

# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

LWV

OF ALACHUA COUNTY/GAINESVILLE

THE VOTER - January 2008

Official Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Alachua County/Gainesville

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear League Members,

The Election Year is here. Our founders constructed a government like none that had been tried before: A House whose representatives are elected every two years and thus responsive to the immediate will of the people; a Senate whose members are elected for six year terms and thus have longer perspective on the issues; and an executive elected every four years, thus ensuring that no one person wields power for too long. Today the election for the presidency seems to have been going on for the past two years and still has 10 months to go. But the most important day still remains the first Tuesday of November – Election Day.

Just as the candidates and parties are preparing for that day, so must the members of the League of Women Voters. Our self-appointed job as guardians of the franchise and a fair elections process is to register, register, register; and educate, educate, educate. Thank you to our members who have already responded to my call to receive training to register voters and to represent the League at Naturalization Ceremonies and other events in the area. Thank you to those of you who have contributed to the Education Fund to give us the money to conduct candidate forums and to print new education materials.

Two elections in past centuries have determined the very course of our country. The election of 1860 seemed to doom the country to dissolution but ultimately resulted in forging an indestructible union and the promise of equality for all. The election of 1932 resulted in a new compact between the citizens and their government, in which the government assumed new responsibilities for the economy and the health and welfare of its people. It is too early in this century to declare the election of 2008 as “the election of the century,” but Leaguers know that every election is pivotal. We have a lot of work to do.

Yours in League,

*Rosalie Bandyopadhyay, President*  
LWV Alachua County/ Gainesville

## UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

### Save the Dates

**Tuesday, January 8 – Board of Directors Meeting**, 6:00PM – 7:30 PM, D’Acosta House, 703 NE 1<sup>st</sup> Street.

**Wednesday, January 16, 2008 - Gainesville City Commission Candidates Forum**, 7-9 PM, UF Emerson Alumni Hall, 2012 W. University Avenue.

**Tuesday, January 29, 2008 - Presidential Preference Primary and Gainesville City Commission Election.**

**Tuesday, February 5 – Board of Directors Meeting**, 6:00PM – 7:30 PM, D’Acosta House, 703 NE 1<sup>st</sup> Street.

**Thursday, February 21 – Hot Topics Breakfast**, 8:00 – 9:00 AM, 43<sup>rd</sup> Street Deli, 3483 SW Williston Road.

**Thursday, February 21 – Naturalization Ceremony**, Federal Courthouse, 401 SE First Ave.

To receive emails from LWV about local events and League information, please send your email address to Crystal Goodison at [cgoodison@gmail.com](mailto:cgoodison@gmail.com).

*For up-to-date event information, please check our website: [www.lwv-alachua.org](http://www.lwv-alachua.org)*

## RAISE YOUR VOICE!

### Making a statement in Tallahassee and Washington *(Second in a series)*

Action Alerts from LWVUS get Leaguers' attention and organize our response to issues of interest – but how can we make sure our voices get heard?

Legislative offices are flooded daily with emails, telephone calls, and form letters; if you want your message to rise about the din, the League can help!

#### LESSON TWO: Letter-writing with style

Members of Congress and Members of the legislature are always far more likely to heed your message if you are one of their constituents. Be sure to direct your attention to the officials elected from your district, and let them know that your vote counts.

#### Tips for effective letter-writing

- State your purpose in the first sentence of your letter.
- If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it (EX: HB 100)
- Make sure that you are referencing the correct legislation to the correct body of Congress.
- Be courteous – a little Southern hospitality goes a long way!
- If appropriate include personal information about why the issue matters to you.
- Address only one issue in your letter – if you have a few things on your mind, write a few letters!

Always address your correspondence correctly!

#### To a Senator

The Honorable (Full Name)  
United States Senate  
Washington, D. C. 20510 (or district office)

Dear Senator (last name):

#### To a Representative

The Honorable (Full Name)  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515 or district office

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (Last Name):

Note: When writing to the Chair of a committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address him/her as “Dear Mr. Chairman” or “Dear Madam Speaker.”

An effectively written letter will state your opinion succinctly and ask your legislator to support or oppose an issue. You may wish to maximize your effectiveness by following your letter with a telephone call – and the League will tell you how to do that in the next Voter issue!

