personally, I had seen many newspaper articles about our League but never considered attending until Ellen Hill invited me to a meeting. She picked me up at my office for that first meeting and I haven't looked back. Thanks Ellen, for that first invitation.

There are many events coming up for LWVO too. Statehouse Day on April 4th, Council/Presidents' Training in May and LWVUS, National Convention is in June. Check the newsletter for more information. Please plan to attend as many of these events as you can. The more the merrier and a large group from LWV Clermont would certainly be a good time.

Nancy Middleton

President, League of Women Voters Clermont
513/575-0273

FEBRUARY LWVCC MEETING:

Clermont County Public Library will be the focus of our program on February 28. Leslie Massey, director of the library, and Elizabeth Fiene, coordinator of branch services, will offer a power point presentation on the library, its history, its accomplishments, and its future. Leslie and Liz, both long time employees of the library (and League members), are uniquely qualified to share its joys and sorrows over the years.

Begun in 1955, the library celebrated its 50th anniversary of public service to Clermont County in 2005. Over the years, with the enthusiastic support of local residents, the library has built ten local branches, provided informational resources and recreational reading to thousands of people, and directed programs for countless children. The library is a major provider of free Internet access, and works today to serve the homebound and disabled citizens of our county. In addition to sharing their success stories, Leslie and Liz will discuss information on library funding and how proposed changes on the state level will adversely affect only library services, but other service agencies, such MRDD and Clermont Senior Services.

The next meeting of the LLWCC will be on February 28, 2006.
The meeting will be held at **Reception's Eastgate** 4450 East Gate Blvd. Suite J.
Cincinnati, OH 45245.
Dinner Begins at 6:00 (\$18.00 / person)
Program begins at 7:00
Register online at www.lwvclermont.com to pay with a credit card
or call Brenda Johnson at 576-5264 and mail your check to
LWV Clermont, PO Box 733, Milford OH 45150

UPCOMING LWVCC MEETINGS:

On **March 28th at 7:00 p.m.** the League will be hosting a meeting to talk about land use, more specifically the relevance of green space. Corey Wright, a planner with Clermont County and Andy Dickerson, a board member from the Valley View Foundation, will be speaking about the importance and benefits of green space and the need for preservation. Green space makes an essential contribution to the quality of life. It provides a recreational resource, educational opportunities, a peaceful retreat, a medium for social interaction, and a reserve for urban wildlife. This will be a very informative meeting, something everyone should hear.

Just about everyone knows that under a process called eminent domain, the government can (and does) seize private property for public use to build a road, a school or a courthouse. But did you know the government can also seize your land for private use if they can prove that doing it will serve what's called "the public good"? Under eminent domain the government buys your property paying you what's determined to be fair market value. On **April 25th, at 7:00 p.m.**, Samuel Staley, Director of Urban and Land Use Policy for the Reason Foundation, and an expert in the field of eminent domain, will be joining us to talk about the use of and abuse of eminent domain.

So mark your calendar now so you don't miss these two very important meetings!

May 23 – **Annual Meeting**

Dear Editor,

I have been a long-time “guilt-free” member of the Clermont County League of Women Voters. I have kept my membership active because I believe so much in what the League does and can do. In the past year, I was “invited” to become more active. Becoming more active has meant moving into a role on the Board, serving on the Suffragist Event committee and attending more of the General meetings.

The format of the monthly General meetings includes a dinner hour that is geared toward socializing with the program portion beginning at 7: 00 p.m. The dinner hour is strictly optional and everyone pays for his or her meal. The quality of the meals served at Receptions, Eastgate, our new meeting location, is first-class. The food is delicious! I have not heard any complaints about the quality of the food but I have heard complaints about the increase in the cost of the dinner going from \$15.00 to \$18.00. I have inquired into the changes and learned that the dinners have always “cost” more than the members were charged. That means that the League, OUR league, with its meager budget, has been subsidizing the “Social Hour” for years.

The board looked at the dwindling funds for our organization and reluctantly made a very wise, stewardship-based decision to no longer subsidize the social hour. If you are charged \$18.00 for your dinner, then please know that is what it costs the league. This is not a fund-raiser for us. If you don’t choose to pay \$18.00 for your dinner, you can always by-pass the social hour and come to the General Meeting: the cost is FREE! Either way, please know that the Board welcomes and wants your attendance in any way you choose to participate. Please also know that we are acting in fiscally financial ways making hard choices for the benefit of the membership as a whole.

So, now I ask you: where can you go and get a first-class, chef-prepared, full-course, sit-down dinner served in such a beautiful environment with 20-30 of the nicest, most-enlightened and civic-minded people you know? Cost of the dinner: \$18.00. Value of the experience: Priceless.

