

March 2009

League to Honor Curtin and Andrle

This year, the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus honors two great communicators who have helped central Ohioans better understand what our government is doing. Mike Curtin and Fred Andrle will each receive the League's 2009 Democracy In Action award at a ceremony May 14.

Curtin is associate publisher emeritus for *The Columbus Dispatch*. For most of his career, he specialized in the coverage of state and local government and politics, serving first as reporter, then as public affairs editor, executive managing editor, editor, associate publisher, president, and vice chairman at the paper. His commitment to professionalism and balanced reporting earned him praise and gratitude from the *Dispatch* readership.

Weekday mornings, Andrle hosts his award-winning talk program, *Open Line*, on WOSU Radio. His show features fascinating national and local guests as he guides an intelligent and balanced discussion on topics ranging from politics to literature, music to science, health to finance, and psychology to science fiction. Periodic "open forums" give listeners a chance to comment on issues of the day.

Franklin County Engineer Dean Ringle and Ohio State University professor Herb Asher will serve as honorary co-chairs for Curtin, while educator Mim Chenfeld and Statehouse News Bureau journalist Bill Cohen will serve as honorary co-chairs for Andrle.

League members are invited to get involved in planning the event, securing patrons, or serving as a sponsor. To do so or for more information, contact League Administrator **Amy Pulles** at the League office, or event co-chairs **Kitty Burcsu**, 614-728-2916, or **Sara Meyers**, 614-204-0558.

Town Hall Meeting Set for March 26

A new poll reveals that citizens doubt their elected judges can be impartial in cases involving their biggest election campaign financial supporters. *The Columbus Dispatch* is focusing on contributions to state Supreme Court justices. And the US Supreme Court is set to hear an important case about recusal. Learn why the judicial branch is in the news these days, how it's different from the other branches of government, and why judicial impartiality is critical to our democracy at a Town Hall Meeting, March 26.

Join the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus for this community-wide event focusing on judicial independence. The event, from 7:00-9:00 PM, is free and open to the public, with ample parking available at the Jewish Community Center (1125 College Avenue, Columbus 43209).

Speakers include The Honorable Kim Browne, judge for Franklin County Common Pleas Court, Domestic/Juvenile Division, and Scott Sturges of McNamara & McNamara LLP.

This town hall meeting is made possible with support from imPACT Ohio and the League of Women Voters of Ohio Education Fund.

Who Said That? Take the League Quiz!

Go to www.lwvcols.org to take the League's Birthday Quote Quiz. Simply identify who made the memorable quotes like "If our leaders are not worthy, we have the power to elect leaders who are" and "The American dream is not dead. It is gasping for breath, but it is not dead."

FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Janyce C. Katz, Esq.

May the Wind be at Our Back... The wind was whistling through the downtown Columbus artificial canyons as I made my way home tonight. I pulled my coat's hood tightly over my head, jammed my glove-covered hands into my coat and braved the icy breath of the wind.



The wind whipped clouds rapidly around a multi-colored sky, tinged reddish orange by the setting sun. As miserable as I was trying to walk in that wind, I had to admit the sky was really glorious.

A friend called tonight, depressed because her finances, like those clouds, were whipping around and she felt her income was blowing away. I tried to cheer her up, but, I am afraid the icy breath of dreams lost and vanished life savings was too much for her.

We are all watching what is happening in the financial world, in our own pocketbooks, with our jobs and we are all nervous - at least almost all of us. We are waiting to see what will be next....

And, here is where LWVMC can be most useful. No, not in restoring the lost savings and reversing the toxic debt and the ghost banks' holdings. Leave financial miracles to the fairy godmothers - the ones who produce carriages out of pumpkins - and economists who can wave TARP or Stimulus packages with hopefully the same results - transformation of pumpkins.

LWVMC can be studying this problem or part of it. Say, the tax system in Ohio and whether it is beneficial or not in the current economy. OK, LWVO has tabled its Taxation and Finance Study temporarily...but this does not mean that we can't start analyzing the issues around tax and finance, or helping LWV to better address this issue in the future.

We could be studying the National Popular Vote or how about Climate Change. And then, we have the ever present problem of judicial elections, just waiting for study, discussion and action...

This month, *The Voter* is full of articles about important actions and upcoming activities.

What is missing is YOU. We need your participation and help. We need you to go forward into the wind and help LWV progress.

Don't forget, if you can help us raise money through Democracy in Action by encouraging a company with which you work closely or a person you know well to donate to LWVMC and Ed Fund, you will help us move all of our exciting projects forward. It would be just as if those strong downtown winds were at our back, pushing us rapidly toward our goal.

We may be facing harder times than many of us have ever known, but, if we all pull together, we will have a glorious outcome.



Ohio Statehouse Celebrates Women's History Month

The Ohio Statehouse will celebrate and honor important women in the history of Ohio throughout March during Women's History Month with tours of the Ladies' Gallery and a special display.

A small display will be on view in the Ohio Statehouse Map Room. The exhibition will focus on books by or about Ohio women. The display will feature children's authors, politicians, activists, and women in the arts. The exhibition is presented in partnership with the Ohioana Library.

