



VOTER

A monthly publication of the League of Women Voters of Polk County, P.O. Box 934, Lakeland, FL 33802

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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.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Be the Change
You Want to
See in the
World."

Mahatma Ghandi

2008 General Election



Candidate Forums




The League of Women Voters of Polk County will sponsor its second round of Candidate Forums to assist voters in learning about the candidates for Polk County elective offices. General Election Forums are scheduled for the following dates in October at the:

County Administration Building, Commission Chambers
330 West Church Street, Bartow


(TV Broadcasts on Brighthouse Ch 22, Comcast Ch 33, Verizon Ch 20)


Tuesday, October 7, 2008, 7:30 p.m.

Constitutional and Charter Amendments:
Round Table Discussion - Guest Speakers TBA


Tuesday, October 14, 2008, 7:00 p.m.

County Commission Candidates:
Nancy Daley, Ed Smith, Ghassan Zebdaoui
Jim Brown, Sam Johnson, Jacquelyn Smith


Tuesday, October 21, 2008, 7:00 p.m.

Congressional Candidates:
Ginny Brown Waite, John Russell, Adam Putnam, Doug Tudor

Legislative Candidates:
JD Alexander, Scott Thompson, Bob Hagenmaier, John Wood
Alton Smith, Kelli Stargel, Gordon Wayne Watts

Summary of Proposed Constitutional Amendments

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS POLK COUNTY BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Ann Weeks, President
648-4127
president@lwvpolk.org

Susan Lee, Secretary
324-4517
secretary@lwvpolk.org

Mary Thomas, Treasurer
859-7560
treasurer@lwvpolk.org

Sue Schultz, Voter Service—
Elections
646-4634
voterservice@lwvpolk.org

Paula Mims
686-0356
pmmims@aol.com

Joan Verret
682-7724
JoanClaireV@aol.com

Jerry Weeks
648-4127
2weeks@tampabay.rr.com

Pete Wesley
682-2578
mjohnandpete@aol.com

Off-Board Specialists:

Membership, Joan Verret, retaining
682-7724
JoanClaireV@aol.com
and Ann Weeks, recording
membership@lwvpolk.org

Judy Walker, Voter Service—Guide
299-9285
judywalker@polkelections.com

Fundraising and Government, Lisa
Parks
686-6482
lparksaicp@aol.com

Library, Barbara Stampfl
687-2787
stampfls@tampabay.rr.com

Civics Education, Susan Lee
324-4517
Suezq11@verizon.net

VOTER Editor and Webmaster,
Jerry Weeks
webmaster@lwvpolk.org

Website:

www.lwvpolk.org

AMENDMENT #1: RELATING TO PROPERTY RIGHTS/ INELIGIBLE ALIENS

Summary: Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to delete provisions authorizing the Legislature to regulate or prohibit the ownership, inheritance, disposition, and possession of real property by aliens ineligible for citizenship.

Sponsor: The Florida Legislature

Background: Article I, Section 2 of the Florida Constitution provides that equal rights are for all in Florida, but creates a glaring exception for "aliens ineligible for citizenship," who can be stripped of the right to own property by the Legislature. The exception dates to the early 1900's and is common to many states' law, and was directed at Asian-American immigrants (the "Yellow Peril.") Senate Joint Resolution 166, filed in 2007, proposed this amendment. Only New Mexico and Florida still have these provisions in their constitutions, and both states' leaders are asking voters to remove the language this year.

PRO:

- The amendment would remove an outdated and discriminatory passage from our Declaration of Rights.

CON:

- Constitutional action is not necessary at this time because there is no present Florida statute prohibiting ownership of property by aliens ineligible for citizenship.

AMENDMENT #2: FLORIDA MARRIAGE PROTECTION AMENDMENT

Summary: This amendment protects marriage as the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife and provides that no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof shall be valid or recognized.

Sponsor: Florida4Marriage.org

Background: A Florida statute already provides that marriage is only recognized between a man and a woman. An Orlando activist, John Stemberger, organized this ballot initiative, which is the only citizens' initiative on the ballot.

PRO

- Supporters say the amendment would protect children by ensuring that only one form of marriage, between a man and a woman, would ever be celebrated in Florida.
- The Florida statute that already provides for a single form of marriage could be overturned by a court on constitutional grounds.

CON:

- A statute already provides for a single form of marriage in Florida.
- Health care and pension benefit plans which cover unmarried couples living together and which are now legally valid may be adversely affected.
- Article I of the Florida Constitution, known as the Declaration of Rights, establishes rights, but this amendment would instead limit the right to marry.

AMENDMENT #3: CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS NOT AFFECTING THE ASSESSED VALUE OF RESIDENTIAL REAL PROPERTY

Summary: Authorizes the Legislature, by general law, to prohibit consideration of changes or improvements to residential real property which increase resistance to wind damage and installation of renewable energy source devices as factors in assessing the property's value for ad valorem taxation purposes. Effective upon adoption, repeals the existing renewable energy source device exemption no longer in effect.

Sponsor: Florida Budget and Taxation Reform Commission

Background: Increased value of residential property based on improvements designed to improve hurricane safety could not be assessed as taxable increased value.

