

Officers and Board - 2006-2007

President - Kathleen Balogh
Vice President - Karen Sanders
Treasurer - Jack Saye
Recording Secretary - Linda Carol
Membership - Sandra Abromitis
Barb Panarites- Board
Hal Hogstrom- Board
Anne Higgins-Board
Ruth Christie-Board
B. J. Snow -Board
Sheila Franklin - Board

Nominating Committee

Chairman - Jean Parks
Member - Marsha Stickford

Off Board Appointments

Betty Becker - Office Phone
Judy Bissell and Nelda Holder - Web Page
Sheila Franklin - Kids Voting
Grace Curry - Hospitality/Phone
Fran Myers - Corresponding Secretary
Jack Saye - Newsclippings

About the League of Women Voters

MISSION OF THE LEAGUE

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE LEAGUE

Membership is open to all citizens of voting age, female and male, who subscribe to the League's purpose and policies. Citizens of other countries or those under 18 may be non-voting (associate) members. Membership in the LWV of Asheville-Buncombe County (\$50 individual or \$75 household \$20 student) carries automatic membership in the LWVNC and LWVUS.

The League of Women Voters
of Asheville-Buncombe County
221 Miles Building, 2 Wall St.
Asheville, NC 28801
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www.abc.nc.lwvnet.org/

1981 ERA march in Asheville, with Florence Ryan



Notes from the President's Desk

In the past 48 hours or so we have had sun/wind/snow/rain, temperatures below 20 degrees (at my house anyway) and up to 50 degrees. It's March!

Some of the activities from the month of February include the LWV being contacted by the newspaper for our position on the school merger; hope you noticed the letter to the editor on February 24 expressing our concern with

the proposed Woodfin power plant; we signed a Resolution to the Asheville City Council concerning a Living Wage; and members have been active in several other projects as you will read in this edition of the VOTER. If the League has a position statement on an issue, we can and do become active on the issue.

Please put the May 19th date on your calendar and plan to join us for our Annual Meeting! We are going back to a Saturday lunch and hope that many of you who are not comfortable driving at night will join us! Details to follow as we finalize our plans.

We are preparing to head to state convention later this month and we will fill you in on all the happenings in the April newsletter.

I am going to include the member survey again with this e-mail newsletter. PLEASE fill it out and send it back to us if you have not already done so!

Membership Planning Meeting

About 25 members came together for the annual membership meeting, held on 2/28/07 at the YWCA in Asheville. A wonderful potluck was shared and personally, I think that next year we should bring recipes to share, such good food!

The business meeting brought us together in discussion of the program work for our league in the coming year. Some of our members responded to the Program Committee e-mail request for prioritizing issues for emphasis and these were added to the results of the members in attendance. The group agreed that the LWV should concentrate efforts on issues that do not have organized advocacy efforts ongoing, and to lend our support through collaboration and partnership with those issues that have efforts in place.

The following is the resulting ranking of interests that will be voted on at the Annual Meeting:

Program Emphasis on:

- Civic Education
- Voter Service
- Immigration Study/National Project
- State Issues of Election Reform and Redistricting
- Working in collaboration with local/regional groups on environmental

issues, including but not limited to Planning & Zoning and steep slope development. More information can be found on these issues at the LWVNC website www.lwvnc.org and the LWVUS website www.lwv.org

Until next month,
Kathleen

March 2007

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Membership

Membership year is July 1 to June 30.

- Individual: \$50
- Household: \$75
- Student: \$20

Member names and addresses are not given or sold to other organizations. We do provide mailing labels when we co-sponsor an event with another organization.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year there are a limited number of scholarships given to cover the cost of membership. In exchange for the membership we ask that recipients actively participate in League functions.

If you know someone who is interested in League Membership and has financial need, ask them to contact Sandra Abromitis (686-8281) for an application.

The League of Women Voters welcomes women and men who are interested and supportive of our principles and goals.

Redistricting Position Statement

A statewide study on redistricting was completed in January of 1994 and the following position was reached by concurrence:

Congressional districts, both houses of the state legislature, as well as municipal government districts including boards of education, should be apportioned primarily according to population. Districts should be single-member, compact, convenient, contiguous and should reflect a community of interest. Specific standards of fair representation as required by the National Voting Rights Act should be ensured.

