



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF EVANSTON

THE INTERCOM

DECEMBER 2009

Candidate Forums

LWV to Host Back-to-Back Candidate Forums on January 10 18th Legislative District and 13th Cook County District

by Judy Hoffman, Voter Service Chair

We are in the process of inviting the candidates for forums for the Democratic races for the 13th Cook County District and the 18th Legislative District. There are no contested Republican or Green races for these offices.

The forums will take place on Sunday, January 10, at Evanston Township High School. They will be held in the Bacon Cafeteria, located right inside the main WEST entrance. The parking lot directly off of the entrance can be accessed from both Church St. and Lake St..

The schedule for January 10:

- 1:30 Doors Open
- 2:00-3:00 Forum for 13th District Cook County Board of Commissioners Candidates: John Michael Keefe, Larry Suffredin
- 3:00 Break
- 3:30-5:00 Forum for 18th Legislative District Candidates: Robyn Gabel, Patrick Keenan-Devlin, Eamon Kelly, Edmund Moran, Jeff Smith

The Evanston Township High School is generously donating the special Sunday use of the facility. Our co-sponsors include the other Leagues of the 13th Cook and 18th Legislative districts and the Evanston/Skokie (District 65/202) PTA Council.

Interested in assisting in the final plans and day of event? Contact Judy Hoffman, 847.491.6275 or judhof@aol.com.

Voter Registration Dates

At press time, plans are being made for a variety of voter registration dates. Look for updates on the LWVE Calendar.

Suburban Cook County Needs 2000 More Election Judges for February Primary

The County Clerk's office recently contacted the LWV of Cook County saying they are still **2000 judges short** of meeting their goal of five judges/precinct in suburban Cook County for the February 2 primary election.

We know from our Poll Reporting Project held during the last election that one of the biggest impediments to having a smooth voting experience is a lack of election judges. So here is your opportunity to improve the voting process. You can sign up yourself – or notify your friends, relatives, and neighbors of this opportunity.

You will be trained and paid \$170 for attending a training class and serving as a judge.

There is additional pay if you are a "supply judge" or "equipment manager." You'll probably be asked to help set up the polling place the evening before. On Election Day, you'll work from 5:00 a.m. through the close of the polls at 7:00 p.m. and then until the results are tabulated and all the equipment is stored securely (usually another 1 to 2 hours). It is a long day, but what a sense of satisfaction you'll get by being part of the process!

MISSION STATEMENT

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through citizen education and advocacy.

The LWVE welcomes men as well as women and encourages all residents of our diverse community to participate.

Sign up online through the Cook County Clerk's office at www.voterinfonet.com or by calling the Clerk's office at 312-603-0906.

Sign up now so you can be scheduled for training and help to make this election run smoothly.

President's Letter

Member: an individual belonging to a group such as a society or team
- *The Oxford American College Dictionary*

The two questions I am usually asked by individuals when approached to join the League of Women Voters are "What will I have to do?" and "What do I get for being a member?" Both questions are reasonable. Today it seems we all have more to do than we can possibly tackle. For better or worse, "What's in it for me?" is a common consideration.

Many, many years ago, a dear friend told me I should join the League of Women Voters. I have always been interested in political issues and policy and this person thought it was the best organization for people interested in both. Instead, I went to graduate school, became a commercial lender, worked ridiculous hours learning my trade and although an active volunteer, did not follow up on the excellent advice given so many years before. Then September 11th happened. It made me think about how disengaged I was in my civic responsibilities. The world's perception of my country was changing and I felt "out of the loop." Yes, I read newspapers; I voted. But how much time did I spend really learning about candidates? How much time did I spend learning about issues that impacted my community, my state, my country? How much did I understand the structure of government at the local and state level? It was time to get involved - I decided to join the League of Women Voters.

My experience in terms of "what I have to do" has been, simply put, whatever I have decided to do. Obviously, I've decided to become quite involved in the organization through committee work and later, participation on the board. But had I decided just to read the monthly newsletter, attend the League's candidate forums, and familiarize myself with League websites, I still would have been a better informed citizen. Had I decided to do nothing but pay my dues, I would have supported the League's educational programs, voter registration efforts and issues advocacy. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville considered the many threats to democracy, including a too powerful media and an ignorant population. The League of Women Voters works to mitigate both of these threats.

