

March 2010

Public Transit General Meeting Set for March 18

by Scott Britton

Is central Ohio ready to go “Beyond the Bus?” Join us March 18 at University Plaza Hotel, Ballroom V-VI (3110 Olentangy River Road, Columbus 43202) to hear different visions for the future of public transit in the metro area.

Gulsah Akar, a visiting assistant professor in city and regional planning at OSU’s Knowlton School of Architecture, will moderate a discussion of transit prospects among a panel that will include:

- Chester Jourdan, executive director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC);
- Bill Lhota, president and chief executive officer of the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA); and
- Brent C. Simonds, advocacy coordinator, Mid-Ohio Board for an Independent Living Environment, Inc. (MOBILE).

Registration for *Beyond the Bus? Public Transit in Central Ohio* begins at 5:30 PM, with a cash bar available, and dinner will be served at 6:15 at a charge of \$25. Payment need not be made in advance, but you must RSVP by March 15 if you want a dinner reserved for you, indicating regular or vegetarian. To RSVP, contact **Amy Pulles** at the League office, 614-837-1089 or vote@lwvcols.org,

The panel discussion begins at 7:15 and is free and open to the public.

The general meeting – open to members as well as anyone who wants to learn more about transit options – is hosted by the League’s public transit study committee, chaired by **Ellen Haider** and **Nancy Brown**. The committee, which includes two members of the Delaware County League, has been working since last summer preparing background materials, pros and cons, and consensus questions that will help the Metro League reach consensus on a new public transit position later this spring.

Background materials will be available at the meeting and are available now at www.lwvcols.org (click on “events” and then scroll to the March 18 meeting). Read more inside this issue of the *Voter* about public transit in Central Ohio.

Visit the MC Website for a History Lesson

As the League celebrates nine decades of making democracy work, why not find out about the history of the organization by visiting www.lwvcols.org.

www.lwvcols.org

Did you know the Franklin County League, later to become the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus, was founded in 1919, seven months before the Ohio League and ten months before the US League. The website (under the blue tab, click on “about the league,” and then “history”) provides information about the League’s rich history as well as links to other online resources.

For 90 years, the League of Women Voters has influenced public policy through education and advocacy. By communicating directly with policy makers, the League takes action on a range of civic issues at every level of government. All action is based on League positions, which are posted on the website (under the green tab).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Janyce C. Katz, Esq.

Too much snow fell this February!

I thought about our March 18 program "Beyond the Bus" one snowy morning as I tried to drive my car through the heavy whiteness.

I wished I could zoom through the thick snow on a transportation system that offered speed, ease of access and affordability. My fantasy system had the convenience and ease of use of my car except it would allow me to read a book or text safely while the system took me where I needed to go in a timely manner.

As the snow fell faster and heavier, I thought about other trips such a system could make easier. For example, what if I could travel from my house to Cincinnati in bad weather to check on the welfare of my aging father without worrying about icy roads, just reading all the way from my house to his and back. How much more relaxing that would be!

I thought about that fantasy system when the snow was so bad that roads were labeled Level 2 and my fear of driving in that stuff encouraged me to take the bus to and from work. That day, I waited about ten minutes at rush hour for a bus to take me from work to a stop near my home, walked a mere 15 minutes through snow from the stop after about twenty minutes of reading time on a very warm bus. I should add that it takes me ten minutes to drive from my house to where I park downtown.

What will be beyond the bus and our current transportation system? Will it be my fantasy system? Will it be automatic cars? Will it be privatized expressways or trains? Come March 18th and find out. There is more on our upcoming and very exciting program including how to register for it in this issue of the *Voter*.

Meantime, as we start the real push for our fundraiser, Democracy in Action, which will be held on May 13 and will honor **Terry and David McCoy**, I want to alert you to letters that are coming in from the State League. The let-



ters will be followed by phone calls to those who do not respond.

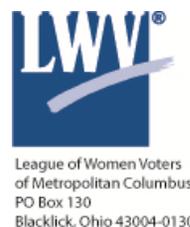
Why donate to the LWVO Phonathon, especially when LWVMC needs money so badly? The first reason that I can think of is, as LWVO President **Meg Flack** said in her recent letter, our League will receive 15 percent of all Phonathon donations received by May 1. This rebate would help our fundraising. At the same time, you would be helping the State accomplish its many goals.

Metro, State and National all need money to operate, do programming, reach out to members and potential members and to pay staff. All three need your help. Further, the general public doesn't differentiate among the three levels of League, so that when one League produces a successful program, we all receive benefit from that.

This last year LWVO was widely recognized in news articles that 1) identified League as a major force in keeping the issue of redistricting reform alive in the legislature and 2) acknowledged the role that the League's lawsuit had in forcing vital election administration reforms. Plus, LWVO provided us with information on statewide issues and candidates for our *Voter Information Bulletin*.

Finances are tight for many of us these days. But, if you could help LWV Ohio by supporting the Phonathon and you could help Metro and Ed Fund by supporting DiA as much as you can, you will be helping LWV to continue its programming and to continue working to improve our democratic system.

