

LWVSAA

President's Message

It is somewhat comforting to learn the results of a recent national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in conjunction with the Smithsonian National Museum of American History for the museum's newly opened "American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith" exhibition that shows an overwhelming 91% of people consider the right to vote as essential to their own personal sense of freedom.



Madhu Sridhar

A 59% majority says that everything possible should be done to make it easy for every citizen to vote. There seems to be some disconnect when it comes to what we believe our elected officials should be focusing on versus what

they think needs to be fixed. Rather than making voting easier and enhancing voter confidence in the election process by relaxing voter ID laws, increasing the pool of trained poll workers and state-of-the-art voting machines, educating the voters about their voting rights and encouraging underrepresented communities to vote, the White House

has created, through executive order, the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity. The purpose of this commission is to look into voter fraud despite the fact that there is little evidence that voter fraud exists. (At the state level, our legislators are more worried about the "bathroom bill" than they are about fixing funding for public

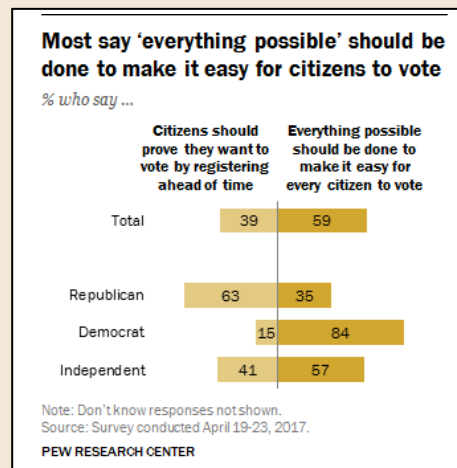
education and addressing other important issues.)

Various studies have demonstrated that impersonation fraud by voters is almost non-existent. The Brennan Center's seminal report on this issue, "The Truth About Voter Fraud," found that most reported incidents of voter fraud are actually traceable to other sources, such as clerical

errors or bad data matching practices. The report found incident rates between 0.0003 percent and 0.0025 percent. Voting officials on both sides of the aisle agree that imper-

sonation fraud by voters is rare.

Courts have also expressed that fraud by voters at the polls is



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Court allows voter information to be collected

By GLENDA WOLIN

A new wrinkle arose on July 24 in the controversy over whether states should release voter information to the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity.

A district judge in Washington, D.C., denied a temporary restraining order to the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), which was attempting to block the commission from collecting the data

from all 50 states and D.C., based on privacy concerns. The panel had been unable to collect the data pending the judge's decision.

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insignificant. The Fifth Circuit court stated in an opinion that Texas's strict photo ID law is racially discriminatory. It noted that prior to the law passing, there were "only two convictions for in-person voter impersonation fraud out of 20 million votes cast in the decade." Statistics nationwide are no different and government investigations have reached the same conclusion time and again across the nation that voter fraud is uncommon.

Real fraud, of course, should be publicized and prevented. Concerns for potential fraud have often been forwarded as an argument for raising barriers against qualified voters. Fraud can never be an excuse for disenfranchising lawfully registered voters or creating hardships for them to participate in the electoral process. The goal, in those cases, should be fraud suppression and not voter suppression.

So why is it necessary to create a commission to look into voter fraud? The Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity is requesting private voter data that had been previously protected by the state. As a result, there have been reports that voters are dropping their names from the state roll to protect their privacy. This is having exactly the opposite effect of the mission of making voting easy for all citizens. Is this building election integrity or eroding public confidence in the election administration?



Voter information

Now, most states can choose to release voter data to the commission.

The decision doesn't affect the situation in Texas for now though, because on July 20, the League of Women Voters of Texas, the Texas NAACP and a private citizen filed suit in District Court in Travis County seeking to prevent release of state voter records to the commission. Several other states are in similar situations because of pending lawsuits.

"Since a federal court has ruled that the commission can continue to pursue its data collection efforts, it is even more important that Texas adhere to our privacy protections in state law," said Texas League President Elaine Wiant. "Texas cannot send the data to the commission until our lawsuit is resolved."

The Texas suit points out that Secretary of State Rolando Pablos would be breaking state law if he hands over personal information about voters to the commission without meeting certain conditions. Those include paying a fee – more than \$1,000 for the entire Texas voter list – presenting a notarized affidavit stating they will not use the data in connection with advertising or promoting commercial products or services, and protecting birth dates to prevent risk of iden-

tity theft.

