



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS of NEW ORLEANS LEAGUE ESSENTIALS

Volume 56, Issue 1

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## Save The Date

**Annual Meeting Brunch, Saturday, June 7, 2014, 10:30 am-12:30 pm**

The Irish House, 1432 St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans

Our guest speaker will be *U.S. Attorney Kenneth Polite*. \$40 per person with free parking. More details will be announced.



### LWVNO Board of Directors 2013-2014

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### **The City Council Coffee and Croissants Breakfast**

The City Council Coffee and Croissants Breakfast was held on March 25th, and it was a great success. It was well attended by Councilmembers, LWVNO members and guests. We want to thank Lea Young for planning this wonderful event.

### **Membership Updates**

Our League is making the news with our voter service efforts and attracting new members which are listed below. We need to continue to recruit and the best way is for you to ask your friends to join and bring them to our meetings and or activities. It is easy to refer them to Rosemary, by email, [lwno@bellsouth.net](mailto:lwno@bellsouth.net) or by phone, 504-581-9106 to get an application.

*~Lea Young*

### **Welcome New Members**

Lisa Marie Ambrose, Elizabeth Barron, Rosemary Ciaccio, Harriett Cortez, Sarah Covert, Eden Davis, Suzanne Dicharry, Bernadette D'Souza, Mary Ferry, Blake Jones, Sally Kenney, Clay Latiner, June Leopold, Nanci McVile, Susan Milliner, Thomas Milliner, Jessica Nieblas, Anne Pincus, Jessica Rhoades, Brenda Roussell, Tania Tetlow, Dorothy Wolfold.

## Message from the President

It has been very fulfilling serving as President of the New Orleans League of Women Voters. I am very proud of our Voter Service Committee, who successfully initiated a change in our election schedule from spring to early fall beginning in 2018 through its "Celebrate or Vote" study. We have received permission to assist in registering new citizens to vote at the Immigration Ceremonies—a wonderful way to introduce new citizens to the right to vote especially if they come here from countries that do not afford them of those rights and encourage them to participate in civic action in their new country.

Our candidate debates for city council, sheriff, mayor and council at large have been successful and we are grateful to our wonderful co-sponsors WDSU, National Council of Jewish Women, Coalition of 100 Black Women, Urban League of Greater New Orleans, The Public Law Center and Dillard University.

As a member of the LAW group, we are advocating with our partners for women's rights at the Louisiana Legislature to ensure that women protect the rights we have obtained and endeavor to have the same opportunities for equitable treatment in the workplace and equal pay. LAW is a coalition of women's groups who work together on legislative issues.

Also, I am happy to announce that our newsletter will be published again every quarter to provide information to you in print along with our regular e-mail correspondence.

Every member of our organization is important and the service that each one of you provides is valued. I know that some of you do not have a lot of time to give but pay your dues and support our organization with your hard earned money. I know many of you who are able to support our organization with your time and endless commitment to voter service and women's rights as well as the other issues that the League supports. Without you, the League of Women Voters of New Orleans would not be able to achieve its goals. I want to thank each and every one of you for your commitment to the League of Women Voters of New Orleans and its goals.

*~Francine Giugno*

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### Getting out the vote in the Third Precinct/Third Ward

One of the many tasks of the Registrar of Voters is the investigation of voting anomalies in the number of cast ballots. Not surprisingly, New Orleans has quite a few precincts where turn-out is lower now than historically.

Dr. Sandra Wilson, Registrar of Voters for Orleans Parish, contacted Francine Giugno of the League of Women Voters of New Orleans to solicit the League's assistance in remedying some of these shortfalls. On a beautiful Saturday afternoon in February, four League members Linda Walker, Anne Middleton, Francine Giugno, and Patty Andrews, joined about an equal number of staff members from the Registrar's office.

Armed with a huge box of envelopes stuffed with information about voting—including an explanation of the option for senior citizens to receive ballots by mail and blank registration forms—we traveled the short distance to Galvez St. between Poydras St. and Tulane Ave., Galvez is lined with small businesses, a church, and empty lots, so the instant reaction was, "No one lives here any longer."

While there were many residential homes, the population in this area has decreased due to the construction. A few residents were home and were encouraged to register. Each dwelling, whether anyone answered the door or not, received a packet. Walking up Gravier St. toward Broad St., we paused to admire the den of the Krewe of Coup d'Etat and the classic architecture of an abandoned school.

