



## Calendar 2009

### SEPTEMBER

--01, **Tuesday**, 7:00 pm, Voter Service Committee Meeting, at Janet Safanda's home. Contact [voterservice@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:voterservice@lwvgenstc.org).

--11, **Friday**, 4:00 pm, LWV Geneva/St. Charles-Batavia Merger Meeting.

--17, **Thursday**, 7:00 pm, LWV of Illinois Fundraiser, "Wait, Wait -- Don't Tell Me", Chase Bank Auditorium, Chicago, IL.

--19, **Saturday**, 10:00 am-2:00 pm, Batavia LWV sponsors Annual Volunteer Fair, Batavia Library.

--22, **Tuesday**, 4:00 pm, Environmental Committee Meeting, Betsy Thelin Zinser's home. Contact [environmental@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:environmental@lwvgenstc.org).

--24, **Thursday**, 7:00-9:00 pm, Board Meeting. All are welcome to attend. Contact [president@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:president@lwvgenstc.org)

--30, **Wednesday**, 6:45-8:15 pm, TLC (Thoughtful Lively Conversation), "How the League Advocates", at the Arcadium Coffee House, First & Indiana, St. Charles.

### OCTOBER

--02 & 03, **Friday & Saturday**, Lake Michigan Interleague Organization Annual Meeting, Saugatuck, MI. More info at

[http://www.lmilo.org/time\\_sensitive/lmlwv3.pdf](http://www.lmilo.org/time_sensitive/lmlwv3.pdf)

-- 07, **Wednesday**, 12N-1:00 pm, Mental Health Rally to support an income tax increase to rescue community care, at Thompson Center Plaza, Chicago (sponsored by the Mental Health Summit, a coalition partner with LWVIL). Contact [league@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:league@lwvgenstc.org)

--10, **Saturday**, 9:30-11:30 am, Freedom of Information (FOI) Forum, sponsored by Kane County Leagues (Geneva-St. Charles, Batavia, Elgin), Gail Borden Library, Elgin (see p. 2).

--13, **Tuesday**, 7:00-9:00 pm, Board Meeting at Carrie Carter's home. All are welcome to attend. Contact [president@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:president@lwvgenstc.org)

--20, **Tuesday**, 6:45-8:15 pm, TLC (Thoughtful Lively Conversation), topic and location TBA.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**November 9, Monday**, 7:00 pm, Presentation on Education Funding in Illinois, by Ralph Martire, Executive Director of the Illinois Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, Geneva Public Library (see article on p. 2) Contact [education@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:education@lwvgenstc.org)

**November 2009**. Affordable Housing Month Public Forum, Housing Action Committee of Illinois. Exact date and location TBA (see p. 2).

**Dec 17, Thursday**, 7:00-9:00 pm, Board Meeting, location TBA. All are welcome to attend. Contact [president@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:president@lwvgenstc.org)

## Presidents' Letter

Welcome to the beginning (almost) of another fall season. We have had an amazingly lovely summer season weather-wise, and it would be wonderful if the ensuing fall and winter seasons are as lovely.

It has been a summer filled with a constant barrage of news on the political front as the two national parties as well as the factions within those parties have clashed over health care reform. You have received updates from the LWV about their official stand on the issue of health care reform, and whether or not you are taking a particular stand, it has been a topic of interest.

