

LWVSAA

President's Message

The Texas Legislature ended its 85th regular session with both chambers successfully passing a two-year \$217 billion budget – the only item the Legislature is required to pass. Hundreds of other bills were also passed, but several high-profile issues were left unresolved amid divisive fights and petty squabbles in



Madhu Sridhar

the final days of the legislative session. As citizens, we do expect spirited debates on issues but we also expect civility from our legislators and expect them to amicably resolve their differences. We deserve mature, responsible and constructive debates to move the public's agenda forward.

Gov. Greg Abbott has called a special session. The legislature will reconvene on July 18 to address 20 issues put on the agenda by the

continued on page 8



The panel, from left, San Antonio ISD Superintendent Pedro Martinez, Texas Association of School Boards senior consultant Catherine Clark, Northside ISD Superintendent Brian Woods, and Trinity University Education Department chair Shari Albright.

Public education discussion attracts full auditorium

By EVELYN BONAVIDA

Education experts discussed “The Future of Public Education in Texas” before a full auditorium at the Central Library on June 12 in a forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area and moderated by **Richard Middleton**, former North East School District superintendent.

Shari Albright, chair of the Department of Education at Trinity University, called herself “the Pollyanna at the table.” She presented an upbeat, enthusiastic assessment of the teaching profession, saying educators have more tools and know more about

how students learn than ever before, and are helping more students as well. There are, however, some downsides, she said: The teaching staff is aging, alternative certificates are now the norm, and of course school funding is always a concern. But the No. 1 factor in student achievement is good teaching, according to Albright, and good teachers must be nurtured. “Good teaching IS rocket science.”

Catherine Clark, senior consultant for the Texas Association of School Boards, announced that “public education is not

continued on next page

in a crisis despite widespread opinion.” She attributed the rise in charter and private schools to “parents who want their own brand of education” and praised public school board members who serve, unpaid, in often contentious conditions. She is concerned with many aspects of the current school funding situation, specifically with the mandate for a \$1,000 bonus to each teacher in the state that comes with no funding, and pre-kindergarten financing, which has shrunk from \$225 million to just a few million in this year’s budget.

Pedro Martinez, superintendent of San Antonio ISD, faces an economic challenge. He pointed out that San Antonio is largely segregated by income levels. There are pockets of poverty and a low median income among his families, with parents often working two jobs. Indeed, he said, “poverty is growing in Texas.” School funding formulas are antiquated and not designed to address current conditions, he believes, but SAISD has launched several programs designed to address these concerns: a dual language academy, single-gender schools, the first public Montessori school, and the Advanced Learning Academy with partner Trinity University, among others. All have waiting lists, and he is

encouraged by early indications of more students graduating.

Northside ISD superintendent **Brian Woods** described a district of great diversity with differing expectations. He believes that



Brian Woods, Northside ISD superintendent, said that he likes to hold up a picture of a young student like the one above when talking to legislators about education and the future of Texas.

high-quality teachers are important to student success, but so are high-quality principals. He wants his district to be “values driven,” not “data driven.” He said the aging teacher problem means it is crucial to plan for succession. He insisted that Texas focuses too much on short-term issues instead of long-range planning. It is the goal of his district to produce well-rounded kids, so NISD offers a variety of courses in the fine arts, athletics, robotics, automotive programs, etc. He is enthusiastic about the future of public schools.

When the panelists finished, they took questions from the audience. Someone wanted to know how to assess what the districts

are doing. Answers ranged from providing more complexity in testing to creating new models based on wanting students to love to learn.

Another question was about the 16 separate but unequal school districts in the city. Middleton hinted that San Antonio may face some consolidation in the future, and Woods said we are not so different from other big cities with suburban districts.

The final question, which drew somewhat uncomfortable laughs from the panelists, was, “What is the one thing you would like to see happen in education?”

Woods: A turnaround in public perception of educators, especially by legislators.

Albright: Re-engagement of communities in public schools.

Clark: Re-energizing the idea that there is a common good in schools.

Martinez: More engagement in the community; more respect for teachers.

