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VOLUME 47 NUMBERS 10

November-December 2008

Calendar (League activities in bold)

DATE	DAY	TIME	LOCATION	DETAILS
Dec 3	W	6 p.m.	Bobbie Porter's house	Program Planning/Holiday Party
Dec 16	Tu	6 p.m.	16th Floor Courthouse, Camden	Freeholder caucus meeting
Dec 18	Th	7 p.m.	Somerdale VFW	Freeholder meeting
Jan 7	W	7 p.m.	Vogelson Library	Board meeting and voting rights consensus. See page 4

At its Nov 12 meeting, the LWVCC board:

1. Decided to hold the Probationers and Parolees Voting Rights consensus meeting as part of the January board meeting. **All members are invited!**
2. Decided how to organize Program Planning on Dec 3.
3. Made preliminary plans for having a speaker on local emergency preparedness in late February (Feb 28). Snow date March 7.
4. Learned about plans for *Running & Winning* at Sterling High School the last week of April.

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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CAMDEN COUNTY

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President's Message:

"I would like to personally encourage each of you to attend the program planning party which is scheduled this year for December 3rd 2008.... Bring a friend..."

As we begin to prepare for the New Year, let's keep in mind that program planning for the year is an important aspect of the League's business. I would like to personally encourage each of you to attend the program planning party which is scheduled this year for December 3rd 2008. This is always an opportunity for new members and old members to come together in a social setting to get to know each other and to participate in the program planning process. This is the year we are asked to review the state League positions on programs that will set the direction for lobbying and citizen education for the next two years at the LWVNJ convention. (May 2, 2009).

In addition to state recommended programs, the LWVCC is particularly interested the topic of preparedness in the Camden County region. As a result of the recent hurricane devastations and the raging fires in California, many of us believe that it is necessary to become more informed about the vulnerability of the Camden County populations in the process of disaster planning. We have not yet been tested, but it is never too late to begin to combine community and regional resources to be as prepared as possible in the face of a disaster.

Bring a friend to the program planning party and make this next year one of "change".

Sincerely,

Ann Saunders

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

The League of Women Voters of Camden County, LWVCC

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The VOTER is published ten times a year to keep the membership and public informed of the activities of the League of Women Voters of Camden County. For subscription or membership information call (856) 795-7878.



Getting there - Directions!

Camden County Courthouse: Take 676 north to Mickle Blvd. Flow right at the fork (don't go on Campbell Place), then turn right onto 5th street in a few blocks. The courthouse is at 5th and Federal, a block up from Mickle.

Camden, Federal Courthouse: 4th and Cooper, but we generally car pool. Call 856-795-7878 if you're interested. *About 3-4 blocks from the City Hall PATCO station.*

Lindenwold High School: 801 Egg Harbor Rd. Take Route 30 (WHP) south past the Echelon Mall area to Gibbsboro Road. Turn left at that intersection (with traffic light). In a bit less than a mile, cross Egg Harbor Road and see the school on your right.

Somerdale VFW: 10 Kennedy Boulevard. Take the White Horse Pike (Route 30) to Somerdale Road (about 2 miles south of 295 or a mile south of Evesham Road). Turn left onto Somerdale if going south on 30 and drive for about 0.3 miles, then turn left onto Kennedy. Or you could take 561 (Haddonfield Berlin Road) south from 295 to Somerdale where it hits Evesham. In that case, turn right onto Somerdale and continue about 1.6 miles from 561 to Kennedy. Turn right there. The center is close to the turn on Kennedy. *There are buses that run nearby (especially Route 403) as well.*

Voorhees: Vogelson Regional Library: Driving south on 30, turn left onto Somerdale Road, just above the Echelon Mall. Go under the train bridge in about a half mile, then turn right onto Burnt Mill. Soon turn left onto Laurel Road. The library is on your right. Burnt Mill Road also crosses 544 (Evesham Road) north of the library and White Horse Road (an extension of Springdale) south of it. If you know where the Echelon Mall is, you're home!

LEAGUE'S VOTE411.ORG HELPS MILLIONS OF VOTERS IN 2008

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Washington, DC—The League of Women Voters of the United States announced November 13, 2008, that VOTE411.org helped millions of voters looking for information online throughout the long primary and general election season.

"VOTE411.org saw considerable spikes in traffic in the days leading up to the election," stated Mary G. Wilson, national president of the League of Women Voters. "The four million page views that our online voter education site experienced in the final days leading up to Election Day speaks to the continued demand from voters for reliable and nonpartisan election information."

