



Stillwater Voter

A Publication of Stillwater League of Women Voters

Kay Murphy, President

March 2007

Marlee Pierce, Editor
Carol Stone, Distributor

President's Message

Thank you to everyone who attended and supported the Banquet in February. There were a wide variety of items available in the silent auction and a profit was made on your generous bids. Andrew Rice as the speaker was an excellent choice; thanks to Trish for her planning ahead and asking him last fall.

We are also grateful his son was not born until after the banquet.

At the noon meeting in February the members discussed local program priorities for next year and this is reported in another part of the Voter. We also arrived at consensus on our response to the LWVOK question on the Re-entry. Thank you for your participation in the discussion and

again, special thanks to all those individuals who were involved in collecting information and summarizing the information for the re-entry study.

In this Voter you have the information needed to prepare you for the Annual Meeting on April 26th. As required in the procedures for the SLWV, the by-laws changes,

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This newsletter is supported by member dues.

Complimentary copies are provided to interested parties.

*If you are interested in joining the League, please contact **Bren Bose** at 624-2554.*

Stillwater LWV Calendar

March 13 (Tues) 11:30 AM Hunan Chinese Restaurant	SLWV noon meeting (Immigration Study)
March 27 (Tues) 7 PM Roxie Weber Community Room	Participation in the 'Big Read' with a book discussion of <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
March 29 (Thurs) 7 PM Head Start Bldg., 1601 S. Main	Community Discussion of the Charter Review Members of the Charter Review Committee will be there to respond to questions.
April 3 (Tues)	City Election for Commissioners, Charter Review Vote, and School Board Seat
April 10 (Tues) 11:30 AM Hunan Chinese Restaurant	SLWV noon meeting (Immigration Study)
April 14 (Sat)	Trash-Off Day sponsored by the City of Stillwater
April 24 (Tues) 7 PM	SLWV book discussion
April 26 (Thurs)	Annual Meeting of the Stillwater League of Women Voters (Time and place to be announced)
May 18 & 19 (Fri & Sat) Guthrie	LWVOK State Convention All are welcome! 'Women Speak' will have the Friday night program.

Message....(continued)

nominating committee report, annual meeting minutes for 2006, budget for 2007-08, and the rules for the meeting are for you to read and bring with you to the annual meeting.

By the time you receive the Voter you will probably have seen in the News Press the Letter to the Editor about openness in government. It was written jointly with PIC and SLWV. We sent this at the time of Sunshine

Week (March 11-17) and hope the newspaper will also do a more extensive coverage of the issues covered in LWVUS Sunshine Week.

Don't forget to support the activities of The Big Read, especially our discussion of Grapes of Wrath on Tuesday, March 27th.

Last but not least, SLWV will sponsor a community discussion of the Charter Review changes on March 29th, and several

members of the committee will join us to answer questions. This is a perfect opportunity for members of the Stillwater community to get accurate information, rather than speculation and gossip, about the changes in the Charter. Remind your friends and neighbors about the March 29th discussion at the Head Start building on S. Main.

There is a lot to do this month so join us as many times as you can. Kay Murphy, President

Minutes of the 2006 Annual Meeting**April 25, 2006, Highland Park Methodist Church**

Call to order: at 7: 35 p.m. by Dottie Goss, President

Quorum Check (quorum is 15): members present--29; a quorum is acknowledged.

Appointment of Parliamentarian: Ted Agnew

Adoption of Rules of the Annual Meeting: Sunny Choi moved that we adopt the rules as printed in the March 2006 Stillwater Voter. Accordingly, Karen Melcher recommended we add adoption of local program to the agenda. The motion passed.

Acceptance of 2005 Annual Meeting Minutes: Pat Jaynes moved that we accept the minutes as submitted. The motion passed.

Accomplishments on the 2005 Directives to the Board (reported by Dottie Goss, President): One directive was for us to organize and clean up our files. This was accomplished, and much more, thanks to Alice Richardson's initiative in collecting and organizing the files and in enlisting the collaboration of the OSU library staff to have our materials become part of the library's Women's archives.

The second principal directive

was to focus on local issues. In surveying last year's activities, about half of our programs could be considered "local" and the other half, "other." Dottie hoped that was satisfactory. She was gratified that we were thanked by the new city staff for our role in fostering the city plan. We had programs by local officials; we engaged other local organizations in programs of mutual interest; and our members monitored other meetings and reported on them. On the topic of drug policy, although SLWV has not taken a position or tackled the issue directly, we have considered addictive behavior during the State study on re-entry of ex-offenders into the community.

