

*December 2009/January 2010*

*Voice Your Opinion on League Policy Positions*

## **All Invited to Program Planning Meeting in January**

*by Scott Britton*

If the opportunity to weigh in on the League's national and local advocacy platform for the next two years isn't enough to bring you out to the January 28 program planning meeting, then we hope the prospect of piping-hot soup and fresh bread on a cold winter's evening will be.

Join us on Thursday evening, January 28 at 6:00 at Wesley Glen (5155 N. High Street, Columbus 43214) for a look at "Where We Stand" with respect to League positions. Metro board members will provide their favorite homemade soups, along with bread, cheese, and beverages - a light supper furnished at no cost to attendees. RSVP to **Amy Pulles** at the Metro office, 614-837-1089 or [vote@lwvcols.org](mailto:vote@lwvcols.org), so that we know how many to expect.

Every two years, in the run-up to National Convention (June 11-15 in Atlanta) and Metro's annual business meeting (tentatively scheduled for June 7), the League takes stock of its current advocacy program. Our grassroots membership has a chance to change existing positions or propose new areas for study. If you've ever wondered, "Why doesn't the League *do something* about that?" then this meeting is for you!

Program planning is a great way for new and veteran members alike to learn more about League positions, and to add their voice in helping determine the direction of the League of Women Voters. Bring a friend who cares about health care reform, climate change, or any number of issues near and dear to the League. The meeting will be informal, educational, and entertaining. The grassroots structure of the League of Women Voters is like no other organization. Lend your voice to the conversation.

And mark your calendar now for March 18, when the public transit study committee will host a general meeting on the topic to help members prepare to reach consensus.

## **Visit [www.LWVCols.org](http://www.LWVCols.org) for News, Events, and More**

### **Learn More about the History of the Women's Vote**

As the League prepares to celebrate its 90th anniversary, an informative new brochure is available covering the woman's suffrage movement, courtesy of the League of Women Voters of Cleveland Educational Fund. Visit the history section (under "About Us") to download *A History of the Women's Vote* and get a chronology of events, a look at female elected officials, and a quiz on significant political "firsts."

### **Check Out our Action History**

Your Metro Columbus League has been in regular contact with members of Ohio's Congressional delegation and central Ohio legislators on a number of important public policy issues. Go to the "Action History" section (under "Taking Action") to see the list of letters and e-mails sent to elected officials on health care reform, the state budget, climate change, and more.

### **Become a Fan of the League on Facebook**

Join us on Facebook to see photos of the League's fall events and to connect with other members and fans. Simply click the Facebook logo on the website homepage.

[www.lwvcols.org](http://www.lwvcols.org)

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Janyce C. Katz, Esq.

The winter holidays, filed with bright lights to counter the winter's darkest days, are becoming memories.

One wonderful memory that will burn bright in my mind will be the Metro League's holiday party. **Lucy Buzzee** chaired the wonderful event and I want to thank her and her committee, plus all the Board members who brought food for all they did to make the event a success. I must also mention **Brent Taggart**, who once again used his sense of humor and charming personality to make the live auction not only profitable but lots of fun.

I do keep thinking about what Dr. Earl F. Epstein, Esq., environmental and natural resources professor, yelled out at the very interesting meeting on the environment, which was organized by **Tiffany Dixon**.

If you missed the meeting, you missed Dr. Epstein railing against the lack of education in the area of sciences that makes people ignorant. His intensity made people jump, but his words made people think. His concern was that without basic scientific knowledge, how could an individual judge which scientific statement was correct - i.e. is there or is there not global warming, should we have the cap trade and how would that work or is that a ploy to shift industry to a country with cheaper labor etc.

I thought, Earl's right, but his rant should not have been only about the sciences, it should have been broader.

How many of us understand a derivative or the math behind that and other such creative financial tools? How many of us have the background to understand what is happening in a foreign country? Can we intelligently understand a story or are we swayed by pictures of pathetic women and children injured by some other force? Do we understand how a foreign country works, who is the real leader - the politician out front or the religious leader? Can the car salesman sell us a car that doesn't work because we don't understand how it should?



We have become a rather uncivil country, at least on cable television, where commentators shout their opinions at each other and who knows if the facts they use in their arguments are correct. We are a country where a considerable amount of money can purchase publicity to make a war hero not such a hero or a lie sound like truth.

