

VOTER

League of Women Voters of
Indiana County, Pennsylvania
www.palwv.org/indiana



Volume XXVII, Issue 3 March, 2008

LWVIC Board of
Directors, 2007-
2008

Sherene Hess, Presi-
dent, 724 465-2595

Nancy Fricke, V.
President, 724 465-
5036

Sandy Whitson,
Treasurer, 724 463-
7205

Ann Rea, Secretary,
724-465-5796

Stephanie Chandler

Diane Duntley

JoAnne Ferraro

Jane Lord

Beth Marshall

Olga Platt

Clarice Reber

Aida Shotts

CURRENT HAPPENINGS:

Annual Meeting Change

The Annual Meeting has been moved to April 29, 2008 at 6 pm. It will be held in the lodge at Blue Spruce Park. Since we did not have our potluck dinner in January this year because of the Immigration Consensus, we decided to have a potluck at our Annual Meeting this year. How could the League go a full year without a potluck? We would all have withdrawal symptoms! Please bring a covered dish and your own tableware. The reason for the change in date? **The primary election is that day!** When we originally scheduled the annual meeting, we did not know the primary was being changed to April 22.

In addition to dinner and a short business meeting to elect officers for the next year, we will hear from IUP Professor Wang Xi on immigration, among other things. There will be time for questions. We hope you will join us for a fun evening on April 29.

Wang Xi () (Professor; Ph.D., Columbia, 1993) specializes in political and constitutional history of nineteenth-century United States and teaches courses in Civil War, Reconstruction, and African American history. His seminars cover such topics as slavery, citizenship, history of American suffrage, and American state-and nation-building. He is the author of *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910* (1997), and *Principles and Compromises: The Spirit and Practice of the American Constitution* (in Chinese) (2000, rev. & exp. ed., 2005). He is the translator of the Chinese edition of Eric Foner's *The Story of American Freedom* (2002, 2003). Since 2003 he has served as an editor of *The Chinese Historical Review*, a transnational journal of history. He has been a fellow at the Frederick Douglass Institute for African and African American Studies at University of Rochester, the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University and the Huntington Library. A native of China, Wang Xi regularly lectures on American history in China and currently holds a Changji-ang Scholar Chair Professorship in the History Department of Peking University.

NATIONAL VOTER ONLINE

Would you prefer to receive the **National Voter** online rather than through the mail? The League of Women Voters of the United States is offering its members the option of getting the national magazine through the internet rather than the mail.

If you would prefer this method, send an email to nationalvoter@lww.org and ask that you be added to the email delivery list.

WEB SITES TO CHECK

www.factcheck.org - A nonpartisan site with information about political ads, debate statements, and news articles about political campaigns.

www.snopes.com - Another site which checks the facts about many issues of the day.

www.palwv.org/indiana/ Scroll down - To read the LWVIC report on our consensus meeting and to read the LWVIC letter of comment on Idling Reduction legislation.

NATIONAL FARM BILL TIME AGAIN

Every five years the US Congress writes and passes a farm bill that covers agriculture programs for the next 5 years. This is the year for the newest bill. It covers everything from food stamps to food banks, research to conservation and, of course, commodity programs and pricing. The commodity programs get the largest part of the funding.

The League has a national position on agriculture that we reached in the 1980's. We support sustainable agriculture and the research needed to promote it. We also favor support for small family farms and making markets accessible for them.

The organic agriculture community has been working for the last several farm bill cycles to get measures supporting conservation, organic research, and several other issues into the farm bill with modest success. This year several of the issues are relevant to the LWVUS position.

- Make the Conservation Security Program, which financially helps farmers implement conservation practices, an entitlement program with secure funding.
- Make research into classical plant and animal breeding a priority to conserve this rare germplasm and expand diversity in crops and livestock. Currently, our food system is based on a very limited pool of genes, both in plants and animals. This could be a very dangerous practice.
- Increase funding for organic research. Presently, research targeted to organic agriculture amount to only 1% of the research budget despite the fact that the organic sector accounts for 3% of the US market and is the most rapidly growing segment of the food market.

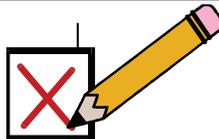
- Establish a liability regime so that farmers suffering losses from contamination by genetically engineered technology can recoup their losses from the manufacturers of this technology. Presently, farmers have no recourse if their crops are cross-pollinated by GMO plants and can, in fact, be charged by the GMO manufacturer with illegal use of the technology.

After the bill sets the priorities and the funding targets, organic lobbyists spend the next five years working to make sure the funding remains in the budget and appropriations. Yet another full time job.

Where Do I Vote on April 22?

The county courthouse can answer that question, but there is also a way to find out online, along with lots of other information related to voting.

To find all the information you will need, go to: <http://www.palwv.org/indiana/> where you will find a section that will link you to the answers.



Scroll down to:

Where Do I Vote on April 22?

Visit Pennsylvania Voters Service to find the polling place for a given residential address. Follow the steps carefully when you enter the address for which you are registered to vote on April 22.

REMINDER: You have until March 24 to register to vote for the Primary!