"VOTE411 was the place to go for online voting information," Wilson said. "Voters, especially the millions of first-timers participating this year, needed simple, helpful tools to help them navigate Election Day. In addition, VOTE411 was used by many of the major voter hotlines to answer questions from the public and provide election information."

"With the stakes as high as they were for this election, the League was proud to empower voters with trusted and accurate information about registering to vote, finding polling places, checking voting hours, learning about absentee and early voting opportunities, and getting the facts about Election Day," Wilson said.

The League's VOTE411 was featured prominently as a voter resource by many media organizations, including The Washington Post, The New York Times, C-SPAN and CNN. Additionally, more than 9,000 nonprofit advocacy organizations, community groups, search engines, media outlets and blogs linked to VOTE411 and informed their constituents about the League's online resources.

Voting Rights for Probationers and Parolees

LWVNJ Study and Consensus

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At the 2007 biennial convention of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey (LWVNJ), delegates approved a study of the voting rights of probationers and parolees. The study would examine current state law and its impact. The study would serve two purposes: 1) to educate League members and the public about current law; and 2) to offer League members an opportunity to reach consensus about voting rights for probationers and parolees.

The LWVCC will discuss this issue and seek consensus on January 7, 2009. We need a good turnout for our local consensus meeting. **Please plan to come!**

Here is the basic question:

1. Does your League support restoring voting rights to probationers?
 - _____ a. Under all circumstances
 - _____ b. Under some circumstances: (more than one circumstance may be chosen)
 - _____ If the felony is a non-violent crime
 - _____ For non-sex offenders
 - _____ After a waiting period
 - _____ After the individual has paid fines/restitution
 - _____ Other (Please explain):
 - _____ c. Our League does not support restoring voting rights to probationers under any circumstances.

The question is then repeated for parolees. And there is a space for comments. This information will be provided to LWVNJ, which will determine whether a consensus has emerged from the local League responses.

An interesting non-League take on the issue: <http://www.miller-mccune.com/article/766>

Here are some key points from the LWVNJ materials. You can read the entire document online: http://www.lwvnj.org/members/SBR/Probationers_Voting_Rights_Study.pdf

Basics: While the Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court have a significant role in setting standards for elections, each state has some authority to determine who has the right to vote. Various amendments to the Constitution and Voting Rights Acts have “federalized” the right to vote (i.e. forbidden discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin), but the states still have considerable discretion about aspects not covered in the federal laws. It may not be surprising, therefore, that our nation’s voting laws vary considerably. This variation is especially

evident with regard to states' laws defining whether probationers and parolees have the right to vote.

In New Jersey, individuals with a felony conviction may not vote while they are incarcerated, on parole or probation. A convicted felon who is released from prison and has completed parole may re-register (or register for the first time) to vote.

Only two states, Maine and Vermont, allow incarcerated citizens to vote. In contrast, only two states, Kentucky and Virginia, impose a lifetime ban on voting for persons who have been convicted of a felony; in Kentucky and Virginia, a felon's voting rights can only be restored if the governor makes a special exception. The remaining 46 states allow some felons to vote and/or impose conditions for restoration of voting rights.

"In New Jersey, individuals with a felony conviction may not vote while they are incarcerated, on parole or probation."

FELONY - A generic term to describe high crimes and to distinguish these from comparatively minor offenses. A felony is usually defined in terms of an offense punishable by imprisonment for more than one year.

Demographic and racial issues: In 2006, 26,746 persons were in New Jersey prisons; some 70,000 adults were on probation; and 14,260 adults were on parole. Of those in prison, 90 percent were male and over 80 percent were members of minority groups.¹ According to a legislative brief prepared by students in the Rutgers Law School/Newark Constitutional Litigation Clinic under faculty supervision, the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts reported in March, 2008, that 78 percent of those on parole and 52 percent of those on probation are members of minority groups.

"78 percent of those on parole and 52 percent of those on probation are members of minority groups."

In 1982, 12 percent of New Jersey's prisoners were drug offenders, with 69 percent of them minorities. By 2006, 32 percent of the state's prisoners were drug offenders and 80 percent of them were minorities. The New Jersey Department of Corrections attributes this substantial increase in minority prison populations to the impact of the Comprehensive Drug Reform Act of 1986.² This increase exists despite the fact that drug use is only slightly greater among African-Americans, 9.2 percent compared to 8.1 percent for Caucasians.³

¹ www.state.nj.us/corrections/offender_statistics/2006/highlights.PDF Note: The demographic characteristics of parolees are similar to those in prison; since there are no published statistics on parolees, it is accepted practice to consider the demographic characteristics of prisoners are reflective of the parolees as well.

