

April 2009

League's Democracy in Action Coming in May

by Sara Meyers

In focusing on the significant role of communications in a thriving democracy, the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus will be honoring Mike Curtin, associate publisher emeritus of *The Columbus Dispatch*, and Fred Andrle, host of WOSU Radio's award-winning *Open Line*, at our annual Democracy in Action event to be held next month.

Angela Pace, of WBNS 10-TV News, will serve as emcee for the ceremony, which will be held Thursday, May 14, at the Ohio Statehouse Atrium, 5:00-7:00 pm.

As you receive your invitation this month, please consider our new and expanded opportunities to participate as an event patron, dedicated to furthering the stimulating communication and exchange of ideas critical to vital democratic society. We equally welcome your participation as a volunteer. If you are interested in joining the incredible group of volunteers who are working on Democracy in Action this year, please contact event co-chairs **Kitty Burcsu**, 614-728-2916, or **Sara Meyers**, 614-204-0558.

State League Redistricting Contest Can Overcome Partisan Bias

The League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO) announced a groundbreaking competition for redistricting in Ohio. For the first time, a statewide office will provide all Ohioans with the opportunity to take part in a competition to draw Ohio's congressional districts.

Plans submitted under the competition will be ranked and scored based on specific issues, including traditional redistricting principles (compactness and communities of interest) and modern redistricting principles (competitiveness and representational fairness).

The competition is the culmination of nine months of discussion and planning by LWVO in partnership with state Reps. Dan Stewart (D-Columbus) and Vernon Sykes (D-Akron), Dr. Richard Gunther of The Ohio State University, Ohio Citizen Action, Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner, and Common Cause Ohio.

"Since the 1970s, I have worked with Republicans and Democrats to minimize political influence over redistricting. Voting is fundamental to our democracy, but unfair legislative districts reduce the power of our vote," said **Joan Lawrence**, a former state representative and an LWVO leader of the redistricting initiative.

Under specific rules and timelines, contestants can use cutting-edge geographic information system (GIS) software to redraw Ohio's congressional districts. Each plan will be evaluated, scored, and ranked by an impartial technical consultant.

"We believe this redistricting competition will show that our state can transition to a fair, open process for drawing legislative lines. By focusing on the criteria for drawing districts and reducing discretion in choosing a final plan, we can minimize the political games that can mar redistricting under any political party," LWVO President Linda D. Lalley stated.

The redistricting competition seeks to show that Ohio's districts can be drawn using a blended redistricting formula that carefully weights traditional and modern redistricting principles. Under the proposed process, the top 25 percent of plans would be reviewed by an apportionment board, which would then choose a winner from those plans.

For more information about the redistricting competition, call 1-877-LWV-OHIO.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Janyce C. Katz, Esq.

When the LWV started almost 90 years ago, its founders envisioned (I am guessing) an organization that would help the newly enfranchised women voters understand the important issues of the day. Of course, the woman, enlightened by her study of both sides of the issue and armed with the Truth, would march to the polls and vote.



LWV's founders understood that democracy was based on educated voters. That is two words: 1. people who go to the polls and vote; and 2. people who are educated about the issues and thus make well-informed decisions when voting.

Sure, people have had elections – the chance to voice an opinion through a ballot – and have not been educated voters. But, are the results reflective of what is best for the voters or have the people been pulled by the nose (subtly, of course) to a decision someone or some group wants them to make.

LWV's attempts to thoroughly analyze issues and then disseminate the information to many people made LWV an important tool of our democracy.

Given LWV's interest in ideas, all of us who belong to LWV should be concerned when we read that newspapers are closing or laying off people in a struggle to survive.

For example, the *Seattle Post* may survive only online and *The Rocky Mountain News* is just plain dead. *The New York Times* reports some towns may end up with no daily newspaper in the near future.

We should ask if newspapers are dying and ill because we are flooded with such news, or just not interested in news that affects us, or just don't care.

On one hand, information is everywhere. The Internet is flooded with blogs and newspapers and sites and web pages. Use blogsearch.google.com to find blogs on anything from politics to movie stars' sex lives to horses.

Even the bathrooms carry advertisements and elevators have television. On a recent trip to Boston, I was mesmerized by the television screen in our Cambridge Marriott's elevator that showed stocks going down as the elevator went up and down. (A metaphor for our times?)

One can spend all day clicking and reading. But, is this information really well researched and objective or just pretending to be?

Then there are the clearly one-sided radio programs or blogs where talk hosts cut off those who

do not echo their thoughts – and those committed to an idea listen or read in order to further strengthen their thoughts.

One example out of many was a talk show host on WLW-700 (out of Cincinnati) who, on Thursday, March 12 at around 10:00 pm, ranted for the entire time about the radical improvement in the Ohio economy that legalizing prostitution and voting for the latest proposed gambling casinos bill would bring. During the hour I listened as I drove back to Columbus, no one challenged him. No one even asked if he envisioned a Calcutta-type Ohio with storefronts of naked men, women and children undulating under price tags?

Is this the way to discuss a serious, important issue? I think not.