Voter service was active, as usual, with forums and events like Juneteenth. Thanks were expressed to the Stillwater Leaguers who traveled to Midwest City to communicate with DHS clients on the importance of voting.

Treasurer's Report, by Alice Richardson, Treasurer. As of April 17, 2006, we had \$2,407.96 in the checking account, including funds that have been received in memory of Meg Hollman and as donations

to pay the GED exam fee for parents in the Head Start Program. On Saturday, April 22nd, two took exam. A detailed financial statement was distributed. Trish Emig moved to accept treasurer's report. The motion passed.

Budget Committee Report, by Surekha Sheorey, Chair. The budget committee was comprised of Surekha Sheorey, Alice Richardson, and Rhonda Wright. The Board has recommended the proposed budget be submitted to the membership for approval. We can budget inflow based on our membership (\$45/member, including \$23.80 per-member-payment for LWVUS) plus donations plus net income from the banquet/auction. Outflow is estimated based on assuming a \$25/member payment to National, although \$26.30 is the amount that will be voted on at the convention. The committee does not suggest we change the budget because the whole proposed amount may not be passed by the delegates. Any amount needed in addition to that budgeted can be taken from the undesignated funds in the checking account. Kay Murphy moved we accept the budget as proposed. The motion passed.

By-laws Committee Report, by Shirley Weeks, Chair. The by-

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laws committee was comprised of Shirley Weeks and Joann Murer. They recommended no changes in the by-laws.

Nomination Committee

Report, by Trish Emig, Chair.

The nomination committee was comprised of Trish Emig, Gloria Hesser, Karen Melcher, and Hilda Waller.

Slate of Officers and Board Members for 2006:

President: Kay Murphy

President-elect: Trish Emig

Directors: Ted Agnew (returning), Brenda Bose, Carol Stone, Beth Thornton, Esther Winterfeldt (returning)

Nominating Committee for 2006: Marlee Pierce, chair, Hilda Waller (returning), Avis Rambo, and Pat Jaynes

There were no nominations from the floor.

Avis Rambo moved to accept the report. The motion passed.

Program Report, by Kay Murphy, President-Elect and Committee Chair. Last year's programs and activities were reviewed and summarized in a table, which Sunny Choi will be asked to post on our web site. Kay thanked everyone who contributed to a successful year for SLWV. Ted Agnew was thanked for organizing the program on archival materials, Esther Winterfeldt for the health program, and Sue Williams for the national program review. We were requested to fill in a sign-up sheet for standing committees and the survey to help planning for next year.

Voter Service Report, by Carol Fincher, Committee Chair. Dottie Goss and Alice Richardson were thanked for staffing a table at Juneteenth. Joanne Murer and Dottie were thanked for staffing a table for the Payne County Farm Bureau. Esther Winterfeldt and Gladeen Allred were thanked for moderating forums and

Marlee Pierce for being time keeper. Many others were thanked for helping with forums and publicity, including Trish Emig, Kay Murphy, Rhonda Wright, Joanne Murer, Karen Melcher, Nita Newcomer, Ted Agnew, Sunny Choi, Paul Richardson, and others whose names were accidentally omitted. Audrey Marks of the Stillwater NewsPress was also thanked. Carol ended by reading an inspiring poem.

Membership/Hospitality

Report, by Joanne Murer. Presently our membership stands at 74. Joanne handed out a summary of meeting attendance, which showed we averaged more than 20 members per program. Joanne received materials from LWVOK on membership recruiting, and she will try to implement some of these suggestions in the coming year.

Publicity Report, by Kay Murphy. For news articles, the only way to be sure of having an article in the paper is to pay for it; otherwise, it depends on luck. Trish says key is "bring food". The membership gave their thanks to Kay for filling in this role.

Voter Editor/Web Master

Report, by Sunny Choi. More are using the web this year than last. It's your right to have a hard copy of the Voter if that is what you want. But please check the web for last-minute updates. Karen Melcher thinks the web is a very good service; she specifically noted the value of our posting the questions for the mayoral candidates. Sunny thanked all the reliable writers-Dottie Goss, Kay Murphy, Karen Melcher, Carol Fincher, others. Carol Stone was thanked for distributing the Voter.