## PROGRESS REPORT ON ALACHUA COUNTY ENERGY CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

Members of the LWVAC Natural Resources Committee have been monitoring the proceedings of the ECSC and its five subcommittees and contributing as ex-officio members. After many hours of meetings, the ECSC is now attempting to sort, prioritize, and organize a plethora of ideas, schemes, and suggestions for the report due to the County Commission in May 2008. While energy conservation is in the name of the commission, much of the discussion has included alternatives to fossil fuels and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We will keep reminding the group that strategies for changing wasteful behavior, both private and public, should be high on the list.

For more information, or to become involved with the Natural Resources Committee, contact Jerry Kidder at [jkidder@cox.net](mailto:jkidder@cox.net).



*Creating solutions, changing lives.*

Linda A. Frey, R.N.  
Program Director

**Easter Seals Florida, Inc.**  
*Adult Day Health Care at  
Altrusa House of Gainesville*

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# JANUARY 29, 2008 ELECTION INFORMATION

## WHAT WILL APPEAR ON THE JANUARY 29 BALLOT?

In Gainesville, the January 29 ballot will include more than just presidential primary candidates.

On the ballot, will appear:

1. Presidential Preference Primary
2. Proposed Amendment to the Florida Constitution: Property Tax Exemptions, Limitations on Property Tax Assessments
3. Gainesville City Commission (Three seats: District 2, District 3, and At-Large 2)



### Gainesville City Commission Candidates:

#### District 2 Candidates:

Bryan Harman  
Bonnie Mott  
Lauren Poe

#### District 3 Candidates:

Jack Donovan  
Armando Grundy  
Christopher Salazar

#### At-Large District 2 Candidates:

Robert Agrusa  
Thomas Hawkins, Jr.

## AMENDMENT 1 ON PROPERTY TAXES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**BALLOT TITLE:** PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS ON PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENTS

**SPONSOR:** The Florida Legislature

### **AMENDMENT SUMMARY:**

This bill contains the proposed amendment to the Florida Constitution concerning property taxes. **If approved by 60 percent of the electorate, it would:**

1. **Provide an additional \$25,000 homestead exemption** for the assessed value of homestead property valued at more than \$50,000. However, this exemption does not apply to school taxes, which represent approximately 40 percent of property taxes assessed. The \$25,000 exemption would therefore actually result in an additional exemption of only around \$15,000. This provision will be effective January 1, 2008.
2. **Allow homestead owners to transfer up to \$500,000 in Save Our Homes benefits** to a new homestead within two years of giving up their previous homestead. However, if the valuation of the new homestead is less than that of the previous home, the amount of benefits that can be transferred is proportional to the value of the new homestead. This provision will apply retroactively to owners who gave up their homestead in 2007, if they apply for a new homestead no later than January 1, 2009.
3. **Creates a new \$25,000 exemption for tangible personal property.** Since individuals are not subject to taxation for personal property, this provision only benefits businesses. This provision will be effective January 1, 2008.
4. **Caps assessment increases on non-homestead real property at 10 percent per year.** However, this cap does not apply to school taxes. This provision will not take effect until the 2009 tax roll.

### **PRO:**

- Adds a new \$25,000 homestead exemption applicable only to county property taxes (not school taxes).
- Allows homestead property owners to apply up to \$500,000 in existing Save Our Homes tax savings to a new homestead.
- Provides businesses with a new \$25,000 tax exemption on tangible personal property.
- Limits county property tax assessment increases on non-homestead real property to 10% per year (this is not applicable to school taxes).
- May help stimulate sales of real property by allowing homestead property owners to transfer Save Our Homes tax savings to a new homestead.

### **CON:**

- Cities and counties will lose \$9.6 billion in tax money over the next 5 years<sup>1</sup>.
- Public schools will lose \$2.8 billion in tax money over the next 5 years.
- Making Save Our Homes portable extends the present inequality in property tax assessments between homestead owners and owners of non-homestead property.
- The tax breaks will apply to all homeowners, even those who can afford to pay.
- Counties may raise developer impact fees or other taxes or fees to pay for cuts in property taxes.
- May be unconstitutional because it treats long-time homestead owners differently from new arrivals to Florida.
- Changes state property taxes while the constitutionally mandated Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission are still working on its once in twenty years study of the taxation system.

