



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF NEW ORLEANS LEAGUE ESSENTIALS

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Orleans Parish Prison Tour

Fifteen Leaguers and friends toured the Orleans Parish Prison facilities led by Criminal Sheriff Marlin N. Gusman. After a brief review of the layout, Sheriff Gusman assigned passes to each and off we rode on the prison bus to see life behind bars. Under the guidance of FEMA, the Sheriff built eight “pods,” holding 88 male prisoners each, each pod surrounded by 10’ fences topped with razor wire. There is no longer a large eating area for all the inmates so food is sent to every pod where tables are set up while bunks fill in the space around them. This is the minimum-security area. There is no solitary confinement area, but in the House of Detention there is a psych ward. We actually went into the pods with the prisoners, and we were much impressed with the Sheriff and his low key but very respectful demeanor with not only his staff but also the inmates.

All of the prison is in various stages of repair and updating. In the women’s prison, there was a library and a reading/teaching area to improve reading skills. Many inmates function at a first grade reading level, which sets them up for future failures in society. Parenting skills are also taught to those inmates whose children are removed from them by the Court. There are computerized dolls to help these parents learn to respond to the needs of a baby so that they can petition the Court to get their children back once they get out of prison. It was a very enlightening yet educational tour. Sheriff Gusman was most gracious, and the general agreement of the group was a positive view of him and his endeavors.

NOTE: The library would love book donations which can be dropped off at the entrance located at 819 S. Broad.

Lea Young

Welcome New Members:

Barbara Ferguson

Mary Hogan

Jerry Osborne

Susan Weishar

Pat Kimmel resigned from the Board this winter. Thanks, Pat, for your time of service to the League.

President's Column

The March 22-23 State Convention in Lafayette was very important for us, because it meant a new president for the first time in six years. Lawrence Narcisse, an African-American businessman from Baton Rouge, is now our LWVLA's President and will be in this position until 2011.

The voting delegates were credentialed, and the delegate count was updated, as the delegates arrived on Saturday morning, checked in, and sat down at the opening plenary session. One of the fun activities was an art contest of line drawings of four Louisiana trees using boxes of colored pencils. We were encouraged to take part (but not during the Juvenile Justice luncheon or seminar!), and had our drawings displayed for the drawing later on. The rest of the opening plenary was used to establish various motions, and to resolve conflicts over other issues.

The Juvenile Justice luncheon and seminar were very informative and educational where we learned the complexities of this issue involving poverty, race, class, crime, and educational priorities. The Saturday agenda was very good as was the Saturday night banquet.

Outgoing President Jean Armstrong said that thousands of LWVLA's stored files needed to be taken out of storage, sorted and organized, and then saved electronically, whether on a computer database or on CDs so that they would be accessible. She was concerned that when members learn about a League position, and don't have the history or documents that lead up to that position, they don't understand the process. LWVLA Secretary Thetis Cusimano asked each president to find three members willing to volunteer to work with her on this project, which can be funded with Ed. Fund money since it relates to historical files and advocacy positions. She also encouraged League presidents to share results of the NPV consensus.

Sunday, we voted to approve or drop each position with the following results: the "head and master" position was dropped, ("Head and master" refers to an old concept that considered husbands to be the "head and master" of a household and gave them the final authority on financial, property, and heirship issues over their wives and children). Supporting our state in ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment was retained.

Lea Young was given a plaque for leadership in revitalizing and sustaining the League of Women Voters in New Orleans. I received 11 certificates on behalf of LWVNO's 50 year members, and I will give them to those honorees at our Annual Meeting.

Wendy King

SPRING VOTER SERVICE, by Linda Walker

NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE COMPACT STUDY: Local members participated in two meetings discussing the LWVUS study on NPV Compact method to by-pass the Electoral College in selecting the President and Vice-President. The League has a position supporting a constitutional amendment to eliminate the Electoral College as the result of three different studies. Over the past two centuries, all attempts to pass a constitutional amendment eliminating the Electoral College have never been successful. In answering the consensus questions our local League did not favor the NPV Compact alternative because it was felt that it would be too difficult to implement even if enough states adopted the compact. But we also felt that the option to adopt the NPV Compact might assist in getting the constitutional amendment before the state legislatures. We also considered the option of individual states splitting their Electoral College votes according to the popular votes within the state, such as Nebraska's plan. Following the deadline for all leagues to submit their consensus results on May 1st, the LWVUS will draft the position to be taken by the League.