What's in it for me? By joining the League, I have contributed to a political, **nonpartisan** organization that studies issues before formulating positions. There's a breath of fresh air! I've had the opportunity to meet wonderful, informed, interested people who are accessible and inclusive. With a phone call, I can find out what happened at a City Council meeting, learn about Cook County's budget or obtain an update on health care legislation. The League has provided me with wonderful friendships, the opportunity to meet people locally and nationally who care about our government and has enabled me to participate in an informed manner. In a democracy, it doesn't get much better than that!

As the holiday season approaches, I think we all stop to count our blessings, as well we should. This year I would encourage all of us to stop and think about the blessing of being born in a country where we can participate in our government. I'm sure the reasons that individuals join the League are as varied as the people joining. But speaking as a banker, and league member, my membership has been one of the best investments I've ever made.
- *Warmest Wishes, Karen*



League of Women Voters of Evanston

2100 Ridge Avenue Evanston, IL 60201
847-866-7844

Office E-Mail: lwvevanston@att.net

Web Site: www.lwve.org

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VP, Local Programs	Betty Hayford
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Membership	Katy Compere Pendleton
Database	Janet Kittlaus
Membership Directory	Diane Korling
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Progressive Dinner	Ellen Browne

THE INTERCOM

December 2009 Vol. 88, No. 11

THE INTERCOM is the newsletter of the League of Women Voters® of Evanston. Ten issues are published each year.

From the League of Women Voters of Cook County

“No Fault” Absentee Voting and Other Changes for 2010 Elections

by Elizabeth Hayford

Cook County voters will choose candidates for the Democratic, Green and Republican parties in the **February 2, 2010 primary election**, with the winners going on the parties' ballots in the November general election. Among the offices that are up for election next year are one of Illinois' U.S. Senate seats, all the U.S. Representatives, the Governor and other statewide offices, state legislators, some Circuit Court judges and the Cook County President, Assessor, Clerk, Sheriff, Treasurer, all the Cook County Board Commissioners and the Water Reclamation District Commissioners. Here are some of the things you should know, followed by some of the key dates for the February primary.

No-fault Absentee Voting. In the past, in order to qualify for an absentee ballot, a voter had to sign an affidavit that he/she would not be able to get to the polling place on Election Day. With a change in Illinois law, we now can choose to vote via absentee ballot without giving any reason. Given the early Feb. 2 primary date, you may not want to take a chance on the weather, but instead choose to apply for an absentee ballot. Applications may be obtained beginning December 24 up through January 28 by:

- calling the **Cook County Clerk at 312-603-0906**
- going to the website at **www.VoterInfoNet.com**
- visiting the office at **69 W. Washington** in downtown Chicago

Absentee ballots must be postmarked by February 1 in order to be counted. Or, you can vote absentee in person up to February 1 at the 69 W. Washington office.

The advantage to Absentee voting is that you can make your choices up to the day before the election and can do so in the comfort of your own home. In contrast, to utilize Early Voting, you must go to a specific site, usually in your community.

There are special rules and dates that apply for absentee voting by military or overseas voters and voters who live in nursing homes or who are in the hospital. College students are also eligible for the Student Absentee Voter Program, which allows them to receive absentee ballots automatically at their parents' homes or at their school addresses for all elections held during the next 2 years. Check the website or contact the County Clerk's office for more information.

Longer Grace Period Registration. While the deadline for normal voter registration is January 5, there is again Grace Period Registration at the 69 W. Washington office of the County Clerk until January 26. If you utilize the Grace Period Registration, you'll also have to immediately vote when you register.

