

# Woter



March 2017

League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area



*Jeanette Reynolds, Elaine Talarski and Martha Lankford plot out their day of visiting*

*legislators on the second day of Lobby Days at the state Capitol in Austin.*

## League airs positions to lawmakers

By *GLEND A WOLIN*

The biennial Texas legislative session is in full swing, and the League of Women Voters left its mark Jan. 30-31 during Lobby Days in Austin at the Capitol. Turnout was higher than usual, with 110 members registered before enrollment was cut off because the room where we were meeting was beyond capacity.

San Antonio Area members attending were Diann Andy, Kathy Hill, Phyllis Ingram, Martha Langford, Sybil Morgan, Jeanette Reyn-

olds, Elaine Talarski and Glenda Wolin.

### **Hearing the talk**

The first day was filled with inspiring speeches about voting rights, women's health care and public education, which are the League's priority goals for this legislative system.

Mimi Marziani, executive director of the Texas Civil Rights Project, led off with detail of how, as she put it, "democracy is pretty broken in this state."

Close to 4.4 million people in

Texas are eligible but unable to vote because of registration issues, she said, pointing to a Rice University study that shows as many as 9 percent of people were discouraged from voting in a recent election because of confusion, not necessarily because they were ineligible.

TCRP has sued Texas for not automatically registering people through the Department of Public Safety when they update or renew their driver's license through the DPS website as required by the federal "motor voter" law, which has been in effect since 1993. Plain-



***Phyllis Ingram, Martha Lankford and Glenda Wolin visit with Elana Ladd, Rep. Lyle Larson's legislative aide in his office at the Capitol.***

tiffs who thought they had been registered discovered when they went to vote that they were not on the rolls. Trial is set for this summer.

The organization is also working to correct the state's failure to enforce the law requiring high schools to offer voter registration twice a year to students of voting age, Marziani said. A meeting with then-Secretary of State Carlos Cascos resulted in a letter to all principals in the state pointing out the law. Meanwhile, community groups are going into schools to register students, but it is not always easy to do.

Alice Bufkin, director of policy and advocacy for the Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition, spoke about the coalition's priorities for the legislative session. The coalition of more than 60 organizations, including the State League, advocates for women's preventive healthcare and was formed in 2012 in reaction to the legislature's huge cut in family planning funds in 2011.

Policy priorities include main-

taining and increasing funding, ensuring provider capacity and distribution, increasing access to long-term birth control (IUDs and implants), eliminating barriers/improving continuity of care, and protecting vulnerable populations.

Bufkin pointed out that when women have access to family planning, the babies and mothers are healthier and families are stronger. A great deal of money is saved because half of babies in Texas are unintended, and half are paid for by Medicaid.

Jim Nelson, an attorney who has spent much of his career working in education including as state commissioner of education and president of the Texas Association of School Boards, addressed the League's public education priorities: funding, vouchers, curriculum standards and accountability standards.

He pointed out that the Senate budget accounts only for some growth and inflation only, and that the House provides more, but only if there are changes to the school

finance system. That question has yet to be answered.

Vouchers by any name are not about school choice, he said, but about "private school choice."

Most school districts have magnet schools that offer plenty of choice, he said, and there's no proof that poor kids who go to private schools do any better.

Curriculum standards are still a work in progress, he said, but the state is close to having standards on language arts and science. It's important, he said, that they ultimately drive what teachers teach.

Nelson does not like the A-F accountability standard for districts that was used as a trial run in January. He described it as "like taking a giant square peg and trying to squeeze it into a tiny round hole." He said terms like exemplary and acceptable don't have the same meaning as letter grades – acceptable isn't the same as C.

Not officially part of Lobby Days, but attended by many who were in Austin for the occasion, was the Making Democracy Work in Texas dinner, a fundraiser for the League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund. Amid wonderful food and company in a beautiful setting, the LWV/Texas honored five organizations for making democracy work in Texas: the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF), the Children's Defense Fund of Texas, the Texas Association of Community Health Centers, Your Vote Tu Futuro, and Texas Civil Rights Project.