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To our surprise, most of the houses in the four or five block area were freshly renovated or painted, and many were occupied by young people. The area along Tulane Ave. was abuzz with construction.

Few of those we met were registered to vote, and they seemed pleased with our outreach efforts. A large stack of information was left at the new Rosa Keller apartments on Tulane, which have 60 units, all occupied. The Registrar's office plans to go back to talk to the housing director. We look forward to a report from the Registrar's Office to see if our campaign netted new voters.

Dr. Wilson plans to send investigators to New Orleans East in the near future. We heartily recommend this as a chance to learn about our city and to improve voter participation.

*~Patricia Andrews*

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## LAW Update

The LWWNO is working with LAW, the Legislative Agenda for Women. LAW is a coalition of organizations that has been established to develop specific legislation to improve and protect the interests of women. LAW is gearing up for its second year, and will continue to work on Medicaid expansion, sex education, and equal pay. They are also working with a group dedicated solely to preserving women's access to the full range of reproductive health care services, including abortion.

Last year, LAW was instrumental in obtaining passage of a bill mandating equal pay for all state government employees, and in the creation of a Task Force on Fair Pay. In addition, sexual health education was successfully referred to a study group, bringing the issue a step closer to possible legislation.

This year LAW is focusing on encouraging individual members of each organization to be in communication with their legislators when key bills come up. Specifically, willing members will receive email alerts to contact their state senators and representatives when legislation related to the focus issues is being considered. So far, almost 60 LWWNO members are prepared to receive and act on email alerts to their legislators. This is a very good showing. If you are interested in participating, and have not received a call, please email Annemarie Dewey at [annemdewey@gmail.com](mailto:annemdewey@gmail.com).

Another LAW strategy is for members to meet in legislators' offices or hold house parties for their legislators in order to educate them on LAW's positions on upcoming legislation. Jane Jurik held a successful party for Senator Heitmeier on February 19<sup>th</sup>, and meetings have been held or are planned with others.

*~Annemarie Dewey*

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## Debates

The League of Women Voters of New Orleans hosted a series of debates this election season for city council, sheriff, and mayor with its co-sponsors WDSU, National Council of Jewish Women, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Urban League of Greater New Orleans and The Public Law Center.

On January 8, 2014, a debate was held for all city council seats except for District B, which was unopposed, at Dillard University. Members of the public had the opportunity to hear answers from the candidates on various topics such as budget allocation with respect to crime, employment, and infrastructure development. Camille Whitworth moderated the district council seat debate.

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The debate for sheriff was held on January 10, 2014 at the WDSU studio and it was televised for all voters in New Orleans to watch. The questions were comprised by the co-sponsors of the debates and New Orleans residents.

The debate for New Orleans Mayor was held at Dillard University on January 16, 2014, where members of the New Orleans public came to hear the candidates speak on their priorities for the city and answer questions posed by the co-sponsors of the debate and the public. Our last debate was held on January 17, 2014, for the at large council seats at the WDSU studio.

The debates for mayor, sheriff and council at large elections were moderated by Norman Robinson and televised by WDSU at various times so that all New Orleans residents had several opportunities to become informed voters on the comprehensive issues covered in the debates.

The League of Women Voters of New Orleans is committed to work with non-partisan organizations to provide candidate information to the voters in New Orleans by co-hosting debates and by posting candidate information on the our website at [lwvno.org](http://lwvno.org). If you would like to participate in any voter service activity, please contact Rosalind Cook, [rosalindcook@cox.net](mailto:rosalindcook@cox.net) Linda Walker, [walker3201@bellsouth.net](mailto:walker3201@bellsouth.net) or Francine Giugno, [francinegiugno@yahoo.com](mailto:francinegiugno@yahoo.com).

*~Francine Giugno*

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### **Voter Registration Outreach Week**

The New Orleans Registrar of Voters will reach out to voters during its **Voters Outreach Week** from May 12, 2014, until May 16, 2014, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and we are looking for members who are able to assist the Registrar's Office. If you are interested in participating with the Registrar's Office during **Voter Outreach Week**, please contact Rosemary at [lwvno@bellsouth.net](mailto:lwvno@bellsouth.net) for more information.