PRO:

- Hurricane safety may be improved in residential property.
- Residential property values may be increased.
- The amendment may relieve the burden on non-renewable energy sources.

CON:

- Local revenues could suffer.
- Individuals' savings may be minimal.
- The amendment does not apply to new construction.



AMENDMENT #4: PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION OF PERPETUALLY PRESERVED LAND; CLASSIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF LAND USED FOR CONSERVATION

Summary: Requires Legislature to provide a property tax exemption for real property encumbered by perpetual conservation easements or other perpetual conservation protections, defined by general law. Requires Legislature to provide for classification and assessment of land used for conservation purposes, and not perpetually encumbered, solely on the basis of character or use. Subjects assessment benefit to conditions, limitations, and reasonable definitions established by general law. Applies to property taxes beginning in 2010.

Sponsor: Florida Budget and Taxation Reform Commission

Background: Numerous provisions of federal estate and tax law favor landowners who preserve their property in its natural state. This provision would provide further tax benefits to those landowners.

PRO:

- The amendment may encourage further conservation of land in its natural state.

CON:

- Local revenue will be decreased.
- Existing policies already favor those who preserve their land.
- The amendment would not require public access to the lands to which it applies.

Amendments (continued from page 3)

AMENDMENT #6: ASSESSMENT OF WORKING WATERFRONT PROPERTY BASED UPON CURRENT USE

Summary: Provides for assessment based upon use of land used predominantly for commercial fishing purposes; land used for vessel launches into waters that are navigable and accessible to the public; marinas and drystacks that are open to the public; and water-dependent marine manufacturing facilities, commercial fishing facilities, and marine vessel construction and repair facilities and their support activities, subject to conditions, limitations, and reasonable definitions specified by general law.

Sponsor: Florida Budget and Taxation Reform Commission

Background: Access to public waterfront has been reduced as marinas and the like cannot afford to resist developers' offers to convert the land into condominium towers or other private buildings. The amendment would require those properties to be taxed based on their current use rather than on their "highest and best" use.

PRO:

- Access to public waterfront areas would more likely remain at current levels rather than continue to diminish.
- This measure may reduce property taxes on working waterfront properties and thereby reduce pressure to sell those properties to developers.

CON:

- Local revenues would suffer.
- The measure allows the Legislature to define terms and impose conditions and limitations on any tax break working waterfront owners receive.

AMENDMENT #8: LOCAL OPTION COMMUNITY COLLEGE FUNDING

Summary: Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to require that the Legislature authorize counties to levy a local option sales tax to supplement community college funding; requiring voter approval to levy the tax; providing that approved taxes will sunset after 5 years and may be reauthorized by the voters.

Sponsor: Florida Budget and Taxation Reform Commission

Background: The Legislature has allowed Miami-Dade County to levy a local-option sales tax to assist that area's community college.

PRO:

- Community colleges serve as a gateway to the university system and to greater employment opportunities; this amendment could increase their funding.
- Voters would have the option of denying any proposed local-option sales tax increase under the proposal.

CON:

- Sales taxes impose a greater burden on lower-income families.
- The measure shifts the burden of funding community colleges from state to local authorities.
- The amendment could create unequal opportunities for Florida residents based on the economy in their county of residence

President Observes Post-Election Audit

The LWV Florida has partnered with Florida Voters Coalition in a multi-state observation and study of the conduct of post-election audits. This report will be used in advocating for meaningful audits. For more information, go to www.floridavoters.org.

LWV Polk County President, Ann Weeks, volunteered to help observe and document the audit conducted by the Polk County Supervisor of Elections, Lori Edwards, after the Primary Election in August. Volunteers are needed to observe the audit after the November general election. Please contact Ann at president@lwvpolk.org if you are interested.



Ann Weeks observes Lori Edwards, her staff and Judge Robert L. Williams Jr. conducting the Post-Election Audit of the Primary Election on September 4.



Supervisor of Elections staff counting Ballots



Ann recording her observations



The League of Women Voters Of Polk County **VOTER**

PO Box 934, Lakeland, FL 33802
863-683-2328
www.lwvpolk.org

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*** * * Candidate Forums: Oct 7, 14 & 21 * * ***

Candidate Forums Need Volunteers



We need volunteers to serve as greeters, questioners, question gatherers and timekeepers.

Help make the LWV of Polk County a vibrant organization by volunteering.

Please call Sue Schultz to volunteer or with any questions to ask at the Forums at 646-4634 or email her at voterservice@lwvpolk.org.



Calendar

Tuesday, Oct 7, 7:30 pm
Constitutional and Charter Amendments Forum, County Admin Bldg, Commission Chambers, 330 W Church St, Bartow.

Tuesday, Oct 14 7:00 pm
County Commission Candidates Forum, County Admin Bldg, Commission Chambers, 330 W Church St, Bartow.

Monday, October 20: **Early Voting Begins**

Tuesday, Oct 21, 7:00 pm
Congressional & Legislative Candidates Forum, County Admin Bldg, Commission Chambers, 330 W Church St, Bartow.

* * *

Saturday, November 1: **Early Voting Ends**

Tuesday, November 4: **General Election**

Tuesday, Nov 18, noon
LWV Polk County BOARD Meeting