

The
OTER

VOLUME 45 NUMBER 1

January 2006

Calendar (League activities in bold)

January 2006

Happy New Year!

17 Tu 3 p.m. Freeholder Caucus (Note time)
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden

19 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
Mullen Community Center, Bellmawr

February 2006 - Black History Month

2 W 7:00 p.m. **LWVCC Board Meeting**
Haddon Township Library

12 Su 3:30-5 Regional Equity Public Event
All welcome. See p 6. Turnout is important!

14 Sa All day **Happy Birthday LWV! (1920)**

14 Tu 6 p.m. County Freeholder Caucus
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden

19 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
Wayne Bryant Community Center, Lawnside

March 2006

1 W 7:00 p.m. **LWVCC Board Meeting**
Haddon Township Library

At its Jan. 2006 meeting the LWVCC board:

1. Agreed on a number of steps to promote awareness of the League and increase membership.

2. Considered saving money by offering an electronic-only option for the *Voter*.
3. Authorized the development committee to look into hiring a paid public relations director to help get media attention for the League.
4. Voted to pass along to LWVUS all of the national recommendations from the program planning meeting except the proposed study of national security. The latter will be taken up at the February board meeting.
5. Voted to recommend to the Annual Meeting the existing local program from the directory and a study of the county pension and health plan issue.
6. Considered a number of program suggestions for the upcoming year (starting this spring).
7. Discussed working with the Center for Civic Responsibility on an empowerment training session for the League.

**Running & Winning
Volunteers Needed**

The *Running & Winning Workshop* will take place at Cherry Hill High School West on Friday April 7 from 8 a.m. till 2:30 p.m. League volunteers are needed to assist in various aspects of the program. If interested in helping run this interesting workshop, please call Renée Robbins at 856-428-4841 or e-mail her at ReneeLWV@snip.net.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CAMDEN COUNTY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

The beginning of the new year is when we often make resolutions to lose weight as a result the holiday binges, or to quit smoking or even to commit our time to a cause we love. While our resolutions are commendable, this past year's catastrophic events has caused many of us to step back and reevaluate our own lives and to think about how we can began to prepare and safeguard our families and community from future catastrophes. The LWVCC is committed to planning programs and undertaking studies that are important to the welfare of our community.

In December of each year the LWVCC comes together at its annual program-planning meeting to consider program at either the state or national level. This year the national level was discussed. A major part of the League's responsibility is to educate ourselves through study and to provide feedback and recommendations to these higher levels of League about positions on which action is taken. This year's planning meeting proved to be very informative and productive because the topics that were presented for discussion addressed the concerns and issues that represent a crucial time in our history. National League positions fall into four basic categories, all of which we discussed in December:

- Government
- International Relations
- Natural Resources
- Social Policy

Within each of these areas there are specific positions that have been studied by the national League of Women Voters over many years. Our task was to consider each and decide if we wanted to retain it as is, or perhaps to update it with a study. We also had the option to suggest full studies on new topics. The LWVCC recommended retaining all positions in the national League program, but also to recommend an update of the trade position. In December, attendees wanted LWVUS to study homeland security, but before approving that recommendation a committee was established to develop the scope of the proposed study. That committee is still meeting. We also voted to form a committee to take a closer look at Camden County's pension and health plan.

Our primary goal for 2006 is to adopt program studies that will have an impact in improving the overall welfare of the community which we have committed to inform.

Ann Saunders

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization of men and women that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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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!

Bellmawr: James Mullen Community Center, 29 E. Browning Rd, Bellmawr. Take 295 to 168 South. Browning is in about 0.4 miles. Turn left. In about a block, the building is on the left. *The 400 bus runs up and down Route 168 from Turnersville hourly or more often evenings.*

Blackwood: St. Agnes church

Take 295 to 42 south. Take the exit to 168 south, but after a few tenths of a mile turn left from 168 onto Coles Road. St. Agnes church is in about 3/4 of a mile from there.

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.*

Haddon Township: Rohrer Library: Take 295 to Route 30 north. On 30, pass King's Highway. In about a mile after King's Highway, just after Nicholson Road on the left, you'll see Cuthbert Road on the right. Turn right onto Cuthbert from 30. Stay on Cuthbert for about half a mile. Just past Hopkins, turn right onto MacArthur. The library is at that corner. // This is the same Cuthbert Road that becomes Cuthbert Blvd further north at routes 70 and 38, so you could take it south from there. MacArthur is about 0.8 miles south of Haddon Avenue on Cuthbert Blvd.

