



# Chester County VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Chester County, PA

Vol. 14 No. 6

FEBRUARY, 2010

## AROUND THE LEAGUES

**LWVUS**—League calls Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United vs. FCC* to allow unlimited corporate funds in campaigns 'constitutionally irresponsible' and a 'tragic mistake': "The Supreme Court has made a tragic mistake. Their decision announced today in Citizens (Cont. p. 4)

**LWVPA** has just introduced A Citizens's Guide to a Modern Constitutional Convention with 3 other non-partisan organizations. To read this guide of Keystone Conventions, go to [www.lwvpa.com](http://www.lwvpa.com).

**LWVCC**—Rather than holding our traditional Legislative Luncheon, LWVCC will be calling upon individual members to visit with our PA Senators & Representatives & report back on their answers to questions. See pp. 9 & 10 for more on this process.

## Marcellus Shale Study Presentation & Consensus Meeting

Saturday, February 27, 2010, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.,

East Goshen Township Building, 1580 Paoli Pike, West Chester, 19380

Marcellus Shale Study Questions: Pages 7 & 8

Marcellus Shale Study Guides I-IV: [www.palwv.org](http://www.palwv.org)

The Pennsylvania League of Women Voters has done a very comprehensive study of the Marcellus Shale Gas Drilling Process. The LWVCC Marcellus Shale Study Committee will present the study information as it relates to the Consensus questions on Saturday, February 27, 2010. The Consensus Meeting will follow the presentation in order to come to a consensus and send the decision on to the State League.

### League Contacts, Numbers, & Websites

**Chester County:** 610 644-5960 [www.palwv.org/chesco](http://www.palwv.org/chesco) [www.healthyfrog.org](http://www.healthyfrog.org)

**Southeastern PA (SEPR):** 215 474 7669 [www.palwv.org/SEPR](http://www.palwv.org/SEPR)

**Pennsylvania :** 800 692-7281 [www.palwv.org](http://www.palwv.org)

**United States** 202 429-1965 [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

**LWVCC Officers:** **Co-Presidents:** Jean Goerth & Pat Horrocks, **1st Vice President:** Charlotte Gosselink, **2nd Vice President:** Marylou Dondero, **Secretary:** Marg Perina, **Treasurer:** Joan Safford,

**LWVCC Board of Directors:** Barbara DeWilde, Alma Forsyth, Susan Mano, Meryle Rothman, Anne Stefan-Kopko

**Voter Editor:** Susan Fields 610 255 0192, [sudofields@gmail.com](mailto:sudofields@gmail.com)

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**PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE** Jean Goerth & Pat Horrocks

The year 2010 marks the 90<sup>th</sup> year of the League of Women Voters in the United States. February has been its traditional month to celebrate. But reaching the venerable age of 90 needs to see more of a recognition that covers the entire year. Here in the County we are creating tote bags to carry all our important documents, papers, directories, informational handouts and voter registration forms.....as every League member knows one must be prepared to educate inquiring voters!

We are in the midst of a **study** about the Marcellus Shale controversy and will be meeting in February for an educational meeting and later to reach consensus. The ability of the state government to fund sufficient oversight of drilling is compromised by the fiscal budget problems of the Commonwealth.

We are **interested** in the lawsuit brought by affected voters in the County about the inadequacies of the Upper Oxford polling site in the 2008 elections.

We are **watching** the reactions to the Supreme Court decision that gave corporations, both nationally and internationally, the ability to fund political campaigns in America.

We continue to **monitor** the progress of the Health Care Reform efforts in Washington.

And we are asking members to join in **actively working** to interview our elected officials to Harrisburg during the month of February in their home offices with the State League questions and a few of our own. Each year we ask relevant questions of our Senators and Representatives so that we may better understand their positions and understandings of timely issues. We also share the League positions and understanding of those issues with them.

But most of all we are celebrating the healthy viability of our organization that is 90 years young. Please join us in our various activities over the coming year as we give attention to the activities of good government, educate new citizens and voters to the importance of knowing the reasons someone is a responsible candidate and continue to watch, monitor, study and actively work to create a better governmental environment here in the County, across the Commonwealth and within the Beltway.