Book Club Report, by Sunny Choi. We have read 6 books; we

really have a good time. The book choice for May is *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver.

Program Emphasis for 2006

by Kay Murphy. Beth Thornton moved we adopt the local program as adopted the last two years (see Local League handbook). No new programs surfaced at the meeting in January. City government and education are the over-arching topics. We have consensus on all of these, and if we vote to retain them, then we can act on these consensuses. If adopted, Sunny will put on the description from the handbook on our website. Motion carried. Kay referred us to the Questionnaire and asked the membership to volunteer for helping with SLWV activities.

Directives to the Board: Alice Richardson suggests we ensure all members get a handbook and member roster, and that we create a New-Member packet.

Karen Melcher suggests we be ready to prepare new Facts For Voters-have some available in the summer for people who move in and then make major revisions after the November election.

Avis Rambo asks if there will be any follow-up on re-entry topic. Kay Murphy mentioned that passing the GED can be a positive factor in re-entry. Hilda Waller thinks our interview process was a positive contribution and there has been the positive spin-off of increased visibility of issue and of the organizations interviewed. We will get feedback from LWVOK and we are asked to review local results of the interviews.

Shirley Weeks suggests we should seek more opportunities to make use of our positions on issues. Dottie wonders if we should assign people to topics; Shirley recommends letters.

We were invited to convey

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further thoughts by filling out the brown survey sheet.

Old Business

(Helen Gorin memorial funds), by Karen Melcher. Margaret Essenberg has designed a loop trail for Hinrichs Park; further progress has been slow, partly because the City Attorney has been busy. Pat Jaynes says both Gorin children agree a contribution to a nature trail would be a nice memorial to their mom. Another possibility is a booth on water at the heritage festival. This issue was referred to next year's board.

New Business

(Meg Hollman memorial funds), by Alice Richardson. Over \$100 has been received now. This issue was referred to next year's board.

State Council- May 20th, Bartlesville. Voting delegates are

the President plus two other delegates, but all members are welcome. Dottie Goss and Kay Murphy will attend. The Board will meet briefly after the Annual Meeting to appoint another delegate.

National Convention- attendees (delegates). Sunny Choi reported that the Board has decided to pay registration for all of the members who are interested in going to the convention, and we have five people who expressed their interest. She said that Stillwater has only one vote, and that she was working with other local Leagues so as not to waste any votes. The Board has agreed that our delegate will be Trish Emig. Karen Melcher will represent LWVOK. Tentatively, Sunny Choi will represent the Tulsa League; Brenda Bose, the Norman League; Kathy Huston, the Lawton League.

Head Start proposal: The Stillwater School System has

been cooperating with the local Head Start Program to assist Head Start Parents in getting their GED certificates. However, the \$50.00 cost per person / exam is a barrier to some of the parents, and Head Start does not have a fund for this purpose. Linda Smolen of Head Start spoke of this need at a recent meeting. Leaguers felt we could donate individually to this cause, and Alice Richardson volunteered to handle the fund for us. The SLWV Board asks the membership: Shall we put this item in our budget (\$100) in the slot previously used for the Stillwater Women's Scholarship Fund (adopt as League Public Relations Scholarship)? The proposal passed.

Respectfully submitted, Marlee Pierce, Secretary
Minutes were approved by committee members Sunny Choi and Rhonda Wright.

Program announcements (Don't miss any of these!)

The March and April LWVS meetings will cover subjects that should be of interest to all members. A committee has been working hard on the new National Study - Immigration. Ted Agnew will give us a historical background on the issues Tuesday, March 13 at Hunan's Restaurant, 720 E. 6th from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.

There will be a vote on the proposed charter changes on April 3. In order to be prepared to vote you will want to attend a forum March 29th. Charter Review Committee members Carl Weinaug, Terry Miller and Martha McMillan have agreed to meet with us to give the reasoning for the proposed changes. The forum will be held at the Head Start Building, 1601 S. Main from 7 PM to 9 PM. Be sure to bring a friend.

The immigration study will continue at the April 10 noon meeting which will again be held at Hunan's, 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM.
Beth Thornton

Book Club

The LWVS Book Club will be joining the Stillwater Community in the Big Read. Tuesday, March 27th we will meet at Roxie Weber Community Room to discuss John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. We hope you and residents of Roxie Weber will join us. Librarian Linda Reynolds will lead the discussion. If you need a copy of the book, let Trish Emig or me know.