### **Walking the walk**

After a brief strategy meeting, the League members spread out to meet with legislators and staffers, support attendees at Texas Muslim Capitol Day, or watch as Rep. Donna Howard introduced a resolution



on the House floor commemorating the League of Women Voters of Texas Lobby Days.

It was a busy day because it was the day Gov. Greg Abbott gave the State of the State address and many groups were at the Capitol representing various causes. But everyone was cordial and helpful and we found staff members knowledgeable and available when legislators were out of the office.

Newly elected legislators as well as veterans were eager to embrace the League's priorities and accept our help.

Staffers with Ina Minjarez, a Democrat who became the representative for House District 124 in a special election in March 2015, said that "everything in the (priority issues) brochure, we're 100 percent on." Minjarez especially supports our voting rights initiative, said Haroon Mushtaq, a legislative aide, and Kolby Monnig, the legislative director, and Minjarez has introduced bills relating to automatic voter registration when an eligible person gets a driver's license or personal ID changes an address on one unless that person opts out.

Diana Arévalo, a Democrat elected to represent House District 116 in November, is much in line with the League's interests, according to her chief of staff, Sally Velasquez. She is particularly interested in providing more access to registering, getting ballots and voting for the military. Her office was also quite welcoming.

Rep. Diego Bernal, serving his second term as a Democrat representing District 123, is especially dedicated to education issues (and was recently named vice chairman of the public education committee), so he appreciated our education priority. He has also filed bills dealing with women's health and

voting rights, and spent a long time chatting with several League members on what was a very busy day with him.

Considering the League's progressive agenda, Democrats as expected approved of our agenda.

But as a nonpartisan organization, we reached out to both parties and were welcomed by both, and we found common ground with both.

Lyle Larson, the Republican representative from District 122, may not agree with much of the League agenda, but his legislative aide, Elana Ladd, listened with interest to what we had to say.

And Larson is known for his strong positions on water and the environment, which are also important to the League, so that was a point of agreement.

League members from Comal and Austin met with Republican Sen. Donna Campbell, whose District 25 covers parts of Bexar and several other counties. They had a cordial meeting with Campbell's policy analyst, Bibi Katsev, who was very open to their concerns about additional funding for women's preventive health, although she did say that the pie is only so big. Campbell is a big supporter of school choice, so Katsev was less open to our concerns about the need for funding for public schools. Katsev, whose husband was not able to vote in November because of a glitch with his voter registration, expressed her complete support of online voter registration.

Rushing from appointment to appointment, from one end of the Capitol to the other, was exhausting but exhilarating. Martha Lankford, our vice president of engagement, spoke of how nice it is to see that the legislators obviously think a great deal of the League, and how she loves meeting other League

members from around the state.

"It is obvious that the halls of the Capitol are filled with folks like us who are lobbying for their various causes," she said, "and it reaffirms my belief in our democracy."



**Rep. Donna Howard welcomes members of the League of Women Voters as they assemble for Lobby Days.**



***New League member Jeanette Reynolds (left) the League of Women Voters and the political talks with U.S. State Department guests about process in the United States.***

## **League hosts U.S. State Department visitors from 7 nations**

Three members of the League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area met Feb. 13 with visitors from seven nations participating in a U.S. State Department program called “Education and Activism for Young Women.”

Nancy Price, Jeanette Reynolds and Phyllis Ingram met with seven women from India, Nicaragua, Russia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda who are visiting

several cities in the U.S. hoping to learn more from their counterparts about women’s political participation at the local level.

The discussion centered on activities of the League of Women Voters and how it is organized. The visitors expressed interest in how the League reaches out to those in society who aren’t participating in the political process. The discussion grew from there to a more general

review of how the U.S. political process works.