**Please reserve before April 1, 2010**

4CP Board of Directors Invites You to Attend the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual

**GENE WILSON AWARD LUNCHEON**

Wed., April 14, 2010 11:30am – 2:00pm

Downingtown Country Club 85 Country Club Road Downingtown, PA 19335

*Gene Wilson, long time League of Women Voters member, provided the concept & inspiration for 4CP. His initiatives, commitment & dedication to a healthy environment will be honored & recognized at this celebration. Please join us, along with all League members, for this very special afternoon.*

www.chescocooler.org \$ 30 per person (Cash Bar) Checks Payable to 4CP (No credit cards accepted)

Mail to 4CP 719 Price Street West Chester, PA 19382 Questions: Call Meryle Rothman

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Entree Choices: \_\_\_ Herb Citrus Chicken \_\_\_ Grilled Salmon \_\_\_ Vegetarian

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

(Street, City, State, Zip Code)

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

# COMMITTEE CORNER

## INTERNATIONAL

### Botswana – A Near MDGs Success Story

*Note: This is the fourth article on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), part of a joint AAUW – League of Women Voters study. **Members are invited to attend our meeting on Thursday, February 18 at 9:30 am at the Friends Home in Kennett Square.***

For tourists entering the land popularized by Alexander McCall Smith's inimitable detective, Precious Ramotswa, this land-locked Southern African nation bounded by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia projects promise. Government signs proclaim "zero tolerance for corruption," free condom dispensers openly acknowledge the scourge of the region – HIV-AIDs, and friendly camp staffs welcome weary travelers with stirring African folksongs.

Optimism makes sense. The Republic of Botswana (formerly Bechuanaland, a protectorate of Great Britain) has achieved remarkable social, political and economic progress since gaining its independence in 1966. Seretse Khama, a leader in the independence movement and a tribal chieftain, stabilized the country during his fifteen year presidency – pouring Botswana's mining wealth into education, health and infrastructure, mandating English and Setswana as national languages, and capitalizing on the country's exceptionally fast economic growth. According to the Lonely Planet's narrative ([Botswana and Namibia](#)) life expectancy for Botswana's approximately two million people grew from 33 to 70 years (a statistic revised downward to 46 due to AIDS), and the literacy rate leaped to over 75%. The country boasts a stable democracy and a robust economy fueled by diamonds, high-end tourism and manufacturing. Although 70% of the land is Kalahari Desert, geographic features include the huge Okavango Delta, large saltpans, and diverse wild-life habitats.

The government has conducted a rigorous needs assessment to outline the path to MDG achievement. A brief assessment follows:

It is unlikely that poverty will be eradicated, but the country will reduce hunger and malnutrition.

Botswana has achieved universal education, and turns now to education quality.

Gender issues are intractable – a tradition of male dominance hampers progress.

Child mortality will be reduced and goals for immunization met.

Maternal mortality rates will likely drop by 50% by 2011.

Although the government has begun supplying anti-viral drugs, the AIDs infection rate (between 25-40%) threatens to subvert substantial progress in other areas.

Environmental planning and sustainable development continues, with a cautious eye to diminishing diamond reserves.(Cont.p.4)

## CIVIL LIBERTIES

The regular Civil Liberties Meeting on Tues., Feb. 9 at Marg Perina's house at 1 p.m. will be addressing poll-workers' meetings and the 2nd Annual Voters Coalition Elections Symposium. All are invited. Please call: *Marg Perina*

In the past we had focused on identifying problems in polling places in Chester County, particularly with the Lower Oxford Voting District where Lincoln University is located. At our yearly discussion with the Commissioners last Spring we urged the Commissioners to appoint an independent bi-partisan committee to look into alternative polling locations, including returning it to the Lincoln University campus where it had been located several years earlier.

Instead, the Commissioners decided to move the polling place to government garage in the same building as the Upper Oxford polling place. The result of this decision is not surprising: a lawsuit against the Commissioners, etc. arising out of the extremely bad 2008 voting problems at the Lower Oxford (Cont. p. 11)

## HEALTHCARE

The League of Women Voters of PA supports [HB1660](#) / [SB400](#). The Family & Business Healthcare Security Act, the single payer bills in the state Legislature. Visit the Healthcare For All Pennsylvania web site ([www.healthcare4allpa.org](http://www.healthcare4allpa.org)) for more information.

**COMMITTEE CORNER, Cont.****VOTERS' SERVICE**

We began the new year with the Naturalization Ceremony at the Justice Center on January 29. League members registering the new citizens were Meryle Rothman, Charlotte Gosselink, Karen Gorgonzola, Cathy Lakaff, and Susan Mano. Thanks to all of you for the warm welcome you gave these new Americans!