On April 24, the discussion will be on *Every Day is a Good Day* by Wilma Mankiller, at Trish Emig's house.

Beth Thornton

News about the banquet:

The League of Women Voters annual banquet on February 15 at Meditations was festive and informative with about 70 people present. Jennifer Paustenbaugh, co-author of the "Oklahoma Women's Almanac" gave a brief review of the book, a first of its kind, and pointed out that it recognizes the contributions of Oklahoma women in all areas of public life since the early 1900's. She had copies available and indicated she may be contacted at any time at the OSU library if further copies are needed.

Kay Murphy introduced Senator Andrew Rice for his presentation on "Its Not About Red or Blue: Moving Beyond the Political Battles of the Past". As the Junior Senator, he gave up-to-date information regarding the cur-

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banquet... (continued)

rent session of the Legislature with an indication of ongoing legislative actions.

The silent auction was well-received and successful, thanks again to Dottie Goss who works tirelessly every year to make the event a success.

Esther Winterfeldt, Chair of Planning Committee

VOTER ID BILLS INTRODUCED IN THE OKLAHOMA SENATE

Should Oklahomans have to provide proof of identity in order to vote? This legislative session at least four bills have been introduced in the Oklahoma Senate that would require voters to provide proof of identity before voting. These bills are SB159 introduced by Senator Laughlin, SB172 introduced by Senator Aldridge, SB778 introduced by Senator Reynolds, and SB874 introduced by Senator Jolley. Most require a voter to show a photo ID at the precinct polling place or to mail in notarized proof of identity with an absentee ballot. Sen. Jolley's bill would require certified proof of citizenship be either mailed in with the voters registration form or to be shown to the Election Board when registering.

LWVUS has no absolute opposition to increased voter identification, but has found that most of the bills introduced nationwide unfairly target the poor, elderly, handicapped and minorities. These bills the League cannot support. However if a voter identity plan is written, which does not discriminate, the plan will be very expensive to implement. The legislators need to decide if voter fraud is a serious enough problem to warrant the expense.

Trails Task Force - review

Stillwater's Trails Task Force recently presented their ideas, for a comprehensive trail system and for on-street bicycle routes for the city, to the Parks, Events and Recreation Board and will be presenting the plans to the Planning Commission and the City Commission in the near future.

Two Stillwater League members, Pat Jaynes and Karen Melcher, have been members of the City's Trails Task Force. The City Commission formed the Task Force to study existing trail plans and the on-street bicycle routes and to make recommendations for improvements.

In addition to updating and expanding the current Kameoka Pedestrian Plan and the On-street Bicycle Plan, the task force wants the city to have a guide for the future development of a comprehensive system of trails and bike routes for Stillwater and the surrounding area. Clearly, this system will not be achievable in the immediate future; however, there are potential trail locations and stream corridors that should be identified and protected now.

Utilizing information from the surveys and public meetings, the

OKLAHOMA WILL RETAIN OPTICAL SCAN PAPER BALLOTS--Michael Clingman, Secretary of the Oklahoma State Election Board, spoke to the Oklahoma County League at a recent noon meeting. He laid to rest the worries of many that the present system of optically scanned paper ballots would be replaced with another system. He said that the equipment is wearing out and will need to be replaced, but that the replacement would utilize the same system. The replacement will have the capacity to allow better

Trail Task Force came up with a map of existing and proposed trails for the City to consider. In addition to recreation, an ideal trail system would provide a way for commuters to get across town to work, for children to get safely to school, and for residents to get from place to place without having to rely on an automobile.

The Trails Task Force came up with the following recommendations:

- 1) Hire a full-time trails coordinator
- 2) Complete Kameoka Trail Corridor (Boomer to Couch)
- 3) Connect Tech Park to Babcock Park
- 4) Connect Sanborn Park to Oklahoma State University
- 5) Connect Babcock Park to Couch Park
- 6) Create a Southwest Connection Loop
- 7) Build an Outer Loop Trail
- 8) Build the Stillwater Creek Corridor
- 9) Develop a city-wide on-street bicycle route system

The maps of the proposed trail system and the proposed on-street bicycle plan can be seen on the city's web site.

access for disabled voters. He assured League guests that the Election Board had no intention of switching to touch screen voting machines.