Oh yes, if you want to be more involved in our committees as well as support League financially, please let **Amy Pulles**, our wonderful staff person, or me know so we can make certain you are placed on the committee you want. By the way, being active should be much easier, now that the snow is FINALLY melting!



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Meeting Recap

by Scott Britton

More than 30 members gathered January 28 for program planning – a record turnout inspired by the lure of hot homemade soup on a cold winter night.

Program planning – the annual review of League positions in the run-up to a state or national convention or a local annual meeting – demonstrates the grassroots power of League, giving members a say in advocacy. Members may choose to retain, drop, or update existing positions, and can recommend a new area for study.

Members participated in a “quiz bowl” of questions about national and local League positions. Discussion centered on the level of specificity contained in some positions, and a concern about food safety prompted members to propose an update of the League’s position on agriculture policy.

At its February 1 board meeting, trustees approved the following recommendation for submission to the national League:

Agriculture Policy found under the Natural Resources Position has not been updated since 1988. Since that time food production has been greatly influenced by the manipulation of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics, mono-cultures, and genetically modified products. How safe are food supplies and who determines the safety level? How has our environment been contaminated by the process of food production? How does food and livestock production on today’s farms impact the health of the farm worker and the general population? Which arm of the federal government should be responsible for ensuring food safety, both domestic and imported, at a feasible cost?

Do federal policies guarantee adequate and healthy food supply for all residents of the US?

Thanks to **Jean Byrd** and **Eleanor Pearlman** for helping to craft the discussion into a recommendation, and to Jean, **Ann Henkener**,

and **Dave Patton** for their facilitation at the program planning meeting.

Information about local program planning, which focused on a study of land use and planning, will appear in a future issue closer to the annual meeting.

League Takes Action on Supreme Court Ruling

In response to the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*, League of Women Voters national President Mary G. Wilson issued a public statement, sent a letter to the US Senate urging an update of campaign finance laws, and testified before the Committee on House Administration.

She outlined the implications of the Court’s decision, noting the unprecedented ruling upends campaign finance law that has been in place for a century and pointed to a new nationwide ABC News-Washington Post poll showing that the League is not alone in this fight: 80 percent of Americans of both parties oppose the Court’s decision.

“Congress and the President enacted campaign finance laws over a series of decades for a reason – to protect our democracy from the perverse influence of big money in our elections,” Wilson said. “In making this decision, the Court has ignored the best interests of the American public and our representative form of government. We now need Congress to respond immediately and pass legislation that governs corporate and union spending. Waiting until after the 2010 elections is simply not a viable option.”

For more information and to read Wilson’s letter, go to www.lwvcols.org.

Unit Date Change

The LWVMC Morning Unit will meet on Thursday, May 20. The meeting had been previously scheduled for May 13.

It will be held at the same time, 9:30-11:00, and place, Wesley Glen (5155 N. High Street, Columbus 43214).

A History of Attempts to go Beyond the Bus

COTA has proposed adding other forms of transit to complement its bus service over a period of years.

- In 1984, they suggested adding light rail, but were discouraged by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce.
- In 1995, COTA considered a levy to expand bus service and add a \$250 million light rail system on the North Side. City leaders balked and COTA killed the rail plan. Voters nixed a bus only sales tax.
- In 1999, COTA asked voters to pass a light-rail levy, but it was rejected.
- In 2002, COTA's North Corridor rail project was one of eight nationwide that was recommended by the Federal Transit Administration. The FTA turned around and dropped the proposal in 2004, because central Ohio voters did not pass a rail levy.
- Mayor Coleman first proposed a streetcar line from the Brewery District to the University District in March 2006. At about the same time, COTA tried to revive the North Corridor project. ODOT pledged to pay a fourth of the \$640 million cost estimate. But in June 2006 Bill Lhota told the COTA Board that its plans for mass transit didn't qualify for federal funding, and COTA shut down their rail activities.
- In July 2008, the city set aside the streetcar line proposal from 2006, because they didn't know how to pay for the project with a sagging city budget.
- In December 2008, Mayor Coleman met with President-elect Obama in Chicago and asked for \$200 million for light rail for the North Corridor in an economic stimulus grant along with requests for money for several other projects. But by then ODOT's cupboard was bare. Chester Jourdan and others on Strickland's transportation task force said that it is time for innovative fi-



nancing in Ohio, such as enlisting corporate money to pay for light rail. Federal funding for light rail was not approved, although other stimulus money went to COTA, mainly to pay for a new facility for the maintenance of paratransit vehicles.

Source: Columbus Dispatch, January 10, 2009

Tax and Finance Update

As the Metro Columbus League studies mass transit and prepares to reach consensus, the state League has released its update of the position on Ohio tax and finance. Members are asked to use the material to educate themselves in advance of a fall consensus meeting.

The background materials and consensus questions can be found at www.lwvcols.org (click on the blue banner entitled "the league" and then select "publications and studies" from the dropdown menu). Contact LWVMC League Administrator **Amy Pulles** at 614-837-1089 if you prefer that a paper copy be mailed to you.