- On September 30, we will hold our first TLC (Thoughtful Lively Conversation) on "How the League Advocates" at 6:45 pm at the Arcadium Coffee House, at First & Indiana St. in St. Charles. We hope you will be able to add your thoughts and ideas as we discuss various issues.
- There are a number of forums coming up this fall on topics that have engaged not only the state and national LWVs but our own members as well.
- On October 10 there will be a forum from 9-11:30 AM at the Gail Borden Library that will be on the topic of transparency in government and FOI (freedom of information) issues. This is a follow-up to the study conducted by the Leagues in Kane County. [www.lwvgenstc.org/files/kane\\_county\\_foia\\_audit\\_2009\\_final.pdf](http://www.lwvgenstc.org/files/kane_county_foia_audit_2009_final.pdf)
- Headed by returning member Jean Pierce, our League is starting an Education Committee. Please see Jean's article in this issue (pg. 2) and plan to attend the forum with Ralph Martire on November 9 at 7:00 pm at the Geneva Library.
- Member Candy Goldstein has informed us that there will be a forum on the creation of affordable living options for persons with disabilities sometime in November in the tri-cities area (see pg. 2). Please watch for updates on this topic.
- The Voter Service Committee is meeting to plan ahead for what promises to be a busy primary season. The Environmental Committee will be working to focus on the use of energy in the central Fox Valley.
- We are continuing with our merger process with Batavia LWV and are excited about the new possibilities brought about by combining our two groups.

We hope that you will find areas to interest you and are able to be involved in these activities. Please feel free to contact us with questions or comments at [president@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:president@lwvgenstc.org).

Janet S. Craft and Kimberley Haag  
Co-Presidents, LWV Geneva/St. Charles

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## **Freedom of Information Forum**

**Sponsored by the Leagues of Women Voters of Geneva/St. Charles, Batavia and Elgin  
October 10, 2009, 9:30-11:30 am  
at the Gail Borden Library in Elgin**

**Speakers: Mark Stern (see below) and a representative from the Citizens Advocacy Center in Elmhurst**

**Mark Stern** is a board member of Educate 200 Foundation, a group of parents and citizens frequently critical of the Wheaton-Warrenville school district. In January 2006, Stern requested, under Illinois' Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the employment contract of the district's superintendent, Dr. Gary Catalani. Mark will talk about his experience attempting to get this requested info. For more info, visit the First Amendment Center link and Citizen Advocacy Center's Link.

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/commentary.aspx?id=21641>

<http://www.citizenadvocacycenter.org/>

### **Affordable Housing Month Forum**

**Submitted by Member Candy Goldstein**

Watch for an upcoming announcement about a forum to be held in November during Affordable Housing Month. This form will provide Information and discussion regarding current housing resources and creating more independent living options for persons with disabilities in Kane County. Although still in the planning phases, likely speakers include representatives from local service agencies, legal services and housing planning agencies. The forum is being organized by the Kane County Housing Action Coalition, of which Candy is a member.

## **Ralph Martire to speak on Education Funding at Geneva Public Library, November 9, 7:00 pm**

Our League's new Education Committee, chaired by Jean Pierce, will host a presentation at 7 pm on Wednesday, November 9, at the Geneva Public Library, by Ralph Martire who will address issues of vital concern to every taxpayer, student, and parent in Illinois. How did the "Doomsday" budget that was passed by Illinois legislators this summer affect local schools? How would it be possible to retain local control of schools while increasing the proportion of support from the state? What needs to be done now in order to save vital programs of our schools and local human services? Why must we act now to reverse the situation?

Ralph Martire is well-known to League members as the executive director of the State of Illinois Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. Ralph is also a knowledgeable advocate for HB 174, the League-supported bill which would increase state income taxes while providing credit for local property taxes.

Please invite your friends and neighbors to join us for what promises to be a provocative discussion. Anyone from the League who would like to work on this and other educational programs is invited to contact Jean Pierce at [education@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:education@lwvgenstc.org). A great big "thanks" goes out to Jean for stepping forward to chair our League's new Education Committee and for arranging this presentation.

## **HEALTH CARE REFORM**

**By Janet Craft**



You don't have to read it here to know Health Care Reform was on everyone's agenda in August. When Representatives were in their home Districts the heat was on from proponents and opponents as well as those just needing more information. That includes most of us since there are multiple bills that will eventually wind their way through the political process which we will watch closely.

LWVUS supports the concepts in HR 3200 to provide affordable health care for all Americans including a public health option. For more information, go to [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org). The benefits of America's Affordable Health Choices Act in the 14<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Illinois are outlined on the following page.