*~Francine Giugno*

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### **Louisiana/New Orleans Education Updates**

Early Childhood funding continues to challenge Louisiana state legislators. Recently the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) and the Department of Children and Family Services announced a second round of sixteen new Early Childhood Networks (joining the first thirteen launched in July 2013). They are charged with coordinating the care and education for all their at-risk children under the age of five. Agenda for Children manages the New Orleans Network. These are funded with department funds and were not funded in Act 3 (The Louisiana Early Childhood Act) passed in 2012.

Act 3 did not contain the dollars to improve the state's pre-K system. Guidelines for early learning performance for infants to age 3 and academic standards for three and four year old children have been developed. The materials, the staff development, the technology and the increased requirements for higher education should be available for all programs in the state that are currently certified. Centers around the state could face the possibility of closure because of increased operating costs.

In addition the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which has helped low income families pay for pre-K and child care, has been drastically reduced (58% reduction) and is dependent on federal funds. Center tuition around the state is expected to rise to cover the new requirements and the fear of child care providers is that education options for parents will decrease because the CCAP payment does not cover the full cost of tuition.

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On the local level public education in New Orleans continues to evolve. *The State of Public Education in New Orleans 2013 Report* released by The Cowan Institute concluded that there are unintended consequences of reform that need addressing as well as the ongoing efforts needed to improve opportunities for students. The Report described four successes which contributed to a “more efficient, effective, and equitable system of schools.”

- Additional schools have been included in the OneApp (a unified application system).
- A centralized expulsion policy was implemented.
- The State Board of Education (BESE) has become more consistent in school closure and the transformation process.
- Academic Performance continues to improve on state standardized tests, the ACT and the cohort graduation rates.

The challenges which public education in New Orleans faces must be addressed for “long-term sustainability, effectiveness and equity”.

- Long-term effective governance for a complex decentralized system must continue to engage the community until a system that works is designed and implemented.
- Comprehensive and coordinated special education continues to be a problem.
- The lack of social services, especially those providing mental health care for both inpatient and outpatient students in middle school and high school, demand a long term solution.
- The transition by the LDOE to the Common Core Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments will challenge students, teachers and schools and will require “an ongoing, continued investment”.
- Academic performance at schools continues to improve but New Orleans is still a long way from providing quality school options for all children.

~Ann Meese

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### **What Does the LWVNO Have to do with Sewerage & Water Board Consent Decree?**

For a number of years and through more than one mayoral administration, the City administration and the S&WB fought complying with the mandate in the Clean Water Act to cease discharging contaminated storm water into Lake Pontchartrain. Money was being paid to D.C. attorneys to fight the USEPA. The U.S. Justice Department had filed action on the City and S&WB to pay huge amounts of fines and to comply with the mandate (Civil Action No. 93-3212). The impasse was in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

In 1998, the League of Women Voters of New Orleans, the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, the Louisiana Audubon Society and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) filed an intervener suit to force the City, S&WB, USEPA and the U.S. Justice Department to settle and enter into a consent decree. The goal for the League was twofold: stop the pollution of Lake Pontchartrain and quit spending money on fighting compliance. The case, *League of Women Voters of New Orleans, et.al. v. Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, and the City of New Orleans, State of Louisiana* was ruled in favor of the intervening parties. The Tulane Environmental Law Clinic has acted as the interveners’ legal representation.

The culprit in the pollution was raw sewage getting into the storm drains from broken or leaking sewer lines and in some cases there were cross connections between the systems that were opened under certain conditions. The worst section of the city was the Lakefront area which had been built on reclaimed swamp land.

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Under the terms of the resulting consent decree, the city was divided into eight basins with work schedules constructed for each. The USEPA and the Justice Department agreed to allow the S&WB and city to do a supplementary environmental project in lieu of paying the fines they would have levied. The project chosen was reclamation of the Lincoln Beach area. Marsh plantings and other measures were applied to the Lincoln Beach area of the Lake to provide protection and water cleansing. As an unexpected benefit, that section of the lake levee was the only part that came through intact due to the reclamation.

The designated basins were Lakeview, Central Business District, Gentilly, Uptown, MidCity, Ninth Ward, Carrollton, South Shore and New Orleans East. Work began on December 15, 1998 on the Lakeview Basin. From that date, the work repairing the sewer lines in the Lakeview, Central Business District, Gentilly, and Uptown basins was completed and approved by the USEPA by the end of 2005.

Katrina and the failure of the levees resulting in the ensuing flooding caused the S&WB and the City to file for a *force majeure* stoppage of the terms of the consent decree.

