

Denton VOTER

*The League of Women Voters of Denton, Texas
Established 1961*

P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station
Denton, Texas 76204

February 2007

Sue Smith, President
Ken Ferstl, VOTER Editor

www.lwvdenton.org

CALENDAR

Thursday, February 22, 7 p.m. General Meeting. Speaker: Mia Price, President, Denton School Board. Environmental Education, Science and Technology Building (EESAT), Room 176, University of North Texas campus. Hickory at Avenue C.

Sunday, March 4, 3 p.m. Board Meeting at the home of Peg La Point, 1900 Highland Park Circle. Members are welcome to attend board meetings.

Monday, March 12. Last day to file for place on the ballot for the municipal election on May 12.

Thursday, March 15, 7 p.m. Panel on Immigration Policy. EESAT building, Room 176, UNT campus.

BOARD PRESIDENT OF DENTON ISD TO SPEAK AT FEBRUARY MEETING

Our speaker will be the President of the Denton Independent School District Board of Directors, Mia Price. She has been asked to address the state of our schools and important issues facing the Board. Local representative to the LWV-Texas School Study, Barbara Burns, plans to attend and help us ask questions pertinent to the state study. This will be an interesting and informative meeting.

Peg La Point, Program VP

JUDGE HORN SHARES CONCERNS ABOUT PROPOSED CAPS ON PROPERTY TAXES

Our speaker at the January meeting was Denton County Judge Mary Horn. Judge Horn used the majority of her visit to explain her strong opposition to legislation that would impose caps on property taxes. In a letter last October to our legislators and the Governor she made the following points:

“Those that support [revenue caps] always confidently propose the idea saying that with adjustments for growth and inflation this should be plenty of funds to run the county unless a higher amount is approved by the voters.

There are 4 reasons this is a flawed formula:

1. No existing measure of inflation correctly captures the growth in the cost of the kinds of services county governments provide.
2. Population growth does not reflect the growth in the subpopulations county government serves.
3. County government does not and cannot control the demand for services.
4. Counties cannot adapt to state or federal mandates without flexibility to generate revenue.

Please also remember that the City of Houston after imposing revenue caps on themselves, was faced with an immediate reduction in their bond ratings by Standard and Poor and Moody's.”

Judge Horn showed that Denton County's (continued on page 2)

(Judge Horn, continued from page one) overall value has risen 321.5% in the last 10 years, but we have not increased our tax levy commensurately, even with the growth in cost of operations that the County cannot control (such as utilities [136%], fuel costs [123%], or un-funded mandates). The County's tax levy has risen 284.65% in that time. Some examples of increased costs incurred because of mandates are indigent attorney fees (234%), employee health insurance (317%), and juvenile probation/detention (495%).

Judge Horn has considerable experience with property appraisal and fears that some legislators may not understand the impact of their actions. She noted that appraisal caps help the homeowner who remains in the same dwelling for many years, but if a home is sold the cap does not apply and the new owner pays property taxes based on the current market value. If a dwelling is sold several times the most recent owner could pay much higher taxes than the owner of an identical home that has had only one owner. Judge Horn asked us to consider if the owners of two identical homes should have different tax rates simply because one home has changed hands a few times.

She argued that, with allowances for special needs, all property owners should pay taxes based on the current appraisal, whether it has gone up or down. She also argued that operating funds must be found somewhere. If property taxes are capped, other taxes will have to rise.

The County received \$4,603,377 in oil and gas revenue in 2006. Judge Horn pointed out that the school district likes oil and gas well revenue because it does not require any commensurate expenditure (gas wells do not have children to educate). However, revenue the County receives from oil and gas wells can easily be outweighed by costs of road repair necessitated by drilling.

Judge Horn was asked the inevitable question about library funding and

responded that the FY 2007 budget includes \$549,865 for 15 cities in the County. She understands Denton did not apply for funds and explained that the county Library Board made the decisions as to allocations of available funds, based on requests from the various libraries. The Commissioners followed the recommendations of the Library Board without comment. Judge Horn indicated that an increase in funding was not likely in the future, but could not say for sure. The issue of library censorship was not raised.

When asked, Judge Horn indicated that the most pressing issue facing the County in the upcoming year was road maintenance and construction.