*Mary Lou Dondero, Chair*

**LEADERSHIP—****LEAGUE STYLE**

On January 18 the League participated in a general meeting of the Freedom Valley Girl Scouts held at the Advent Lutheran Church in Westtown. The gathering of more than 200 Scouts focused on the theme of "Leadership", recognizing that the qualities of self-confidence, courage, and perseverance can be developed and nurtured at very young ages. LWVCC members Carolyn Comitta, Mayor of West Chester; Charlotte Gosselink, the League's 1st Vice President and an ordained minister; and Cathy Lakoff, a former business owner, spoke to the girls about their experiences as young girls of the Scouts' ages that prepared them to succeed as leaders in their adult lives.

Thank you Carolyn, Charlotte, and Cathy for sharing your stories with these future leaders!

*Mary Lou Dondero*

**ENERGY****4CP Monthly Meeting:**

Chester County Citizens for Climate Protection: Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2010 7 - 9pm

West Chester Municipal Bldg.

**EFFICIENT****MICRO-TURBINE HEATING SYSTEMS**

Learn how this system is more efficient than typical heating systems and how much carbon dioxide they can reduce. For more information, join us at our event and checkout our website [www.chescocooler.org](http://www.chescocooler.org).

**HOT TOPICS**

Both Hot Topics will be discussing "Immigration Reform" this month. South is at 10 a.m. 2nd Thurs. (Feb. 11) at Longwood Family Restaurant on Rte.1in Kennett Sq. North is at Noon 3rd Thurs. (Feb. 18) at Easttown Library, 720 First Ave., Easttown. For more info: For more info: Call Carol Bossert

*(Botswana, Cont. from p. 3)*

Continued regional cooperation is likely.

In summary, a stable and honest government, economic wealth and relative homogeneity make Botswana a success story tempered by HIV-AIDs, which tragically undermines goal achievement in other areas.

Betsey Cullen (610-793-4664)  
*Note: Betsey and her husband, Neil, traveled to Botswana on safari in October 2009.*

*LWVUS, Sup. Ct. Decision on Campaign Finance, Cont. from p. 1) United v. FCC is constitutionally irresponsible and will surely bring about an anti-democratic revolution in how we finance elections in this country. Today, basic pillars of American democracy have been undermined – that elections should not be corrupted by vast corporate wealth and that the voters should be at the center of our democratic system.*

"Justice Stevens had it right when he said, in his dissent, 'The Court's ruling threatens to undermine the integrity of elected institutions across the Nation. The path it has taken to reach its outcome will, I fear, do damage to this institution.'

"In creating a new constitutional right for corporations to spend unlimited amounts of their shareholder's money to determine the outcome in candidate elections, the Court has unleashed into our elections tremendous sums of money from for-profit corporations that cannot possibly be matched in quantity by contributions from ordinary citizens. The only possible outcome of this is that big money and special interests will have an even tighter grip on our democracy.

"Congress and the President enacted campaign finance laws over a series of decades for a reason – to protect our democracy from the perverse influence of big money in our elections. In making this decision, the Court has ignored the best interests of the American public and our representative form of government."

**MEMBERS' CORNER****Why I Joined the League**

by Cathy Lakoff

I have owned and operated a business in Chester County since 1978. In that capacity, the 30 years in business gave me an opportunity to meet a great many people from the community, and to gain a sense of their lives and what was important to them. Through the business, I established a fund benefiting a local woman who was left quadriplegic after a fall in her home. With no benefits from her job, we were able to assist in her purchase of a modified van, and to retrofit her home with special needs equipment. Additionally, our company instituted an annual art show that benefited the Domestic Violence Center of Chester County.

After my recent retirement, I decided to broaden my knowledge about the needs of our community and about civic issues county wide. As a new member and volunteer of the League of Women Voters, I have enjoyed my experience and have gained an appreciation for the role that the League plays at debates and elections and at the Chester County Naturalization Ceremony. Witnessing the ceremony and registering the new citizens to vote gave me great joy, but the highlight of the event was personally recognizing one of the new citizens being sworn in as she was celebrating this very moving and important milestone.

I admire the sense of purpose and selflessness that is visible among League members. By facilitating debate, encouraging voter awareness and welcoming new citizens, the League is working in the service of the community and the interests of democracy. This is an organization in which I am proud to be a member.