The uncertainty about the information that is constantly available on the Internet and elsewhere raises a major question for all of us. How do we find the information we need to make an informed choice in anything, from the politics in which we believe to the issues we support or even the types of food we need to be healthy. Do we know if an article is based on substantive research and is valid and can we distinguish it from something with creative facts?

Loss of print newspapers is really bad for those of us who see the height of luxury as having the time to sit in a comfortable chair, read through a pile of different newspapers and books while sipping good coffee.

But, it is more. A nice, long newspaper article, well-written, researched and objectively presented helps us understand our world. An objective television or radio story on the same topic is also important, but, because of the nature of the television or radio news, cannot go into the same depth as a newspaper article.

True, the same information can be gleaned from the multitudes of available sources, providing one has the time and energy to look and the background to weed out the creative fiction posing as truth. But how many of us have that time?

The demise of our newspapers thrusts LWV into an even more important role. Of course, we need to remind people about the value of information and we need to praise our newspapers, like *The Columbus Dispatch*, that still give us the information we need.

We also need to double our efforts to provide objective information through our studies. Hmm, have you signed up to help on the study about public transportation? What about another study....

Oh, by the way, a plug: as we need to do studies, we need just as much your help raising money to allow us to do the studies. Promise me you will come to DiA on May 14 and bring your friends.

A Message from LWVO
Call to Convention

by Linda D. Lalley

I am excited to bring you the details of our state convention, hosted this year by the LWV-Ohio Board. The 58th Biennial State Convention will be held May 1 - 3, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Dublin.

We have rejuvenated the traditional schedule to give you maximum opportunity to network, share ideas, explore possibilities, discover solutions. Yes, the economy may be dismal. But we have chosen to celebrate our many successes at all levels of League; to focus on what we can achieve, whether at the local level or the state level; to plan our collective future together.

We have subsidized our costs with sponsors in order to keep registration fees as low as possible. Convention registration closes April 10.

Information about Convention is available on the LWVO website at www.lwvohio.org. Keep an eye on the website for more details as they become available.

LWVMC Seeks Volunteers for Mass Transit Committee

To join the Mass Transit Study Committee, contact LWVMC Office Administrator **Amy Pulles** at vote@lwvcols.org or 614-837-1089. No experience necessary, but if you have expertise on the subject, let us know.

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LWVO 2009 Convention // Calling All Volunteers

COMING TOGETHER FOR THE POWER OF ALL

Come to the LWVO Convention to be a volunteer.

We need League members to work at the registration tables. At the General Session floor we need people to be ushers, timekeepers, tend the floor microphones and act as door monitors. You may volunteer for the entire day or any portion of it. We will try to accommodate people's requests. The Visitor Registration fee will be waived for the day you work. Meals and room accommodations are not included. Please contact Jean Koznarek, 216-702-8430 or jkozlww@aol.com for further information and to sign up today (or use the form below). Please let us know by 4/20.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____

EMAIL: _____

DATE AND TIME YOU CAN WORK: _____

LOCAL LEAGUE: _____

**BIENNIAL
STATE
CONVENTION**
May 1-3, 2009
Crowne Plaza
Dublin

This is a wonderful opportunity for new members to observe and participate in the Convention and for other members to join old and new friends.

LWVO Statehouse Day Recap

by Scott Britton

As it does these days in the legislature, the state budget dominated the discussion at this year's Statehouse Day. The March 17 event at the Vern Riffe Center in downtown Columbus was entitled *The Budget Shortfall: We're All Going to Feel the Pinch!*

The state's fiscal crisis and the General Assembly's debates over Gov. Ted Strickland's FY10 budget book ended the state League's annual lobby day.

The morning began with a keynote address by Howard Fleeter, PhD, an economist with the Columbus firm Driscoll & Fleeter. He presented a cogent and sometimes humorous analysis of the sweeping tax reform of 2005, the national economic recession and its effects on state revenue, and the Governor's budget balanced by rainy-day funds and federal stimulus money.

Fleeter concluded that:

- The Commercial Activity Tax (CAT) enacted in 2005 was smart policy at the time, modernizing Ohio's corporate tax structure, eliminating loopholes, and reducing taxes on business to make Ohio more competitive;
- Decreasing state income tax rates by 21 percent that same year was not as prudent, resulting in drastic reductions in state revenue;
- The economic recession has resulted in revenue projections for FY11 that are below actual revenues in FY04; and
- By drawing down the rainy-day fund, borrowing money from the Ohio School Facilities Commission, and using federal stimulus funds, the state may be spending more than it has and creating a problem balancing next year's budget, but economists overwhelmingly believe the problem will almost certainly be worse if these funds aren't used this year.

Speaker of the House of Representatives Armond Budish (D-Beachwood) addressed the participants, talking about how he was wrestling with these very issues during long committee hearings on the budget. Budish also said he is encouraged that legislators can work together in a bipartisan manner to produce a budget and tackle Ohio's other challenges. He said he fears an urban/rural division among legislators—rather

than a Democrat/Republican split—will hamper approval of a “3-C” passenger rail system connecting Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati (and possibly Toledo and Dayton).