Facts for Voters

After the April elections it will be time to update the Facts for Voters, which is distributed to the community. VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED TO HELP ON THIS PROJECT. Even if you don't attend meetings and are at home, you can help collect the necessary information to update the Facts.

Program priorities for 2007-08 to be discussed at the Annual Meeting

Discussion of priorities for the local programs for 2007-08 was held at the noon meeting on February 22. The consensus was that our local program priorities should be the Comprehensive Plan (adopted in Dec. 2000) and Open Meeting Law (adopted in April, 1976 and retained in Feb., 2001). Without listing all

of the detail on what the Comprehensive Plan should include, two parts seem most relevant for next year and the specific concerns are underlined.

A part of the plan should describe the way in which new growth should occur, which would define the planning area boundaries and describe smaller areas within the community that need to be specifically addressed. This

part of the plan should also include current and projected economic and population statistics and land use patterns (zoning.)

The CCDP should be reviewed annually and updated periodically by the planning commission, with citizen participation in addition to a public hearing. It should be used as a guide for daily decisions by the city's staff, the City Commission and the Planning Commission.

By Law Change Recommended

Section 1 (Purpose) of Article II (Purpose and Policy) of Stillwater LWV Bylaws should be revised to read as follows:

Sec. 1 Purpose: The purpose of the League of Women Voters of Stillwater, a nonpartisan political organization, shall be to encourage informed and active participation in government, work to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

Rationale: The LWVUS changed their mission statement and this brings SLWV bylaws consistent with the national.

Submitted by Committee Members Helen Jordan and Beth Thornton

The Budget Committee Report

The Committee, comprised of Surekha Sheorey, Chair, Margaret Ewing, and Alice Richardson has prepared the budget proposal.

Please look for the insert in this issue. (The on-line Voter will not have the budget insert, so we are mailing this issue to every member regardless of their preference in receiving the newsletter.)

Nominated Slate

Nominating Committee Report

The Committee, comprised of Marlee Pierce, Chair, Pat Jaynes, Avis Rambo, Hilda Waller, and Carol Stone submitted the following slate for the new Board.

President: Trish Emig

President-Elect: not identified

Board Members: Ted Agnew, Gloria Hesser, Deanna Homer, Claudean Reynolds, and Esther Winterfeldt

The following members have agreed to be on the Nominating Committee for 2008: Avis Rambo (chair), Alvena Bieri, Dottie Goss, and Helen Jordan.

Rules for the Annual Meeting

Article VII, Sec 1 of the Bylaws of Stillwater LWV, dictates the following:

An Annual meeting shall be held before May 1 yearly, the exact date to be determined by the Executive Committee. The Annual Meeting shall:

A. Adopt a local program on even numbered years

B. Elect officers, directors, and members of the Nominating Committee

C. Adopt an adequate budget

D. Consider the report of the Bylaws Committee, and

E. Transact such other business as may properly come before it.

In addition to the rules in the Bylaws, our traditional rules of Annual Meeting will be observed to ensure fair and orderly execution of business:

1. Only the members who have their dues current have the privilege of the floor. (Guests may be granted the privilege of the floor if the meeting so directs.) No person may speak twice until all who wish to speak have had the opportunity. Debate will be limited to two minutes for each speaker.

2. Any member, upon recognition by the Chair, shall first state her/his name clearly.

3. When a motion is made, it shall be put in writing, signed by the mover and sent at once to the secretary.

4. Roberts Rules of Order shall be used.

FYI: Finishing Your Taxes?

Check off the Box for Presidential Public Financing. As you prepare your federal taxes in the coming weeks, be sure to support the League's mission by checking the box in support of Presidential public financing. Please encourage your members to do the same!

The Things They Carried BOOK DISCUSSION

The League Book Discussion Group met at Brenda Bose's home the evening of February 27th to discuss Tim O'Brien's book about the Viet Nam War. Joyce Cox and Trish Emig led the discussion. Joyce began the evening by having us "empty" our purses to determine if "the things we carried" told something about ourselves. Joyce also provided us with a short bio of Tim O'Brien who truly had served in the Viet Nam War.