<sup>1</sup>Florida Senate, Updated Senate Fiscal Analysis for Proposed Tax Reform Package, October 28, 2007.

## LWV OF FLORIDA OPPOSES AMENDMENT 1 ON PROPERTY TAXES

The League of Women Voters of Florida opposes SJR 2-D, the proposed state constitutional amendment that will be placed on the special election ballot on January 29, 2008, because it would:

- Add limitations and exemptions regarding revenue sources in the Florida Constitution
- Extend and increase homestead tax limitations without regard to the ability of homeowners to pay;
- Extend the inequities created through Save Our Homes by allowing homeowners to transfer its benefits; and
- Worsen Florida's current infrastructure deficit and the decline in the level of state services and in our quality of life.

President Dianne Wheatley-Giliotti states that "The League of Women Voters of Florida has long held the position that tax sources and revenues should not be specified, limited, exempted or prohibited in the state constitution and that local governments in Florida should have available a variety of options for generating revenues to meet local needs. SJR 2-D contravenes this principle because it increases and extends present homestead-based exemptions, creates a new exemption for tangible personal property and caps assessment increases on non-homestead real property."

In addition, the League of Women Voters of Florida believes that property taxes in Florida should be levied based on ability to pay, and that tax relief or circuit breakers should be provided for all low-income persons who own or rent property regardless of age. By allowing current homesteaders to keep the Save Our Homes tax limitation, SJR 2-D runs contrary to this principle – Save Our Homes is not based on ability to pay and has introduced a bias against more recent home buyers and non-homestead property owners resulting in large inequities in the taxes they pay.

Finally, the League of Women Voters of Florida believes that our state has a present infrastructure deficit, and state service levels and our quality of life are declining. The League's position is that sufficient state taxes should be levied to reverse the decline in levels of service and improve the quality of life for all Floridians. According to the Legislature's own calculations, passage of SJR 2-D will result in revenue losses of \$12.4 billion in the next 5 years. These losses are in addition to the already mandated revenue cap passed by the Legislature during its earlier special legislative session.

## LWV JOINS COALITION TO FIGHT PROPERTY TAX AMENDMENT

A broad coalition representing well over 1 million voters filed the paperwork today to create "Florida Is Our Home," a ballot initiative committee to coordinate a statewide grassroots effort to defeat Amendment 1 on January 29<sup>th</sup>. The coalition includes a diverse group of social service advocates, retirees, community organizations and groups representing teachers, firefighters and other workers. Some of those groups include; the Florida PTA, **the Florida League of Women Voters**, Florida ACORN, the Human Services Coalition and Florida Alliance of Retired Americans, as well as the Florida AFL-CIO, SEIU, Florida Education Association and the Florida Association of Professional Firefighters.

The committee will be chaired by Karen Woodall, a long-time social service advocate. She said, "We have created Florida Is Our Home to educate all Floridians about the negative impacts of Amendment 1 on our communities and our state. When all is said and done, the bottom line is that this is a bad deal for Florida's families." While proponents of the amendment are highlighting the fact that most homeowners may save some money, Florida Is Our Home wants the voters to know that the average \$20 a month homeowners may save will cost our schools, public safety and critical programs that enhance our overall quality of life dearly. Woodall said, "This misguided amendment will hurt all aspects of life in

Florida. Schools and public safety, parks and recreation programs, libraries and after school programs, even public sanitation will suffer greatly if this amendment passes."

### TUNE IN AND LISTEN ONLINE: LWV/ WWG PROPERTY TAX FORUM

On October 24, 2007, the League of Women Voters and Women for Wise Growth held a discussion about property tax proposals that were pending in the state legislature.

Two excellent speakers educated the audience about property tax reform and budget issues. The speakers were: **Karen Woodall**, Director of Outreach & Education, Florida Center for Fiscal & Economic Policy, Tallahassee, and **Randy Reid**, County Manager, Alachua County.

The League is very thankful to Bill Beckett of WUFT-FM, who recorded the forum.

To listen, go to the League website: [www.lwv-alachua.org](http://www.lwv-alachua.org)

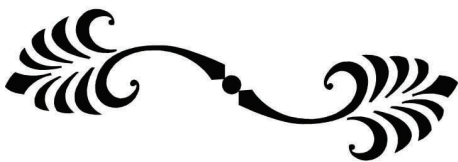
## LWVAC TO HOST “HOT TOPICS” GATHERINGS

LWVAC will hold its inaugural “Hot Topics” discussion meeting on Thursday, February 21, 2008, from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Street Deli Restaurant on Williston Road near the I-75 interchange.