Reduction in Precincts. The Cook County Clerk has reduced the number of precincts in suburban Cook County, which should save \$750,000 per year. In many cases precincts which shared the same polling place have been combined, so although your precinct may have changed, you may be voting at the same location. The Clerk's office should be sending out postcards prior to February 2 which will identify your precinct and polling place. But you can also check by typing in your address on the home page of the VoterInfoNet.com website. Closer to the election, you can also access a sample ballot to see everyone who

will be on the ballot for the party you select.

Checking Whether You Are Registered. Voters can visit the website at www.VoterInfoNet.com to verify they are registered.

Ballot Selection. For the primary, voters will need to select either a Democratic, Green, or Republican primary ballot if they want to vote for candidates. This does not mean that the voter is registering as or joining any of those parties. If there are any referenda on the ballot, a voter could choose a non-partisan ballot, but that voter will only be voting for the referenda, and not any candidates.

Key dates for the February 2 Primary

- Dec 24 – Jan 28: apply for Absentee Ballot
- Jan 5: last day to register to vote, except for:
Grace Period Registration at Cook County Clerk's office
- Jan 6 – Jan 26:
- Jan 11 – Jan 28: Early Voting at selected sites
- Jan 29 – Feb 1: In-person absentee voting at Cook County Clerk's office

Whether you choose Grace Period Registration & Voting, Absentee Voting, Early Voting, or voting at your polling place on Feb 2,

Be Informed and Vote! It Does Matter!



Lunch & Learn

Houlihan Takes the Mystery Out of Property Tax Assessment System at CCLWV Lunch & Learn Event

by Elizabeth Hayford

**“The more people who know what you do,
the more likely you'll do a good job.”**

With these words of wisdom from his mother, Cook County Assessor James Houlihan captured a key reason behind many League activities when he spoke at the November 10 “Lunch and Learn” hosted by the Cook County LWV. Assessor Houlihan also said that these words lie behind much of what he has tried to do since taking office in 1997.

Mr. Houlihan mixed humor with substance and helped to demystify the assessment process and what his office does. For example, the Assessor does not get the checks for payment of your property tax bill! Nor does he set the property tax rates. The Assessor's role is to determine the market value of each of the 1.8 million pieces of property in Cook County, reviewing about 1/3 every year, in the process known as “triennial review.” In 2008, for example, the Assessor's office revalued properties in the western and southern suburbs. This year, it is the city of Chicago's turn. And next year, it will be the turn of the northern suburbs of Cook County.

continued on page 5

Membership News

by Susan Black, Vice President, Membership

Why Encourage Friends to Join the League?

- 1 The existence of the League is important to the health of our democracy. There's no other organization quite like it in the country
- 2 The more total members we have, the greater our advocacy impact. The more active members we have, the more we can accomplish in our community, county, state.
- 3 League members are great people to know!

Please Welcome Our New Members

Donna Burton
Gail Jones
Norah Delaney
Ann Adams (*National Member*)

We'll Be Wrapping It Up For the Holidays – The Bookstores Are Seeking Wrappers

Yes the holidays are now in full swing and as a gift to our League, and to our busy shoppers, please set aside an hour or two for wrapping books at Border's in Evanston.

The store will provide wrapping paper, scissors, and tape. Customers will bring their purchases to you after paying for them. We'll have a sign for LWVE on the table along with a donation jar and we ask that you wrap whatever comes your way (as long as it's been purchased at the bookstore). If you have a friend or a family member who's willing to join you on your shift, please bring them along.

The dates for this year's "wrap sessions" are:

Saturday, December 19	Border's Evanston	10 am to 4 pm
Sunday, December 20	Border's Evanston	10 am to 6 pm

Please contact Sonia Evenstad, 847-869-5112 or Evenstad@sbcglobal.net, and let her know what hours you can work.

Most importantly, thank you for volunteering and representing the League of Women Voters of Evanston in the community

PAYPAL: Make It Easy to Pay Your Dues

Have you renewed your membership in the Evanston League? It's never been easier to renew, now that Paypal is alive and kicking on the LWVE website. Please visit the membership page and renew your membership today!

www.lwve.org/membership.php

Do you know someone who might be considering membership in the Evanston League

Prospective members can also join on-line. Or, send me contact information via the email below and I'll follow up with them about the benefits of League membership.

