

(continued from page 1)

drag, on the economy as local governments reinvest in enhanced infrastructure.

Diane concluded with comments about the Federal Reserve Board's policy of increasing interest rates in the past nineteen months and expectations for the new Federal Reserve Chairman, Ben Bernanke. Bernanke is an academician who values diversity of opinion and believes in debate and dissent in contrast to the uniformity of message that characterized former Chairman Alan Greenspan's tenure. Diane responded to several questions from the audience on social security and health care. She favors means testing for social secu-

rity and believes social security could be fixed if there were the political will to do so.



Valerie Jarrett (center) receives LWVIL Civic Leadership Award from Desiree Rogers (left) and Paula Lawson (right). Photo courtesy of North Shore Photography & Design



Diane Swonk and League member.

The League of Women Voters of Illinois thanks the following...

for their generous support of the 2006 State of the State benefiting the Education Fund

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Valerie Jarrett | Chicago Stock Exchange |
| Corinne Wood | USG |
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| The Habitat Company | GVA Williams |
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LWVIL and Community Shares of Illinois

The League of Women Voters of Illinois is proud to be a member of the Community Shares of Illinois giving programs.

Community Shares of Illinois links people and their passions, connecting caring donors with local organizations that are changing people lives - and Illinois communities - for the better every day. They work to give employees expanded choices in workplace giving programs, enhance their awareness of the valuable services provided by local grassroots organizations, generate critically needed support for these organizations, and raise the level of workplace philanthropy in communities across Illinois.

When you choose Community Shares of Illinois, you decide where your money goes. You can direct your contribution to one or more of the 70 member organizations, including the League of Women Voters of Illinois Education Fund.

For more information about Community Shares of Illinois, and how to bring the program to your workplace, visit www.communitysharesillinois.org

VOTING RIGHTS ACT ACTIVITIES

Entitled "Celebrating the Past, Fighting for the Future," a conference on the Voting Rights Act (VRA) was held January 20, 2006, in Chicago and drew participants from seven states. The conference was spearheaded by the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Bar Association to focus on the fact that key provisions of the VRA will expire in August, 2007, and that action is needed now to ensure their reauthorization.

Morning sessions covered the history of the VRA, enacted in 1965 to address abuses, including literacy tests and poll taxes, that resulted in racial discrimination in voting. Panel discussions focused on the successes that have occurred under the VRA. Afternoon sessions focused on publicizing the need for the reauthorization, including how to interact with legislators and the media. The Reverend Jesse Jackson was the luncheon speaker, and Senator Richard Durbin gave closing remarks.

Several League members involved in VRA issues are available to present the information to local Leagues. Please contact the LWVIL office to arrange for a presentation.



Illinois Voter

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Founded in 1920, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization which encourages citizens to play an informed and active role in government. At the local, state and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. For membership information, call (312) 939-5935. Articles from the *Illinois Voter* may be reprinted in full with complete acknowledgment.

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LWVIL Diversity Policy: The League of Women Voters of Illinois, in both its values and practices, affirms its belief in and commitment to diversity and pluralism. The LWVIL recognizes that diverse perspectives are necessary for responsible and effective decision making in democratic organizations. LWVIL affirms its commitment to remove barriers to participation in any League activity on the basis of age, race, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or national origin; and to actively seek to be inclusive.

Phonathon

February 13 thru
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LWVIL Tackles Immigration and More

Immigration in Illinois: Challenges and Opportunities Statewide

League members gathered for the annual LWVIL Issues Briefing at the Loyola University Water Tower Campus on February 4th. With *Immigration in Illinois: Challenges and Opportunities Statewide* as the main topic, the League welcomed panelists Andrew Sagartz of the Calmec Global Law Group, and Fred Tsao of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

Immigration Background and History

Mr. Tsao explained that immigration restriction to the U.S. began in the 1880's in response to Asian immigration to California. A great migration from Europe to the U.S. followed, but after World War I, an isolationist trend set in with the U.S. imposing per-country quotas. Immigration levels picked up again in the 1960's, largely due to refugees from World War II and the rise of the civil rights movement. Eventually the per-country quotas were dropped, replaced by an emphasis on family or employer sponsorship and refugee status. However, a per-country ceiling or "soft cap" was created. Because of these changes, immigration that had been legal under previous law became illegal, which proved especially significant to immigrants from Mexico.