Make Plans to Attend Statehouse Day

Join League members from across the state on April 14 right here in Columbus at the Riffe Center (across from the Statehouse) for the perfect opportunity to learn about the most pressing issues being considered by the legislature when the League of Women Voters of Ohio hosts Statehouse Day 2010.

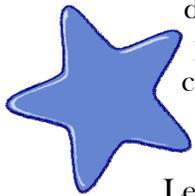
Gov. Ted Strickland has been asked to keynote the event, and workshops will feature policy experts on education finance, health care reform, open records, and more.

Registration is \$35, which covers a continental breakfast, lunch, materials, and a birthday cake reception with legislators celebrating the League's 90th anniversary.

See the latest issue of the Ohio VOTER for details about registering. A link to the registration form can also be found at www.lwvcols.org under the Statehouse Day event entry.

Member News

Mary Cannon has been selected as Project Coordinator/Master Trainer for LeaderSpark, run by fellow League member **Karen Dawson**. Mary will provide support for the “Leadership for Change in Targeted Neighborhood” programs. LeaderSpark (leaderspark.org)



develops young leaders by providing a practical leadership skills curriculum, coaching, and training support through partnerships with organizations.

Formerly known as Leader Institute, LeaderSpark has had a long relationship with the League.

Mary continues to work at the Ohio Historical Society as the lead volunteer coordinator, where she oversees 1,000 volunteers throughout the statewide organization.

Mary holds a Master of Nonprofit Management from Regis University in Denver and an undergraduate degree in anthropology from OSU. She previously worked for the League of Women Voters of Ohio and has served on the Metro Columbus League board.

Donna Marie Lossing Jones has been selected by the League of Women Voters of the United States as a Fellow of the newly endowed Ruth S. Shur Leadership Institute.

The Institute will develop and sustain a “national coaching team” that will support and strengthen emerging League leadership, membership recruitment, and League visibility and best practices.

Lossing Jones is a former president of the League of Women Voters of Marion and former member of the state League board. She is currently an education consultant and trainer; she and her husband recently moved to Columbus.

She is among a dozen Fellows selected by an invitation/application process. Shur Fellows

will receive intensive face-to-face training through the Institute, which will be led annually by key League leaders and staff. The training will launch a term of at least two years of service during which each Fellow will work with two state Leagues to strengthen



emerging leadership; coach on League basics and best practices in raising visibility and membership recruitment; and support state-level coaching teams, who in turn will help local Leagues institute successful visibility, leadership development, and membership growth practices.

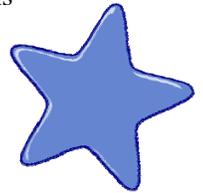
The Institute was made possible by an extraordinary gift from League member Walter Shur, in honor of his late wife Ruth S. Shur, a longtime League member and leader in New York and North Carolina.

Longtime League member **Phyllis Shwartz** received a Lifetime Achievement award for supporting reproductive choice at a January 27 dinner commemorating the 37th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*.

The award was presented by Freedom of Choice Ohio (FOCO) and the National Council of Jewish Women, Columbus Section. The League of Women Voters is a member of FOCO, and League members from Metro Columbus and Delaware County filled more than two tables to celebrate Shwartz’s achievement.

Shwartz said that her activism was inspired by her Lithuanian grandmother. She was joined by her daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughters, and she acknowledged the support of her late husband, Myron.

The event at OSU’s Fawcett Center drew more than 200 guests to hear author and activist Cristina Page. Page discussed the need to find common ground with those who oppose reproductive choice, particularly in the area of pregnancy prevention.



Volunteer Needed

LWVMC is looking for a volunteer to serve as editor of the *Voter* starting after the Annual Meeting in June.

Basic duties include securing news items and photos from Board members, proofreading, and layout. The newsletter is issued ten times annually.

For questions or more information, contact Cheryl Markino at cherylmarkino@att.net or 614-805-7697 (cell).

Mark Your Calendar...

- March 9** **LWVO 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.
- March 18** **LWVMC General Meeting: Beyond the Bus? Public Transit in Central Ohio**, University Plaza Hotel, Ballroom V-VI (3110 Olentangy River Road, Columbus 43202), Reception and cash bar 5:30, optional dinner at 6:15(\$25 payment at the door, must RSVP in advance.) Panel discussion begins at 7:15 is free and open to the public.
- March 23** **LWVO Lobby Lunch**
- April 5** **LWVMC Board of Trustees**
- April 14** **LWVO Statehouse Day/State Council**, Vern Riffe Center for Government and the Arts, 77 S. High Street, 31st Floor, Columbus 43215, 9:45 am - 3:30 pm.
- May 13** **Democracy In Action**, sponsored by LWVMC, 5:30 pm.
- May 20** **LWVMC Morning Unit**, 9:30-11:00 am, Wesley Glen. **Note the new date.*
- May 26** **LWVMC Dinner Unit**



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