All in all, the mood of the panelists and the audience was

For a complete video of the forum, go to NowCastSA’s website, <http://nowcastsa.com>, or watch it on NowCast’s YouTube channel at <http://bit.ly/lwvforum>.

one of optimism about the future of public education in Texas. Although there are prob-

lems, there are also solutions and many creative and caring people, parents and professionals, implementing these solutions.

Texas Senate, House face education finance differently

By DIANN ANDY

The Senate and House had very different priorities in the 85th Legislature's regular session when it came to public education. The most critical was evident in the way the two bodies approached the need to revise our public school finance system. Two of the most obvious differences include the Senate's determination to use public funds for private and religious school vouchers, which the House steadfastly opposes; and the Senate's efforts to invest sweeping powers in the Education Commissioner, which the House does not appear to promote.

An equitable, fully-funded school finance system is essential

Chairman Dan Huberty and the House Committee for Public Education crafted HB 21, which was a much-needed first step to address persistent flaws in the current system. It would have added \$1.8 billion to public education, raised the basic allotment by \$210 per student, and much more. While this commendable effort passed the House, the Senate gutted the funding (offering just \$530 million) and tacked on an Education Savings Account voucher amendment before passing it. The House refused to accept the voucher amend-

ment and called for a conference committee. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Senate Education Committee Chair Larry Taylor refused and the bill died.

Vouchers are unacceptable

Several other voucher bills were proposed. Given LWV's strong opposition to vouchers, we testified against two, HB 1335 and SB 3, that had traction in committee. We registered against others. Fortunately, none made it through the House. We owe thanks to the strong stand that House Public Education Committee Chair Huberty, Vice Chair Diego Bernal and committee members took against vouchers with Speaker Joe Straus's backing.

Accountability measures should be non-punitive

Because we support a non-punitive accountability system, we followed with concern several bills relating to the new A-F ratings schools and districts will be receiving. HB 22, which in its original form would have delayed implementation of A-F, clarified the ratings methods, and mitigated some of the effects, passed the House, but did not pass the Senate intact. The bill as ultimately passed by both houses does delay implementation for schools (to 2019) but not for districts. Under the Senate's changes, it gives the Commissioner of

Education broad authority to make rules and set implementation methods and standards. Gov. Greg Abbott has signed HB 22.

An example of other bills related to the A-F rating system is HB 2782, which would have prevented a Bell Curve approach to the ratings. It passed in the House and the Senate's education committee, but was not heard by the Senate.

Students should be well-prepared for future

Our positions on academic standards led us to follow several bills relating to teacher and instructional quality.

HB 3759 would have temporarily allowed districts to ignore a long list of instructional mandates relating to nearly every academic subject. These exemptions had the potential to adversely affect students' performance on exams required to graduate, and we testified against them. HB 3759 did not make it out of committee.

SB 1278 would allow field supervisors of teachers in training to reduce on-site observations and would allow those same aspiring teachers to be certified even after twice failing the required content exam, leaving a generation of students with under-prepared and unqualified teachers. We testified in opposition and, although SB 1278 passed the Senate, it failed in the House Public Education Committee.

continued on next page

HB 1485 would have allowed science teachers to instruct students on their personal beliefs regarding the origins of life, evolution, and climate change under the guise of academic freedom. We argued that teachers are charged with preparing students for graduation under the TEKS and, ultimately, for academic and career success, which require them to know and use the scientific method and understand proven science. HB 1485 was left pending in committee.

SB 463 would extend Individual Graduation Committees (ICGs) through the 2018-19 school year. We urged support for this bill which would require that the students' teachers, administrators and parents agree that, in all other aspects, the student qualifies for graduation. We had hoped the bill would make ICGs permanent; however, we'll take this as a step toward that goal. The bill awaits

the governor's signature.

HB 1237 creates a dual credit-type arrangement for students taking post-secondary approved technology courses in high school. We testified on this bill, lauding most of its provisions, but questioning elements allowing the Commissioner to accept and use private funds to implement the program. The bill passed and becomes law Sept. 1.

Notes: A bill search on public education criteria resulted in a list of 785 bills total in the Senate and House. Of those that were heard in committee, we testified and/or registered in support of or opposition to 45 bills, achieving the desired outcomes on 39. These results would not have been possible without the patient assistance and hours of work of LWV-TX VP Grace Chimene and the Capitol Corps, especially Barbara Fransden and Janet Imhoff. Thank you!