Ohio Statehouse visitors will have the opportunity to visit the Ladies' Gallery during their tour. The Ladies' Gallery is a place of honor and learning in the Ohio Statehouse. The room pays homage to Ohio's first six women legislators who paved the way for women in government. The room also honors all women who have served in the Ohio General Assembly.

The Ladies' Gallery's enduring goal is to inform and inspire all who visit - especially young women and girls - to take an active role in democracy.



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Mass Transit Committee Seeks Members

by Scott Britton

The Metro Columbus League is gearing up for its first study in many years.

At its February meeting, the board of trustees approved a proposal to update the League's position on mass transit. The proposal will be submitted to members for approval at an upcoming general meeting, but in the meantime, **committee members are being recruited** so that the study committee can hit the ground running.

The League's current position on mass transit states: "Support mass transportation in central Ohio." Unfortunately, no further information is available about the position or the study that led to consensus on the position. With a variety of public transportation options being considered by local and regional authorities, and with \$42 million in federal stimulus funds just earmarked for the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission and the Central Ohio Transit Authority, an update of this position is in order if the League is to play a role in shaping improvements to mass transit in the metro area.

MORPC and COTA have 6- and 12-month deadlines to spend the money. Beyond traditional road projects, MORPC can use the funds on public transit, ports, or passenger rail. COTA's share, estimated at \$14 million in capital transit grants from the Ohio Department of Transportation, does not include the \$200 million local officials requested for light rail because the proposed eight-mile line from Downtown to Ohio State along High Street is not far enough along to qualify. But COTA is keeping the project on the table, with hopes of having it operational by 2015.

The League study committee will identify criteria that members will use to decide the League's support for or opposition to specific types of mass transit. These types will include:

- The current COTA bus system;
- Various proposals currently being discussed, e.g., Mayor Coleman's streetcar proposal, federally funded light rail, the "3-C" train corridor; and
- Other realistic options for mass transit.

The committee will examine such factors as cost and funding sources, how the transit option

meets local needs without duplication of services, success of similar ventures in comparable cities, and environmental impact. The study must be broad enough to help the League determine criteria for supporting or opposing mass transit proposals in both the near and long term.

If members approve the study, then the committee will begin its work, conclude the study within an appropriate time frame, and submit a report to the board of trustees. The board will then structure an education and consensus process for the membership. If consensus is reached, a new position shall be adopted.

If you are interested in serving on the study committee, contact LWVMC Administrator **Amy Pulles**, 614-837-1089 or vote@lwvcols.org. No experience is necessary, but if you do have expertise on this subject, let Amy know.

LWVMC Celebrates Birthday

League members and guests celebrated the organization's 89th birthday at a dinner and discussion, February 18, with last year's

Democracy In Action award recipients: **Judith Brachman, Lou Briggs, and Peg Rosenfield**. The trio discussed women and politics, democracy and advocacy, and more in a forum led by **Joan Lawrence**.

The birthday bash was held at the Clintonville Woman's Club in Columbus.



Guest Column

Greater Ohio Working for Prosperous Future

Greater Ohio is the state's "smart growth" organization. The mission is to grow Ohio's economy and improve the state's quality of life through intelligent land use. Toward this end, Greater Ohio works to redevelop existing communities, strengthen regional cooperation, reduce Ohio's energy profile and protect Ohio's countryside and natural resources by promoting state policy through research, public education as well as local and grassroots advocacy.

Greater Ohio and the Brookings Institution held a major Summit in September 2008 that launched the Restoring Prosperity to Ohio Initiative and unveiled an agenda to address Ohio's future with the goal of revitalizing the state's communities and reinvigorating their economic competitiveness. Over 1000 local and state leaders attended the event.

The Summit was - and continues to be - catalytic in promoting an agenda for change in Ohio. The Restoring Prosperity to Ohio Initiative derives directly from the policy goals framed in the original Greater Ohio/Brookings Institution report released at the Summit. The report's framework and premise held that the state has a major role to play in targeting resources to our older industrial cities and towns that concentrate the assets that drive prosperity: innovation, human capital, infrastructure and quality places. Therefore, state reforms in several key policy areas - focusing on these central assets - are crucial to economic revival.

Greater Ohio is working closely with communities and partners such as The Ohio State University, Franklin University, MORPC, The Columbus Partnership as well as the Governor's staff and General Assembly leadership to craft administrative and legislative policy action items. Key policy items include: catalyzing cluster development (geographic concentrations of interconnected firms/organizations); leveraging anchor institutions (universities and medical institutions); proposing a foreclosure action plan; transformative infrastructure investments; advancing workforce training; and regional collaboration to promote solutions for change in Ohio.

If you have questions or suggestions about Greater Ohio, contact Project Coordinator Ann Seller, aseller@greaterohio.org, 614-258-6200 or visit www.greaterohio.org.

Local League Seeks Congress Support for DC Voting Rights

In an e-mail to US Representatives Steve Austria, Mary Jo Kilroy, and Pat Tiberi, the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus asked for support for the DC House Voting Rights Act.