Finished work had to be revisited and emergency repairs and rebuilding was done on all the lift stations in the city. A second crisis was the lack of funds. Flood damage was now mixed with the existing inadequate sewer lines. FEMA did not have a workable policy to address the situation and they would only pay for documented flood damage. It was impossible to know the status of the damage until the lines were dug up and there were no available funds to hire the contractors.

Repairs did continue on all the pump stations throughout the city and they were elevated. An elevated generator system was installed at the sewage treatment plant to prevent shut-downs in the event of power failures. Now, a protective levee has been constructed around the sewer plant.

The current administration and city council addressed the issue of needed funding by raising water rates, a move previously refused by former administrations. Since sewer costs per entity are based on the amount of water used it was the basis for raising the rates. Finally, FEMA agreed that the S&WB did not have to justify each pipe after it was dug up in order to receive funding and block funding would be practical instead of piecemeal reimbursement. Actual sewer line repairs could resume.

In the spring of 2013, negotiations were resumed on the Second Modified Consent Decree. The interveners were once again part of the process and party to writing the terms. Since it was now impossible for the remaining work to be completed by the deadlines set in 1998, the S&WB and city asked for extended deadlines for the Ninth Ward and New Orleans East basins. The Ninth Ward basin has now become the most critical basin because it is adjacent to the sewage treatment plant. As part of the terms, the interveners requested additional reports on contracted work at specified intervals to assure the new deadlines will be met.

In conjunction with the Second Modified Consent Decree, the S&WB must design and implement a plan for a green infrastructure project by April of 2014. The target issue is how to improve water retention and slow release in response to major rain events. The League met to discuss the issue and submitted comments in November of 2013.

Since the city also received lump sum FEMA funding to repair Katrina damaged streets, the S&WB and Public Works Department informally began cooperating in order to maximize the money. Also, the Public Works Department imbedded nine engineers in the S&WB headquarters in order to facilitate the cooperation.

In the fall of 2013, the S&WB applied for a Third Modified Consent Decree to set new deadlines for the Carrollton, Mid-City and South Shore basins. This time the interveners, including the League, were more demanding in setting the terms. In the previous versions, although the city was a named party and signed the decree, the city's role was not defined. Despite the current cooperation future administrations may have other plans for the FEMA road funds and could withdraw the embedded engineers since the final deadline is 2025.

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Now, the cooperation is a requirement in the consent decree. In addition to the contract reports, the interveners asked for quarterly reports on meeting the stated deadlines for the completed work.

The Third Modified Consent Decree was signed by all the parties on January 31, 2014. The work on all the basins will be done in phases. For instance, the planning and letting of contracts for one basin can be done while the construction in another basin is going forward. The Carrollton basin will be the last completed with a projected deadline of October 31, 2025. The USEPA and Justice Department have made it clear that there will be no more modifications of the consent decree. If any of the deadlines are not met, then fines will be levied.

The interveners owe a great debt to the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic and the attorney, Lisa Jordan. This continuing consent decree saga demonstrates the breadth and depth of the issues that the League of Women Voters undertake. Forcing the settlement and original consent decree is a large part of our cleaner Lake Pontchartrain. Plus, we are gaining a reinforced and improved sewer system.

*~Linda Walker*



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## Celebrate or Vote

The Orleans Parish local elections in 2010 were overwhelmed by the Saints' playoff games and their ultimate Superbowl XLIV win on February 7<sup>th</sup>. Carnival season which began on January 6<sup>th</sup> ended February 16<sup>th</sup>. Prior to those events, there were the Christmas holidays, New Year's celebrations and the college bowl games held in the Superdome.

The local election schedule was woven into those events. Qualifying to run for office took place December 9-11, 2009. The last day for prospective voters to register to vote in the primary ended January 6<sup>th</sup>. The primary election took place on February 6<sup>th</sup>. The last day for new voters to register for the general election was February 3<sup>rd</sup> with the election being held on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

Prior to 1982 the Orleans Municipal and Parish elections were held in the fall, which is a regularly designated voting period for Louisiana. The move to late winter/early spring was effective for the 1986 elections. From that point on, Orleans was the only jurisdiction in the state holding an election during the early spring. Consequently, the total cost of holding the elections was borne solely by the local taxpayers.

