



June/July 2009

"People might not get all they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get."

*Frederick Douglass
American abolitionist,
author, editor, orator,
reformer and statesman*

This issue is brought to you by Reverend Rodney and Jeannette Debs, our inaugural Susan B. Anthony members!



Join or renew at this special level to support your Local League programs.

Mission:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Message from the President

In March I returned from Legislative Seminar full of enthusiasm and energy. In May I returned from Convention in the same condition. It's inspiring to be surrounded by men and women who persevere despite setbacks, because they believe safeguarding democracy is worth the effort.

It's thrilling to be part of the solution, but also a bit daunting to see the work still ahead of us. I chose this issue's banner quote with that in mind. We won't often succeed the first time, but we must never stop trying.

Susan B. Anthony recognized this when she promised us "Failure is impossible." She knew universal suffrage would be achieved if we just kept working for it.

Usually League takes the summer off, but this year we have a chance to make a big difference by working to get the Fair Districts Florida amendments on the 2010 ballot.

Read on to find out how you can help put competition back into our electoral process and give Florida voters the choices they deserve.

Mary Blackwell

Fair Districts Florida Petition Drive Underway

To date all we've done is talk about the Fair Districts Florida initiative. Now it's time to get to work.

The Supreme Court approved the proposed amendments in January. To be added to the 2010 ballot, 676,811 petitions signed by registered Florida voters from at least 13 Congressional Districts must be collected, and then certified by the Florida Department of Elections no later than February 1, 2010.

Initiative proponents estimate 1.6 million signatures must be gathered to ensure the minimum required number of certified petitions. It will cost \$1.8 million to accomplish this.

Help give Floridians the opportunity to vote on the amendments by: signing the petitions, asking friends to sign, and donating money at <https://www.fairdistrictsflorida.org/donate.asp>.

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No Consensus on National Popular Vote Compact

On May 18th the LWVUS Board released the following statement:

"The LWVUS affirms its support of the direct election of the president and abolition of the Electoral College, but the LWVUS has no position on the National Popular Vote Compact as studied in 2008-2009."

Over 51% of Local Leagues participated in the study and consensus process, but the NPV Compact did

not win the two thirds support required to achieve consensus. The process elicited strong support for the NPV Compact (about 50% of responding Leagues in favor). However, the remaining 50% were split almost evenly between not favoring the NPV Compact and not being able to reach consensus.

For more details visit our website at <http://www.lwvokaloosa.org/NPVCompact.html>.

Signing the petitions is **NOT** a vote in favor of the amendments; it will simply get them on the 2010 ballot and allow voters to decide if the legislature should follow fairness standards when drawing districts.

What is redistricting?

Redistricting is the process of drawing legislative and Congressional district lines -- designing districts, so that they are relatively equal in population. It is done every ten years after the census.

Who does it?

The state legislature draws the district lines.

What's the problem with the way it's done now?

It's not fair. Legislators draw districts for their own political advantage.

What are the new rules?

They won't be allowed to design districts to favor a political party or incumbent like they do now.

- Districts must be compact and contiguous. Representatives will not have to represent citizens who live hundreds of miles apart like many do now.
- Districts won't divide communities. For example, Winter Park, a town of 24,000 now has four members of Congress representing it. It should have only one!
- Districts must be drawn to preserve minority-voting rights.

Why the signatures?

We must collect over 1.6 million signatures to get this on the ballot so that everyone can vote on it.

State League Conference Call on Fair Districts Florida

On May 28th, our new State League President, Deirdre Macnab, hosted her first monthly conference call with Local League presidents. The main topic was the on-going Fair Districts Florida petition drive.

League is part of a broad coalition working to get the Fair Districts amendments on the 2010 ballot. Signatures gathered so far comprise about 60% of the goal, with a 75% certification rate. While a great start, it's only the beginning.

The rest of the signatures must be gathered by the end of October to

ensure sufficient time for certification by the 1 Feb deadline. Since the state charges 10¢ per petition for certification, fundraising efforts are also in full gear.

If you have a venue where we can collect signatures, let us know! Call Mary at 850-621-4018 and we'll be there to explain the amendments and the petition process, collect signatures and mail them in to Fair Districts Florida.

Please refer to the special insert for more details on how Florida legislators have hijacked redistricting.

Redistricting: Why it Matters

After each decennial census, the boundaries of our congressional and state legislative districts are redrawn. Regular adjustment of district lines was intended to keep pace with population changes and ensure that districts are roughly equal in size -- to make sure every vote counts equally.

However, the party that controls the Legislature also controls redistricting, and with no standards to ensure fairness in the process, it has used the system to make seats "safe" for its own incumbents and less safe for the other party's incumbents. This system allows politicians to choose their voters instead of voters choosing their representatives.