The responsibility for redistricting and reapportioning should rest with an independent agency commissioned by the legislature once every ten years; the agency plan (for redistricting) should be submitted for legislative approval without amendment. The independent agency should not be a court. While the agency should reflect the geographic, racial and gender make-up of the state population, no elected official should be a member. As a creature of the legislature, the agency should be subject to the Open Meetings Law. Definite provisions should be made for compensation and staff services of the independent agency.

A process should be provided to effect automatic, compulsory and periodic redistricting and reapportioning. Measures to enact this process should include: authority, enforcement powers, time schedule and funding. The specific measure may take the form of a constitutional amendment or legislation.

Specific provisions should be made for court review of redistricting and reapportioning measures and for courts to require the independent agency to act on a specific schedule.

The state and its political subdivisions should be redistricted and reapportioned every ten years within a year of certification of the census.

Definite time limits should be set for an agency to act after the decennial census figures are available in order to comply with federal Voting Rights legislation. Time limits should be set for initiating court review of the constitutionality of measures.

E-mail may be directed to ellerbetty@aol.com

Don't forget to mark your calendars for the **Reality Courtroom Series** on April 19, 26, and May 3 from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. in the County Courthouse (5th floor courtroom).



Florence Iddings Ryan

The Biography of Florence Ryan is a continuation from last month's Voter. There will be a final article about her remarkable life in the April Voter.



During the years 1932-35 Florence worked for the Emergency Relief (ERA) program office in Asheville and Transylvania County. She was involved in the distribution of school books in 1933. Up until that time the public school furnished no text books. She can remember a teacher saying, "Isn't this wonderful, each of my children has a book and I can really begin to teach."

The ERA work involved interviewing those who needed help. When a new work program was authorized by Congress, which gave workers \$13.00 a week, Florence was transferred to Transylvania County where no one on the staff had any Social Work training. In 1934 she was made head of the Agency, which now had become a WPA program. In addition to farm and garden projects, there were various work programs for men and canning and sewing programs for women, as well as a model Nursery School for children. Her work in Transylvania County made her realize that if she were to get ahead in the field of Social Work she was going to need a graduate degree. She applied to Smith College. Her AB degree from Bryn Mawr plus the work she had been doing for the past three years with the ERA were accepted for one year of credits. She graduated with her master's degree in 1937.

From Smith College she went to work for the Child Guidance Clinic supported by the Junior League in Winston-Salem until 1940. From there it was the State of Virginia Child Welfare Department until 1942. Then she worked for the Red Cross in various military hospitals in the Southeast. 1946 found her in a military hospital in Memphis, the year her mother died in Asheville. That was also the year that the Memphis hospital changed over to a Veteran's Administration Hospital. This offered the opportunity for Florence to transfer to the Oteen VA Medical Center which was at that time entirely devoted to tuberculosis treatment.

There was a law in North Carolina that prohibited the issuance of a marriage license if one of the anticipated marriage partners had a communicable disease, such as TB. Venereal disease was excepted in order to validate a marriage and to protect a child if the patient was under the care of the Health Department. Since North Carolina did not recognize common law marriages, it was necessary to have a valid marriage certificate for a veteran's wife to get any benefits. South Carolina did not require a health certificate for a marriage license, so it was possible for a couple to be "re-married" there. With the help of the local Red Cross Chapter in Greenville, such arrangements could be made. But this was complicated and time consuming. The answer seemed to be – get the law changed in North Carolina.

Florence brought this situation to the attention of one of the North Carolina legislators. This resulted in tuberculosis being added to the law as an exception. After that there was no more trouble getting a marriage license for a veteran with TB.

Florence has always been active in her professional groups, helping in the organization of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and its development in North Carolina. She has served in various official capacities on local and state levels and prepared a history of the Council of N.C. Chapters, which existed between 1955 and 1974. Following her retirement she continued to be active and in 1980 was chosen Social Worker of the Year by the N.C. Chapter.