LWV-TX positions on K-12 Public Education:

1. Supporting a school finance (funding) system that ensures a fair distribution of funds to provide ALL students with high quality education
2. Opposing vouchers by any name that transfer students and funding to private and religious schools
3. Supporting academic standards and curricula that prepare students for success in college or careers
4. Supporting academic achievement testing (assessment) that is used for diagnostic (not punitive) purposes
5. Supporting a fair, non-punitive accountability system

NOTE: PreK education is handled by Marlene Lobberecht, LWV-TX Chair for Early Childhood

New Member

Carolina Barrera

I was born and raised in Mazatlán, Mexico. I attended Universidad Metropolitana, Mexico City, earning a BA in Cultural Anthropology. I later lived in England where I concentrated in Latin American Studies at the University of Birmingham.

In 1984 I moved to the U.S. with my husband, a corporate executive, when he was transferred to manage an international company in St. Louis, Missouri.

I have lived in San Antonio since 1987. My husband and

I have been empty nesters for a while. Our 32-year-old-son is married and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where he is a corporate executive at a technology company.

In the past 30 years, I have been intensively involved in social volunteering activities with different local and national organizations: mentoring students with severe behavioral problems, assisting with legal representation, consultation and support services for immigrants and refugees, as well as participating in voter registration and get-out-the-vote initiatives.

When I became a U.S. citizen,

I was excited and overwhelmed with the dynamics of democracy. Looking for guidance, I got the League's Voting Guide at my local library. Since my student days in Mexico, I had known about the League of Women Voters as a sound grassroots organization engaged in advocacy, leadership and education.

I am very enthusiastic to join the League and have the opportunity to contribute to the process of democracy, working particularly in the areas of immigration, Hispanic voter participation, juvenile justice and natural resources protection.

Planning workshop sets goals

By GLENDA WOLIN

“A good plan implemented today is better than a perfect plan implemented tomorrow.”

With those words by Gen. George S. Patton, followed by a fun icebreaker Bingo game, a group of members of the San Antonio League buckled down to the business of planning for the 2017-18 year on June 24.

Even though most of the attendees already knew each other, by the time we found out who “has made a New Year’s resolution and kept it” (no one!), who “has been in a parade,” and “who has two or more pets,” we knew each other just a little bit better.

The morning was devoted to a process of defining a few major goals, defining a strategy to reach those goals, and defining action plans for how to enact those steps.

Led by our president, Madhu Sridhar; and aided by one of our newer members, Jeanette Reynolds, who in her job as the development director for a nonprofit is used to taking on the role; we decided on three main goals:

- Increasing voter turnout,
- Holding a workshop for those who want to run for office, and
- Conducting forums on public policy issues.

Along with those are perennial goals including increasing membership, looking for opportunities for branding and increasing visibility, keeping the website and newsletter vibrant, and registering voters.



About a dozen League members strategized at Parman Branch Library about goals for the 2017-18 year and how to accomplish them.

Growing turnout

Voter turnout seemed to resonate the most with participants. A large percentage of eligible residents of Bexar County are registered, but they don’t vote. The feeling was that the League needs to find out why they don’t vote and try to remedy that problem.

Since people who “look like us” – mostly women over 65 – do tend to vote, attendees said we need to partner with groups who work with younger demographics and see where we can be of use there. MOVE SA, SA2020 and young professionals groups were all suggested. Perhaps distributing Voters Guides on campuses would help. Having an app instead of promoting 411.org, which requires repeating input of information every time it is used, would be more appealing to tech-savvy people

Other suggestions included being at popular locations both before the election and on Election Day with information on where to vote and urging people to vote; creating a simplified chart or summary of responses in the Voters Guide, and having a Spanish translation of the Guide.

Something considered vital was to focus on a few things and follow through.

It was pointed out that we are going to need more people to help with a get-out-the-vote effort, and hopefully more members will pitch in. We can also recruit volunteers who aren’t members but whose involvement may lead to membership.