Statehouse Day 2009 brought out more than 23 legislators or their staff members to join more than 80 League members from across the state. Metro Columbus League members were well represented, both as participants and as leaders.

Ann Henkener moderated a panel on regionalism and facilitated a workshop on sunshine laws and government transparency.

Eleanor Pearlman introduced a health care reform workshop led by fellow member **Cathy Levine**, director of Universal Health Care Action Network Ohio. **Dave Patton** introduced a workshop on education funding reform, and **Peg Rosenfield** led a workshop on election reform.

In their call to action, state League President Linda D. Lalley and Executive Director Deidra Reese laid out an ambitious legislative agenda for the League in the coming year. They urged all members to continue doing their part to make this grassroots organization the credible and respected force it has always been at the Statehouse.



Left: State Rep. Armond Budish, speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives, presented *What's Next: Legislative Priorities and Economic Realities* at Statehouse Day, March 17. The annual event was sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Ohio. Below (l-r): Ohio Township Association Director Michael T. Cochran; Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Executive Director Chester R. Jourdan, Jr.; and former state Rep. Larry Wolpert, of Hilliard, participated on a panel discussion about regionalism.



LWVUS Files Amicus Brief Judicial Campaign Spending Before US Supreme Court

The US Supreme Court heard oral arguments, March 3, in *Caperton v. Massey*, a case that weighs the influence of campaign spending in state court elections with judicial independence. The League of Women Voters joined an amicus brief in this case that calls on the Supreme Court to both preserve judicial impartiality and reform judicial selection.

“The League is involved with this case because of its compelling importance - too much special interest money is being dumped into state court elections nationwide,” said Mary G. Wilson, national president of the League of Women Voters. “The Supreme Court can do a great deal of good in this case by ruling in favor of judicial impartiality and restoring confidence in our nation’s courts.”

Wilson noted there has been an alarming trend across the country of increasing financial contributions from special interests to judicial elections. “For the past decade, state and local Leagues have been working with concerned citizens and communities to reform judicial campaigns and lessen the influence of special interest contributors on the legal system” she said.

“Americans are looking to the nation’s highest court and their decision in *Caperton v. Massey* to stem the flow of special interest money and politics into our courts,” Wilson concluded. “Every American’s right to equality under the law must be protected.”

League Marks Sunshine Week

In mid-March, the League of Women Voters honored Sunshine Week 2009, a national period dedicated to the importance of open government and freedom of information. In a statement from national League President Mary G. Wilson, the League issued a call to action asking citizens to understand that they too have an important role in fostering and maintaining an open government.

“The League’s many years of work on the issues of open government and freedom of information have put us in a position to work with The White House, the Congress and citizens to ensure that our government is for the people and by the people,” said Wilson. “By marking this milestone week - Sunshine Week 2009 - and holding government officials accountable for their actions and decisions, the League is improving the way that Washington works for all Americans.”

On March 20, LWVUS cosponsored the 4th Annual Sunshine Week National Dialogue, *Opening Doors: Finding the Keys to Open Government*. The free webcast was an interactive discussion of federal openness policies and citizen opportunities to use government information in their communities.

In addition, local Leagues across the country showcased their ongoing work on “sunshine” issues calling attention to Observer Corps programs and holding town hall meetings.



New Survey Finds Millions Disenfranchised in 2008

Think the 2008 election was relatively smooth?

A newly-released study conducted by Cooperative Congressional Election Survey found that four to five million voters did not vote in the 2008 election because of registration issues or because they did not receive an absentee ballot.

An additional two to four million registered voters were discouraged from voting because of long lines and voter identification requirements.

The League of Women Voters continues to battle these barriers to voting at the local, state, and national levels. Through the Public Advocacy for Voter Protection project, the League is tracking 34 specific pieces of legislation that would add to the discouraging numbers mentioned above if they became law. Some of the “highlights” include fighting against voter identification in Missouri, South Carolina, and Texas; against proof of citizenship requirements in Georgia; and against third-party voter registration restrictions in New Mexico and Florida.

Mark Your Calendar...

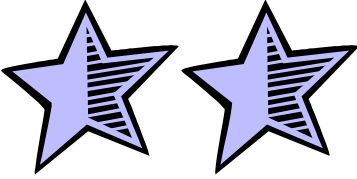
2nd & 4th Tues **LWVO Lobby Lunch**, All invited, 11:30 am-1:00 pm, Columbus
Metropolitan Library-Main Branch (96 S. Grant Street)

April 6 **LWVMC Board Meeting**

April 18 **LWVMC New Member Orientation**

May 1-3 **LWVO 58th Convention**, Dublin

May 14 **LWVMC Democracy In Action Ceremony & Reception**, Statehouse Atrium



*The League of Women Voters
is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy
leads to civic improvement*

League of Women Voters
of Metropolitan Columbus
PO Box 130
Blickl, Ohio 43004-0130
614-837-1089
614-837-1263 fax
www.lwvcols.org