Respectfully submitted,
Cyndy Wright

Gretchen Hurt at the New York Stock Exchange



Gretchen Hurt rang in the New Year by helping ring out a day of trading at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). As one of a group of members from the Better Investing Association, she was on hand for ringing the famous bell that signifies the close of trading for the first business day of the year on January 3rd. Gretchen is a member of the Better Investing Association’s National Board; and she and her husband were invited to view the trading floor, speak with brokers and participate in the ringing of the bell. The experience of ringing the bell and touring the NYSC was amazing Gretchen said. “It was definitely one of the high points of my life” she said in an interview with the Cincinnati Enquirer, “for just an ordinary person from Milford; I can’t believe I was there.” Congratulations to Gretchen, what a wonderful experience.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF OHIO:

LWV OHIO FILES LAWSUIT

By Elizabeth Fiene

Seeking to redress decades-old defects in the way Ohio conducts federal elections, the LWV of Ohio, the LWV of Toledo-Lucas County and more than a dozen Ohio citizens filed an historic, non-partisan lawsuit against the State of Ohio in July 2005.

The lawsuit alleges that Ohio Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell, Governor Bob Taft, and their predecessors have failed to protect the fundamental rights of eligible Ohio voters to cast a meaningful ballot, as required by the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In addition, the complaint contends that Ohio has not met its obligations under the Help America Vote Act. The lawsuit does not challenge the results of any past elections, but instead seeks to bring about changes necessary to protect the rights of Ohio voters in future elections.

Among other allegations, the lawsuit states that thousands of Ohioans could not vote in 2004 because lines in many precincts were up to nine hours long; that precincts run out of ballots; that election workers are inadequately trained; that there are inadequate numbers of available, properly functioning voting machines; and thousands of erroneous or misplaced voter registrations.

In December 2005, a federal court issued a ruling allowing the lawsuit to proceed, denying motions by the State of Ohio to dismiss the claims. The court specifically rejected arguments by the defendants that state officials are not responsible for protecting voters' rights in Ohio. The court held that if the defendants acted "with deliberate indifference" and that indifference resulted in injury to voters, the state defendants would be in violation of the Due Process Clause. A trial date of June 2006 has been set.

ELECTION REFORM LAW NEEDS REFORM

Requiring everyone to show ID before he/she is allowed to vote is only one of the controversial issues addressed in more than 400 pages of HB 3, signed into law by Gov. Bob Taft January 31, 2006. Among other serious concerns raised by the LWV-Ohio are:

- New restrictions that make it nearly impossible to conduct voter registration at universities, fairs or festivals
- A greatly increased use of provisional ballots
- The illegal removal of hundreds of voters from the registration list
- A lack of provision for a random hand count to verify voting machine accuracy
- No provision for improved poll worker training
- Removal of debt liability for campaign committees

While the League lauds the intent of legislators to enact reform, the LWV-Ohio fears that the effect of the law as it currently stands will be confusion, disenfranchisement, and an overburdened election system.

LWVO Phon-a-thon

When: March 12, 2006

Call the League of Women Voters of Ohio for more information: (614) 469-1505
or toll free (877) 598-6446.

Council/Presidents' Training, May 5-6, 2006

During one weekend, LWVO will be hosting two events--Council and Presidents' training. All Presidents will be invited to arrive on Friday, May 5 for cost-free training sessions to take place Friday evening and Saturday morning. It will be similar to the very well-received event offered two years ago.

Members attending only as delegates, not as presidents, are welcome to attend the training sessions. Hotel and meal charges would be incurred by these attendees.

Council business, including lunch, will be conducted midday. Stay tuned as plans crystallize, and please write the date on your calendar so you do not inadvertently schedule your local annual meeting on the same weekend--we need you in Columbus!

Statehouse Day - Riffe Center

When: April 4, 2006 (Columbus, Ohio)

Call the League of Women Voters of Ohio for more information: (614) 469-1505 or toll free (877) 598-6446.

Death Penalty Caucus

LWVO is co-sponsoring a caucus on the death penalty issue at the national convention June 10 - 13, 2006. Thanks to all of you who helped us reach consensus in Ohio, we can take a leadership position in promoting the adoption of a national position. Anne William (LWV-Shaker Heights), a member of the state death penalty study committee, has offered to lead the convention caucus for us. Thank you Anne!

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS :

Coalition of Seven Reform Groups Presents a Six-Point Plan for Real Lobbying Reform January 23, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congress has finally awakened to the corruption that festers under the influence-peddling system in Washington. The legislative proposals offered so far are good first steps, but more needs to be done and the key will be the details of the proposals. We look forward to working with congressional leaders in strengthening the reform bills as the legislative process continues, said a coalition of seven national reform groups today at a press conference. The groups released six benchmarks for lobbying reform that they will use to judge the merits of the proposals being considered by Congress in the next few months.