The LWV Presidents of Geneva-St. Charles, Batavia and Elgin area have sent joint letters to the editor to local media (see pg. 8), and to Rep. Foster, Senator Durbin and Senator Burris. We also met with Rep. Foster on August 31 for further discussion.

If you haven't already done so, contact Rep. Bill Foster to let him know of your support and concerns: e-mail from web site-- <http://foster.house.gov/Contact/foster>; call 630/406-1114, or stop by the Batavia Office at 27 N. River Street in Batavia, as Linda Robertson did. Linda emphasized the need for health care reform for small business owners.

## **Kane County Website Task Force** **By Kimberley Haag**

Kane County has assembled a task force in order to work on its website to make it more user friendly and transparent. A letter was sent to the League of Women Voters, Geneva/St. Charles, to ask us if we would like to send a representative to serve on this task force. As of now, I am that representative, and Lynn Elam, of Batavia LWV will be attending.

The task force consists of representatives from the various Kane County Departments, information technology specialists from Kane County as well as an information technology specialist from Elgin Community College. Jeanette Mihalec, a newly elected Kane County Board member from Elgin, is chairing the committee, and Tom Van Cleave, Board member from Batavia is a member. Ms. Mihalec is hoping to involve more community members as this task force proceeds, including citizens from many parts of the county as well as from various subgroups of citizens. This committee has received \$65,000 in grant money to update the website.

So far we have had one meeting, with the second meeting scheduled for September 14. The plan is to meet several times a month until we are finished. Our first task has been to identify 5 positive and 5 negative aspects of the website. In going over the website more thoroughly I found that they have updated many parts, and some are in process of being updated.

I look forward to the progress this task force will make. Please feel free to send me your opinions and thoughts. You can access this website at [www.countyofkane.org](http://www.countyofkane.org). You can also access the agenda and minutes of this committee at: <http://www.countyofkane.org/Pages/MeetingNotices.aspx>



July 2009

## Benefits of America's Affordable Health Choices Act In the 14th Congressional District of Illinois

### Committee on Energy and Commerce

America's Affordable Health Choices Act would provide significant benefits in the 14th Congressional District of Illinois: up to **17,000 small businesses** could receive tax credits to provide coverage to their employees; **7,900 seniors** would avoid the donut hole in Medicare Part D; **1,610 families** could escape bankruptcy each year due to unaffordable health care costs; health care providers would receive payment for **\$61 million** in uncompensated care each year; and **81,000 uninsured individuals** would gain access to high-quality, affordable health insurance. Congressman Bill Foster represents the district.

- **Help for small businesses.** Under the legislation, small businesses with 25 employees or less and average wages of less than \$40,000 qualify for tax credits of up to 50% of the costs of providing health insurance. There are up to 17,000 small businesses in the district that could qualify for these credits.
- **Help for seniors with drug costs in the Part D donut hole.** Each year, 7,900 seniors in the district hit the donut hole and are forced to pay their full drug costs, despite having Part D drug coverage. The legislation would provide them with immediate relief, cutting brand name drug costs in the donut hole by 50%, and ultimately eliminate the donut hole.
- **Health care and financial security.** There were 1,610 health care-related bankruptcies in the district in 2008, caused primarily by the health care costs not covered by insurance. The bill provides health insurance for almost every American and caps annual out-of-pocket costs at \$10,000 per year, ensuring that no citizen will have to face financial ruin because of high health care costs.
- **Relieving the burden of uncompensated care for hospitals and health care providers.** In 2008, health care providers in the district provided \$61 million worth of uncompensated care, care that was provided to individuals who lacked insurance coverage and were unable to pay their bills. Under the legislation, these costs of uncompensated care would be virtually eliminated.
- **Coverage of the uninsured.** There are 105,000 uninsured individuals in the district, 13% of the district. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that nationwide, 97% of all Americans will have insurance coverage when the bill takes effect. If this benchmark is reached in the district, 81,000 people who currently do not have health insurance will receive coverage.
- **No deficit spending.** The cost of health care reform under the legislation is fully paid for: half through making the Medicare and Medicaid program more efficient and half through a surtax on the income of the wealthiest individuals. This surtax would affect only 4,300 households in the district. The surtax would not affect 98.8% of taxpayers in the district.