When the committee first requested voter records nationwide in late June, Pablos indicated he would provide it "public information." He did not mention any conditions attached to the release of the information.

On July 5, Wiant sent a letter to Pablos urging him to decline the request as several other states had done at that point, citing privacy concerns and the belief that the real purpose of the commission was to "suppress voter participation and to promote a false narrative about voter fraud."

The commission is headed by Vice President Mike Pence. Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach is vice chairman.

"This commission has assembled a Who's Who from the Voter Suppression Hall of Fame and presents one of the greatest threats to democracy in the last 100 years," said Gary Bledsoe, president of the Texas NAACP and an attorney with the Bledsoe Law Firm. "This lawsuit is intended not to obfuscate any legitimate efforts to scrutinize voter efforts, but to ask that our state recognize our traditional values such as privacy and not produce unnecessary and inappropriate information that can only lead to harming voters."

To read the Texas lawsuit, go to <http://bit.ly/lwvsuit>

Panel set to discuss planning for traffic in future

By ELAINE TALARSKI

How well is metropolitan San Antonio prepared to meet transportation needs as the area continues to grow, with 1.1 million new residents expected by 2040?

As the population increases, so does the number of cars. Currently the volume of traffic on many roads exceeds the capacity it was designed to handle. Anyone who drives major roads during morning and evening peak traffic can see that. The 23-mile stretch of Loop 1604 between Bandera Road and Interstate 35 is 60 percent over capacity now, says County Judge Nelson Wolff, and if the proposed expansion by two lanes in each direction doesn't happen, it is predicted that it will be 150 percent over capacity by 2025.

Efforts to reduce the number of vehicles and improve the flow of traffic have met with minimal success. Studies made for SA2020, a nonprofit created to plan for the city's future, show that daily vehicle miles traveled per capita increased from just under 21 in 2010 to 24.5 in 2015, while SA2020's goal for the year 2020 is to reduce them to 18.7 and for 2040 to 16.5. The overall goal is to reduce vehicle miles per person 26 percent from 2013 to 2040.

This could be done with im-



proved bus service and more public transportation options as well as infill housing so people live closer to work, encouraging business to provide shower so people can bike to work, improving walking and biking corridors, creating mixed-use communities, and other ideas that let people get places without taking cars.

So far, despite efforts to improve bus service, for many it is not readily accessible and does not meet people's needs. VIA bus use has shown a slight decline since 2010, going from about 40 million annual boardings to about 41 million. SA2020's goal for 2020

To address the need for comprehensive planning to meet future transportation needs and examine factors that impact quality of life, The League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area is planning a public forum to be held in October 2017. Stay tuned for date, time and place of the forum.

is 126 million.

Quality of life is impacted, with vehicle emissions adding pollutants to the air, resulting in increased respiratory problems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vehicles contribute more than 50 percent of air pollution in urban areas.

The CDC points to a study done during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, when peak morning traffic decreased 23 percent and peak ozone levels decreased 28 percent. While the number of most children's emergency room visits remained normal, ER visits for children with asthma decreased 42 percent, suggesting that reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality can improve the respiratory health of a community.

Other statistics show time spent in traffic impacts the economy from the standpoint of loss of productivity, increased fuel cost and maintenance and increases risk of accidents. Sitting in traffic has also been reported as contributing to obesity from inactivity, and the stress can contribute to road rage.

Traffic can't be eliminated, but as San Antonio grows, every step taken to minimize the problems it causes will make the city a more livable, enjoyable place to be.

Membership up 12 percent

League interest jumps following election

By GLENDA WOLIN

As the League of Women Voters prepares to enter its second century, about 50 members of six Texas Leagues gathered at Canyon Lake on July 15 to benefit from lessons state leaders have learned on how the League will transform in the coming years.

“The ideals of democracy itself are under attack, and the League of Women Voters, with its almost 100 years of history, is the organization to fix it,” said Elaine Wiant, president of the League of Women Voters of Texas. “After the recent election and the Women’s Marches, we’ve seen a new wave of activism and interest in the League.”