With so much excitement over the 2008 elections, state taxation proposals, and local growth management issues, we have a lot to talk about! LWVAC’s “Hot Topics” gathering will feature good food, good company, and good conversation. Each month’s discussion will focus on an important issue affecting the citizens of Alachua County.

Please join us on February 21 for coffee, breakfast, and discourse, and help us kick off the first of many “Hot Topics” events!

*Contact Jennifer Springfield at  
mediatjen@espring.cfcocxmail.com for*



### Energy Diversity by Jerry Kidder, non-poet

Clothes on my outdoors line dry silently  
serenaded by my neighbor’s pool pump.

## PRESENTS FOR THE LEAGUE’S BIRTHDAY!

In February, all League members and their supporters celebrate the founding of the League of Women Voters. As descendants of these courageous women and men, we have taken on their burden of spreading voter education and ensuring that all citizens have the right to vote. The League is also a leader in many of the most important social and environmental issues of the past nine decades.

We are a grass roots organization and proud of it! But that does mean that the League relies exclusively on its members and friends for financial support. In mid-February you will receive our annual birthday donation appeal. You can contribute to the general fund for local programs, or make a tax-deductible gift to the LWV Education Fund.

Please mark the League’s birthday – February 14 – on your calendar, and consider making a contribution to support the important work the League is doing this election year!

### WIN, LOSE OR DRAW... YOU’RE INVITED!

Please join your LWVAC friends to watch the January 29<sup>th</sup> election returns at Jennifer and Emory Springfield’s house – 3718 SW 65<sup>th</sup> Lane (in the Gainesville Country Club) – at 7:00 p.m.

*For more information, contact:  
Jennifer Springfield at  
mediatjen@espring.cfcocxmail.com*

## LWVAC SUPPORTS FLORIDA CITY GOVERNMENT WEEK

*Debbie Gallagher, Elementary Social Studies Curriculum Specialist, Alachua County Public Schools*

The City of Gainesville, the League of Women Voters, and Alachua County Public Schools collaborated on a special field trip for students this fall to celebrate Florida City Government Week, October 22-27, 2007, as part of an ongoing effort to educate the public how city government works.

Each elementary school was invited to send their Citizen of the Month for September on the field trip. Twenty fifth grade students toured the different departments in the City of Gainesville and saw our local government at work, up close and personal.

Students toured the MLK City Recreation Center, Fire Station # 3, the Gainesville Police Station, and the Public Works Facility; ate lunch at the Thomas Center; and ended the day with a visit to City Hall, where the students were filmed in a public service announcement. The students met Mayor Hanrahan and tested out the city commissioners’ chairs during a reenactment of a public forum discussion.

Thank you to the League members who participated in LWVAC’s fundraiser for the event; the League raised money to help pay for the field trip’s charter bus. The League Board has committed to a goal of covering the entire transportation cost for Florida City Government Week in 2008.

# ARE YOU READY FOR THE JANUARY 29 ELECTION?

With all the media coverage of presidential primary candidates, it is easy to overlook the other important aspects of the January 29 election...namely the Proposed Amendment to the Florida Constitution on Property Taxes, and the Gainesville City Commission race (in which three seats are up for election). As citizens of Gainesville and the state of Florida, both of these issues will have an effect on our daily lives.

Please join us on **Wednesday, January 16, from 7:00 – 9:00 PM**, where we will cover both ballot aspects. LWV of Alachua County/Gainesville is teaming up with University of Florida's Chomp the Vote for this event, which will take place at the **University of Florida Emerson Alumni Hall, 2012 W. University Ave.** UF Chomp the Vote's goal for this event is to engage student interest in local politics, and LWV is happy to support their efforts.

The first segment of the forum will be dedicated to the Gainesville City Commission races. After the candidates question and answer segment, LWV will hold a discussion on the property tax constitutional amendment. **More information about the property tax amendment is also inside this issue!**

Parking is available across University Avenue in the O'Connell Center parking lot. Volunteers will be at the parking lot to assist and direct.



[www.lwv-alachua.org](http://www.lwv-alachua.org)

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