APRIL 4 AND MAY 1 ELECTIONS: A different approach was tried to solicit candidate information for the LWVNO.ORG website for these low-profile general and run-off elections. The three-day shifts we have staffed for past elections are very labor intensive for League volunteers, and we are seeking a better method. We had 40% participation from the Orleans candidates and 35% participation from the Jefferson candidates. From the low results compared to past elections, we will be modifying the new approach to involve more personal follow-up phone calls to the candidates. The results of the elections are reflected in the candidate participation on the League's website.

Quick Facts On Health Care Costs

- . Total health spending in the U.S. reached \$2.1 trillion in 2007 – or \$7,026 per capita.
- . By 2016, total health spending is projected to rise to \$4.2 trillion.
- . Between 2005 – 2006, total health spending increased 6.7 percent, more than double the rate of the 2.9 percent increase in overall economic growth.
- . Total health spending remained relatively constant at about 16 percent of gross domestic product from 2003 – 2006, but is projected to increase to 19.5 percent by 2017.
- . Spending for home health care increased at a faster pace from 2005 – 2006 (9.9 percent) than any other category of health spending; however, its impact is limited because it accounts overall for only 2.5 percent of total health spending.
- . Yearly prescription drug spending growth accelerated in 2006 to 8.5 percent from a low of 5.8 percent in 2005, in part because of full implementation of Medicare Part D.
- . Between 2006 and 2007, premiums for health coverage offered by employers increased 6.1 percent, the fourth straight year of declines in the rate of premium growth, from a peak of 13.9 percent in 2003. Even so, this was more than twice the rate of growth in the Consumer Price Index.
- . Of every dollar spent on health services in the U.S. in 2006, 46 cents came directly from government sources.
- . Costs for program administration and the net cost of private health insurance were about 7 percent of total health spending in the U.S. in 2006 and grew 8.8 percent, a marked increase over the 3.6 percent rise in 2005.
- . This list (without the original endnotes) is from "A Reporter's Toolkit: Health Care Costs" (an Alliance for Health Reform Toolkit produced with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation) and is reproduced here courtesy of the Alliance for Health Care. The entire toolkit can be found at http://www.allhealth.org/Publications/Cost_of_health_care/health_care_costs_toolkit.asp#keyfacts. Resource provided by the LWVUS Health Care Education Task Force, 2009.

• *At-Risk Americans: The Uninsured And Underinsured, by Janis McMillen*

Data from multiple sources agree that in 2007, 47 million Americans (15.6 percent of the total U.S. population) lacked any kind of health insurance coverage. When these numbers are adjusted for age (excluding those 65 years and older), the uninsured percentage of the population rises to 17.9 percent. Moreover, it is estimated that 25 million adults under age 65 were underinsured during 2007, despite having insurance all year. In total, 42 percent of *all* adults (86.7 million) were either uninsured or underinsured during 2007.

Putting a face on persons who were uninsured or underinsured during 2007 and 2008¹

- **Age:** One of three people under age 65 were uninsured for some or all of 2007 and 2008; of the total uninsured population, 60.1 million were adults (between 19 and 64 years of age)
- **Duration:** Among the underinsured/uninsured, 74.5 percent were uninsured for nine or more months and one-quarter were uninsured the entire 24 months
- **Employment status:** 80 percent of individuals who were uninsured were in working families and only 16 percent were not in the labor force (due to disabilities, chronic illness, or serving as family caregivers)
- **Income:** Nearly 60 percent were in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL: \$21,200/year for a family of four); 52 percent with incomes between 100 to 200 percent of FPL went without health insurance in 2007/2008
- **Racial and Ethnic origin:** 55 percent of Hispanics/Latinos, 40.3 percent of African Americans and 34 percent of other racial or ethnic minorities had no health insurance in 2007/2008, compared to 25.8 percent of whites. While racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to be uninsured, whites accounted for 49.8 percent of the uninsured
- **Age breakdown:** The likelihood of being uninsured declines with age; 49.5 percent of those 19 – 24 years old, 36.3 percent of those 25 – 44 years old, 32.5 percent of those 45 – 54 years old and 21.2 percent of those 55 – 64 years old were uninsured over this two-year time period. The 55- to 64-year-old age group consumes more health care on average than younger adults.