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) established a work authorization system to penalize employers who hired illegal immigrants. IRCA also set up an amnesty program for undocumented immigrants in good standing who were already in the country. Mr. Tsao explained that the IRCA controls didn't take into account the fact that U.S. employers still relied on migrant workers so that "this attempt [to control immigration] didn't shut the spigot [of immigration], just made it more dangerous. Now . . . we have a mess."

Demographics of Current Immigrants

Mr. Sagartz continued with the following statistics: 20 percent of Chicago residents are foreign born. There are more than eleven million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States, with between 700,000 and one million new undocumented immigrants arriving every year. Undocumented workers comprise 26 percent of the Chicago workforce, and their consumer spending has created 31,000 jobs and contributed \$5.5 billion to the regional economy. Despite public perception to the contrary, 70 percent of undocumented immigrants pay taxes. Mr. Tsao added that in the past decade, the immigrant population in Illinois has grown by over 600,000 to 1.5 million, translating to a 61 percent growth rate. This growth has affected many communities around the state, including Chicago, and has become a statewide phenomenon.

Current immigration levels nationwide generally break down as follows: 50 percent Latino, 40 percent of which is Mexican; 25 percent European, including Polish, Irish and Bosnian; 25 percent Asian, including Chinese, Koreans, Indians, Pakistanis, and Southeast Asian refugees;

and a small percentage from Africa. The speakers stressed that immigrants still come to the United States for reasons largely associated with poverty and violence in their native countries.



Robin LaBedz, Janet Kittlaus, Kathryn Nesburg, Eileen Hattan Lynch

Challenges for Undocumented Immigrants

► **Social Security Numbers & Documentation**

A major challenge for undocumented immigrants is the lack of valid social security numbers, especially amid post 9/11 security concerns. As such, immigrants often resort to

falsifying a social security number or borrowing or taking someone else's number.

There is constant tension between obtaining documentation and the fear of exposure to authorities. While the paperwork is necessary, the system often has the net

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GUBERNATORIAL DEBATES ON ABC

On Wednesday, March 8, ABC 7 Chicago broadcast Race for Governor: The Republican Candidates Debate, an hour-long, commercial free debate moderated by their news anchor Ron Magers. The League of Women Voters of Illinois sponsored the debate with ABC 7 Chicago and the Illinois Broadcasters Association. Supporting organizations of the debate included The Chicago Urban League, the Asian American Institute, the Mikva Challenge, and the Coalition of African, Asian, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois.



Ron Magers with Republican gubernatorial candidates (l to r) Judy Barr Topinka, Andy Martin, Ron Gidwitz, Jim Oberweis, and Bill Brady. Photo is courtesy of ABC 7 Chicago

All five Republican Gubernatorial candidates participated--Bill Brady, Ron Gidwitz, Andy Martin, Jim Oberweis and Judy Baar Topinka. The League's Candidate Participation Policy determined whether each candidate was eligible to participate in the televised debate. A media panel questioned the candidates on many important issues. This year's panelists were Andy Shaw of ABC 7 News; Laura Washington, award-winning journalist and DePaul University professor; and Ben Calhoun, deputy news director, Chicago Public Radio.

State of the State

Over 340 individuals attended a fabulous event on February 13, 2006, at the Westin River North. Co-Chairs Valerie Jarrett and Corinne Wood each were presented with awards. Senator Barack Obama provided videotaped opening remarks.

Corinne Wood was given the Civic Action Award by LWVIL for her service to her community as an active member of charitable, political, and government boards and commissions and to the state of Illinois as a state representative and lieutenant governor. (In Ms. Wood's absence the award was presented and accepted on her behalf by Valerie Jarrett.)

Valerie Jarrett was presented the Civic Leadership Award by Desiree Rogers for her leadership and dedication to the Chicago community through her work in various governmental and community organizations, including the University of Chicago Hospitals Board of Trustees and the Executive Council of Metropolis 2020.