*We want to hear your story about why you joined the League. Please email stories to [mgrothman@verizon.net](mailto:mgrothman@verizon.net) or mail them to Meryle Rothman, 719 Price St., West Chester, PA 19382.*

**SAVE the Date! MARCH 20th 10am -1pm**  
**2010 World Water Day Walk-a-thon** at  
 MLK Dr., Philly to support Kenya Water Projects  
 Sponsored by Keiyo Soy Ministries  
**Register at [www.ksministries.com](http://www.ksministries.com)**

**JANUARY 2010****NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES**

The Tredyffrin Democrats invited the League to speak at their monthly meeting and we accepted the invitation for January 20th. They wanted to know what we do and how they can take advantage of our services. The presentation and discussion were a brief 15 minutes, but the audience was engaged, asked questions about candidate forums and redistricting and was very appreciative of our visit.

Building partnerships help the League to grow and maintain our relevancy in Chester County and the opportunity to network with us is open to all - Democrats, Republicans, Independents, non-political, religious and community groups. We simply want to let people know who we are and what we do in townships throughout Chester County.

MEMBERSHIP, VISIBILITY and NETWORKING...all important ways in which people can learn about the League and get involved in the political process. Don't forget, when someone asks you what you have been up to, we hope you will say "I've been busy volunteering as a member of the League of Women Voters". That's networking!

**OPTIMISTIC FOR 2010**

When I think about the contributions that the League of Women Voters has made over the past 90 years, I feel such pride and optimism. Proud of the work that we have done educating our community about candidates and elections, energy and the environment, international relations, civil liberties, redistricting and healthcare, to name a few. And optimistic about the opportunities to serve Chester County this new year in a way that continues to help improve the quality of life for our residents, our workers and our visitors.

Thank you all, each and every one of you, our incredible membership, for your support, your time and your contributions. It is because of you that we are able to make such a difference in the lives of the people around us. And it is because of you and your commitment to the League that I am so optimistic about 2010.

Some of the challenges that we will be participating in this year are Marcellus Shale and other energy/environmental issues, the Census, Redistricting, and Congressional and Gubernatorial (*Cont. p. 6*)

**MEMBERS' Cont.****VIRGINIA REIMET****1935 – 2009**

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of our friend and colleague Ginny Reimet. Ginny was a longtime, active League member who participated in many activities, especially in Phoenixville. Join the League Board in extending our deepest sympathies to her husband the Reverend Walter O. Reimet, their three daughters, six grandchildren and large extended family. In memory of Ginny, contributions can be made to:

St. John's Lutheran Church  
Maasae Girls Lutheran Secondary  
School Fund  
355 St. John's Circle  
Phoenixville, PA 19460

*(Optimistic, Cont. from p. 5)* Elections. This means we need members to step up and help with the study groups, candidate forums and community outreach. We have been fortunate over the years that when we need volunteers, YOU step up. I am optimistic that you will be here for the League and Chester County again this year.

So much has been accomplished by the League of Women Voters in the last 90 years. We ALL need to be proud of the work that we have done and recognize that our participation in Chester County is important, anticipated and appreciated. Looking ahead to 2010, we ALL have reason to be optimistic too.

**ARTICLES**

**REDISTRICTING & THE CENSUS:** For numerous links to excellent articles & websites on this topic, go to the bottom of the [www.palwv.org](http://www.palwv.org) Home page. For instance it contains the following Committee of '70 article on the PA Redistricting Timetable for US Congress:

“Congressional Districts in Pennsylvania are set by law, and therefore the redistricting plan must be passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor. This usually must be done by late January of the year after the Census data is released (in this case, January of 2012), when paperwork begins for candidates in the spring primary elections. The General Assembly has repeatedly missed this deadline in past redistrictings, wreaking havoc for candidates and election officials and forcing the courts to step in and force the process to a conclusion.

The apportionment of members of the House of Representatives is mandated by the Constitution, but given the importance of the process, it is surprising how little the document actually specifies. Article I, Section 2 calls for a Census every 10 years. It also calls for representatives to be apportioned equally among the states based on population (the original formula notoriously called for slaves to be counted as 3/5 of a person each, although that was changed by the 14th Amendment after slavery was abolished). The Constitution does not even require that House members be elected based on geographic districts, nor does it say how any such districts should be determined.