For all ethnic and racial groups, lower-income families and individuals were more likely to be uninsured than lower-income whites. This disparity continues even as incomes rise in all groups. There is a marked increase in the number of adults having difficulty paying medical bills – the most visible consequence of the weakening in insurance coverage. In 2007, 41 percent of adults (72 million people) reported problems paying medical bills, faced bill collectors or were in debt for medical care, up from 34 percent or 58 million in 2005. The majority had insurance at the time these bills were incurred² – well in advance of the economic downturn.

¹ All statistics above and below are from

<http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/publications/reports/americans-at-risk-findings.html>

²The statistics in this paragraph are from

<http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Testimonies/2009/Feb/Testimony-Insurance-Design-Matters-Underinsured-Trends-Health-and-Financial-Risks.aspx>

Education Update

Dr. Andre Perry, Associate Dean of the College of Education & Human Development, University of New Orleans and CEO of the Capital One UNO Charter Network, spoke to the members of the League and guests about “The Charter Schools Movement within the New Orleans Public Schools” on Monday, March 30, 2009. Dr. Ann Meese, Education Chair for the League of Women Voters of New Orleans, welcomed Dr. Perry and introduced him to the audience at the seminar held at Rayne United Methodist Church.

Dr. Perry framed his remarks within the context of the development of public education in the United States. He stated that public education is not a constitutional right; however, it is essential for equity and democratic freedom. However, a high school diploma is no longer enough to afford graduates with a comfortable life style.

After Hurricane Katrina, students who attended schools in other states often participated in classrooms whose standards and expectations were higher than they had ever experienced, opening a window of opportunity for many blacks. Upon returning to New Orleans, some of these students were able to continue this new course within the charter schools that were allowed by changes in state legislation. As charter schools operate independently under their own Board of Directors, principals and staff have more freedom to select curriculum and to design appropriate instruction and evaluation for their students.

The University of New Orleans became the first university in the state to take over a school. Dr. Perry termed that action an “obligation and a means of self-preservation”. He sees the role of a public university as a partner in building the capacity of families and of supporting neighborhoods. UNO also partnered with the Urban League to form an after school program. Recently the University Charter Network increased its support of secondary education by forming a new high school centered on academic performance and college preparation.

Dr. Perry believes that schools need to become involved in ethics education. He shared his concern about the overt sexuality of public school cheerleaders and dance teams and the high number of black youth, mostly male and under the age of 25, who have been killed on city streets. He stated, “I believe our students do not know the difference between right and wrong.” Charter schools have the freedom to allow the teaching of morality and ethics. He feels that we must involve families in the importance of working for the right behaviors and performances of our children.

Several public issues concerned Dr. Perry. He felt that the universities in the area must develop the teaching talent. Fast track teacher certification programs are best avoided as it takes time to become a good teacher. He stated, “We need to convince top talent to come into education.” He also pointed out certain areas of school management - transportation, health, retirement and special education need to be carefully evaluated to insure equality to all students. He also questioned whether or not charter schools are avoiding the crucial LEAP year testing of 4th and 8th grades. The low high school graduation rate concerned him, and he felt that innovative charter high schools should be developed. However, he cautioned against pressuring kids toward success. He stated that 16, 17 and 18 year olds have complex issues, and they sometimes need time to struggle through the school programs.

Dr. Perry concluded that by and large research does not support charters over other forms of public education. However, locally he is seeing that the students are showing improved academic performance.

In the months to come the League will continue to follow the progress of both charter schools and Recovery School District’s non-charters. The monitoring of the voucher system will continue. The equitable distribution of tax dollars will be observed as will the issue of open admission to all schools. Members who wish to join the Education Committee are urged to contact Ann Meese at 218-8985, or ameese@cox.net.

Ann Meese

LWVNO BOARD 2008-09

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Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars for our annual LWVNO meeting on Sat. June 6. We are putting PIZZAZ into this year's meeting. It is such a great time to reconnect with old friends and tackle new issues. We have a new venue this year with the brunch/lunch at The Fine Arts Center located uptown at 1755 Constantinople at Baronne. Parking is close, and the site is easily accessible by streetcar. This is a historic theatre converted into a meeting hall by Ms. Helen Morgan. The food is homemade by her, so Lea Young and I sampled it to make sure it met our standards - it did! There will be three different salads, croissants, and a dessert station with coffee and tea. No Bloody Marys or wine this year, just the sizzle of our company. Costs are up, but at \$40 each we think we have a winner. This includes the food, location, tax and gratuities plus the workbook. We are scouting out a great speaker and will surprise you next month in the official invitation. I look forward to seeing you there!

Joan Francis Smith, Arrangements Chair