



# The League of Women Voters Washington County

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## LWVAR Council

A well-attended council meeting was held in Little Rock at the Fletcher Library on April 26, 2008, with Mary Alice Serafini presiding. Dot Lishock reviewed the Fayetteville Shale state study process and the consensus results. The vote to accept the consensus was unanimous. A panel spoke on the gas drilling topic. Journalist Ernie Dumas gave a history of severance taxes in Arkansas and the political influences which kept the rate of natural gas taxation abnormally low when compared to other states. Maurice Rigsby of the Oil and Gas Commission discussed the scale of exploration and the licensing process for drillers. Frank Scott represented the Governor's Office and discussed the economic potential for the state and the severance tax rates with their special exceptions.

Geoffrey Kearney, a student in the Clinton School of Public Service, described the cooperative effort he created as a class project with social leaders in Pine Bluff to stimulate collaborative support and better communications in the community.

As a concluding activity on the LWVUS Study on Immigration, two guests shared their perspectives on immigration problems and how they were working to resolve them. Carlos Cervantes, Director of LULAC, discussed the conflicts that make it difficult to comply with the law. Guillermo Hernandez, Hernandez Law Firm, gave examples where employers take advantage of the immigrant when the Federal Government does not provide the necessary enforcement.

Items of business completed the session. The board approved a motion to pay for Stephanie Johnson's air fare to Portland. (Note: She was a candidate for the LWVUS Board and succeeded in attaining that position during the National Convention in Portland, OR. She will be chair of the committee on convention and council.)

## State Study and Conservation Easement Forum

A LWVAR study is in the early stages of development but should be ready by August. Interest in agricultural land preservation and watershed protection has been on the rise since the new millennium. States have been introducing tax incentives to promote conservation easements. This type of easement restricts all future development within the defined parcel so that sufficient land for food production, forests and watersheds can remain productive as the pressure of growing populations puts those activities at risk. Because many people are "land poor" and cannot afford to donate development rights, tax incentives on both the state and federal level are targeting protection with significant amounts of acreage now under protection.

Fourteen states have introduced state tax credits through legislation. Arkansas would also need to pass a bill to do this. The study for the League will be to determine if this is a wise use of public funding and if there are other options that could accomplish the same goal.

At the same time that approval was given by the LWVAR Board to go forward with the study, the League was approached by managers of the Beaver Water District requesting that we host a forum on *The Use of Conservation Easements as a Watershed Protection Tool*. The forum will provide League study opportunities and serve a double purpose. What started out as a regional focus now includes the entire state. Support to bring experienced people from other states has expanded the simple forum idea to a two-day invitational meeting with fifty representatives of state departments/agencies, water managers and conservation organizations. The event will take place August 27-28 at the Lodge on Mount Magazine State Park. Speakers will include Lola Spradley, Colorado Speaker of the House when their conservation bill passed, Clint Miller with the Conservation Fund and Ted Heisel with the Ozark Regional Land Trust. Beaver Water District, Central Arkansas Water, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, the Arkansas Farm Bureau and the Cooperative Extension Service have all volunteered funding leaving the League to host without financial obligation.

Resources for the LWVAR study and material packets for forum attendees will be developed by Joyce Hale, Barbara Farley (both LWVWC), Diane Gately (LWVBC) and Dina Nash (LWVPC). Materials will be posted to a League website for individual study activities. Leagues will need to have their consensus reports complete by late fall so that the LWVAR Board can complete the study process to have input on this topic for the 2009 Legislative session when a conservation easement bill is likely to be introduced.

### **Follow the Money**

The League voted to organize programs that focus on the theme, "Follow the Money." During this time of reduced municipal budgets, studying how money influences policy decisions helps illuminate trade-offs and complexities. Volunteers signed up for the following topics, which have tentatively been assigned to a month. More committee members are always needed and welcomed, and they determine the format and focus of the program. If one of these topics is a personal passion or concern, please contact Karen Minkel at 444-8348 or karen\_minkel@yahoo.com.

**September: Membership Meeting and Candidate Forum**

**October: Impact Fees**

**November: Land Preservation**

**December: Communications**

**January: Septic and Sewer Systems**

**February: Childcare**

**March: Choosing the League's Local Programs**

**April: Developing Local Markets**

**May: Annual Meeting**

### **2008 Finance Drive**

The Washington County League of Women Voters could not meet our financial obligations without additional funding from members and also those generous supporters who are not League members.

The League of Women Voters of Washington County sends a special thank you to the following citizens (non-members, individuals and businesses) for their contributions to the 2008-2009 Finance Drive. Together they have contributed \$1985.00. They are: Bank of Fayetteville; Woody Bassett; Jim Blair; Collier's Drug (Carl Collier); Deborah and Dan Coody; Sue Condren; Marilyn Edwards; Mort Gitelman; Jack and Jan Groh; Morris and Ann Henry; Bob McBride (Budweiser); Karen McSpadden; Carl Owens; Ozark Stell Co.; Frances Phelps Roberts; Shelby Rogers; Sara and Frank Sharp; Susan Schroeder; Marcelle Thompson; Mrs. E. Philip Trapp; Tyson Foods (Archie Schaefer); Lynn Wade; M. A. Westphal; Judith Woltjen.

Our thanks go to the following members who contributed a total of \$1235.00: Lois Alward, Leslie Belden, Jo Bennett, Anita Bukey, Mary Burton, Genie Donovan, Joyce and Jay Hale, Kay Trumbo Havens, Elizabeth Howick, Harriet Jansman, Sally Kelly; John King, Bettie Lou Lancaster, Anne Harris LaRew, Robert Leflar, Louise Mann, Linda McCartney, Mary Bess Mulhollan, Jeanine and Steven Neuse, Linda Nicomento, Janine Parry, Janet Richarson, Trudy Scott, Jane Scroggs, William Shuman, Phil and Mary Alice Serafini, Barbara Taylor, Gene Tweraser, Mike and Martha Ward, Elizabeth Wheeler, and Marge Zinke.

The total for the 2008 fund raiser is: \$3220.00. Please thank these individuals and businesses on behalf of the LWVWC when you see them. They help our efforts to promote good government for the citizens of Washington County.

If you know of others who appreciate the League's work, please ask them to join the LWVWC and/ or support our mission.

Jeanine N. Neuse, Finance Chair

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