This analysis is based upon the following sources: the Gallup-Healthways Survey (data on the uninsured); the U.S. Census (data on small businesses); the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (data on the Part D donut hole, health care-related bankruptcies (based on analysis of PACER court records), and uncompensated care); and the House Committee on Ways and Means (data on the surtax).

## Freedom of Information (FOI)/ Transparency Project Public Document Audit – Citizens’ Initiative for Transparency

Kudos go to **Darlene Bakk** (Geneva/St. Charles League), **Laurel Bault** (Elgin League) and their team of 11 “auditors” (representing Elgin, Geneva/St. Charles, and Batavia Leagues) for their diligent work, completion and reporting of results of the FOI public document audit project supported by a grant from LWVUS – one of only 12 grants awarded nationally. Essentially, the team’s objective was to find out whether local and state governmental offices were complying with laws set forth in the FOI Act. In addition to Darlene, Kim Haag, Suzanne Kolomyjec, Chris Pakan, and Susan Secondi worked on this project from the Geneva/St. Charles League.

Several articles and editorials were written and appeared in local newspapers. Shown on pages 7 and 8 are reprints of two articles giving further information into the work of this team.

A comprehensive report is available on our website at [www.lwvgenstc.org](http://www.lwvgenstc.org). A forum relating to FOI, sponsored by the Leagues, will be held on October 10 at the Gail Borden Library in Elgin (see page 2).

## LWVIL Convention Highlights

**Co-Presidents Kim Haag and Janet Craft represented LWV Geneva-St. Charles at the 54<sup>th</sup> State Convention of LWV of Illinois held in Peoria, June 12-14.**

- **Roll Call for LWV Geneva-St. Charles (each League describes itself)**
  - ❖ Mega Candidates Forum—600 attending—record for Voter Service
  - ❖ FOIA Audit with other Kane County Leagues—Education Fund grant from LWVUS
  - ❖ LWV Batavia and Geneva-St. Charles anticipate merger to serve Central Kane County with a larger, stronger League
- Community Impact Award to Rochelle League of 35 members who took leadership to provide rural Ogle and Lee Counties with a public transportation system.
- Spotlight on League Achievement for Geneva-St. Charles/Batavia’s Mega Forum
- Kim participated on panel, “League as Community Organizer”
- From President’s Lunch: “Make sure there is a welcoming presence. Pick one or two (opportunities) to focus on – you don’t have to do it all! None of our mistakes is fatal.” Paula Lawson, Outgoing LWVIL President
- **Action Focus Readopted**
  - ❖ Fiscal Policy and Tax Reform including school funding and social services
  - ❖ Campaign Finance and Ethics Reform
  - ❖ True Census Count 2010 and Redistricting Reform
  - ❖ Will of the Convention statements to Governor and Legislators stating LWVIL’s commitment to Campaign and Ethics, Fiscal/Tax Reform.

*Please Join Us*

**Dues are Due!!**

**Don't forget! Yearly dues are due now.**

- \$60 one-year **Individual Membership**
- \$90 one-year **Household Membership** for two members who share address
- \$25 one-year **Student Membership**

Make check out to: League of Women Voters of Geneva/St. Charles.  
Send to: PO Box 824, St. Charles, IL 60175.  
The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization of women and men, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education.

*Dues are Due Now*

**Pay by PayPal**

Pay your dues with Pay Pal. Go to our website  
<http://www.lwvgenstc.org/join.html>  
Go to the bottom of the page and click the amount you wish to pay. This is for both new and renewal memberships. You do not need to have a PayPal account in order to utilize PayPal.

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**Welcome New Member**

**Nan Harrison  
From St. Charles**

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Dear Members,

We value your membership and support of League!