In the 2008 General Election, out of 24 Congressional races only 3 of 23 incumbents were defeated for re-election, and 2 were re-elected unopposed. All 14 incumbent State Senators were re-elected, and 6 of 39 races were unopposed. Only 1 of 86 House incumbents was defeated, and 35 races out of 120 were unopposed. Additionally, 15 of 34 races without an incumbent had candidates from only one party. Most of these also featured NPA or

write-in candidates, a common ploy to restrict voter participation during the primary.

The bottom line is that nearly 24% of the races were unopposed; 44% of the "no incumbent" races were one-party; incumbents enjoyed a 97% re-election rate; and Florida voters were effectively stripped of choices.

America was built on the concept of Free Enterprise, which in turn rests on competition. Yet there is no competition for Florida's elected representatives, which means they need not be responsive at all to their constituents.

The standards in the Fair Districts amendments will end partisan gerrymandering and require districts to be compact and community-based.

We need your help! Together we can restore fairness to Florida's electoral process and ensure that everyone's vote counts.

First, sign the petitions at <https://www.fairdistrictsflorida.org/freepetitions>.

Second, join the fight here <http://www.fairdistrictsflorida.org/>



FAIR DISTRICTS FLORIDA PETITIONS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Prepared by League of Women Voters of Florida for LWV Volunteers

General

Why are there two petitions? One is for Florida Legislative districts and the other is for U.S. Congressional districts. Amendments to the Florida Constitution are required to address a single subject. Since these standards address drawing districts for two different legislative bodies, each requires its own petition.

Do I need to have people sign both petitions? YES! We need people to sign both petitions!

For Petition Signers

Can I submit the petition online? Petitions must be submitted as hard copies with original signature. You can download the petitions online from the FairDistrictsFlorida.org website, but you cannot submit the petition online.

I'm not sure if I already signed a petition. Should I sign it twice? While it is illegal to intentionally sign more than once - it will happen inadvertently and duplicates will be pulled.

What if my signature has changed and is different than what is listed on my Voter Registration? That is OK. Petitions are also certified with the Date of Birth or Voter Registration ID. But if you know your signature has significantly changed, then you should update it with your local Supervisor of Elections.

Which way should I print my name - Last name first or first name first? Either way, but make it legible.

Can I underline or highlight any words on the petition? The printed petition is a legal document and must not be altered in any way. No underlining, no highlighting, no changing box number, and no printing in another size are allowed.

Can someone assist in filling out the top portion of the petition? Yes, but the signature and date must be filled in by the voter and be in the same color ink.

Must a voter give both birthday and Voter ID number? No. Either one is acceptable.

Must the County be written in? Yes, they must be sorted for signature verification.

For Petition Gatherers

Must the petitions be blue and white? No, that is for ease of sorting. Any color (including both white) can be used for the petitions, but white for the legislative petition and light blue for the congressional is requested where possible.

Can I accept petitions from voters in other counties? Yes, this is a statewide effort.

Should I staple the two petitions together? Petitions can be collated, but please do not staple. Petitions will be submitted separately and will have to be unstapled at some point.

What is the submission deadline for returning signed petitions? February 1, 2010 is the deadline for petitions to be certified for the November 2010 ballot. Our deadline for returning petitions to FDF is October 31 to allow ample time for certifications by local Supervisor of Elections.

If someone dies after signing, is the petition still valid? Yes. That is why the date is so important.

Where should I send the completed petitions? To the Fair Districts Miami office: P.O. Box 330868 Miami, FL 33233. Or check with your local League representative for specific collection instructions.

What if someone mails petitions to the Fort Lauderdale Box number? Not to worry - it will be forwarded.

FAIR DISTRICTS FLORIDA.ORG

Let's let voters choose their representatives instead of politicians hand-picking their voters.

FLORIDA'S VOTERS HAVE LOST THEIR VOICE

- Legislators are choosing their voters by drawing bizarrely shaped districts just to keep themselves in power.
- In the last election cycle, only one incumbent in the Legislature was defeated! Many incumbents never have a seriously contested election.

FLORIDA LEGISLATORS HAVE HIJACKED REDISTRICTING

After every census, legislative and congressional districts are redrawn so that every district has roughly the same number of residents. Historically, the primary goal was to

ENSURE EVERY VOTER HAS A REAL VOICE

But not anymore!

- Legislators now use sophisticated computer programs to pinpoint the voters they want in their districts. The politicians are choosing voters instead of voters choosing their representatives.
- Legislators have their own politician protection plan. It is like getting to choose your own hand in a poker game. Maps are drawn to avoid competition.
- Districts span hundreds of miles, crisscross many counties and divide communities.

POLITICIANS ARE PUTTING THEIR INTERESTS BEFORE OURS

- Politicians design their districts to perpetuate their own power. They choose voters that are likely to vote for them. They rig the districts so they can't lose.
- This divides communities and reduces the voting strength of likeminded voters.
- Representatives are not responsive to us because they do not have to fear a challenge at the next election.