Just this election year in Ohio, we had an interesting situation where specific properties and tax rates for one industry not operating before in the State became part of the Constitution. For a mere \$50 million or thereabout, the election changed the nature of the Constitution from something with broad principles in which the General Assembly creates laws to operate to something authorizing specific industries at specific locations. What's next? One bagel shop in Ohio authorized to make bagels, located at certain sites, and paying only 15 percent tax with the rest of the bagel shops forbidden or authorized only under certain conditions with high taxes?

Whether or not you are a fan of gambling, you have to admit that it is very difficult to fight against a multimillion dollar campaign. The Ohio League of Women Voters clearly said this measure is not good for the Constitution. They had the same concern about Issue 2, which created a regulatory board in the Constitution instead of giving the General Assembly the authority to create such a board.

This brings me back to Epstein's rant about education. If people were really knowledgeable about the role of a constitution and what our Constitution says, would they have voted for a business at a specific address? I think not. Although, pounding the airways with the kind of ads \$50 million can purchase and twisting a problem of lack of jobs into something that a particular business written into the Constitution could end could outweigh education of people.

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The Columbus Voter (Vol 41, Issue #4) is published ten times a year by the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus for \$5.00 annually. President: Janyce C. Katz, Editor: Cheryl Markino. Deadline for copy and photos is the 13th day of the month for the following month's issue. E-mail items to [cherylmarkino@att.net](mailto:cherylmarkino@att.net).

*LWVMC Event is Successful Fundraiser*

## **Holiday Party Features Rafflemania, Live Auction**

*by Lucy Buzzee*

LWVMC's annual fundraising Holiday Party held on Sunday, December 6, had a new twist to it. It was billed as "Rafflemania" and had numerous items that were raffled for a \$1 ticket or a \$10 ticket. Each attendee received 10 (\$1) tickets to put towards any raffle item. In addition, the highly acclaimed live auction took place with seven packages ranging from a B&B in Santa Fe to Opera Columbus tickets with a gift card for dinner at a Cameron Mitchell Restaurant to Blue Jackets tickets and dinner at the Mongolian Grill.

The effort raised \$3000 and provided all who attended and participated a grand time.

The party was held at the beautiful Miranova home of **Nancy and Bob Brown**.

The menu included Mimosas and a variety of delicious brunch items provided by the LWVMC Board of Trustees.

**Brent Taggart** served as auctioneer extraordinaire complete with his humorous PowerPoint presentation, which is always topical!

The committee (**Mary Kaul, Mary Cannon, Janyce Patton**) was responsible for making phone calls and soliciting items for the raffles, as well as planning the party. Thank you to the committee as well as to all who contributed to the success of the event: **Nancy and Bob Brown, Brent Taggart, Mary Cannon, Mary Kaul, Jan Patton** and all of the members of the **Board of Trustees**. Also, we would like to thank **Joy Rose**, who contributed the champagne for

the Mimosas. Thank you to the following League members who contributed items for the raffles and auction:

**Rose Luttinger, Pat Larson, Mary Cannon and David Morgan, David and Lucy Buzzee, Nancy and Bob Brown, Suzanne and Rich Fahey.**



We also want to thank all of the businesses that donated items or services to the League. Please remember these fine establishments who have supported LWVMC:

**BalletMet**  
**Bath and Body Works**  
**Betty Family of Restaurants**  
(Tip Top, Betty's, Dirty Frank's, Surly Girl)  
**Cachet Hair Styling**  
**Cherry Valley Lodge and Water Park**  
**Columbus Museum of Art**  
**Columbus Symphony Orchestra**  
**COTA (monthly pass)**  
**David Morgan (sculpture)**  
**Due Amici Restaurant**  
**Figlio Restaurant**  
**Glenmoor Country Club and Resort**  
**Jazz Arts**  
**Ohio Historical Society**  
(sets of tickets for exhibits)  
**OSU Department of Theatre**  
**Otterbein Theatre**  
**Polaris Grill**  
**Westerville Symphony**

## **President's Message** continued

We have a new year starting and lots to do. We need to advocate, but we need to convince people about why we need certain issues. We need to find out about candidates and issues, but we need to teach people why they should care.

Earl is correct. He just was too narrow in his thoughts, limiting his concern about our lack of knowledge and education only to science.

On a final note, one of our wonderful members – who hasn't been told yet, will receive an award at the FOCO annual ceremony honoring *Roe v. Wade*. Watch your e-mail and mail for details about this January 27 event. I would love to have several tables of League members there to honor this very special person and commemorate the Supreme Court decision that gave women the chance to make their own decisions based on their own health and own needs about whether to carry a pregnancy to term.

## Alternative Energy Panel Debates Science, Politics at League Forum

From wind turbines on Lake Erie to smarter collaboration between OSU and Battelle, ideas for solving the energy and climate change crisis abounded at the November 17 meeting on green energy policy.