Anyone interested can email league@lwvsa.org

Run for Office Workshop

The idea of a “Run for Office” workshop sparked interest, since all the similar workshops in San Antonio are partisan, even though the timing of the workshop may be less than ideal. The goal of this workshop is to provide people with the tools and information they need to run for elected office. Our new unit, Leaders for Democracy, had hoped to sponsor it in November, but people running for some offices would be getting in late in the cycle.

We decided to keep the time frame but change the focus somewhat for this first one to make it

continued on next page

a basic introductory workshop. It will be aimed at people who want to learn about what is involved in running for office before even deciding if they want to try or what office to try for, so they can take months to decide and plan before having to commit. The workshop should answer questions for everyone running for everything from school boards to small city council positions to judgeships to state offices.

All the rest

Public policy issue forums are something we have done well

for a long time, and we want to continue doing them. We have done one this year, on the future of public education in Texas, and have two others planned, on transportation and water. We are flexible enough to add others if the need arises.

After lunch, the session shifted to talk about ways to engage more people, both within and outside the League, using alternate ways of fundraising and presenting the Annual Meeting.

Having several smaller fundraisers, including a Trivia Night and a NonPawdisan Dog Walk, were

discussed, as well as expanding the Bravo Awards to honor more people.

Changing the Annual Meeting to one that allows attendees to network and mingle with their long-time League friends and meet new ones and then address the business part of the meeting was an idea to involve more members.

The meeting ended with the attendees satisfied and enthused about the outlined goals, strategies and action plans that would move our League forward in positive ways and empower voters.

League seeks blog hopefuls

Have you always had a secret desire to write a blog? How about a public yearning? Has the thought even crossed your mind?

If you've had any level of interest, or even if you haven't, the League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area's website offers you the opportunity to try your hand at it.

If you go to the website, <http://lwvsa.org>, you'll see on the right side of the page a section called Blog Posts. That's there for League Members to contribute their thoughts about almost anything, within guidelines. The new post, "Secret History of Women's Rights," is an example.

It doesn't have to be about the League – storytelling is always good, so a story about you or someone you know who was affected by a policy we support (or in a bad way by one we oppose) is good, or how you feel about something related to one of our positions, or just passing on a blog by someone else (with permission of course) that you

thought was worth spreading. If you're passionate about an issue, use the blog to speak out!

We'd like to see lots of people write blogs. Like any blog site, they don't get deleted when a new one gets added, so you don't need to worry that you're replacing someone else's. If you have something to say, please say it!

The national League offers guidance at <http://bit.ly/2sKLp2j>. It is included along with information on personal, non-League blogs and other things which you might want to know about but which aren't relevant here, so pertinent details are included below, along with some other links about blogs from the national League.

You can submit a blog in a Word document or a similar format to league@lwvsa.org. If you have a photo to accompany it, a .jpg is fine. Questions can be addressed to the same email.

Blog guidance

These guidelines are intended

to help protect both the writer and the League she or he represents from unintentionally harming the League brand, name or reputation.

For any Blog entry, League writers must:

- Maintain a good reputation. Reflect the League values of civility, respect for others, and non-partisanship in all writing.

- Know and be faithful to the League's positions. Make sure that all content has been properly vetted through your League's established approval process.

- Remain nonpartisan. When in doubt, consult the League's nonpartisan policy: The League is nonpartisan in that it never supports or opposes any political party or candidate. The League may, however, support or oppose particular ballot measures in line with positions adopted as a result of study and/or consensus reached on program issues. Individuals within the League are

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encouraged to actively support the political parties or candidates of their choice unless they hold sensitive League positions. Each League board adopts its own nonpartisan policy which interprets for its members and the community any restrictions it places on the political activities of its board members.

- Develop a credible voice through engagement, humility, authenticity and transparency. Respond to legitimate user/member/reader concerns in a timely manner.

- Use common sense and good judgment. Refrain from writing, posting, blogging or tweeting anything, including photos or video, that could be perceived as reflecting partisan, sexist, gender, sexual orientation, racial, religious, ageist, ethnic or other bias or favoritism that could be used to tarnish the League's reputation or credibility.

- Protect confidential information and relationships. What we do on social networks should be presumed to be publicly available to anyone. Avoid identifying or discussing private citizens, readers, or members unless you have their permission. Remember that League websites are not restricted to League members, and as such, any information pertinent only to League members should be restricted to Members Only sections of websites.