² http://www.state.nj.us/corrections/offender_statistics/2006/by_base_offense.PDF.

³ "Illicit Drug Use, by Race/Ethnicity, in Metropolitan and Non Metropolitan Counties: 2004 and 2005. <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/2k7/popDensity/popDensity.htm>

Recidivism: One study of voters and non-voters indicated that persons who voted were less than half as likely to be re-arrested after release from supervision as persons who did not vote.⁴ This finding is consistent with virtually all of the research on prisoner recidivism: When people are better integrated into society, they are less likely to commit another crime. The American Probation and Parole Association, the Association of Paroling Authorities International and the National Black Police Association support restoring voting rights as soon as people are released from prison.

"...persons who voted were less than half as likely to be re-arrested after release from supervision as persons who did not vote."

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Is the right to vote an inherent right of all citizens, regardless of their behavior? If so, then depriving any citizen of that right would be wrong, whether prisoner, probationer or parolee. If not, then states may restrict voting for persons who have violated the law.
2. Is the right to vote a responsibility of all citizens? If so, then we should encourage people reentering society to uphold that responsibility. Or is the right to vote a privilege? If so, then everyone should have to earn it and society is justified in denying or limiting the right to vote when individuals have committed crimes.

"Is the right to vote a responsibility of all citizens? ...Or is the right to vote a privilege?"
3. Should society try to rehabilitate those convicted of crimes? If so, depriving any of them a say in their government serves no rational purpose, but is another impediment to rehabilitation. If, on the other hand, the focus should be on punishing offenders, then depriving them of the vote is reasonable.
4. Is the value of integrating ex-felons into society, and potentially reducing recidivism as a result, a good reason to give probationers and parolees (who are still in the criminal justice system) the vote? Or should we continue to wait until they have completed their sentences?
5. Everyone agrees that members of minority groups are disproportionately impacted by disenfranchisement of probationers and parolees. If this is an incidental effect resulting from a disproportionate number of minority individuals committing crimes, is that impact acceptable? As you ponder this, consider that individuals are responsible for their own behaviors *and* are products of their environment (including poverty, racism, and historical factors). Consider also whether there is systematic bias in the justice system that might account for the disproportionate numbers of minorities in prison.

⁴ Uggen, C. and Nanza, J. (2004). "Voting and Subsequent Crime and Arrest: Evidence from a Community Sample," *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 36. No. 1, 193-215, 213.



Fall workshops -- it's all about voting! (Part 2)

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Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein, (NJ-14, pictured) started the second panel. She noted that Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) devices, used in most New Jersey elections, are subject to tampering. In fact, they can be tampered with in ways that cannot be detected. New Jersey law requires that all systems be fitted with voter verified paper trails, but it was not possible to do this in time for the November 2008 election. The new deadline is January 2009, in time for the elections next year.

She suggested that optical scanned ballots may be used in some places instead of DRE devices. If you just fit a paper trail to a DRE, the voter has to read and verify that the trail was created correctly. Optical scan devices have the advantage that the voter actually creates the permanent ballot, by filling in ovals or circles on the optical scan form.



Margaret McCabe (left), Administrator of the Sussex County Board of Elections, and Tacia Johnson (right), their Manager of Election Technology, demonstrated Sussex County's electronic voting system, and talked about steps they take to ensure security. They use a smaller device than we have in Camden County (see picture). Users scroll between screens in order to vote, rather than having the entire ballot on the screen at once. This makes the on-screen display different from the sample ballot, but it can all be large print and easily readable.

They are promoting something I'd never heard of before -- a voter verified audio trail. As each choice is made, a pre-recorded voice adds that choice verbally to a permanent record. At some point, perhaps at the end voting, the voice reads back the voter's choices and he or she must confirm them. Studies have found that people are much more likely to detect errors with such a system than on paper trail forms. When it comes time to audit the vote tally, everyone in the room can hear the choices for each election, rather than one or two people counting results on paper. Interesting idea! Can it be tampered with? I don't know. Could someone figure out who you voted for (since the order of recording would be fixed)? I don't know. Needs some research!

League of Women Voters Of Camden County

Program Planning And Holiday Party

December 3rd, 2008
6 p.m.



**Home of Bobbi Porter
1 Millhouse Lane
Cherry Hill NJ 08003
Tele: 856 429-1415**



**Come Join the League for an evening of holiday treats
and participate in the planning process for the coming
year.
President: Ann Saunders**