

Denton VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Denton, Texas
Established 1961



April, 2010

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

Sondra Ferstl, President
Byron Witmer, VOTER Editor

www.lwvdenton.org

CALENDAR

Thursday, April 8, 7 pm.
General Meeting. Capital Punishment in Texas. EESAT Building, UNT, third floor.

Saturday, April 17, 10:15 am – 12:30 pm. Annual Meeting and Luncheon. Central Fire Station, corner of Hickory and Bell. Bring a salad or dessert to share.

Friday, April 23 – Sunday, April 25.
State Convention of the League of Women Voters of Texas. San Marcos.

Tuesday, April 27, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm.
Candidates Forum. UNT Emeritus College. Candidates for the Denton City Council and the Denton ISD Board of Trustees will respond to questions from the enrollees in UNT's Emeritus College. LWV-Denton is organizing and will moderate the forum.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN TEXAS

The United States is the only developed nation that executes its citizens. The differences, state to state, in numbers of executions and the growing number of exonerations of prisoners on death row could lead to changes, and eventually abolishment, of the death penalty in the U.S.

Although 35 states have retained capital punishment, only a few jurisdictions in the Deep South and the Midwest have administered it with regularity. While the Southern region has most executions, Texas surpasses all other states by a large margin, with 446 since 1976. Texas accounts for more than 45% of the executions in the South and 37.5% of all executions in the nation. The rapid rise in Texas executions started in 1995 and continues to date, indicating a political agenda to be tough on crime.

The allegation that Texas executed an innocent man in 2004 could be the turning point for the death penalty. No one knows for sure how many innocent people have been executed, but since 1973, the number of people who have been exonerated is 138 in 26 states. Ten of those have been in Texas.

The execution of those with mental illness is prohibited by international law and violates the U.S. Constitution, but the determination of sanity is left up to each state. The Texas Legislature has not enacted statutory provisions governing the standards and procedures to be followed in these cases. Some believe that Texas is still executing people who may be mentally retarded.

A report from the Death Penalty Information Center states, "The death penalty in the U.S. is an enormously expensive and wasteful program with no clear benefits for achieving a safer society. All of the studies on the cost of capital punishment conclude it is much more expensive than a system with life sentences as the maximum penalty." Legal expenses related to court costs of both the trial and appeals process makes life in prison less expensive. As many states face painful budget cutbacks, it is an appropriate time to consider whether maintaining the death penalty system is being smart on crime.

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PRESIDENT'S PODIUM



Take a look at the month of April!

We have one general meeting remaining in our League calendar for 2009-2010!

Peg La Point, our Program Vice President, has provided background information for our **April 8, 7 pm meeting on Capital Punishment in Texas**. Note that there will be a change of room in the EESAT Building; there is an elevator near the stairwell that will take you to the third floor. This was done so we will be able to watch the DVD mentioned by Peg in the background material.

We plan that the LWV-Denton **Voters Guide to the candidates for City Council and Denton Independent School District positions in the May 8, 2010 election** will be ready for distribution by the time of our April 8 meeting. We're in the process of receiving replies from candidates. Besides copies for members and long-time financial supporters of LWV-Denton, we plan to place small bundles of copies at the Elections Administration Office, the City Manager's Office, the Denton ISD Administration Building, the Denton Chamber of Commerce, the branches of the Denton Public Library and the main library at UNT and TWU.

In just a few weeks it will be time for **Annual Meeting!** Remember that this year we are meeting at the Central Fire Station on Saturday, April 17, 10:15 a.m. Be sure to bring your Annual Meeting Workbook that was sent to you last month. Your contribution of a salad or dessert for the luncheon following the business meeting will be most welcome. The board will provide the plates, "silver"ware, reusable glasses and cups, and beverages.

Maggie Dodd has been organizing our League assistance in **registering new citizens to vote** after they take the oath of citizenship at the new U.S. Citizenship and Naturalization Center in Las Colinas. In March, Maggie and Janet Peavler traveled to the Center to witness 78 persons from 32 countries become citizens of the United States. Maggie and Janet assisted with voter

registration for those who stopped at the League table in the back of the Ceremony Room. If you have time during the work day to help Maggie register voters, let her know (MaggieDoddDenton@verizon.net). The Denton League has agreed to provide staffing for voter registration there once a month.