The featured speaker was Diane Swonk, senior managing director and chief economist for Mesirov Financial. Diane

remarked on the nation's economic expansion that is five years old and facing midlife challenges. She expressed confidence in our resilience and believes the best is yet to come, as few have benefited from the expansion to date. Of concern, though, is that while new jobs are being generated, most wage earners are being affected negatively by bearing a greater burden for health care costs, gasoline and utility costs, and pension plan changes. In addition, Ms. Swonk commented on strong behavioral changes on the part of consumers such as an increased consumption of alcohol at home, viewing movies at home, and some consumers paying full price for expensive items such as high-end hotel rooms and the opportunity to travel with the famous.

While the expansion is expected to continue, Diane remarked that "good times breed complacency." There are concerns over the economic impact of the conflict in Iran. Other concerns are that the economy is idea-based, and there is a talent shortage that is affected by immigration policy. On the positive side, government spending has been a push, rather than a

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From the President

Election season marks the time of year when Leagues are most visible in their communities with their efforts to encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government, the part of our mission for which we are most noted. This year League members have done a fantastic job in educating citizens. I urge Leagues to think about ways we can make citizens in our communities more aware of League activities and also look for opportunities for action.



Paula Lawson
LWVIL President

This year's changes in election laws afforded the League an excellent opportunity for community visibility. Many local Leagues provided voting machine demonstrations and publicized early voting opportunities. The League of Women Voters of Illinois, along with the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform and the Better Government Association, held a press conference and issued a press release on early voting. We encouraged voters to take advantage of the new early voting system and called on election authorities and law enforcement to monitor the process to ensure that it worked for Illinois voters. The League received great press coverage for its encouragement of early voting in the Sun Times, the Daily Herald, on WBBM radio and Fox news. Additionally, local Leagues have partnered with other nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce and news organizations to sponsor candidate forums, which helped increase League visibility.

The League's Poll Watching activities have provided opportunities for both monitoring changes to the election process and influencing public policy. Following the 2000 elections, LWVIL created the Election Administration Reform Committee to examine election administration in Illinois. For the 2002 March primary election local Leagues were encouraged to request poll watcher credentials. These requests were granted by some election authorities and denied by others. Where credentials were denied, the sticking point was the stipulation in the election code that a civic organization have "among its purposes or interest the investigation or prosecution of election fraud." This prompted League to seek action to change the election laws so Leagues could poll watch in all Illinois election jurisdictions. At this writing, SB 2397, which would permit League members to do poll watching throughout Illinois, has passed the Senate and moved to the House.

I would like to encourage local Leagues to use information sent by LWVIL as a guide in conducting legislative interviews with your state legislators. The emphasis of these meetings should be on an exchange of views and information, strengthening the line of communication and setting the stage for future action. The success of the poll watching legislation, spearheaded by Election Administration Committee Members Marcia McConnell, Sylvia Tillman and Mary-Lou Aagaard, is in part due to the fact that these League members have contacted their legislators about issues in the past and have developed good relationships with them.

The State of the State luncheon on February 13th was a great event, with the hard work the LWVIL staff, board members and host committee members to be commended. The support of Co-Chairs Valerie Jarrett and Corinne Wood, League members, business leaders and friends led to the event's financial success. Our speaker, Diane Swonk, gave us all many different facets of the U.S. and world economy to think about. Thank you to all who participated and supported the LWVIL Education Fund.

Paula

LWVIL Moderator Training Report

Twenty League members attended the moderator training workshop at the Issues Briefing. The two-hour workshop with Diane Lloyd of the Lake Forest/Lake Bluff Area League was packed with information suitable for both new and experienced moderators.

Diane led participants through the complete moderator experience, starting with how to work with the host group so that the moderator is informed about both the format of the event and the participants. She then discussed taking and keeping control of the event and ways to make it go as smoothly as possible. There was considerable discussion about how to handle the actual questions, and Diane explained a method frequently used by moderators to keep track of whose turn it is to speak. Finally, the group discussed how to handle problems that may occur during the forum.