- Respect Copyrights and Fair Use. Always give proper credit for others' work, and double check that you have the right to use something with attribution before you publish.

Additional links:

Advice from national League on how to write blogs effectively: <http://bit.ly/2tFokdQ>

What is a blog and why does it matter to the League?

Upcoming

Regional training for all members of area leagues will be held July 15 from 1:30-4:30 at Tye Preston Memorial Library, 16311 S. Access Road, Canyon Lake. Registration is \$10. For details, see the "Build a Better League" box on the San Antonio League website, <http://LWVSA.org>

Special session begins July 18 for the Texas Legislature in Austin. The 20-issue agenda includes sunset legislation, the "bathroom bill," school finance reform and property tax legislation among other items in the 30-day session. Keep an eye on the state League's Action Alerts and Capitol Action Minutes and be prepared to contact your state legislators to offer your League-based advice.

A five-day trial begins July 10 in federal court in San Antonio following two rulings that found that Texas lawmakers intentionally discriminated against minority voters in drawing up the congressional and state House political maps in 2011.

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governor. The priority will be the sunset bill to reauthorize several state agencies, including the Texas Medical Board, which licenses and oversees physicians.

The list of special session items includes bills that the League fought against, testified against and followed through the legislative process to be sure they were not passed. You as League members were instrumental in this process by calling your legislators and writing to them. They never made it to the governor's desk for signature. Unfortunately though, those bills have made it back on the special session agenda. What that means is we will be vigilant and notify you to let the legislators know, once again, how you want them to represent you as a constituent.

The League of Women Voters has been a staunch defender of public education, and education is also one of our local League's priority issues. To that end I applaud House Speaker Joe Straus for his leadership on this issue. He continues to fight hard to defend public education.

The list on the special session agenda includes a commission to study ways to fix public school financing, school vouchers allowing parents of special needs children to use public school dollars for private schools, teacher pay increase of \$1,000, and administrative flexibility in teacher hiring and retention practices. How will the commission to study ways to

fix public school financing help the children in the pipeline?

Here is a complete list of the 20 items that will be on the special session agenda:

- Measures that will continue the operations of the Texas Medical Board and four other agencies that are scheduled to shutter Sept. 1.
- Teachers' pay increase of \$1,000, to be paid for by local school district funds.
- Administrative flexibility in teacher hiring and retention practices.
- A commission to study ways to fix public school financing.
- Allowing parents of special needs children to use public school dollars for private schools.
- Limiting growth of local property taxes.
- Caps on state and local spending.
- Preventing cities from regulating what property owners do with trees on private land.
- Preventing local governments from changing rules midway through construction projects.
- Speeding up the local government permitting process.
- Restricting cities' ability to annex property.
- Abbott signed a ban on texting while driving Tuesday, but he wants lawmakers to pass a bill pre-empting local restrictions on mobile devices in automobiles.

- Restricting transgender Texans from using the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity.
 - Prohibiting public employers from collecting union dues.
 - Prohibiting local governments from sending tax dollars to abortion providers.
 - Prohibiting abortion coverage under primary health insurance plans.
 - Increasing reporting requirements when health complications arise from abortions.
 - Strengthening patient protections relating to do-not-resuscitate orders.
 - Cracking down on mail-in ballot fraud.
 - Extending a study of the causes of maternal mortality.
- I urge you to take the time to visit, email, write or call your elected officials. Remind them that:
- Voting rights are extremely important to you.
 - You oppose vouchers, which steal money from your neighborhood public schools.
 - Local tree and construction project ordinances belong at the local level.
 - Women have a right to safe medical abortions and that Texas has an extremely high maternal mortality rate.
 - You support LGBT Texans and are concerned for vulnerable children who are transgender.

Vision, Beliefs and Intentions

The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities worldwide.

The League of Women Voters of the United States is a nonpartisan political membership organization, which:

- acts after study and member agreement to achieve solutions in the public interest on key community issues at all government levels.
- builds citizen participation in the democratic process.
- engages communities in promoting positive solutions to public policy issues through education and advocacy.