The local visit was sponsored by the San Antonio Council for International Visitors, a nonprofit organization that arranges professional programming for emerging international leaders who have been selected by the U.S. State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program to come to the United States.

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### **Upcoming**

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**Mayoral forum** moderated by Rick Casey. Monday, March 6, 6-7 p.m. Laurie Auditorium, 1 Trinity Place. Sponsored by Trinity Student Government Assn.

**City Council District 7 forum**, moderated by LWV, Monday, March 13 at 7 p.m., Jefferson United Methodist Church, 758 Donaldson Ave. Co-sponsored by the Monticello, Woodlawn Lake and Jefferson neighborhood associations.

**City Council District 10 forum**, Monday, March 20, 7 p.m., The Tool Yard, 10303 Tool Yard (off Wurzbach by Heroes Stadium). Hosted by the Northeast Neigh-

borhood Alliance.

**Get deputized!** Become a volunteer deputy registrar so you can register people to vote. If you have been deputized in the past, you need to take the class again this year. The next classes at the Elections office are March 14; advance sign-up is required. The schedule for classes at the Bexar County Elections Department is at [www.bit.ly/dep\\_reg](http://www.bit.ly/dep_reg). There is an off-site class March 8 at 6 p.m. at Tri Point, 3233 N. St. Mary’s Street. More information and registration at [www.bit.ly/vdrclass](http://www.bit.ly/vdrclass).

**City Council District 5 forum**, Monday, April 5, 6:30 p.m., UTSA

Downtown Campus, Aula Canaria Room, Buena Vista Building, 501 W César E Chávez Blvd.

**Last day to register to vote** in the May election is April 6. Municipal elections are May 6. Early voting begins April 24. San Antonio voters will elect a mayor and 10 city council representatives and vote on an \$850 million bond issue. Several school boards will also be having elections.

**Meet & Greet** for all members, new and long-standing Saturday, April 8, 10:30 a.m. at the home of Glenda Wolin, 2731 Marlborough Dr. RSVP to Glenda @: 210-378-4614 or [gwolin@gmail.com](mailto:gwolin@gmail.com)

# Andy publishes paper on League's education stance

Diann Andy, the secretary of the San Antonio Area League, is the public education action chair of the state League. Following is the 2017 action paper she wrote.

## Funding

*On May 13, 2016, the Texas Supreme Court ruled unanimously in a 100-page opinion that Texas' system of school finance, while imperfect, was not unconstitutional. The Court effectively closed the door on future lawsuits to effect funding equity for public schools. It is up to us to ensure that all of our students receive a quality public education.*

**The League of Women Voters of Texas supports a school finance system that provides taxpayer equity and an equitable distribution of funds to ensure that all Texas school children receive a high-quality education.**

Why:

1. Currently, Texas is 43rd in the nation, falling from 39th last year, in the annual "Quality Counts" report from the national publication Education Week. This ranking, based largely on per student funding, is routinely used by businesses and professionals when considering where to locate.

2. Because property tax revenues (which constitute the primary funding for public education in Texas) vary widely from one area to another, even within cities, state funding is critical to ensure all students are provided with quality schools and teaching.

3. State funding of public education is critical to ensuring:

- Safe and secure facilities

- Hiring and retaining highly-qualified teachers and staff
- Up-to-date textbooks, supplemental materials and libraries
- Programs that adequately address various students' needs
- Maintenance of and upgrading technologies needed for teaching and for tracking student progress (we are rapidly moving to online test administration in Texas)

## LWV-TX opposes vouchers

Why:

1. Whether called "vouchers," "tax credits," "scholarships," "grants," "school/parental choice programs," "taxpayer savings" or anything else, vouchers fund private and religious schools.

2. The purpose of vouchers is to transfer students and funding from public schools to private schools.

3. Numerous independent studies have been unable to prove that vouchers are effective. They don't produce academic gains over public schools.