Lawnside: Wayne Bryant Community Center: 323 Charleston Ave, Lawnside. Charleston is off Route 30 (White Horse Pike) about a mile below 295. Coming south, turn left onto Charleston, continue past a tiny jog at Warwick for another half mile or so.



is here!

Please respond promptly

The LWVNJ depends on contributions from members. And the LWVCC board calls anyone who hasn't contributed in response to the mailing. The LWVCC gets the same share of the contribution whether you give now or wait to be called! Please help the LWVNJ and save your board extra calls – send in your contribution!

Program Planning Wrap-up

The LWVCC gathered, from hither and yon, on December 7, 2005, to explore national as well as local issues and to determine our program recommendations. Delectable food was abundant (perhaps too much so!) as was good company.

We undertook a new approach to program planning, breaking up into small groups to discuss issue categories at length, then making summary reports back to the full meeting. Each group found features that could be improved in our positions, but few areas were considered worthy of full scale review (i.e., new study). Among those were trade (possible position update) and national security (possible study -- after a committee develops a scope for the study).

Attendees agreed that the LWVNJ should work with other state Leagues to seek a concurrence against the death penalty at convention.

Closer to home, we agreed to study the Camden County pension payment issue that was in the papers a few months ago. On the school construction issue, we will seek to educate members and the public, but did not feel a local study was called for.

*School Construction Corporation Fiasco
Talk to the League by Judy Cambria*

Zena Cohen

At a recent meeting in the Haddon Township Public Library, Judy Cambria delivered a message of crisis in public school construction in New Jersey. The terrible condition of educational facilities in the state sends a message of what we think of teachers and students. Without better facilities, New Jersey cannot be an economic or cultural leader.

Ms. Cambria reviewed the efforts in the sixties and seventies to close the gap in facilities and educational achievement between the poor and affluent districts. In 1973, as a result of these efforts, the state supreme court ruled in *Robinson vs. Cahill* that a thorough and efficient education (as required by our New Jersey state constitution) includes “capital expenditures without which the required educational opportunities cannot be provided”. The court did not, however, order any specific action on facilities at that time, or for the next two decades.

When a 1995 school funding law was passed without money for capital expenditures, the League of Women Voters of New Jersey took a formal stand by filing an amicus curiae brief with the state supreme court that helped persuade the justices that action was needed. The supreme court ruled in 1997 and reiterated in 1998 that the state must pay 100% of the cost of building facilities in the eleven Abbott districts. The legislature finally passed legislation in mid-2000 that included \$6 billion for facilities in Abbott districts and \$2.6 billion for other districts.

Initially, the Economic Development Authority (EDA) was assigned the task of overseeing school construction. It had no experience or background in this area, so in 2002 an independent agency, the School Construction Corporation (SCC), was set up to manage the disbursement of funds and oversee renovations and new construction. As of late 2005, this money has been spent with extremely little to show for it! The agency was dysfunctional!

Ms. Cambria gave many reasons for the failures of the SCC, among which are the following: poor overall policy making and planning; little or no oversight of spending; lack of experience on the part of decision makers; renovations assumed to be primary task while school rebuilding the true need; no provision made for rising inflation and land costs; a torturous process for application by Abbott districts. There was no way to trace the money.

While a bleak picture was drawn, some changes have been made in response to a blistering report by Inspector General Mary Jane Cooper, a report called for by Acting Governor Codey.

Along these changes are:

- A new head of the SCC
- A position of chief financial officer has been filled
- Accounting staff has been increased
- Two new members of the Board of Directors represent the public
- No bonuses for employees
- Agendas are printed before Board meetings
- No single person will be able to approve expenditures or purchases.

Given her devotion and expertise, the school children of New Jersey could have no better advocate, and we in the League of Women Voters of New Jersey can have no better spokesperson for our cause than Judy Cambria.

**2006 Edition of NJ CITIZENS GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT
Will be Available Soon
Place your Order Now!**

The 2006 edition of the *New Jersey Citizens Guide to Government* is coming soon. As an information resource this guidebook is invaluable.