Susan Black: seblack451@gmail.com 847-560-0630



Calendar of Events

All programs are free unless otherwise noted.
For more information, call the League office at 847-866-7844. Calendar updates at www.lwve.org

Monthly Presentations:

Wednesday, January 13, Noon Luncheon Why the Census COUNTS!

Presentation by Mary Schaafsma, LWV of Illinois.
Details to follow.

Wednesday, February 10, 7 pm Formation of NAACP

Film Presentation by Geri Sizemore, NAACP, documenting the formation of the organization, at the North Shore Retirement Home, 1611 Chicago Ave in Evanston

Wednesday, March 10, 8 am, Breakfast The Politics of Aging: Social Security, Medicare & Health Care Reform

Presentation by Jan Witt
at the King Home, 1555 Oak Avenue in Evanston

Special Events

Saturday, January 9

Constitution Contest

View contest entries 2 - 4 pm. Awards ceremony: 3 pm
Co-sponsored by District 65 & LWV of Evanston.
Joseph E. Hill Education Center, (Evanston/Skokie School District 65), 1500 McDaniel Ave in Evanston

Sunday, January 10, 3 PM

Candidates' Forum

Evanston Township High School, 1600 Dodge in Evanston
Forum for State Representative Candidates for the 18th District; Sponsored by the LWV of Evanston.

Save the Dates! - Details to Follow

Saturday, February 6, LWVIL Issues Briefing

University Center 525 South State St in Chicago

Saturday, March 6

Northshore Leagues: Women's History Month

Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Brackett

Saturday, April 10

LWV of Evanston Progressive Dinner

Thursday, May 13

LWV of Evanston Annual Meeting

King Home, 1555 Oak Avenue in Evanston

While not mandatory, RSVP's help us plan.
Please call the League Office at 847-866-7844
to reserve your spot for upcoming presentations.

Lunch & Learn *continued from p 3*

The Assessor's office uses 3 main approaches for determining value, depending on the type of property: for homes, the primary tool is sales of like properties; for income-producing property it is income capitalization; and for unique properties, such as industrial sites, cost and depreciated value are the primary metrics. In the case of private homes, the area being assessed is divided into neighborhoods. The Assessor bases the market value on the median of recent sales prices for similar homes in each neighborhood.

Of course, everyone wants to know why the recent property tax bills were so high, given the tremendous fall in the value of real estate. Assessor Houlihan reminded us that the tax bill we paid in November was the 2nd installment of the 2008 property taxes and reflected the reassessed value as of January 1 of 2008 or earlier – before the real estate market tanked. Further, a number of taxing bodies had increased their tax levies in 2008. But another key factor, according to Mr. Houlihan, is the phasing out of the so-called "7% cap" in

accordance with state legislation. Mr. Houlihan explained that he was unsuccessful in convincing the legislature that the 7% cap, which in recent years has limited the amount of any higher property assessment that could be used in determining a homeowner's tax bill, should be continued.

Assessor Houlihan said that he is breaking with precedent as a result of the dramatic downturn in the market. In an effort to more properly reflect current market values, this year his office is re-assessing properties in the suburbs that aren't scheduled for reassessment for another one or two years. (This is not the thorough reassessment that is currently being done with Chicago properties under the normal triennial review.)


Assessor Houlihan reminded everyone that approximately 2/3 of your property tax bill goes to fund education because the state of Illinois provides only a small portion of what is needed. Mr. Houlihan has long worked with the League and other entities to support reform of school funding by increasing the state's portion, while reducing the property tax portion. To provide the state with the necessary monies under this proposed

reform, the income tax rate would be increased and the categories to which the sales tax would be applied would be broadened. These actions would put Illinois more in line with the majority of other states.

Until these reforms are achieved, Assessor Houlihan supports a stop-gap measure called the "circuit breaker," which would limit an individual's property tax to no more than 5% of the person's income. In order to make up for the resulting difference in revenue collected, the property tax credit would be eliminated from state income taxes. Will there be unanticipated problems should the circuit breaker concept be adopted by the legislature? Assessor Houlihan thinks that that is inevitable, but said the solution is to deal with those problems.