We talked a little bit about the history of the war . . . and the length of the war. This was our Country's last war draft, and for many of us who remember that time period, the draft seemed to last FOREVER. The Viet Nam War began when President Harry Truman provided \$15 million to support the French forces in Indochina in 1950 and did not end until 1975 when Saigon fell. Our administrations, from Truman through Johnson, stated convincing arguments regarding the domino theory. We were to believe that all of the neighboring countries around South Vietnam would fall to communism if the U.S. did not support South Vietnam from North Vietnam. I've heard similar arguments regarding the countries around Iraq. Yet in Viet Nam, there was no oil to gain.

What started as only a monetary and advisory role took on the face of the War in Iraq in today's world. The wars are somewhat similar in that Viet Nam was a civil war while Iraq is a sectarian war. One of the discussion members said that in both wars, it has been difficult for the American forces to identify the "enemy".

In O'Brien's novel, his comrades

carried both tangible and intangible items, which often provided us information about the person. Not only did the soldiers carry the necessities needed to survive, but they also carried memories of sweethearts, their fears of showing their fears of dying, and good luck charms. Many of the items carried by O'Brien and his comrades kept their sanity intact because the war was fought in an unknown and foreign place, on unfamiliar terrain against an invisible enemy. Being there in that place and at that time was a surreal experience for many of these American men and women. For those of us who have known Viet Nam veterans, or have read about the Viet Nam veterans, understand that mental illness ranked high as one of the war casualties.

O'Brien successfully places the reader in the forests of Viet Nam with him and his comrades. We heard, saw, and reacted to a mixture of crazy, anguished, and sometimes beautiful voices and events. In O'Brien's "On the Rainy River," he defines courage as only a 21-year-old can define it: "Courage, I seemed to think, comes to us in finite quantities, like an inheritance, and by being frugal and stashing it away and letting it earn interest, we steadily increase our moral capital in preparation for that day when the account must be drawn down. It was a comforting theory." He had a chance to run, but didn't. O'Brien goes on to describe his entrance into the war as one of cowardice. As a middle aged man (43 years old when he wrote the book) looking back, one can see how O'Brien might describe the act as cowardice because going to fight in a war only perpetuates war.

I shall not spoil the book by telling you more for those of you who have not read it. A few people who attended had not

read the book and by the time the discussion was over, they wanted to borrow the book from others. It is beautifully written.

At our next discussion, we will meet at Roxy Webber Center, March 27th at 7 P.M. to discuss *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Global Warming Myths and Facts ~

coming to you monthly from the Environmental Defense League. (Founded in 1967, the organization's mission is to "find innovative, practical ways to solve the most urgent environmental problems.")

Myth for March: The science of global warming is too uncertain to act on.

FACT: There is no debate among scientists about the basic facts of global warming.

The most respected scientific bodies have stated unequivocally that global warming is occurring, and people are causing it by burning fossil fuels (like coal, oil and natural gas) and cutting down forests. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences, which in 2005 the White House called "the gold standard of objective scientific assessment," issued a joint statement with 10 other National Academies of Science saying "the scientific understanding of climate change is now sufficiently clear to justify nations taking prompt action. It is vital that all nations identify cost-effective steps that they can take now, to contribute to substantial and long-term reduction in net global greenhouse gas emissions." (Joint Statement of Science Academies: Global Response to Climate Change [PDF], 2005)

The only debate in the science community about global warming is about how much and how fast warming will continue as a result of heat-trapping emissions. Scientists have given a clear warning about global warming, and we have more than enough facts - about causes and fixes - to implement solutions right now.

Hello Sunshine Week!

March 11-17 we celebrate Sunshine Week 2007. Journalists Ben Bradlee, Tom Brokaw and Judy Woodruff are the honorary chairs of Sunshine Week, 2007. All three media experts support the initiative's efforts to "empower and educate people about their right to know what government is doing, and why."

Following the landmark 1966 legislation, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) of 1972 and the Sunshine Act of 1976 focused on "public access to government meetings." There are differences in the two laws, but both laws state that government records and meetings "are open unless certain specified exemptions apply." Since the creation of Homeland Security and the passage of the Patriot Act, there has been additional information that the government has considered classified; thus, the information has fallen under the "specified exemption" category. On October, 2001, the Attorney General wrote a memo to inform federal employees that the "Justice Department would support them when they found a sound, legal basis to withhold information." Since that memo, information that was once considered unclassified has become classified.