Peg La Point, Program VP

FINANCE DRIVE IS COMING!

It's February and in Denton that means "LWV Finance Drive." The letters are being printed and will be mailed to 200 or more members and friends of the League this month. Included with the letters will be copies of "Your Elected Officials and also the new brochure "We Support." That new brochure lists the local League's positions on issues involving local government.

The funds that you so graciously share with us makes it possible to print the brochures mentioned above as well as printing Voters Guides to educate voters. This Finance Drive is our **only** fundraiser and thus it is very important to the life of the Denton LWV. Please respond to your letter with the generosity that we have come to expect from League members.

We also need the names of persons that you know who might support the League. Send names to lmcadams@verizon.net. We can also use help in addressing, stuffing and sealing envelopes. You can volunteer by calling or E-Mailing Linnie McAdams.

Linnie McAdams, Organization VP

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON IMMIGRATION STUDY NOW POSTED AT LWVUS WEB SITE

Information giving background on the immigration policy study adopted by the national League of Women Voters is now available on line. Study committee members have produced four papers to date:

- *Economic Aspects of Authorized and Unauthorized Immigration*
- *Overview: Federal Immigration Policy and Proposed Reforms*
- *Immigration and the Economy*
- *Effects of Global Interdependence on Migration.*

All of these papers (with others to come) and be accessed from www.lwv.org/ImmigrationStudy.

The National Board has recently decided to revamp the timetable for the Immigration Study, changing it from a three-year study to two years.

Sondra Ferstl, Immigration Study Chair

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PRESIDENT’S PODIUM

WOMEN’S LEGISLATIVE DAYS

Linnie McAdams and I attended this year and came away with more facts and figures than could be listed here.

Facts from the workshop on Improving Education are:

- 50,000 classrooms in Texas with uncertified teachers;
- Student population increases by 70,000 to 80,000 students each year;
- 45,000 to 50,000 students drop out each year;
- Every five years, we lose half of our teachers;
- Texas is 47th in SAT scores;

- Business lobby is supporting increased class size;
- Several bills supporting vouchers will be introduced this legislative session;
- We need a common sense approach to education; and
- We need to be radically reasonable and radically creative.

Facts from workshop on Women’s Health, Family Planning, Choice and Parental Involvement are:

- Pregnancy prevention care is cost effective;
- Dollars available for about 16% of the one plus million eligible for planning services;
- There is a need for emergency contraception education in pharmacy schools;
- Whether you are pro-life or pro-choice, we should all be pro-prevention;
- Trigger-ban legislation will be introduced this session making abortion automatically illegal if Roe v Wade is overturned.

Our annual finance letter will be in the mail soon. Included will be two brochures. Sondra Ferstl worked very hard on *Your Elected Officials* with a lot of help from Byron Witmer and Kevin Carr. Peg La Point worked on *We Support*, a capsule version of our positions as listed in the membership handbook. This is something we have needed for a long time.

We are all affected by our school system, so make plans to attend our February 22nd general meeting with Mia Price, President of the Denton Independent School District Board of Trustees. As always, there will be time for questions and answers.

Sue Smith

Buy paper that is Processed Chlorine Free (PCF) and contains post-consumer waste (PCW) recycled content. Such paper is readily available, environmentally friendly alternative to virgin, chlorine-bleached paper.

WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE DAYS AND LOBBY DAY

After attending workshops on Global Warming, Immigration, Kick-Starting Stem Cell Research in Texas, I joined the breakout meeting with the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) on Tuesday morning. There we were briefed on priority issues that LWV-TX will push during this 80th Legislative Session. Air Quality tops the list, and that was a major focus when I visited the office of Representatives Tan Parker and Myra Crownover. Representative Crownover visited with us during the LWV breakfast and asked for information on Judicial Reform which she is carrying this session. We gave her the League's advocacy paper. I also visited with Senator Jane Nelson's staff.

Linnie McAdams, Organization VP

Membership dues are now \$25 for an individual member for the remainder of the 2006-2007 League year (until August 31, 2007). Household memberships are \$25 for the first member at the same mailing address. Students may join for \$20. Send a check payable to LWV-Denton, to P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station, Denton, Texas 76204.

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