

The VOTER

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The Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Kent

October 2004

State League Study of Pros, Cons of Death Penalty in Ohio Nearing Member-Consensus Phase

Editor's Note: The information in this article was taken from A Study of the Death Penalty in Ohio. This study guide was prepared by the League of Women Voters of Ohio. The complete study and bibliography may be viewed online at www.lwvohio.org.

At the Kent League's November meeting, members will have a chance to participate in the consensus process that will determine the state League of Women Voters' position on the death penalty in Ohio.

According to the League of Women Voters of the United States publication *In League*, consensus is "the technique most often used in the League for reaching member agreement. It is a process whereby members participate in a group discussion of an issue. The 'consensus' reached by members through group discussion is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the overall 'sense of the group' as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions, whether in a membership meeting or a series of membership or unit meetings."

To prepare for the November meeting, League members are encouraged to read and study the arguments given for both sides of the issue—for and against the use of the death penalty in Ohio.

Arguments in Support of the Death Penalty

The following arguments have been given in support of the death penalty:

- **The death penalty is a deterrent.** The five states showing the greatest relative improvement in murder rates for the years 1995-2002 compared to 1968-1976 (the years of no executions) are, in order, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, Delaware and Texas. Each of these states has aggressively enforced the death penalty since the re-institution of that punishment.
- **The public supports the application of the death penalty.** A Gallup Poll conducted in May 2003 found that 74 percent of Americans favor and 24 percent oppose the death penalty for a person convicted of murder. Even if there is an option of "life without parole," 53 percent still opt for the death penalty.
- **The death penalty provides safety and security and protects the rights of the victims' loved ones.** An executed murderer will never kill a prison guard, escape or be paroled. In 1984, prisons in the United States held 810 inmates serv-

ing sentences for murder who had also been convicted of murder previously.

- **Federal and state statutory safeguards are sufficient to ensure justice.** The system of appeals and the provision for DNA testing are sufficient to safeguard any concerns over the imposition of the death penalty.

Arguments for Abolishing the Death Penalty

The following arguments have been given for abolishing the death penalty:

- **The death penalty is not a deterrent.** After the federal gov-

See *DEATH*, p. 3.



LWVK Events Alert . . .

Tuesday, October 19, 7 p.m.

Forum for candidates on the November ballot; Stanton Middle School, 1175 Hudson Road, Kent.

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From the VP's Desk:

Voter Service Activities in Full Swing

Hello from your VP—that stands for Voter registration Person—and I am just one among many these days. Jan Rusnack has done a great job of organizing voter registration and getting volunteers to fill in the schedule. Stacy Yaniglos made some beautiful banners that we have used at our registration tables, and we even have a couple of portable voting booths so new voters can practice punching out chads. According to Jan, we have registered well over 250 voters and, at this time, we still have a week to go.

Our kick-off meeting for the year is coming up on September 28 at Coleman Professional Services' Sue Hetrick Building in Ravenna. You will be getting a mailing soon with more details. I hope everyone will try to make it. It will be very interesting to hear from the Portage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management about systems in

place for responding to natural disasters and terrorism and from the Portage County Health Department about their responsibilities if a bioterrorism attack occurs. This meeting is free and open to the public, so bring a friend. Thanks to Coleman for opening up its building for this community event.

Candidates' Night is just around the corner, and preparations are well under way thanks to Barb Springer and Nena Hankins. Mark the date on your calendar: Tuesday, October 19. The Northern Portage League of Women Voters will be cosponsoring this event.

We will be doing a Charter Review position update this year. If you are interested in being involved, call Jan Rusnack at 330/678-1261.

Hope to see all of you on September 28.

— *Christine*

The VOTER is published eight to 10 times a year by the League of Women Voters of Kent. The newsletter is available both in print and online at the League's Web site: <http://www.kent.oh.lwvnet.org/>.

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330/678-3135

Amie Cajka, Co-Vice Pres.
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Jeanne Schmidlin, Secretary

Nena Hankins, Treasurer

Call the vice presidents to help with program meetings, to volunteer for any committees or to obtain information about the League's activities and policies.

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Paulla Gates

Vicki Kline

Kerry Macomber

Linda Martell

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Directors set policy and make financial decisions. They are involved in program, voter services and the organizational activities of the League.

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Death Penalty Study

Jan Rusnack

Voter Registration

League Selects Scholarship Recipient

The Kent League of Women Voters presented its annual \$200 Book Scholarship for 2004 to Roosevelt High School graduating senior Elim Shih.

Shih won the award for her essay about the problem of drug and alcohol use.

She actively supports programs that discourage the use of drugs and alcohol, such as Prom Promise and STAR



(Students Teaching Alcohol and other drug Responsibility).

The scholarship applications—an essay identifying a social or political problem present in the applicant's school or community and an analysis and plan for tackling the problem—were judged by Kent League members Christine Bhargava, Deb Newberry, and Jane Rose and Roosevelt High School staff members Randy Kline and Emma Owens.