Nationally, she pointed out, since January the League has grown by 12 percent, and the state has grown by 7 percent. Some local leagues have gone well beyond that. San Antonio’s membership grew about 17 percent, from 85 members in January to 102 now. About two dozen

new Texas Leagues have sprouted.

To accommodate the influx of members and the changing of times, Wiant said, the League needs to make some changes. At two recent meetings, League leaders from throughout the country brainstormed about what those should be.

The overall outcome seemed to focus on flexibility. Wiant said the

leaders felt the administrative burden should be lessened on local leagues, joining should be made simpler for new members, League structure should allow for organizing in a more flexible way, and rules should be less structured so Leagues can be more fun – “like they used to be,” as one person put it.

Grace Chimene, state League vice president and social media guru, emphasized the importance of Facebook, Twitter and other social media in reaching out to members, community organizations, voters, supporters, prospective members, government, media and others. She offered sugges-

tions caught the interest of attendees. It increases visibility, leading to increasing membership, getting better speakers at events and raising more funds. For instance, after the Austin League worked with the Alamo Drafthouse on some projects, the theater asked the League to help put together a panel after a showing of the film “Suffragette.” It then donated the proceeds to the League.

“I really can’t say more than collaborate, collaborate, collaborate,” said Austin League President Cinde Weatherby. “Reach out. Partner.”

A new approach to an old idea – candidate forums – also generated a

lot of interest when it was explained by Meg Scott, state secretary and member of the Hill Country League, which successfully tried the “Speed Dating” method last year.

All candidates are invited to the forum, and the audience is divided equally among as many tables as there are candidates. Each

candidate sits at a table and talks to the people there for 10 minutes. Then each candidate moves to the next table for 10 minutes, and so on, until they’ve gone to all the tables.

The final discussion of the session was about planning for 2018-20, which will be an exciting time, full of



About 50 members from six leagues gathered in Canyon Lake to learn from state League officers in a one-day regional training on July 15.

tions on how to use social media and places for resources.

Old-fashioned printed material is also useful, as state Vice President Peggy Hill pointed out. PowerPoint presentations customized for each local League, bookmarks, brochures, posters and more are available on the state website, <http://lwvtexas.org>.

Collaboration with other organiza-

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New Member

Sharon Lauritzen

Born and raised in Minden, Louisiana, I was the oldest of four kids. Because of an unstable environment, I lived with my grandparents until I was about 18.

My grandparents were adamant that I go to college and so I went to the University of Louisiana at Monroe, where I earned a BA in Computer Information Systems. Soon after graduation I went to work for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. Information Systems Division in Bentonville, Arkansas.

About five years into my career I met my husband Alan in Dallas and moved to Austin, where he was located. After about a year we had a beautiful baby girl.

The software industry changes a lot and circumstances led us to move to San Antonio in 2014. We absolutely love it here and San Antonio has welcomed my biracial daughter with open arms.

Excited to join the League of Women Voters and contribute however I can to promote democracy.

State League President Elaine Wiant spoke about how since the November election, there has been a new wave of activism and interest in the League.

anniversaries and celebrations.

Though 2020 is the 100th anniversary of the League of Women Voters – with the national convention likely to be in San Antonio – Texas women can start celebrating a centennial next year. Texas women were given the right to vote in primaries in 1918.

The state can celebrate the centennial of the League of Women Voters of Texas in 2019, because it was founded on Oct. 19, 1919 even though the national League was not founded until Feb. 14, 2020.

How could this be? Carrie Chapman Catt, in her address to the 50th convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in St. Louis in 1919, proposed the creation of a group of women to “finish the fight” and aid in the reconstruction of the nation after World War I. So a “league of women voters” was formed within NAWSA, composed of organizations in the states where woman suffrage had already been attained, including Texas.

Early the next year, six months before the 19th Amendment was ratified, the League was born in Chicago from the NAWSA and other suffrage organizations.

Upcoming

Special Session of the Texas Legislature continues. Keep an eye on <http://lwvtexas.org> for actions to support bills the League favors and object to bills the League opposes.

Last day to register for the November election is Tuesday, Oct. 10. Early Voting runs Monday, Oct. 23-Friday, Nov. 3

Election Day is Nov. 7

Save the Date! The state convention will be held April 27-29, 2018, at the Inn of the Hills in Kerrville. Details to come.

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