The League is fortunate to have numerous trained and experienced moderators. Leagues seeking their names may contact the LWVIL office or Robin LaBedz, Voter Service Chair, 847-392-6195.

STATE CITINGS

The following are programs or events Leagues around the state have successfully presented:

Environment:

The Leagues of Jo Daviess County, IL, and Dubuque, IA, teamed up for a program on mercury in the environment featuring representatives of the Sierra Club, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Jo Daviess County Health Department. Discussed was mercury as a health threat and the steps to take to reduce that threat. For more info, contact Lu Bleveans of the Jo Daviess LWV at 815-777-2637.

The Rockford LWV, with the Burpee Museum of History, Rock Valley College, Winnebago County Health Department and the Retired/Senior Volunteer Program, work with fourth and fifth grade students in a day of learning to understand issues of ground water protection. For more info, contact Janyce Fadden at janyce_fadden@yahoo.com.

Local Government and Civic Involvement:

The Oak Park & River Forest LWV sponsored member visits to three different local village board meetings to see these governments in action and compare how these boards operate under their different administrative formats. League members met afterward to discuss their observations. For more info, contact Andrea Woyt at 708-524-2807.

The Glencoe LWV holds "Coffee and Conversation" meetings with representatives of the local government boards and agencies such as the village and park district. These gatherings are open to the public and offer members and other citizens an informal opportunity to discuss issues of concern. For more info, contact Hollis Burgess at sesame5401@aol.com.

Wilmette LWV's Student Government Program provides eighth grade students an opportunity to experience local government first hand. Students are assigned an elected official or appointed personnel to "shadow" for the duration of the program and participate in a workshop to help understand these positions. They then assume the responsibilities of their counterparts at mock meetings of the participating boards, which meetings are carried on the local cable station. For more info, contact Holly Berman at hab1012@sbcglobal.net.

National Security:

The LWV of the LaGrange Area hosted a public forum on **Disaster Preparedness: How Is Homeland Security Working at Home**. Eight communities participated and included fire and police personnel as panel members. Issues discussed included current disaster plans in the community, responsibility for implementing such plans, the financial aspects, and how to educate the public about them. For more info, contact Cynthia Schilsky at cschilsky@comcast.net.

Membership:

The Rockford LWV received a donation of \$1,000 from a long-time member with an idea to increase younger leadership in the League. This amount allowed Rockford to offer dues for \$10.00 per year and has resulted in about twenty new young members who are active in the various committees and special projects. For more info, contact Jane McAfee at janemcafee@rockriver.net.

If your League has a program you think other Leagues might be interested in, please send a short synopsis and contact info to Hollis Burgess at HBLLWVILVoter@aol.com or 945 Valley Rd, Glencoe, IL 60022.

MORE GOLD!

LWVIL is proud to have the continued support of the following members for fifty or more years. May they be with us for fifty more!

Joan Anderson, LaGrange Area
Suzanne Boswell, Rockford
Velaine Carnall, LaGrange Area
Daphne Daume, Chicago
Dorothy Espenscheid, Rockford
Priscilla Higgins, Chicago
Vivian Hickey, Rockford
Joyce Holmberg, Rockford
Elizanne Lewis, Rockford
Elizabeth Lewis, LaGrange Area
Naomi Metro, Dalton/Harvey/Riverdale

Ruth Meyer, Chicago
Helen Miller, Glenview
Hazel Mosher, Rockford
Evelyn Palm, Rockford
Ann M. Rothschild, Chicago
Dorothy Scheff, Chicago
Winnie Slusser, Chicago
Elizabeth Spiegel, Chicago
Jane Thain, Chicago
Jesse M. Thornton, Chicago
Jennie Wall, Rockford

CALL TO CONVENTION

MEETING IN THE MIDDLE
LWVUS 47TH National Convention
June 10 – 13, 2006
Minneapolis, MN

Be a part of the League decision-making process — Be a delegate to the LWVUS national convention.