By tradition, most states used the district system to select members of Congress, and it was made a legal requirement for all states in 1967. (There are seven states that have such small populations that they have just one representative; redistricting is therefore a moot question). To prevent Congress from expanding to an unwieldy size, Congress set a limit of 435 members of the House in 1911. Pennsylvania has been steadily losing power in Congress ever since as population moved South and West - down from its peak of 36 in 1910 to 19 in 2001.

- **April 24, 2012** – Pennsylvania Primary Election in which new district boundaries take effect.
- **November 6, 2012** – Pennsylvania General Election to elect Pennsylvania Congressional candidates to newly redrawn districts.
- **January 2012** – U.S. Congress' session begins with newly drawn districts.

**NOTE:** Dates are approximate and subject to change.”

*Compiled by Committee of 70*

**ARTICLES, Cont.***League of Women Voters of PA Marcellus Shale Natural Gas Extraction Study***2009-2010 CONSENSUS QUESTIONS** Consensus Deadline is March 26, 2010**I. Economic Issues** (See Study Guide III – Economic Impact.)*Please respond to each of the following according to the scale below:***1 Not Important      3 Neutral      5 Very Important**

- A. How important is it that natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale benefits the economic strength of Pennsylvania?
- B. Please rate the importance of each of the following items relative to natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale.
1. Creation of new jobs in Pennsylvania
  2. Provision of new revenue streams for: (a) State Government; (b) Local Government
  3. Protection of the Pennsylvania tourism business from disruption of public and private recreation facilities and areas
  4. Research to enhance knowledge of the effects of natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale on the economy, environment, and public health of Pennsylvania

**II. Revenues/Taxes** (See LWV-PA Fiscal Policy as well as Study Guides III Economic Impact, IV Taxation, and V Regulation.)*Please respond to each of the following according to the scale below:***1 Unfair and Inequitable      3 Neutral      5 Fair and Equitable**

- A. Rate each of the following government taxation and/or revenue streams.
1. Income from personal and business taxes derived from natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale.
  2. Severance tax
  3. Local taxes on natural gas as property
  4. Fund from leasing state forest land and associated production royalties
  5. Permit fees levied by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
  6. Bonding funds provided by companies to DEP and municipalities

*Please respond to each of the following according to the scale below:***1 Not Important      3 Neutral      5 Very Important**

- B. How important is it that there be funds allocated for:
1. General Fund
  2. DEP regulation
  3. Environmental restoration
  4. Public health monitoring and remediation
  5. Permanent fund as predictable revenue source to help communities adjust when the industry declines
  6. Basic and applied research related to natural gas extraction from Marcellus Shale
  7. Escrow or reserve fund for unanticipated outcomes

**ARTICLES, Cont.****III. Citizen's Rights** (See Study Guide V – Regulation.)

Please respond to each of the following according to the scale below:

**1 Not Important      3 Neutral      5 Very Important**

How important is it to:

Support legislation that provides transparency in the exploration, drilling and production of natural gas to all interested citizens?

Balance the rights of surface owners and gas/mineral rights owners?

Establish a quick and easy way to request and obtain inspections from DEP?

Provide for local citizen input into the placement of pipelines and compressors?

E. Extend timelines for retesting water quality?

F. Establish an oversight hotline for reporting potential violations and accidents?

**IV. Environment** (See LWVUS Natural Resources Position as well as Study Guides II Environmental Impact and V Regulation.)

Please respond to each of the following according to the scale below:

**1 Not Important      3 Neutral      5 Very Important**

How important is it to:

Remove all natural gas industry exemptions from environmental legislation, policies and regulations, e.g. Safe Drinking Water Act, Clean Air Act?

Specify in all leases how land should be restored?

Develop consistent statewide water use plans and enforcement so that the Erie, Ohio, Genesee, and Potomac River Basins are treated similarly to the Susquehanna and Delaware River Basins?

Disclose completely the composition of fracking fluid and flowback wastewater?

Establish monitoring devices to determine the effect of natural gas drilling, production, and transmission on air and water quality?

Encourage research and development to decrease the negative environmental impact of the exploration, extraction and production of natural gas?

G. Establish a procedure to insure collaboration and communication between local, regional, state and federal agencies regarding the regulation, monitoring, and enforcement processes?

H. Require the use of best practices and available technologies by companies to reduce negative impacts on the environment?