Sponsored by the Metro League, the public forum at the Jewish Community Center featured a lively discussion about alternative energy, the urgency for curbing greenhouse gases, and the need to increase scientific literacy among Americans. The panel included representatives from academia, state and federal government, and environmental advocacy organizations. They were: Earl Epstein, professor, environmental and natural resources, The Ohio State University; Jennifer Miller, Sierra Club, Ohio Chapter; Jim McGregor, executive director, Ohio League of Conservation Voters; Cheryl Roberto, commissioner, Public Utilities Commission of Ohio; Ed Roberts, community liaison, US Senator Sherrod Brown; and Metro Columbus Member **Al Rosenfield**, energy specialist, League of Women Voters of Ohio.

Policy considerations ran the gamut from the international climate conference in Copenhagen, to the Kerry-Boxer bill under consideration by the US Senate, the Waxman-Markey bill that passed the US House this summer, and SB 221 passed by the Ohio legislature during the 127th General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Ted Strickland.

According to Roberts, the climate bill will not be considered until after the Senate has dispensed with health care reform and banking regulations, pushing any hope for a law into early next year, long after the Copenhagen summit.

A major point of controversy was the declining value of science in American education, science illiteracy among the American public, and how policy decisions tend to be based on politics or building consensus rather than hard science.

**Tiffany Dixon** chaired the event and Metro League President **Janyce Katz** moderated the discussion.

## More about COTA

*Following is Part 2 of an article about COTA from the Public Transit Study Committee. Part 1 appeared in the November issue of the VOTER.*

COTA has announced that bus fares will increase on January 1, 2010. For instance, a one-way local trip will go from \$1.50 to \$1.75, a 17 percent increase. CEO Bill Lhota called the increase a “move to catch up with inflation and balance the burden between riders and residents in the region, who subsidize the transit system through a sales tax levy that went into effect last year.” (*Columbus Business First*, November 17, 2009)

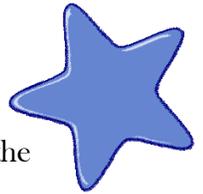
Lhota has told the COTA Board of Directors he would like to stay until the end of 2010—six months past his most recent retirement target. He wants to stay to see through the completion of the \$22 million paratransit facility for buses that transport disabled riders. (*Columbus Business First*, November 30, 2009)

All COTA buses are equipped with bike racks. Bike lockers are available at some Park and Ride lots.

In 1997, The Ohio State University student body voted to pay \$9 per quarter for unlimited use of COTA buses. The GO BUS! program has made expanded service possible in that area. The current student bus pass program is now based on an agreement between OSU and COTA that runs until June 30, 2014, when it will be up for renewal. COTA has developed similar partnerships with Columbus College of Art and Design and Columbus City Schools. In the latter agreement, Columbus City Schools paid \$30 per student who received a pass for unlimited use of the COTA buses last year. A new contract is being negotiated for this school year.

Senior citizens who have a COTA Senior ID card save 50 percent on bus fares. The federal government partially reimburses COTA for this.

In addition, various types of mobility services are offered to those with disabilities. COTA contracts out these services.



- Project Mainstream is a door-to-door service, operated by First Transit, for individuals who are unable to use COTA's regular fixed route service. Beginning January 1, 2010, the charge for ADA mainstream service will be \$3 per trip or \$89 for a monthly pass.
- Urban Express operates a sedan service where a maximum of ten vouchers may be purchased per person per month, based on availability, for \$4 each.
- Will Call is a service provided to individuals receiving long-term, ongoing medical treatments such as dialysis, chemotherapy, or physical therapy. The cost is \$3.50 per trip. Urban Express operates Will Call, providing about 350 trips per month.
- COTA has partnered with Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities to implement a pilot program to transport approximately 140 clients to designated places of work.

One program has been very successful on I-70 East. Express buses traveling there can now drive on the shoulder when traffic slows to less than 35 miles per hour. COTA hopes to expand the program at some point to I-70 West and to I-71. Recently, though, there has been less congestion, so this project has been set as a lower priority. Also, COTA will need ODOT's permission to expand this program.

COTA hopes to have a more sophisticated automatic vehicle location system within the next 18 months. Then it should be possible to make the specific location of buses available to customers, to analyze route structure for efficiencies, and to play back events as they occurred in order to address a particular incident, among other things. COTA is also expecting a new fleet maintenance system that will help detect vehicle problems before they become serious.