It is important for each of us to know what information is legally accessible and how we, as citizens, can obtain the information. Usually state and local laws regarding open access to meetings and meeting minutes follow federal law. Citizens can seek information by filing a FOI request (in writing) to any level of government. Citizens can make the request under a state or federal "freedom of information" statute which citizens state in the letter. Sometimes a

fee is required (i.e. for copying documents which contain the information). Sometimes public records are exempt from FOI laws. Citizens can expect that information impacting "minors, criminal investigations, trade secrets and personal privacy are off limits." Citizens also can be denied documents that they have a right to see. Therefore, it is important that a response to the FOI request be provided within a reasonable time period. If a citizen is denied information access, there is an appeal process, which is started by writing a letter to the person over the government agency.

Other countries are modeling their laws and statutes regarding open access and FOI after our laws here in the United States. It is important, however, for citizens to apply these laws and statutes when elected official meetings are not easily accessible and open to the public. In these situations, citizens must remind elected officials that public support is more likely to occur when citizens have access to the information the elected officials reviewed prior to making their decisions.

Federal S.618 - Legislation to Provide Scrutiny of Insurance Practices

On February 15th, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Chairman of the Judiciary Committee; Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pa.); Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.); and Senate Republican Whip Trent Lott (R-Miss.) introduced the Insurance Industry Competition Act to the Senate. Representatives Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), Gene Taylor (D-Miss.), Bobby Jindal (R-La.), Charlie Melancon (D-La.), Rodney Alexander (R-La.), and Walter Jones (R-N.C.) introduced the Bill to the House as well. For sixty years, insurance companies have experienced

immunity from federal antitrust laws due to the McCarran-Ferguson Act. The bill introduced on February 15th would repeal the McCarran-Ferguson Act and give the Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission the authority to apply anti-trust laws to anticompetitive behavior by insurance companies. Much of this legislation's force comes from the aftermath of Katrina. Senator Lott's own home was destroyed during Katrina, and since then, he has been a harsh critic of the insurance industry's response to Katrina. According to Senator Leahy, "Insurers may object to being subject to the same anti-trust laws as everyone else, but if they are operating in an honest and appropriate way, they should have nothing to fear. American consumers and American businesses rely on insurance--it is a vital part of our economy--and they have the right to be confident that the cost of their insurance, and the decisions by their insurance carriers about which claims will be paid, reflect competitive market conditions, not collusive behavior."

According to the Federal Senate website, March 7th was the last posting of S.618. The bill is currently being heard in the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. To date, no amendments have been made to the bill.

OKLAHOMA STATE HB 1510

On March 7th, the Oklahoma House of Representatives passed HB 1510 by a vote of 76-21. The bill would provide the elderly of Oklahoma who require living assistance to have a new option: Green House facilities. The bill, introduced by Representative Jerry Ellis, would create "Green Home" homes that would be exempt from some of the current nursing home regulations.

HB 1510... *(continued)*

Each Green House home houses six to ten seniors who require skilled nursing care but who wish to maintain a living environment similar to what they were accustomed to when living independently. These types of facilities have already been established in 28 states and they provide residents with individual bedrooms and bathrooms, communal dining, gardening, a spa, a beauty shop and other amenities. In these types of facilities, staff turnover is reported to be at only 10%; whereas, staff turnover at traditional nursing homes is as high as 70 percent. If HB 1510 becomes law, the first Green House facility will be located in Valliant.

Immigration Study Team

On Tuesday, March 13th at our monthly noon meeting, the local immigration study team reviewed the LWVUS Immigration Study Team's scope along with the scope of the local immigration study team's effort. Ted Agnew also provided the local membership with the background of immigration law in the United States, and how we got to where we are today. The local team has gathered information from state and local sources (state immigration office, Stillwater Public School System staff, Stillwater Medical Center staff, Payne County Health Department staff, OSU International Student Services director, and individual immigrants and their families), and documented the team's findings. The team has requested another program date in mid-summer to provide a second presentation to the membership regarding the team's findings.

As part of their effort, the local study team has been tracking HB 1804 by Randy Terrill (R-Moore), which passed the House 88-9

and is now in the Senate. HB 1804 would deny driver's licenses and other government identification to undocumented immigrants; penalize employers who hire undocumented workers as well as require employers who have public contracts to use a federal system to verify the legal status of immigrant workers before hiring them; halt health, welfare and education benefits for undocumented immigrants as well as end resident tuition rates and scholarships for undocumented immigrants attending college (which would repeal SBs 520 and 596 and HB 594).