(To be continued in the April Voter)

Constituent Meeting with Representative Charles Thomas - by Jack Saye

On 8 February, Rep Charles Thomas, R-Buncombe, House 116 met with 9 of us, including Tom & Barbara Coulson, Ken Schapira, and Bob & Irma Howarth from Common Cause, myself and Yvette Wessel (Madison LWV) representing LWV and Adam Sotak of Democracy North Carolina. Private citizen Marla Druker also attended and contributed. There was a very interesting 90 minute exchange of ideas, and we learned a lot about our new representative. He is already actively engaged in the process and committed to making a difference as you may have noted by his recent newspaper articles and radio interviews. Tom Coulson had arranged the meeting to discuss public owned elections with a particular focus on extending the public financing now available for use by judicial election candidates to the Council of State (8 department/commission heads, i.e. insurance commissioner. We identified problems with the current system as lack of access, undue influence and gerrymandered districts. The following are examples: Lack of access is manifested by the fact that the average citizen could not financially afford to run for state office, or spend 8 months a year in Raleigh as a legislator for \$13,000 per year. Undue influence is best exemplified by candidates having their best sources of campaign funds reside in the groups that they must regulate / legislate for or against, and 527 committees/ issue groups. Groups under Section 527 of the IRS Code are able to raise large amounts of funds and engage in election activity while escaping full regulation and disclosure. Rep. Thomas agreed to work with us to resolve the issues of gerrymandering districts and limiting the influence of the 527s. He agreed that increasing the mileage reimbursement for members to the current federal level and a pay raise for legislators are sorely needed to help with the issue of access. Rep. Thomas was wary of the idea of publicly funded elections, as currently designed. He felt that this practice gave an unfair advantage, if only one candidate in a race commits to public funding. The candidate that did not accept public funding knows how much money his opponent has, how much the opponent has left late in the campaign, and can obtain and utilize additional funds in a far more timely manner during the final critical days before the election. He cited his own situation where he had decided not to use his personal funds during his election campaign, but felt compelled to when attack ads needed to be refuted in a strong, timely manner.

Other topics were touched upon as well. Rep. Thomas is very passionate about the need for medical malpractice reform. He cited, in particular, the loss of physicians willing to practice obstetrics in North Carolina. He favors unlimited economic damages, but time did not allow us to discuss other aspects of this issue. Rep. Thomas also spoke very strongly of getting things done while in Raleigh and making a difference.

I look forward to future discussions involving my representative. I felt that he listened to our ideas, and told us very forthrightly what his thoughts were and where he stood. I'm sure our view points don't match perfectly and that we won't agree on everything, but openness and a commitment to work hard are more important.

Planning and Zoning Commission - February 7, 2007

The first item considered was a level III site plan for "Northview at Biltmore Lakes Phase II" located on Enka Lake Road, in the City's Extraterritorial Jurisdiction. The project plans include 251 apartment units on 33.26 acres with lower density than what would be permitted and more open space preserved than would be required. No members of the public spoke. Commission members acknowledged that affordable housing units are not required, but expressed concern about their absence. The Commission approved a motion to forward the proposal to City Council with Technical Review Committee and planning staff conditions and encouraging the developer to work with planning staff to consider making some of the three bedroom units efficiencies instead so they would be lower priced. The developer's representative indicated the developer would be willing to consider this. Next, two agenda items were considered together, wording amendments regarding Urban Place District (in Chapter 7 of the Code of Ordinances) and requests from about a dozen property owners on Craven, Roberts, W. Haywood and Thompson Streets and on Riverside Drive to change their zoning from River District to Urban Place District. The wording amendments, among other issues, extended flood plane protections to Urban Place District zoning. The change in zoning was sought in order to allow more dense residential developments and to encourage mixed use developments. Both the wording amendments and the rezoning requests were approved.

The observer left before additional agenda items were addressed.

Submitted by Jean Parks

Metropolitan Sewer District Board

February 21, 2007

The February 21 meeting was short and efficient, as the entire Board had met with the planning committee prior to the Board meeting. All Board members were present. Responding to concerns by member Glenn Kelly, the Board rescinded previous action in allowing condemnation procedures by the Right-of-Way committee. (Instead, full Board must take such action.) Further, a recommendation was made for changes in policy regarding abandoned sewer systems. A future meeting will deal with such changes. The Board approved a motion to update the Master Plan. This process would require 6-9 months. The Board to be informed when 50% has been accomplished. The Consolidated Motion Agenda was approved, based on background available to members. The March 21 meeting will be a retreat for all members from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at MSD offices.