WE NEED COMMON SENSE REFORM AND WE NEED IT NOW

- Two amendments to establish fairness standards prohibiting legislators from drawing districts for political gain.
- While enforcing existing voting rights laws, districts must be compact and community based.
- We must collect 1.6 million signatures by the Fall to place these critical measures on the 2010 ballot. Act now! **Sign both of the petitions and get others to sign!**

LWVF 32nd Biennial Convention

The State League's Convention was held in Jacksonville on May 15-17. In attendance were 54 voting delegates from 19 Local Leagues. I arrived just in time to give participants a brief wrap-up of the Okaloosa League's 2009 activities.

After parliamentary business ended, League lobbyist Heather Walker summarized the 2009 Legislative session, which was all about lack of revenue. All stimulus funds were accepted, with education and healthcare the winners. League victories included defeat of TABOR, defeat of restrictions on paid petition gathering and defeat of the execrable election reform bill. There was movement on tax reform and the door opened for resource recapture via elimination of exemptions. We expect special session(s)

on tax and revenue in the fall, as more budget cuts are inevitable.

Workshops on growing membership, fundraising, the Transportation Study and Fair Districts Florida filled the rest of my time. We will focus on all of these this year, but Fair Districts will be our top priority. I urge you to *be a part of it!*

WANTED: Membership Chair

We need a volunteer to promote League, cultivate new members, serve as a resource for prospective members, and compile/maintain an email database to help us stay in touch with our membership. If you have 3-4 hours/month to help out, please call Mary (850-621-4088) or Stan (850-651-2619) **today**.

LWVF 2009 Convention Business Wrap-up

Proposed Bylaws Changes

Change 1 would have reduced the necessary quorum for Convention, but it failed.

Change 2 passed, allowing the State Board to meet telephonically and by email.

Proposed Study Items Changes

Change 1 was approved, discontinuing the Education Study due to resource shortages and significant changes in Florida's test administration since the 2007 Convention.

Change 2 passed, implementing the Florida transportation planning study that was recommended by the 2007 Convention.

Proposed Budget for 2009-2010

The **LWVF** budget passed. It projects a 4% increase in income and a matching 4% increase in spending. The State Board did not increase Per Member Payments. The **Education Fund's** budget also passed.

Next year's programs were scaled back to keep them in line with fiscal realities and League priorities.

2009-2010 Program

Delegates approved carrying forward the existing program, and approved program additions, as amended. Review the new items at www.lwvokaloosa.org/positions.html.

New LWVF Officers & Board

President: Deirdre Macnab
1st Vice President: Nancy Ryan
2nd Vice President: Chris Straton
Secretary: Katie Ross
Treasurer: Sandra Colyer

Director: Annie Betancourt
Director: Kit Pepper
Director: Ruth Schechter
Director: Marilyn Wills
Director: Margaret Wolter

Nominating Committee 2010

Chair: Ann Higgins
Member: Corrine Miller
Member: Rebecca Sager

The Okaloosa League's 10th Annual State of the County Report was held on May 30th at the Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce.

This year's Report featured County Commission Chairman Bill Roberts and School Board Chairman Chuck Kelley. Public Defender James Owens was forced to cancel due to an important pending trial.

Budget concerns dominated the meeting. Mr. Kelley described a number of cost-cutting measures the School Board is implementing, including a new contract that will substitute trained medical technicians for nurses in many schools at a substantial cost savings. Additionally, the Board is preparing to close down the central kitchen and contract out for lunch services. The Board is still working closely with the Sheriff to keep Resource Officers in all schools.

Mr. Roberts was upbeat in describing various capital improvement projects to be completed over the next two years, thanks in part to stimulus funds. A new state-of-the-art sewage treatment facility will accommodate the needs of the County, the City of Fort Walton Beach and the new 7th Special Forces Group complex, enabling closure of older, obsolete facilities. The flyover at Hwy 85 and SR 123 will also begin construction soon.

Thanks to: Ted Corcoran for allowing use of the FWB CoC; to our local Chambers for publicizing the event; and to attendees for caring about our community.



The Okaloosa Voter
League of Women Voters of
Okaloosa County
 P.O. Box 4546
 Fort Walton Beach FL 32549

Non-Profit Organization
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 Permit No. 37
 Ft Walton Beach FL 32548

☆☆☆☆ Fair Districts Florida Petition Drive Underway ☆☆☆☆



**Sign up today to
 collect signatures
 for Fair Districts!**

Yes, sign me up for League!

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

[League will never share your contact information with anyone else.]

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$42.50 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$21.25 Add'l | \$21.25 |
| Susan B. Anthony | Individual | Family Member | Student |

New Members: Contact Carol Davis (243-4777) for pro-rated membership fees.

Please make your check payable to LWVOC and mail to Carol Davis, Treasurer,
 524 Dorado Drive, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548.

Please check activities of interest to you:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Voter Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Legislative Action | <input type="checkbox"/> Web Site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Observe Gov't Meetings |

**Make
 Democracy
 Work!**

**Join the League.
 Be a Voice
 for Citizens and
 a Force for
 Progress!**



**Men can join
 League, too!**