**Comments**

*Comments important to the consensus of your League may follow, but please limit them to 250 words.*

**\*\*\*\*\*PLEASE BRING A COPY OF THESE QUESTIONS TO 2/27 Mtg.\*\*\*\*\***

**ARTICLES, Cont.****LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PENNSYLVANIA 2009 QUESTIONS FOR  
LOCAL LEAGUE INTERVIEWS WITH STATE LEGISLATORS**

REDISTRICTING REFORM In the 2008 session, 95 members of the PA House cosponsored a League backed proposal to amend the PA constitution to assign redistricting to a non-partisan bureau that would redraw lines using strict criteria to prevent gerrymandering. However, the bill died in committee. Passage of proposed constitutional amendment legislation by the end of June 2008 was necessary to meet the requirements for a constitutional amendment to take effect in time for the 2011 round of redrawing legislative and congressional district boundaries.

**Since it is no longer possible to pass a constitutional amendment reforming the redistricting process in time to take effect in 2011, would you support an alternate proposal to reform the process through legislation that would take effect for 2011?**

The proposed legislation would do the following:

- Provide that the Legislative Reapportionment Commission constituted under the Pennsylvania constitution would conduct congressional as well as legislative redistricting.
- Assign standards for meeting redistricting criteria already in the constitution to be applied to congressional as well as legislative district boundaries.

Set requirements for transparency and public input.

ELECTION REFORM Protecting the right of every qualified citizen to vote is a central tenet of our democratic system. But this right is often compromised by laws and practices that discourage voter participation.

**Which of the following, if any, would you support to remove unnecessary barriers to voting?**

- Provide that any eligible citizen can register and vote on Election Day.
- Establish a system for early voting to alleviate problems such as long lines and excessive waiting times associated with high voter turnout in some elections.

Remove the requirement that registered voters have an excuse in order to cast an absentee ballot (no excuse necessary absentee voting).

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION Pennsylvania last held a constitutional convention in 1967 – 1968.

**Do you think the time is right for Pennsylvania to hold another constitutional convention?**

**Should such a convention be limited or open ended?**

**How do you think the delegates should be selected?**

**Should recommended amendments go directly to the voters or should they go to the legislature first which might or might not vote to send them to the voters for approval? What recourse should citizens have if the legislature fails to act?**

**What other recommendations do you have should a constitutional convention be held?**

LEGISLATOR'S PRIORITIES

**Do you have any legislative priorities related to the current economic crisis?**

## ARTICLES, Cont.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR 2009 LEGISLATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### REDISTRICTING REFORM

Legislative districts are drawn by a bipartisan commission made up of legislative leaders or their appointees. Congressional districts are drawn through legislation. Both systems are inherently flawed because districts are drawn to protect the reelection prospects of incumbents and, in the case of congressional redistricting skew the lines to favor the election of candidates of the party in power. In the 2008 session, 95 members of the PA House signed on as cosponsors of HB2420 a League backed proposal to amend the PA constitution to assign redistricting to a non-partisan bureau that would redraw lines using strict criteria to prevent gerrymandering. However, the bill died in committee. A similar bill was voted on in the Senate State Government Committee but failed to pass. Passage of proposed constitutional amendment legislation by the end of June 2008 was necessary to meet the requirements for a constitutional amendment to take effect in time for the 2011 round of re-drawing legislative and congressional district boundaries.

Additional information on redistricting reform is available at:

<http://www.palwv.org/issues/redistricting.html>

#### ELECTION REFORM

Protecting the right of every qualified citizen to vote is a central tenant of our democratic system. But this right is often compromised by laws and practices that discourage voter participation.

Additional information on the League's Election Law position is available at:

<http://www.palwv.org/issues/electionlaws.html>

<http://www.palwv.org/lwv/pubs/WhereWeStand.pdf>   <http://www.palwv.org/lwv/pubs/Impact%20on%20Issues%202006-08.pdf>

#### CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Pennsylvania last held a constitutional convention in 1967-68. Prior to that, in 1963, voters rejected a call for a constitutional convention but several amendments proposed through the legislative referendum process were approved by the voters. In the wake of the 2005 legislative and judicial pay raise controversy there has been renewed interest in holding a constitutional convention. In the 2007-08 legislative session several bills were introduced calling for a review of Pennsylvania's Constitution. One proposal would have created a Commission on Constitutional Review that would review the Constitution and either make recommendations for any changes it deemed needed or recommend a general revision by constitutional convention. Other bills called for a constitutional convention, setting forth procedures for selecting delegates and enumerating those sections of the constitution to be addressed by the delegates and those that were specifically not to be addressed – a limited constitutional convention.