Assessor Houlihan left us with the thought that the concern over unintended consequences should not prevent us from making changes to seek improvements. For more information about the assessor's office, visit the website: www.CookCountyAssessor.com. The League of Women Voters of Cook County expects to have another Lunch & Learn event in late winter/early spring. Watch for more details.


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League Program: Facts on Cook County Government

by Elizabeth Hayford

Everyone who recently received a property tax bill from the Cook County Treasurer wants to know how Cook County uses our taxes, and whether they are used wisely. On November 18, LWVE members gathered to hear a presentation by the Cook County League on **Cook County Matters - The Facts** and get some questions answered.

Particularly timely because of elections next year for County Board President, Commissioners and several other County officials, the event summarized the governmental and budgetary structure of the County. The Executive Branch is headed by County Board President Todd Stroger and seven other elected officials. The Legislative Branch consists of 17 Commissioners elected by District, with Evanston, other North Shore communities and parts of Rogers Park represented by Commissioner Larry Suffredin. Cook County has an extensive Judicial Branch of 450 elected judges led by Chief Judge Timothy Evans.

The audience learned that the County spends almost 60 percent of its



LWVE Vice President Betty Hayford (L) and Cook County League President Cynthia Schilsky (R)

revenue on two vital services, Public Health and Public Safety. The Budget for 2009 totaled \$3.37 billion, including \$2.9 billion operating funds and \$453 million capital funds. Sales taxes and property taxes are the main sources of revenue for the County, but consumers and property owners should realize that only a small fraction of these taxes go to Cook County, with the largest portion of the sales tax going to the State, and most of the property tax going to local school districts and municipalities.

The presentation generated many questions about details of government and County operations. Fortunately Commissioner Larry Suffredin attended and was able to provide insight into current issues. Lively interest was expressed in the sometimes peculiar shapes of Commissioner Districts and the process of redrawing districts in 2011 after the 2010 census. The Illinois LWV is undertaking a project to improve the redistricting process in the state.

The evening program was led by Cynthia Schilsky, President of the Cook County League, with additional materials presented by Karen Hunt, President of LWVE, and Betty Hayford, Vice-President of LWVE.

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Progressive Dinner Plans Underway

On November 18th, the committee for next year's Progressive Dinner met at Presbyterian Homes. Ellen Browne, chair of the event, Helen Heyrman, Karen Hunt, Diane Korling and Katy Pendleton met to discuss initial plans for the dinner scheduled for Saturday, April 10th. The evening will begin with cocktails and appetizers at the James Room at the Kimble Fitness Center at Presbyterian Homes. Members and guests will then progress to a dinner at a fellow league member's home and end the evening at the beautiful home of Bob and Kathy Tate-Bradish for dessert and coffee. If you are interested in hosting a dinner or providing a dessert, please contact Ellen Browne at 847-864-2450 or eb1115@aol.com before January 30th. The Progressive Dinner is the primary fundraiser for the Evanston League, held every other year, for the benefit of the League's operating fund. This is a wonderful event, not only for league members, but guests and perspective members. Please reach out to new members to join us for what is always an enjoyable evening. Ticket prices for the dinner will be \$50 per person.

Please mark your calendar now!

What Does League Membership Mean to You? Tell us *your* story!

Karen Hunt's recollection of why she joined the League, and what it means to her, caused me to reflect on my own reasons for joining some 30+ years ago, and why, though membership in other organizations come and go, my LVV membership has never lapsed. Active members give to the League, but we also get. In my case, I have had the great good fortune of being mentored by some incredible women who held leadership positions in the League and in Evanston government and civic affairs. My League membership has also led, directly or indirectly, to every job I've had since I rejoined the workforce after my stay-at-home-mom years. The experience I gained in the League during those years strengthened my resume and gave me new skills and talent to bring to the organizations I worked for. What's your League story? Summarize it in a few paragraphs and send it to me for a future issue of the Intercom at hcgagel@comcast.net

— Helen Gagel

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