Admitted felon and disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff is only a symptom of the corruption that infects Washington; he is not the disease. The core problems that allow the system of legalized bribery to flourish in Washington, and which led to the Abramoff scandal, are systemic, the groups said. The groups are Public Citizen, Common Cause, Democracy 21, Public Campaign, Campaign Legal Center, U.S. PIRG and League of Women Voters.

The roots of the disease lie in the way election campaigns are financed, largely with special-interest money rather than through modest citizen contributions and public funds; the way lobbyists and lawmakers can discuss legislation and government contracts while on exclusive golf courses and in luxury resorts, beyond the watchful eye of the public and with the trips paid for the lobbying interests; and the way ensuring compliance with ethics and lobbying laws has been entrusted to the very people least interested in their enforcement – the lawmakers themselves.

A number of important legislative proposals have emerged to address the corruption and lobbying abuses in Washington. These include: the recent Republican and Democratic leadership plans; legislation from Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.) and

Reps. Marty Meehan (D-Mass.) and Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), which are similar to each other; and identical bills from Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Rep. Chris Shays (R-Conn.). The proposals offer some significant changes in ethics and lobbying laws, but also have shortcomings.

The six benchmarks for lobbying reform that the national watchdog organizations urge Congress to use when developing bipartisan legislation are:

Break the nexus between lobbyists, money and lawmakers: By capping contributions to candidates from lobbyists and lobbying firm PACs at \$200 per election; prohibiting lobbyists and lobbying firms from soliciting, arranging or delivering contributions and from serving as officials on candidate campaign committees and leadership PACs; and prohibiting lobbyists and their organizations from paying or arranging payments for events "honoring" members of Congress and political parties, and from contributing or arranging contributions to entities established or controlled by members of Congress, such as foundations.

- Prohibit private interests from financing trips or subsidizing air travel for members of Congress and staff, executive branch officials and federal judges. Corporations and others should be prohibited from making privately owned planes available for members to travel at the cost of a first class air ticket rather than the cost of a chartered plane.
- Ban gifts to members of Congress and staff. The gift ban should close the existing loophole in the gift rules that allow lobbyists and others to pay for parties held to "honor" or "recognize" specific members, such as the lavish parties held at the national party conventions.
- Oversee and enforce ethics rules and lobbying laws through an independent congressional Office of Public Integrity and increase penalties for violations. The office would monitor and oversee financial disclosure and lobbying reports, advise members, staff and lobbyists on compliance with the rules, conduct investigations of non-frivolous allegations of ethics violations, present cases involving potential ethics violations to congressional ethics committees for consideration and action, and refer potential lobbying law violations to the Justice Department for civil enforcement.
- Slow the revolving door: By prohibiting members of Congress and senior executive branch officials from making lobbying contacts or conducting lobbying activities for compensation for two years after leaving their positions.
- Place sunshine on lobbying activities and strengthen financial disclosure reports: By requiring establishment of a robust disclosure system on the Internet; ensuring that lobbying firms disclose grass-roots lobbying activities and the financial backers of stealth lobbying coalitions are also disclosed; and requiring lobbyists to file a list of the members' offices and the congressional committees they lobbied during the quarter.

The organizations also called for fixing the presidential public financing system in time for the 2008 elections, extending public financing to congressional races, replacing the Federal Election Commission with a real campaign finance enforcement agency, closing the loophole for 527 groups and abolishing leadership PACs. Also key are addressing the earmarking problem and creating a more open and democratic process in Congress to ensure lawmakers have time to read bills before they are voted on and to ensure open debate, the groups said.

A recent Washington Post/ABC News poll reported that 90 percent of the American people believe it should be illegal for lobbyists to give members of Congress gifts, trips or other things of value, and two-thirds of the American people believe it should be illegal for lobbyists to make contributions to members and other federal candidates.

A more detailed explanation of the six benchmarks for lobbying reform is available at each of the group's Web sites and at www.CleanUpWashington.org.

Patriot Act Action Still Needed

Originally passed by Congress in 2001, the USA Patriot Act is intended to help the government in the war against terrorism. Having been extended at the end of 2005, the USA Patriot Act is now set to expire on March 10, 2006. HR Bill 3199 would reauthorize the Patriot Act with significant impact to Americans. Medical, banking, and library records would still be obtainable by law enforcement agencies without necessary safeguards. It would allow for "sneak and peek" searches without adequate judicial oversight. It would make permanent most provisions of the original Act. The Senate version of the bill to reauthorize the Patriot Act does somewhat better in protecting civil liberties and restores checks and balances, providing for more legislative and judicial oversight. The national League of Women Voters website (www.lwv.org) contains relevant educational materials and updates on the subject of civil liberties.

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Time Sensitive Materials – Please Open Immediately

League of Women Voters of Clermont County
PO Box 733
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LWV of Clermont County Membership Form

Individual Membership _____ \$45, Household Membership _____ \$65, Student _____ \$25

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Make check payable to LWVCC and mail to:
Brenda Johnson, Treasurer
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