E-mail was used to ensure delivery by the March 5 vote. The text of the e-mail, which was sent in response to an action alert issued by the League of Women Voters of the United States, read:

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus and our hundreds of members across central Ohio, I urge you to support the DC House Voting Rights Act and oppose all amendments. This bill is an important step in the long struggle for full voting rights for every citizen in our nation.

Citizens of Washington, DC, have always fulfilled the obligations of American citizenship by paying federal taxes, serving in the military, and contributing leaders in nearly every field of human endeavor. Yet they are denied voting representation in the U.S. Congress, the very body that has ultimate authority over every aspect of the city's judicial, executive, and legislative functions.

The principle that all citizens are entitled to a vote in their national government is a cornerstone of American democracy. Please support that principle by voting for the DC House Voting Rights Act and opposing all amendments to the bill.

Thank you for your service to Central Ohio.

LWVUS Announces Changes

To guide the League through the nation's recession and into the period of recovery, the LWVUS Board recently voted on two important belt-tightening measures.

The LWVUS Council in June will be "virtual" rather than "in-person." The Board recognizes potential drawbacks to this type of meeting, but also sees exciting possibilities to explore and experience new communications technologies and expand reach.

The Board also voted to suspend publication of *The National Voter* (paper and digital), noting publication costs for the magazine are prohibitive in a time of budget cutbacks.

Municipal Income Tax Primer

by Scott Britton

The last issue of *The Voter* featured an overview of the Columbus fiscal crisis and a brief discussion of a possible municipal income tax increase. Even now that City Council has approved a \$630.5 million budget for 2009 – with cuts amounting to \$22.6 million less than the 2008 general fund – further cuts may have to be made given falling income tax collections and sagging investment income.

An income tax increase from 2 percent to 2.5 percent is being discussed for the November ballot. The League favors income taxes over other taxes because, in general, they are progressive: higher incomes are taxed at higher rates. For example, the federal income tax for individuals features six tax brackets ranging from 10 to 35 percent. The state income tax progresses through nine brackets of 0.618 to 6.24 percent (in 2008).

The Columbus income tax, however, is a flat tax of 2 percent. Everyone pays the same rate on income earned within city limits. The flat nature of the tax does not necessarily discount it from support by the League because it meets other criteria of simplicity and ease of administration. A progressive tax at this comparatively low level could be unwieldy. The municipal tax is intended to be easy to understand and so easy to collect that many individuals need not even file a return. While many view the tax as a simple payroll tax, in fact, it covers a variety of income and compensation, from jury duty stipends to tips to golden parachute payouts.

Other facts about the Columbus income tax:

- The current 2 percent rate has been in effect since 1983.
- Income tax is owed by the taxpayer to the city in which the income is earned, regardless of the taxpayer's residence. The taxpayer has an obligation to her/his city of residence if the tax rate there is higher. For example, if the Columbus rate is raised to 2.5 percent, a taxpayer living in Columbus who works in Worthington, which has a 2 percent tax, will owe an additional half-percent to Columbus.
- Income tax revenue is divided among the city's general fund, a special revenue fund that covers collections on delinquent accounts, and the debt service fund that

repays municipal bonds and keeps property taxes stable.

- The income tax typically accounts for more than 60 percent of general fund revenues, with other revenue coming from property taxes, shared revenues, service fees, and investment income, among other sources.

An accurate projection of how much an increase might yield in new revenue is difficult to make because unemployment continues to rise. January receipts were less than hoped for even given pessimistic estimates. And if the tax increases to 2.5 percent, that would not be enough to restore all of the cuts made to city services: a police force slimmed down by 80 officers, 11 recreation centers closed indefinitely, and 140 city workers removed from the payroll, not to mention cuts to social service agencies funded by the city to provide basic human needs, health care, and addiction services. (In the final version of the budget, \$1 million was restored to those outside agencies using emergency-grant funds and hotel tax revenue.) Most likely, any increase in revenue from a tax hike would simply reduce the amount the city withdraws from its rainy day fund, which will drop precipitously by the end of the year.

An income tax increase would be felt most keenly by low-wage earners, and it would likely lead to some initial confusion as well as a surge in returns filed by those who live in Columbus but work in a city with a lower tax rate.

Despite these drawbacks, if the federal government's economic stimulus is successful, and more jobs are created or retained, a tax increase would be the easiest way for the city to capitalize on those new earnings.

Would you like to join the conversation on this and other local issues? Join the League's advocacy team at its monthly meeting by contacting **Scott Britton**, sbritton@wowway.com or 614-848-4291.

Habla Español?

Do You Speak Spanish?

The League of Women Voters of the United States is looking for League members who speak Spanish to work on a project leading towards the 2010 Census. Contact zarguedas@lwv.org or sespana@lwv.org.

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)
- March 17 LWVO Statehouse Day**, Riffe Center, Columbus
- March 26 Town Hall Meeting on Judicial Independence**
- May 1-3 LWVO 58th Convention**, Dublin
- May 14 LWVMC Democracy In Action Ceremony & Reception**, Statehouse Atrium
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THANK YOU!

Thanks to all members who completed the League's survey about our new-and-improved website.

If you haven't yet taken the survey, there's still time. Visit the News section of www.lwvcols.org.

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