4. Studies show they don't provide a way out of poverty for poor students.

5. Private schools are not required to follow the state curriculum, ensure academic accountability, address issues of equity and social justice, or respond to transparency concerns.

6. Vouchers are costly, requiring taxpayers to fund both public and private school systems as the majority of vouchers have gone to students already enrolled in private schools.

7. Private schools are not obligated to accept all students. The vast majority of our students (about 90%) still need high quality public schools.

*established the Texas Commission on Next-Generation Assessments and Accountability (TCNGAA), which published its draft report in July. Among other recommendations, it proposed streamlining the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which are the state's academic standards.*

**LWV-TX supports academic standards and a state curriculum that prepares students for success in college and/or various careers.**

Why:

1. The primary purpose of a public education system is to prepare our students to be successful in their communities.

2. Prioritized state standards, upon which the curriculum is based, should support the rigor necessary for postsecondary success in college or careers.

3. The state's curriculum will be most effective when it:

- Is developed by educators and acknowledged experts
- Is sensitive to the diversity of the state's population
- Addresses prioritized knowledge and skill requirements
- Covers tested subjects as well as others to develop well-rounded students
- Reflects ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) requirements to ensure federal and state alignment.

## Assessment and Accountability

*Currently, passing STAAR (State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness) scores in Reading and Math are tied to promotion for 5th and 8th graders, and*

## Academics

*The 84th (2015) Legislative session*

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high school students must pass the English 1, English 2, Algebra 1 and US History End of Course (EOC) exams to graduate. The Texas Commission on Next-Generation Assessments and Accountability recommended limiting state testing to Readiness Standards.

### **LWV-TX supports achievement tests that measure individual mastery and proficiency on the state's academic standards for diagnostic purposes.**

Why:

1. The most effective use of students' test results is to make instructional decisions for the future success of those students.

2. To enable teachers to use the tests diagnostically, the number of TEKS tested should be limited to those directly correlated to adequately preparing students for the next grade level or for college or career success.

3. Research shows that many factors (including subject grades, portfolios, teacher recommendations and various types of assessments) should be considered when determining whether a

student should be promoted or allowed to graduate.

4. Grade Placement Committees (which may advance elementary and middle school students who fail STAAR exams) and Individual Graduation Committees (for high school students who fail one or two EOCs) consider numerous other factors in determining whether such students may be promoted or may still graduate and should be continued.

5. Mandated state-wide (STAAR) and national standardized tests (SAT, ACT, etc.) have not proved to be good indicators of success in college.

6. Use of failed exams to affect students' course grades or to prevent the promotion or graduation of students who have met all other academic and attendance requirements is punitive.

*HB 2804 (84th Legislature) mandated a new A-F measure of school and district effectiveness. It calculates school and district quality using: student test scores, growth in student test scores, progress closing performance gaps, college or career readiness and a district selfassessment. Two hundred twenty-two school boards have passed resolutions calling for the*

*repeal of this bill.*

### **LWV-TX supports a fair, non-punitive accountability system**

Why:

1. Parents and tax payers need to know how best to support their students. School and district accountability systems should be complex enough to diagnose successful efforts for replication and unsuccessful efforts to plan for improvement.

2. The federal ESSA, signed into law December 2015 and effective for the 2017-2018 school year, does not require and may not support an A-F reporting system.

3. Accountability systems that "grade" schools and districts oversimplify problems and may lead to adversarial, rather than collaborative relationships, between parents, school staff, and the community.

4. Accountability systems that reduce reporting to a letter or number tend to adversely affect schools and districts with challenging student populations.

5. There is no proof that such simplified accountability reports improve student performance

## **San Antonio Area League continues to grow**

### **Carol Ward**

Corpus Christi is where I was born and mostly raised. Our family lived in the Philippines for two years while my father, a naval pilot, was stationed there in the 1950s.