REDISTRICTING REFORM

League Position in Brief:

Support apportionment based substantially on the population in all voting districts, with additional consideration given to compact and contiguous territory and with respect given to municipal boundaries.

Why now?

Pennsylvania is one of the most gerrymandered states in the nation. If change is to be effective by the next round of redistricting after the 2010 census, a constitutional amendment is needed.

Timing for passage of an amendment requires that the first piece of legislation be passed by June, 2008. ***If that does not occur, re-districting reform will have to wait until after the 2020 census.***

REDISTRICTING REFORM OP ED COLUMN ISSUED STATE- WIDE

published in *Indiana Gazette* January 20, 2008

Andrea Mulrine, President,
LWVPA

Movement within Pennsylvania's General Assembly toward government reform may not be dead but it's barely breathing.

The profound lack of results is more than enough reason for citizens to demand that re-districting reform legislation is passed by early summer. The boundaries of legislative districts to which voters are assigned are changed every ten years to accommodate shifts in population. The shape of the re-designed districts are drawn by the very politicians whose political futures will be affected. Redistricting as currently practiced has made Pennsylvania one of the most gerrymandered states in the country.

Gerrymandering means drawing the boundaries of voting districts in such a way as to rig elections, thus denying citizens their right to a fair vote. Politicians no longer need constituents to vote them into office. So insidious and long practiced is this "self election" that many voters don't connect the dots between gerrymandering and the hijacking of their Constitutional rights.

Who cares? This is the test.

You care about gerrymandering if you care about even one of the following issues:

- Paying high taxes;
- Affording access to health care;
- Decent roads and safe bridges;
- Quality public education;
- Losing your civil rights;
- Having a voice in the way you are governed.

Sure-fire signs of the effects of

non-representative gerrymandering you may have noticed include:

· **Loss of voting power**—Voters lose their most important civil right—the right to choose their representatives. This basic democratic freedom is repeatedly stolen by politicians to ensure their own re-election and to expand their own political power.

· **Low voter turnout**—When the outcome of elections is predetermined by politicians, going to the polls and voting becomes an empty exercise. Eventually voters stay home when they realize that they are not able to elect the representatives they want.

· **Political polarization**—When district boundaries are drawn to guarantee the election of incumbents or another candidate from the same party there is no need to reach out to independent voters or attract voters from the other party. This means that real campaigning for office shifts to primary elections which are usually dominated by the party's most extreme supporters. Those who finally take office are often more immoderate politically and more out of touch with mainstream Pennsylvania. This polarization produces the extreme rhetoric and political squabbling that is suppressing progress in Pennsylvania today.

· **Unresponsive Representation**—Politicians who are assured of re-election stop listening to their constituents. They vote themselves pre-requisites, high salaries, generous healthcare plans, and retirement benefits. Their pensions are four times what they would get in the private sector. And all this is made possible by our tax dollars. So far, this is what we've gotten for our money:

After a half-decade of intense pressure from government reform advocates, the House and Senate

passed a tepid lobbying law that barely addresses the issue of gifts, meals, travel and entertainment received by public officials. Following the money trail doesn't work in Pennsylvania. Lobbyists still don't have to show all they spend to get what they want.

Pennsylvania has one of the worst open records laws in the nation. But after months of debate, action on open records legislation was delayed for "further study." It is to be hoped that something will be passed soon but will it be just better than what we have or the best in the nation?

Other reforms recommended by a legislative reform commission have received little or no attention.

Politicians are not family heirlooms, yet some Pennsylvanians have inherited legislators from their parents' generation. Many incumbents run unopposed and these non-competitive elections frequently happen where district boundaries are drawn to protect the interests of incumbent lawmakers. In the process the primary right to "one person one vote" within a representative democracy is hijacked.

How can gerrymandering be stopped? Two words:

Redistricting Reform.

More than two hundred years of American history has shown that as long as redistricting is left to the discretion of politicians, political parties will continue to gerrymander Pennsylvania for their own political advantage.

If you care about the shape of representative democracy in Pennsylvania call your State Senators and Representatives today and demand that they work diligently to pass redistricting legislation by June, 2008. If legislation is not passed by June the next ten years will be a blank check for more of the same.

A newsletter of the
League of Women Voters
of Indiana County,
Pennsylvania
PO Box 672
Indiana, PA 15701

Phone: 724 465-2595
Email: lwvic@yourinter.net



CALENDAR of UPCOMING EVENTS



Know someone who may be interested in membership? Let Olga Platt know at 724-465-2073 and she will send a brochure & short letter describing LWVIC's activities.

March 13 – Board meeting at Diane Duntley's home. Doors open at 11:30—Meeting begins at Noon.

March 16-22 – Sunshine Week. Highlights open records and meetings laws.

March 24 – Last day to register to vote before the primary.

April 22 – General Primary. Our legislature did not change the Presidential primary to an earlier date.

April 29 – League Annual Meeting – Blue Spruce Lodge in Blue Spruce Park. **NOTE NEW DATE!**

May 3 – League Garage Sale, Susan McClure's Garage. Save your stuff for this spring fundraiser.

May 10 – League Garage Sale wrap-up – Bag Sale.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to men and women of voting age.