There are four exceptional background papers regarding immigration on the LWVUS website: "Overview: Federal Immigration Policy and Proposed Reforms," "Immigration and the Economy," "Economic Aspects of Authorized and Unauthorized Immigration," and "Effects of Global Interdependence on Migration."

If you're interested in this topic, the local immigration study team meets the first Wednesday of each month at 4:30 PM in the 1st floor meeting room at the Public Library.

FROM THE LWVUS:

Connect Citizens and Government - Opportunity for Leagues. The Association of Government Accountants (AGA) has launched a new pilot project, the Citizen-Centric Government Reporting Initiative. This initiative encourages governments to produce and publish an annual 'state of the government' report. The reports are designed to provide citizens with basic information about the financial condition and performance of their local government. AGA believes that the report will make governments more accountable to their citizens and will help Americans become more educated citizens. AGA is working with various civic

groups as well as its own chapters to promote this project among local government officials. To find out more, see a sample report, and/or promote this initiative locally, please visit <http://www.agacgm.org/citizen/> or contact Susan Fritzlen or call 1.800.242.7211.

New Immigration Study

resources are now available on the LWVUS website: a two-year Study timeline and guidelines to help local Leagues hold dialogues to determine values associated with immigration issues. The guidelines were developed by Kathryn Fennelly, an LWV of Minneapolis member, LWVUS Immigration Study Committee member and a professor at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and the University of Minnesota.

From LWV Tulsa:

The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality is planning to adopt the Federal Clean Air Mercury Rule as Oklahoma's rule for mercury emissions. Some observers believe the federal rule violates the Clean Air Act and that the federal cap and trade provision will result in drawing more dirty energy to Oklahoma. A public meeting of the Air Quality Advisory Council to discuss these rules is scheduled for April 18 at 9:00 am at OSU Tulsa, 700 N. Greenwood. Comments may be sent before the meeting to morris.moffett@deq.state.ok.us. For more information, contact JL Edwards, 479-494-6883 jedwards@abf.com or montelle@cox.net.

Also, the following: Oklahoma is at risk of losing an important rail resource if state Dept. of Transportation plans to destroy the Union Station rail yard in OKC are carried out. Citizens are asking Governor Henry to appoint an investigative commission/committee to report on the Union Station-Crosstown Expressway situation. The governor's transportation liaison: Jeanette.Nance@gov.ok.gov. For more information: Tom Elmore, 405-794-7163. B. Geary, thinkcivic@aol.com

State Re-entry Study

Discussion of the state questions, to reach our consensus, was held at the special noon meeting on February 22. Thank you to all of the members who worked on collecting information, contacting agencies, attending conferences and becoming involved in this state study. Following are the results of our discussion.

What legislation is needed to best solve these integration problems? Our responses follow in priority order.

1. Case Management for each incarcerated woman while in the correctional institute, during pre-release and after release. It is particularly important to have intensive case management during the 3 months prior to release. This session (2007) HB 1535 would establish a pilot program for Case Management of newly released, previously diagnosed, mentally ill inmates. Funding is included in the bill.

2. Increased use of Drug Court and/or Mental Health Court in sentencing women.

3. Standard programming between all women's correctional institutions. Specifically, each institution needs GED courses, computer skills training and other vocational skills training or access to college courses.

4. Assistance and support to the families of the incarcerated women who are responsible for caring for the children, usually the grandparents (sometimes foster care.) The grandparents need financial assistance as well as help accessing health care for the children. This session (2007) HB 2101 'The Transformational Justice Act' encourages partnership between the faith-based community and voluntary organizations to assist families of formerly incarcerated individuals so they do not re-offend.

5. Effective pre-release help and

follow-up to assist women in re-entry into society. This would include counseling with the women, their children and families in order to overcome problems and re-establish a family unit.

6. Increased funding for women's correctional institutions and programming.

7. Prosecution of corrections department employees who provide drugs within the prison system.

Political Barriers

The attitude change that needs to take place in Oklahoma is the realization that non-violent offenders will be coming out of prison and back into communities. Very few people are incarcerated for life. The proposed legislation is designed to help with re-integration of the formerly incarcerated females into the community.



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