Additional constitutional convention information is available at:

<http://www.issuespa.net/articles/22182?curCategory=15117>

<http://www.issuespa.net/articles/22183?curCategory=15117>

## ARTICLES, Cont.

(Civil Liberties, Cont. from p. 4) polling place. The following newspaper article describes that suit, Golden English v. Chester County, which was filed in the US District Court for the Eastern District of PA:

### **“Civil Rights Groups File Suit Alleging Racial Discrimination In Chester County Vote: Lincoln University Students And Other Residents Forced to Wait Up To 7 Hours in Pouring Rain to Vote** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 10, 2010

PHILADELPHIA—A federal lawsuit was filed today on behalf of African-American residents and Lincoln University students in Chester County, asserting that the County Board of Elections and Department of Voter Services have deprived African-Americans in Lower Oxford East Township of their right to vote by assigning them to inconvenient and inadequate polling facilities. Prior to the November 2008 election, community members had warned county officials that the existing polling place could not handle the anticipated turnout, but county officials refusing to move the polling place. As a result, on Election Day 2008, hundreds of Lower Oxford East voters—most of them African-American—waited up to seven hours in the pouring rain to cast their votes. Those who were unable to wait left without voting.

The suit asks the court to order Chester County to return the Lower Oxford polling place to the Lincoln University campus, authorize federal elections monitors, and award damages to residents who faced extreme difficulties or were prevented from voting in the 2008 general election.

‘That this happened to Lincoln University students who walk the same halls as the great civil rights advocate Justice Thurgood Marshall once did, and to community members who live where he once lived, makes it an even more compelling case,’ said Phil Wilson, lead lawyer for the plaintiffs. ‘This suit will help ensure that racial discrimination at the polls—a sad part of national electoral legacy—is a thing of the past in Chester County.’

Lower Oxford East Township contains the largest concentration of African-American voters of any voting precinct in predominantly white Chester County, in large part because of Lincoln University, an historically African-American university. The Lower Oxford East voting precinct made national news in November 2008 as some voters waited literally all day to cast their votes. Many voters could not wait that long and were unable to vote. Late in the evening, a Chester County judge ordered the county to expand the facilities at Lower Oxford East to process voters faster.

But by then, the damage was done: voter turnout at Lower Oxford East was the lowest of any precinct in Chester County—just under 56%, compared with nearly 80% turnout elsewhere. And although African-Americans make up more than half of the voting age population in Lower East Oxford East Township, the African-American voter there was lower than in other precincts.

‘Voting is everyone’s right,’ Shanisha Smith, a plaintiff and student at Lincoln University. ‘Being involved in this lawsuit would allow those who come after me an opportunity to exercise that right. In my eyes, being the voice of my peers and standing up for what’s right is not an obligation but a responsibility I welcome.’

The suit alleges that the long lines at Lower Oxford East resulted from a combination of factors, most importantly the location of the polling place in a tiny community center that could accommodate only two lines of voters, a small number of privacy booths and a single ballot scanner. Voting was slowed further by the failure of the Department of Voter Services to provide up-to-date voter rolls and frivolous challenges by a Republican poll watcher to young African-American voters—problems that did not occur at other polling places.

The suit also alleges with the County Board of Elections refused to address the cramped conditions before the election. Early in the fall of 2008, residents of Lower Oxford East petitioned to have the polling place returned to a larger facility on the Lincoln University campus because of the anticipated large turnout. But the Chester County Board of Elections rejected the move, 2-1. After the disastrous 2008 general election, the board decided to combine the Lower Oxford East and Lower Oxford West polling places in a small township building farther away from the university. ‘Keeping your opponents from voting is not the American way to win elections,’ observed co-counsel Michael Churchill....”

**The League of Women Voters**

**P.O. Box 57**

**Kemblesville, PA 19347**

**FIRST CLASS MAIL**



The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that helps citizens understand and participate in their government.

## FEBRUARY 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3 4CP Mtg.	4	5	6
7	8	9 Civil Liberties Mtg.	10	11 Southern Hot Topics	12	13
14 League Birthday!	15	16	17	18 International Committee Mtg. Northern Hot Topics	19	20 LWVCC Board Mtg
21	22	23	24	25	26	27 Marcellus Shale Consensus Mtg.
28						