The *Guide* is filled with information about registration and voting procedures, political parties, county, state, and local government, the New Jersey courts, and legislative districts. It lists state administrators and the names, addresses, and telephone and fax numbers of the New Jersey congressional delegation and all state legislators. The *Citizens Guide* explains how to address elected officials and provides tips on communicating with them. It also lists resources to contact about legislation and provides an election/registration calendar

The price is \$4.25 each if purchased directly from a League member, or \$5.00 to have it mailed. For orders of 10 or more, the price per copy is \$4.00, and we will arrange for delivery.

Why not buy copies for friends, family, co-workers?

They make excellent gifts for teachers.

Civic groups and social agencies find them useful.

Part of the purchase price benefits the League of Women Voters of Camden County.

To place your order, you can call the League Line, 856-795-7878 or **send the form below** to League of Women Voters of Camden County, Box 245, Voorhees, NJ 08043.

Make your check payable to **LWVCC**.

2006 NJ CITIZENS GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT

Name _____ Quantity _____

Address _____ Amount Paid _____

Phone # _____

League of Women Voters of Camden County, Box 245, Voorhees, NJ 08043

ANNOUNCING!
A Public Meeting to promote:

- **Property Tax Relief**
- **Affordable Housing**
- **Equitable School Funding**

Sunday, February 12
St. Agnes Church, Blackwood
701 Little Gloucester Road
3:30 to 5:00 pm

Join Roman Catholic Bishop Joseph Galante, dozens of South Jersey leaders, and hundreds of other residents for an afternoon of
Faith and Commitment in Action!

Sponsored by: The South Jersey Regional Equity Organizing Project

**Each year, politicians say there are “no easy solutions” . . .
and then they do nothing.**

**Unless the people hold them accountable and demand change there will be no
action and no real reform!**

At the February 12 meeting, leaders and clergy will propose specific solutions and seek concrete commitments for action on school funding reform, property tax relief, and fair housing policies.

Sign up to attend with your congregation or organization. Your presence is vitally important as we put our faith and our values into action for social change and fairness.

For more information or directions contact the South Jersey Regional Equity Organizing Project (856) 663-5380 or treis@njregionalequity.org. Or visit our web site: www.njregionalequity.org/sjreop

Death Penalty Moratorium Passes NJ Senate

On December 15, the NJ Senate passed the death penalty moratorium bill by a 30-6 strong bipartisan voter. (See press release from New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty below). Thank you to all who made calls and sent letters on this issue. S.709 must now go to the Assembly for concurrence because the previous Assembly bill does not agree with the Senate one. Contact your Assembly members to support S.709, and consult the Senate list below to thank for a positive vote or express disappointment for a negative one. Time is of the essence.

For additional information, contact Michelle Bobrow, LWVNJ State Board and Death Penalty Study Committee member (973-762-1169;mlbobrow@earthlink.net.)

NJADP Press Release:

December 15, 2005 New Jersey Senate passes bill to suspend executions Bipartisan vote is part of growing state and national trend away from the death penalty.

Trenton -- The New Jersey State Senate today approved S-709, legislation calling for an immediate moratorium on all executions in New Jersey and creating a new study commission which will examine the flaws in the State's current death penalty system. Should S-709 become law, New Jersey would become the first State to legislatively impose a moratorium on the death penalty.

"By its action today, the Senate has signaled its deep concern with the State's current death penalty system and sent a clear message that the death penalty just does not work," said Celeste Fitzgerald, Director of New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, a statewide organization that advocates replacing the death penalty with life without parole.

"This vote underscores what a growing number of New Jerseyans have come to realize; the death penalty risks executing the innocent, is unfairly applied, fails victims' families and law enforcement, and wastes millions of taxpayer dollars," said Fitzgerald.

As required by S-709, the new study commission shall be composed of 13 members and will submit its findings by November 15, 2006. It will examine critical issues such as racial and geographic bias, cost and whether alternatives exist that will both ensure public safety and address the needs of victims' families.

New Jersey's action comes amidst a growing chorus of concern about the death penalty across the country. Cases of have been re-opened in Missouri and Texas because of evidence that those states may have executed innocent men. A Virginia death sentence was commuted to life in prison without parole after DNA evidence was destroyed in the case. And voices including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the editorial board of Alabama's largest newspaper, and the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention have recently expressed concerns about capital punishment.

New Jerseyans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (NJADP) is a statewide grassroots organization with over 10,000 members that since 1999 has campaigned for an end to the death penalty in New Jersey. It is the core group of more than 200 New Jersey organizations, representing interests such as labor, justice, education, business, human rights, and virtually every religious denomination in the state.

For more information, see www.njadp.org.