The League of Women Voters of New Orleans began a study of the local election schedule starting in the fall of 2010. A committee of ten leaguers did the research and wrote the material. The study "Celebrate or Vote" was released in 2011. In the course of the study, the League examined the impact of the schedule on the ability of the candidates to raise funds and to reach the voters with their campaigns. In addition to the voter distraction, the local election supervisor reported that there was lop-sided attendance for commissioner training due to events. Even the delivery and pick-up of voting machines had to take the parades into account.

Seemingly unrelated activities have affected the ability of candidates to get out their message. For instance, one of the primary television stations in the city airs the Winter Olympics for two weeks limiting prime viewing for televised debates. For the 2014 elections, a week of extremely harsh winter weather just prior to the primary limited the usual door-to-door campaigning.

Ancillary to the scheduling of the local elections was the fact that the inauguration date for the new office holders takes place in early May. This meant that the new municipal administration and city council took office halfway through the fiscal year. Funds were already dedicated and contracts signed by the out-going administration.

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It was immediately revealed that the date for the general election for the 2014 election cycle would fall squarely on the week-end before Mardi Gras Day. The polling precincts would be impossible to set up and the voters would be completely blocked from the polls. The League asked four of the local legislators, Sen. J.P. Morrell, Rep. Walter Leger, Sen. Ed Murray and Rep. Jared Brossett to sponsor legislation to move the election from March 1<sup>st</sup> to March 15, 2014. Senate Bill 135 passed both houses unanimously during the 2012 regular session.

Then the serious work of comparing alternative election schedules was undertaken. The possibilities were the following: 1) a later spring election, 2) a later fall schedule combining with the federal congressional elections, 3) skipping nearly two years and combining with the gubernatorial elections, or 4) a move back 3 ½ months to a stand-alone election. One of the primary considerations was the length of the terms of the officials elected for the transition. Should the terms be shortened or lengthened and for how long? Would there be voter drop off for local officials if they were at the end of a long and complex ballot? We weighed cost sharing with the state and federal elections, the screen size of the voting machines, Saturday vs. Tuesday voting, and matching the differences in qualifying dates and general election dates with state and federal schedules. The time between an election and inauguration had to be considered.

The Secretary of State's office gave us extensive help. The Tulane Public Policy Center was consulted. We revisited various elected and appointed officials.

The Registrar of Voters office and the Orleans elections supervisor gave us insight on how various changes would affect their office staffing and work load. Other political experts helped us walk through the available scenarios.

We finally came to the conclusion that falling back to a fall schedule resulting in stand-alone elections for the local offices would best benefit the voters and the candidates. This plan would have qualifying in August, the primary in October and the general election in November. It avoided all major holidays and preserved Saturday voting which is preferred by local voters. There could be some cost sharing with the state if constitutional amendments could be put on the ballot. Generally, fall is considered to be the traditional election period. The transitional terms would be shortened by 3 ½ months.

Sen. J.P. Morrell, Rep. Walt Leger, Rep. Jared Brossett and Sen. Ed Murray again agreed to carry a bill to make the permanent change. SB 191 passed both houses unanimously during the 2013 regular session. SB 191 became Act 95 and is now incorporated in the Louisiana Revised Statutes as La. Rev. State., Sec.18:402(D). 2014 is last time New Orleans Municipal and Orleans Parish elections will be held in the early spring. The new election cycle will begin in the fall of 2017.

To effectively complete total election reform, it is necessary to have a local referendum changing the City Charter to move the inauguration date to match the new election schedule. Leaving the inauguration in early May creates a very long time between the election and newly elected officials taking office. In addition, it leaves the city with the problem of a new administration taking office in the middle of the budget year. This brought up another fact to consider; the inauguration is moved to January of 2018, to match the fall of 2017, elections, then the out-going administration would miss participating in the city's tri-centennial celebration.

In order to accommodate the out-going administration, a city charter proposition was drafted that would move the inaugurations to the second Monday in January beginning in 2022. On January 9, 2014, the current city council passed the ordinance calling for the proposition to be on the November 4, 2014, ballot. If this proposition passes, then the total reform will be complete. We encourage voters to support the city charter proposition to move the inaugurations to the second Monday in January beginning in 2022, by voting for it on November 4, 2014.

*~Linda Walker*



The League of Women Voters of New Orleans

1215 Prytania Street, Suite 224, New Orleans Louisiana 70130

Office hours Tues, Wed & Thurs. 9 am to 1 pm 504-581-9106 [lwnvo@bellsouth.net](mailto:lwnvo@bellsouth.net) [lwnvo.org](http://lwnvo.org)