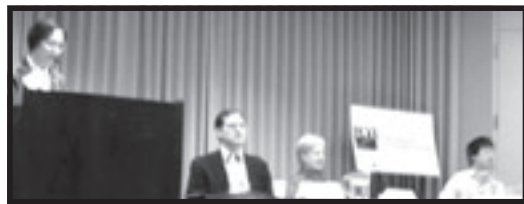
Join delegates from Leagues around the country to determine by-laws, budgets, officers and program for the League for the 2006-2008 biennium. Local Leagues are entitled to at least one delegate, with additional delegates for each 100 additional members. If you are interested, talk to your local League president.

LWVIL Tackles Immigration and More *(continued from page 1)*

(continued from page 1)

effect of forcing immigrants to go “underground” or engage in behaviors designed to hide their status, with implications for everyone. For example, immigrants need to have valid driver’s licenses in order to obtain insurance so the paperwork problem thus translates into a public safety concern.

The documentation challenge is further complicated by the enactment of the Federal Real ID Act, aimed at strengthening U.S. security. This law will establish Federal standards for the issuance of driver’s licenses by the states, including requirements that applicants have valid social security numbers. It also sets up a separate “driver certification” option that could be used for state, but not federal, purposes. For example, only licenses complying with the federal standards could be used to board airplanes. The law specifies that the non-complying licenses, the alternative driver certifications, must be visually identifiable. Although time will tell, this requirement could potentially discourage immigrants from seeking certificates.



Paula Lawson, Andrew Sagartz, Jan Kay, Fred Tsao

► *Crime*

While immigrants are generally no more likely to commit crimes than native born Americans, they are more likely to be victims of crime. Without valid social security numbers, undocumented immigrants cannot open bank accounts to safeguard their earnings. Due to the threat of deportation, they are also afraid of interaction with the police or the government and unlikely to report any problems, all of which makes them easy targets for criminals.

► *Deportation*

Mr. Tsao further explained that fear of deportation stands as a very serious concern for undocumented immigrants. For example, three states have deputized police to enforce immigration laws so a routine traffic stop can mean much more. Immigrants are often mistreated on the job but may not speak out or act to protest for fear of being turned over to immigration authorities. Since over 75 percent of undocumented immigrants live in mixed-status families, meaning they have family members who are American citizens or here legally, the deportation threat has family repercussions as well.

► *Access to Education & Social Services*

Education, particularly higher education, and eligibility for social services are also major challenges for immigrants. As explained above, the majority of immigrants pay taxes, but they are not eligible to receive most public benefits and have limited access to health care services, especially hospital care. Foreign language instruction also remains a serious challenge. Mr. Tsao cited the example of Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood, which, though famous for its Latino heritage, does not have bilingual signage at the public aid office. Both speakers emphasized that immigrants do want to integrate and learn to speak English, but that the demand for bilingual resources far outweighs supply.

Immigration Legislation – Where to Next?

“Everyone agrees that the system is broken, they just differ over the best way to fix it.” In the U.S. House of Representatives, legislation (HB 4437) has been introduced to penalize those who knowingly assist undocumented immigrants. While some policy makers argue for more enforcement of existing law, Mr. Sagartz and Mr. Tsao claimed that the enforcement of bad laws does not make a difference. Guestworker programs are not an easy solution because workers are eventually expected to return to potentially unfavorable conditions in their home countries.

A comprehensive reform package (SB 1033), introduced in the U.S. Senate, proposes a program of “earned” legalization, setting up milestones to be attained before an immigrant can gain legal status. Unlike an amnesty program, legal status would not be handed out unconditionally. Separate legislation is also pending to establish a path for undocumented students, brought to the U.S. by their parents, to become legal residents.

At the state level, Illinois passed an In-State Tuition Law for undocumented students and has enacted anti-consumer fraud protections for immigrants. With the latter, however, confidentiality of whistleblowers remains a problem.

The central problem remains that there are not enough lawful opportunities for immigrants to come to the United States. A tremendous backlog in applications exists, with the extreme being a wait of 22 years for a sibling from the Philippines to join a family member here. The U.S. economy relies upon immigrant labor, but there is no safe way for them to come here. Enforcement has increased, yet immigration levels still go up. Mr. Tsao labeled this as insanity: to keep doing the same thing for the same bad result.