Regarding energy and the environment, there are six hybrid buses on order. They are diesel/electric vehicles. The electricity is recharged when braking. COTA was using soy-based diesel, but it became too expensive. COTA is not using alternative fuel at this time, but is always looking for opportunities.

Several discounted pass programs are offered where employers buy monthly passes at full price and sell them to their employees at a discount. Also, IRS Regulation 132 offers substantial dollar savings to transit riders on the cost of their daily commute. Employers serve as the gatekeeper, deducting the cost of a COTA pass each month from the employee's paycheck, before taxes. The City of Columbus, Franklin County and the State of Ohio offer this benefit.



*Columbus Monthly* had a very informative article in the September 2009 issue titled "COTA's Moment." The article tells how the organization has improved under Bill Lhota's stewardship and possibilities for the future.

You can find an archive of all League study committee reports at [www.lwvcols.org](http://www.lwvcols.org). Under "The League," choose "Publications and Studies" and look for the link.

## Lawsuit Settlement to Help Ohioans Register to Vote

Low-income Ohio citizens will be ensured access to voter registration at Ohio public assistance offices as a result of a settlement agreement submitted to Federal District Court Judge Patricia A. Gaughan in late November.

The settlement successfully resolves a three-year-old lawsuit filed against the Ohio Secretary of State and director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services in September 2006 by two Northeast Ohio residents and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) charging widespread violations of the federal National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). Section 7 of the NVRA requires public assistance agencies to provide voter registration opportunities to their clients.

"As a result of the steps the Secretary of State and ODJFS Director will take, we expect hundreds of thousands of voting-eligible low-income Ohioans to be registered to vote," said the co-lead counsel for the plaintiffs. "We applaud the integration of voter registration into agency processes as well as the planned monitoring of the county public assistance offices."

## Mark Your Calendar...

- January 4**    **LWVMC Board of Trustees**, 6:30 - 9:00 pm, Jewish Community Center, 1125 College Avenue, Columbus 43209
- January 12**    **Lobby Lunch**, 11:30 am - 1:00 pm, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Third Floor, 96 S. Grant Avenue, Columbus 43215. Bring your lunch and join the conversation.
- January 13**    **LWVMC Public Transit Study Committee Meeting**, 7:00 pm, Clintonville Cornerstone Deli, 3296 N. High Street, Columbus 43202
- January 26**    **Lobby Lunch**, 11:30 am - 1:00 pm, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Third Floor, 96 S. Grant Avenue, Columbus 43215. Bring your lunch and join the conversation.
- January 28**    **LWVMC General Meeting: Where We Stand**, 6:00 - 8:30 pm, Wesley Glen, Ravine Room, 5155 N. High Street, Columbus 43214. Includes light supper. RSVP to the League Office for this program planning meeting.
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## Forum Aims to Change Election of Ohio Judges

Conveners of a two-day state conference in Columbus said they will work collaboratively to build a coalition to support amending the Ohio Constitution to eliminate judicial elections.

*A Forum on Judicial Selection: A Time for Action* was held November 19-20. The conveners of the event were Ohio Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer, the Ohio State Bar Association (OSBA), and the League of Women Voters of Ohio Education Fund. The forum was made possible by a grant from the Joyce Foundation.

Based on the input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, experts, and interested parties that change is needed, the conveners concluded there is support for some form of an appointive-retention system. They proposed replacing the current system of statewide elections of Supreme Court Justices with a new system where justices are appointed and then stand for a retention election.

“Early next year we will propose a specific plan that we will take back to the partner organizations for formal consideration,” Moyer said. The conveners said that while the specifics of the plan will take time to develop, based on what they heard at the forum any plan will have the following characteristics:

- The appointment process will be open and transparent.
- Any nominating commission will be representative of the diversity of Ohio’s population and will include multiple appointing authorities.

- Some form of a public education component will be included.
- Retention elections will ensure that voters still have a voice.

“These two days were an important first step toward addressing the public’s concern about the influence of campaign contributions on judicial decision making,” said OSBA President Barbara J. Howard.

“As discussed, the elements of an appointive-elective system will go a long way toward making the process more transparent and open,” said **Meg Flack**, president of the League of Women Voters of Ohio Education Fund.

“What we learned during the two days is that we can do better in Ohio,” Moyer added.

Gov. Ted Strickland, who addressed conference attendees, thanked participants for their pursuit of a strong and fair judicial system. “Because as with all hard problems facing our state, we must not throw up our hands and concede defeat, but rather – as encouraged by this forum – continue the conversation, study the options, and relentlessly pursue the betterment of our Ohio community,” he said.



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