The weekend after Annual Meeting Sue Smith, Linnie McAdams, and I will drive to **State Convention** in San Marcos. We are looking forward to three days of League activities: workshops, plenary sessions, award dinners and auctions. League conventions are great opportunities to see old friends and make new ones. I expect to return energized and looking forward to the year ahead.

The last Tuesday of April the Denton League is sponsoring a **Candidates Forum** as one of the class offerings of **UNT Emeritus College**. This is not a public forum in the usual sense of the word; in fact, the class has reached the capacity limits of the room. Linnie McAdams will be the moderator; I will be the timekeeper and organizer of the event; and Barbara Huggins will help collect questions for the May 8 City Council and School Board candidates from the attendees. I'm anxious to see if this variation of the usual League forum will be a new way of educating the public and helping them cast an informed vote. Stay tuned!

by Sondra Ferstl

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN TEXAS, Continued

LWVUS supports the abolition of the death penalty. LWV-Texas studied capital punishment in 2001-2, and reached a limited consensus in which we called for a ban on the execution of the mentally retarded, mentally ill, and juveniles under age 18 when the crime was committed. Our position also calls for the option of life imprisonment without parole, and for a moratorium on all executions in Texas while an official study of the capital punishment system in Texas is conducted.

Has the time come for the LWV-Texas to bring our position in line with the LWVUS position? If a bill to abolish the death penalty were to be introduced in the Texas Legislature, we could not support it under our current position.

At our meeting on April 8, we will view the documentary "At the Death House Door", which advocates for the abolition of the death penalty. The film should encourage a new conversation among our members.

Excerpted from "Capital Punishment" by Susybelle Gosslee, Capital Punishment Issue Chair, in the March issue of the LWV-Texas Voter.

by Peg La Point

RESULTS OF OUR VOTING PROCEDURES DISCUSSION

So many members participated in our Voting Procedures consensus meeting, you will be interested in the outcome. The state study committee has collated recommendations from Leagues across the state and compiled them into a proposed new position for the Texas League. The following proposal has been approved by the state board and will be voted on by our delegates to the state convention next month.

The League of Women Voters of Texas supports election laws that facilitate citizen participation and voter convenience, as well as voting procedures that may increase voter participation. Our support includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Unlimited access to vote-by-mail with no restrictions
- A permanent vote-by-mail list on which any voter may request to be placed
- The establishment of guidelines which would allow jurisdictions to conduct all vote-by-mail elections
- Election day registration
- Election day centralized voting, with applicable safeguards
- Election Poll-site Internet voting for military/overseas voters.

by Peg La Point

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

Membership in the League of Women Voters of Denton is \$50 for an individual.

Household memberships are \$50 for the first person and \$25 for each additional person residing at the same mailing address.

Memberships for full-time students are \$20. To join us, please send a check payable to LWV-Denton to the Treasurer, Sue Smith, at P.O. Box 424945 TWU Station, Denton, TX 76204.

DENTON DRUG DISPOSAL DAY

Do not flush your medications!

Flushing unwanted or expired medications down the toilet has created a significant water pollution issues. Water treatment plants cannot always remove pharmaceuticals from wastewater. They are released into the environment, negatively impacting natural systems.

Denton County residents are being given the important opportunity to properly dispose of medications, without cost.

When: Saturday, April 24 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Where: Professional Building at 3535 S. I-35E, Denton, 76210. This building is located on the Denton Regional Hospital campus.

Who: Denton County residents

Please leave ALL items in their original containers and black out names or other personal information.

ACCEPTED ITEMS:

- Prescription Medications (pills, liquids, creams, patches)
- Non-prescription medications (pills, liquid, creams, patches)
- Medication for pets
- Medication samples
- Vitamin and herbal supplements
- Inhalers

DO NOT BRING: Sharps, syringes, oxygen tanks, pen needles, or lancets.

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