Mr. Sagartz and Mr. Tsao were questioned on the long-range impact of unlimited immigration on the environment. Mr. Tsao argued that this issue is about the American lifestyle, not immigration policies. He also reconfirmed that advocates are generally pushing for reform of existing law, not unrestricted immigration. Laws must recognize the ebb and flow of immigration in connection with conditions in other countries. It was also pointed out that certain companies benefit from illegal immigration. The speak-

ers explained that many businesses want reforms because they would much prefer to hire legal workers, but, in the absence of reform, they are left with little choice.

LWVIL Advocacy – Study, Action, Change

To demonstrate the many ways in which League members seek to make a difference in their communities, the second group of panelists discussed League advocacy efforts at the national, state and local levels.

Robin LaBedz, the LWVIL Voter Service Chair, began by discussing the Federal Voting Rights Act. Certain critical pieces of the law are set to expire in 2007, and this spring League will begin action in support of extending these provisions for another 25 years. Janet Kittlaus, Issue Specialist for the Death Penalty, then explained how the effort to abolish the death penalty grew from her League in Evanston, to adoption by the LWVIL, and then onto the current campaign to have LWVUS adopt the position by concurrence at Convention this coming June. Kathy Nesburg, Issue Specialist for School Funding and Fiscal Policy, discussed the state’s ongoing budget challenges and League efforts at the state level in support of tax reforms and enhanced school funding. Eileen Hattan Lynch discussed the work of the LWV of Adams County in support of an indoor smoking ban in the City of Quincy that also involved support for legislation at the state level.

Death Penalty Abolition Concurrence Update

Our focus until March 1 has been to urge local Leagues to support the death penalty concurrence on their national program planning reports. We posted instructions on our website explaining how to complete the report form in order to support our effort. This information also was sent to State Leagues with the request that it be forwarded to their local Leagues. We received a number of positive postings on the program planning listserve.

An informational packet will be mailed to all local Leagues as required by the LWVUS bylaws. The information also will be posted on the website (http://www.lwvil.org/death_penalty/) and will include links to other State Leagues’ positions on the death penalty issue. We have identified eleven State Leagues with abolition positions, two Leagues with moratorium positions, and two, Connecticut and New Mexico, which will be completing studies and consensus/concurrence processes before convention. The three Leagues with the most recent studies, New York, Ohio, and Maryland, have begun planning caucuses for the national convention.

We thank the several Leagues and League members who have provided financial support thus far. If your League has not done so, please consider a gift. We do need your partnership in this effort! Please contact me at dpconcurrence@lwvil.org with questions, suggestions, or to help.

Janet Kittlaus
Death Penalty Specialist, LWVIL

ELECTION REFORM WORKSHOP

The Election Reform Workshop had four components: Voting Procedures for the March 21 Primary, Changes in Illinois Election Laws, LWVIL Pollwatching project, and SB2397, the LWVIL bill on issuance of pollwatching credentials.

The Cook County Clerk’s Office staff demonstrated the new touch screen voting machine and discussed the sample paper ballot and other changes to the election processes. Those attending the workshop were able to practice using the voting machine and were shown how to review their vote before pressing the “cast ballot” button. This machine meets the LWVUS goal that any electronic device must be auditable and verifiable by providing paper backup in the event of challenges and questions.

The 2005 Omnibus Election bill brought many changes to the Illinois Election laws, including a grace period extending registration beyond the twenty-eight days before the election; the option for voters to vote from twenty-two to five days prior to the election at sites determined by the local election authorities; and that voter registrars are no longer restricted to a specific county but can now register people to vote for any jurisdiction within Illinois.

The LWVIL statewide pollwatching project was discussed in great detail. Tasks and tips for effective pollwatching were reviewed. Those who could not pollwatch the entire day were urged to observe the activities in the polls and complete a survey. The Election Administration Reform Committee will tally the survey and provide a report of the results, which will guide future action.

The LWVIL Election Administration Reform Committee is promoting passage of SB2397, which would ensure that Leagues are permitted to pollwatch. Currently some county election authorities say the League does not have legal authority to perform this important activity. All League members are urged to advocate for passage of this legislation.