Please help us maintain and grow our membership by sharing what we are doing with your friends and colleagues and asking them if they would be interested in joining. The current politically environment and the League's action focus provides a good opportunity to increase membership, but we need to ask people to join. Please keep asking.

Mary Ann Naas  
Membership Chair

**The LWV Geneva-St. Charles extends their heartfelt sympathy to long-time member, Jamie Daniel, who recently lost her son, Daniel Phyfer.**

The next two pages contain newspaper articles on the FOIA audit project and a letter to the editor from the League on health care reform.

For questions/comments about this newsletter, contact Voter Editor at [editor@lwvgenstc.org](mailto:editor@lwvgenstc.org).

**From the Daily Herald, 7/6**

**Voters group puts FOIA laws to the test. By Josh Stockinger**

There's plenty of room for improvement when it comes to how forthcoming suburban taxing bodies are with public information, according to a recent study by the Kane County League of Women Voters.

In April, the nonprofit organization sent identical letters to 44 government bodies asking for the names, titles, salaries and hire dates for all public officers and employees. The recipients weren't informed they were being tested, and were asked to respond electronically.

The results, according to the league, were a mixed bag of full approvals, partial denials, and responses that were both timely and late under the Freedom of Information Act.

Laurel Bault of the league's Elgin chapter said the project was meant to coincide with Independence Day and also to highlight President Obama's recent call for more transparency in government.

"The most telling result for me was that, while many agencies complied with our requests very professionally, quickly, fully and electronically, some did not, and some even made the process difficult," Bault said.

The league recruited 11 members to put in the requests as private citizens and document their experiences from start to finish.

In its final report, the league cited the village of South Elgin as an example of how records requests ideally are handled. The village provided the requested information almost immediately, as well as contact information for an employee who could address any follow-up questions, according to the report.

Mary Vandenoorn, assistant to the village administrator, said she was pleased the league had a pleasant experience.

"If the information is public record, it should be easy to duplicate," she said. "We kind of want to make it (information requests) easy. We have a commitment to transparent government."

But others provided either incorrect or incomplete information, missed a seven-day legal deadline for responses, failed to respond electronically or asked for fees that ranged from a few cents to more than \$100.

St. Charles Township Clerk Jack Brainard defended his office's request for a \$50 expense fee to prepare the documents, and an initial denial of employee names that was later reversed, as the result of being a small, rural entity that receives few records requests and must pay someone to prepare such documents.

"We don't try to give anybody a rough time," he said. "It isn't a big thing with me, and I don't think it's a real big thing with anybody else unless they're just picking at it. If we figure we're wrong, we'll change something and do it right. But I'm still not convinced we were wrong."

Likewise, Campton Township Clerk Dick Johansen took issue with the report's characterization of his office's response. According to the report, Campton Township was late in responding to the initial request, required the completion of a special form, and provided incomplete information.

But Johansen said officials are prohibited from creating documents for the purpose of fulfilling a FOIA request, and the township also was not clear on precisely what the auditor was looking for. Additionally, he provided a letter of response dated five days after the initial request and within the legal time frame, although not all of the information was provided on that date.

Johansen added that the township was unable to provide employee hire dates because that information is maintained in personnel files, which are not open to the public.

"We bent over backward to get them what they wanted," Johansen said. "I think we handled it exactly the way it should be handled."

Bault, who stood by the report's findings, said the point was not to "catch somebody doing something wrong," but to raise awareness. In all, the project cost about \$400 and was paid for with grant funds, she said.

"While the League of Woman Voter members are very tenacious, how would a citizen react to when faced with some of these barriers? My guess is that they would stop the process," she said. "We hope this audit is viewed as an educational tool not only for the public, but the agencies as well."

The full report details responses in parts of Kane, DuPage, Lake, Cook and McHenry counties. It is available online at [lvvgenstc.org/audit.html](http://lvvgenstc.org/audit.html) or [elgin.il.lwvnet.org/Public\\_Document\\_Audit.html](http://elgin.il.lwvnet.org/Public_Document_Audit.html).