Submitted by: Leah Karpen, Observer

The State of Black Asheville February 17

On February 17 the University in Asheville sponsored an all-day conference, initiated by Dr. Dwight Mullen of the Political Science Department and students who had done major research on the topic. It was divided into four themes: Education, Health Care, Housing, and Law Enforcement. As stated by Mayor Bellamy, the purpose was about moving forward and establishing a partnership between the City and the University. The theme was to be self-empowerment. I attended the groups on Education and Law Enforcement.

Among many important points regarding education were: All children need high quality, well-funded, diverse schools. Disparities exist in the City schools, as shown by statistics. The pool of needed and potential black educators is drying up. Economic disparity was pointed out.

The Law Enforcement panel included Theodis Beck, Director of Corrections for the State. He called the Department of Corrections [Prisons] a public service agency of last resort. The majority of persons in prison are not high school graduates and/are on drugs. Transition and re-entry after prison are difficult. Bill Hogan, Chief of Police for Asheville, pointed out that social issues are involved. Recruitment of women and minorities has been difficult. Poverty and a sense of hopelessness influence criminal behavior. While mental health services are lacking, police are being trained to deal with emotional issues.

While my notes are just a sampling of the day's conversations, my hope is that the League of Women Voters will deal with some of these issues. Not only can we observe School Board and other meetings, but we can work for positive change.

Submitted by: Leah Karpen, participant

Proposed Woodfin Power Plant

On 16 January, I joined dozens of other citizens who attended the Buncombe County Commissioners Meeting to comment on the proposed peak power plant. Based upon the Leagues' selection of air quality as a priority issue, I felt that this indicated support for avoidance of any additional air pollutants. Using this criterion, I made comments for our chapter referencing two articles.

The main article from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy spoke directly to the peak power issue. In January-February of 2001, the California Energy Commission (CEC) found that projected supply and demand data suggested a potential shortfall of 5,000 megawatts (MW) during June-September of 2001. They worked with state policymakers and utility regulators to develop significant new policies that included additional funding for an energy efficiency program. The CEC also created a public information campaign to promote energy conservation. Their effort was extremely successful—"In 2001, California averaged a 10% cut in peak demand during the summer months (with a record reduction of 14% in June), and overall electricity use declined in 2001 by 6.7%, after adjusting for economic growth and weather. These energy efficiency and conservation efforts reduced peak demand by 5,500 MW, which was more than the entire shortfall originally projected." If California could do this in less than six months, surely NC could achieve significant reductions in demand over the three years available, if political will and funding were forthcoming.

The second article pointed out the NC ranks 23rd among states in the use of renewable energy. A state effort to increase both renewable energy suppliers, and more robust conservation measures by the public would have ample room for success.

I felt that these two articles pointed out that there were ways to surmount this problem without the creation of this new power plant. However, I felt as if my comments were futile since they followed comments from two or three other attendees that had been told by a Buncombe County Commissioner the previous day that "they had already made up their mind to vote to approve the power plant". The subsequent vote confirmed my fears. Actions opposing the proposed power plant, including a potential lawsuit, are ongoing, so this potential source of new air pollutants may yet be avoided.

Submitted by: Jack Saye

THE VOTER



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LEAGUE CALENDAR 2007

MARCH

State Convention March 23-25
Board Meeting March 28

APRIL

Civics 101 Class 1-Overview of Court System Courthouse 5th floor April 19
Board Meeting April 25

Civics 101 Class 2 - Criminal Court Procedure April 26

MAY

Civics 101 Class 3-Civil Court Procedure May 3
Annual Meeting May 19

OTHER EVENTS OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS

Sunshine Week March 11-17
Clean Energy Forum, 7-9 p.m. at Jubilee on Wall Street March 13
AIDS Project: Dining Out for support in fight against AIDS April 26
International Women's Peace Conference, Dallas, TX July 10-15

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

Sally Boerschig
Elizabeth Johannaber

LWVABC Board Meetings

The board meets monthly on the fourth Wednesday, 5:30pm at the YWCA Board Room. All members are welcome to attend. The deadline for submissions to *THE VOTER* is each month's board meeting. **Next board meeting is March 28.**

If you ever need a ride to an event we are sponsoring, please let us know, and we'll try to make arrangements for you. We don't want anyone to miss our events for lack of transportation, but we won't know you need a ride if you don't call us. The League phone number is 828-253-8223.