League Voter Registration Drive Nets More Than 250 New Voters

The League's multiweek voter registration drive was extremely successful, with more than 250 new voters added to the rolls.

Registration tables were set up at 18 different locations. "It was really great to have people come up and thank us for doing it—even already registered people," said Jan Rusnack, coordinator for the registration drive. Many questions were answered, and several absentee ballots given to those who requested them.

A lot of people helped out by doing the registration, including some nonmembers. The registration cadre included Nancy Ad-

ams, Harriet Begala, Christine Bhargava, Leona Brown, Tracy Deep-Ross, Paulla Gates, Nena Hankins, Kathy Hardy, Audrey C. Kessler, Vicki Kline, Judy Kovalan, Barb Hipsman Springer, Judy Kirman, Kerry Macomber, Linda Miles, Debbie Newberry, Gail Pytel, Theresa Tarchinski, Barb Watson, Jackie Waltz, Dian Weir-McElroy and Stacy Yaniglos. Stacy also made some great signage to identify the registration table. She also made matching scarves for the volunteers to wear while registering voters and representing the Kent League. Many thanks to all participants!

League Continues Financial Support of Environmental Awards Dinner

As it has done in the past, the Kent League of Women Voters continued its financial support of the Environmental Conservation Awards Benefit Dinner in June by making a donation of \$50.

This year's event raised more than \$12,000 for the Portage Park District's project to renovate a PARTA bus into a mobile environmental education classroom.

The 2004 Award Recipients are as follows: Lew Steinbrecher, Kent City Manager - Envi-

ronmental Advocacy and Action; Village of Mantua - Public Land Preservation; Mark and Carol Busson, Dragon Fly Organic Farm - Land Stewardship; Helen Gless - Environmental Education; City of Kent - Sustainable Community Development; Walter C. Adams - Lifetime Achievement; Glen Talmon, Park District Maintenance Endowment - Honor Roll for Land Conservation; Wanda Walters, Palmyra Township Land Donation - Honor Roll for Land Conservation; City of Aurora - Honor Roll for Land Conservation.

In Memory Of . . .

The Kent League of Women Voters' board approved in September a donation of \$100 to the University of Akron Law School in memory of Donald Martell, Portage County Municipal Court judge and husband of long-time League member Linda Martell.

DEATH

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ernment reinstated the death penalty, the gap between the murder rates in states without the penalty was 37 percent lower in 2001 than in states with the death penalty. To accurately measure the deterrence effect of the death penalty, one would have to hold all other conceivable causes of the crime constant while varying only the expected penalty.

- **Due process is often violated.** The federal appeals court has overturned nearly 40 percent of Ohio's death penalty cases. Factors affecting these convictions include prosecutorial overreaching, incompetent defense counsel, weak supervision by trial judges, misinstructed jurors and expensive appeals.
- **Capital punishment is systematically biased against minorities.** Amnesty International USA found that murderers of whites are about six times more likely to be executed than murderers of blacks, although about an even number of blacks and whites are homicide victims. In Ohio, where black males over the age of 18 make up less than 5 percent of that age group, they comprise more than 49 percent of the inmates on death row. The Ohio Commission of Racial Fairness found that Ohio juries were likely to have a pattern of minority underrepresentation, depriving many of a jury of their peers.
- **Unequal quality of representation is an issue.** The quality of representation varies from case to case. Those who are

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DEATH

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poorly represented are more likely to end up on death row. In 2001, the caps on attorney fees in Ohio counties ranged from \$3,000 to \$50,000 total per trial for court-appointed defense counsel.

- **The trial location is a determinant.** County commissioners may discourage prosecutors from seeking the death penalty based on the costs of time, money and resources. Forty-nine of Ohio's 88 counties have no one on death row. Almost 23 percent of the people on death row come from Hamilton County, the third largest in the state with 7.4 percent of the population. Cuyahoga County is second, being home to 17 percent of death row inmates.
- **The cost of the death penalty versus life without parole.** Studies in New York, North Carolina, Texas, California and Florida have confirmed that judicial systems in which the maximum sentence is death are more expensive than those in which the maximum sentence is life without parole. The legal process from arrest to execution is complex and lengthy. Capital cases are estimated to be three and one-half times as long as other murder trials and involve higher litigation costs than the next closest alternative, life without parole.

The VOTER

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LWVK Calendar . . .

July- October

- **Voter-Registration Activities**
Times and locations vary. See box on page 1.

September-December

- **Finance Drive**
Details to come.

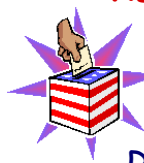
October

- 19 Candidates Meeting**
Stanton Middle School, 1175 Hudson Road, Kent; 7 p.m.
- **Voter's Guide**
Details to come.

November

- **Death Penalty Study and Consensus**
Details to come.

REMINDER!



To VOTE in the November election, you must be REGISTERED by October 4.
Let your voice be heard!