This was a very impactful time of my life because I learned that the world was a big place full of people who did not necessarily look or think like I did.

I met my husband, Bill, at the University of Texas in Austin, married and started our family of three sons. After four years in San Antonio, our family was transferred with my husband's job to Tulsa. Subsequently, his work moved us to Plano and Shreveport.

After 30 years in the retail business

we moved to Colorado Springs in the early 1990s. During that time my jobs included teacher in SAISD, retail merchandiser for Becton Dickinson, special education teacher for Caddo Parrish, La., and research analyst and merchandising analyst for Current Catalog Co. in Colorado Springs.

My volunteer jobs included researching old newspapers for the Colorado Springs Gazette and reading tutor. Gourmet club, garden club, antique club, PTA, book club, German club, hosting foreign students, Pioneer Jubilee Women's Club (Hinsdale County, Co.), genealogy and traveling have been my special interests.

Over a 10-year period we hosted

more than 20 students and teachers from Germany, France, Spain and Poland. We have kept in touch with several visitors over the years.

In the 1990s my husband founded a consulting company that specialized in the retail appliance industry. From that he developed a software/ database company which is still operating after 20 years.

I recently retired from working for the "family business," but two of our sons are now managing it.

We purchased a townhome in San Antonio about 10 years ago with the thought that we could spend our

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summers in Colorado and winters in Texas, and to be closer to family.

As life has happened we spend most of our time now in San Antonio and love living again in this very special city.

My goal this year, 2017, is to become more active locally and to understand issues that directly affect our community.

### **Kimberly Zoeller**

I grew up in the Converse area, attending public school in the Judson Independent School District. I received my Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio, and later an MME from Texas State University.

I am an elementary school music teacher in Northside ISD, married with one daughter, and living on San Antonio's North Side.

I am interested in women's issues such as health care, equal opportunities, equal pay and concerned about violence against women and children, making sure there is a support system in place for those who need it.

Growing up in a rural area and developing a love for nature, I am also concerned about our environment and how we can protect it. I have witnessed the growth of the city of San Antonio, and I am concerned about city planning, and encouraging economic growth throughout the city to ensure the health of our beautiful city.

I am a classically trained musician and perform with several groups in the San Antonio area. I am a member of several musical societies: KET (Kodaly Educators of Texas), ITG (International Trumpet Guild), and I am the webmaster for CTO (Central Texas Orff). I look forward in meeting and working with this wonderful group, the League of Women Voters.

### **Seana Carthan**

I was born in 1983, in Charlotte, N.C.

I grew up there as an only child to a single mother. Aside from my mother, I grew up with my grandmother, an aunt and one cousin. Although we are a small family, we have strong values that were consistently reiterated throughout my childhood: study hard, work hard, and always, always vote!

When I was 20, I joined the Air Force. For my 6 years on active duty, I was stationed in Virginia and did one tour in Iraq. In 2009, I separated from active duty, moved to California with my husband (who remained on active duty), and joined the Air Force Reserve.

In 2010, we had our daughter and in 2011, the Air Force moved us to San Antonio. I attended St Mary's University and graduated with a bachelor's in international relations in 2013. Since then, I have worked as research analyst for the Air Force.

Last year, we had our son. We absolutely adore our children and since they are still young, we don't have a lot of time for hobbies.

I joined the League because both my upbringing and my education taught me the importance of voting in a democracy. My university also taught me that in a democracy, there is power in numbers.

I believe my generation has not been taught well enough the importance of being a part of civic organizations and of being informed voters. Too often I hear of my peers either not voting or not knowing who to vote for. My hope in joining the league is to be an example to my peers on how to be an active citizen by being in a civic organization and to help inform my peers on how to vote and prepare to vote.

My goal this year as a LWV member is to help inform at least one voter within my peer group. I also would like to help the League in the important work they are doing. Thanks for allowing me to join, and I look forward to working with you all.

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