## **Editorial from the Daily Herald, 7/8/09**

### **Exercise Your Right to be Curious**

President Obama began his tenure in the White House with a promise to make the federal government more transparent. After eight years of opacity, that was welcome news. As we've seen, too much still happens without being subject to the antiseptic of sunshine.

It is the duty of an independent press to shine a light in the dark corners, to ferret out those who would corrupt the public's trust and mispend your hard-earned taxes. But it's also the duty of every citizen to ensure his or her government is doing the job it should be doing, and that's really at the heart of the Freedom of Information Act.

For the past four decades, the federal law has given regular joes access to information regarding how government is conducted and where the money goes. States, including Illinois, have their own versions of the law. A major rewrite of Illinois' is awaiting Gov. Pat Quinn's approval.

The League of Women Voters has always been a staunch advocate of open government and cajoling the populace into better understanding the big issues and getting people to vote. Not a particularly rewarding vocation, given the dearth of people voting. But they keep going because it's important.

The Kane County chapter of the League recently took another step: To audit just how open various layers of local government are. In April, the nonprofit organization sent the same letter to 44 government bodies, primarily in Kane County, asking for an electronic accounting of the names, titles, salaries and dates of hire for all public officers and employees. In each case, it was a private citizen making the request, and neither the League nor the study was mentioned.

What the League got back was a mixture of immediate and complete information, late or spotty data and just about everything along the spectrum.

Our experience is that some forms of government - larger municipalities and school districts - deal with Freedom of Information records requests all the time. But some rarely, if ever, deal with one. That doesn't mean the law requiring the timely issuance of information doesn't apply to them.

We applaud those who complied - notably the village of South Elgin, cited as providing the information requested right away and even offering contact information for a village employee who could help with follow-up questions. And we admonish those who did not fare well to brush up on the law, its goals and its requirements.

We applaud League members for their vigilance. But they'll be the first to tell you they can't keep government honest alone.

So attend a government meeting. Request documentation if something doesn't smell right to you. It's your right, after all.

When it comes down to it, if you blindly accept what you perceive as unjust government, but you abdicate your role as part of the checks and balances of government, what do you have to gripe about?

## **From the Kane County Chronicle, 8/9/09**

### **Letter to the Editor:**

While it is encouraging that Senate and House committees are beginning to seriously consider **health care reform** legislation, it is critical that the U.S. Congress take action and passes real health care reform in the next few months. America is facing a health care crisis caused by a combination of skyrocketing costs and an insurance system that leaves 47 million of us without any coverage. The current health care system is endangering both our economy and our health, and voters have made it clear that they want change. According to a study reported in The New England Journal of Medicine, 70 percent of Americans surveyed believe the health care system needs major changes, if not a complete overhaul.

Health care reform legislation must guarantee quality, affordable health care to all U.S. residents. It is universal coverage that will determine the humanity of our system, and all Americans must have health care coverage, including the choice of a quality, affordable public insurance plan. In addition, it is essential that comparative data on treatments, benefits packages and medical outcomes be made publicly available so that individuals can make informed health decisions.

Congress needs to take additional strong action to reduce the costs of health care for individuals, businesses and communities. As a nation, we are spending \$1 out of every \$6 we earn on health care. Legislation must provide effective cost controls, equitable distribution of services and allow for efficient and economical delivery of care. Offering everyone the choice of a government administered health insurance plan like Medicare that would compete with private health insurance plans will be key.

Achieving this kind of comprehensive, system-wide reform will take a shared effort by citizens and Congress. Senators Durbin and Burr and Representative Bill Foster need to support real health care reform.

Kimberley Haag and Janet S. Craft, co-presidents of League of Women Voters Geneva-St. Charles  
Susan S. Russo, president of League of Women Voters Batavia  
Sigi Psimenos, president of League of Women Voters Elgin Area