



NC VOTER

**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN
VOTERS OF NC**

EDUCATE AND ADVOCATE

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ADVOCATE

**CHECK
THESE
WEB SITES**

lwvnc.org -

News and information about the state and local Leagues, *and now a Members Only page.*

ncjudges.org -

To get up-to-date information on the Public Campaign Fund

If someone asked you what the League of Women Voters does, what would you answer?

For most of us the answer would be “educate and advocate”. Okay. But what does “advocate” mean? What should it include? How should it be done? How does advocacy fit with being non-partisan? And finally, how are we doing at it?

This issue of the *NC Voter* is devoted to a discussion of this very important element of the League’s mission. In the following pages, four members of the League have given us their thoughts. Among them are members who have served on the boards of their local Leagues and the State board; one has been a member for only a couple of years.

You are invited to send us your thoughts about advocacy and its role in our activities; forward them to *NC Voter* Editor at ncvotereditor@bellsouth.net or to the League office. Your comments, experiences, and suggestions will be posted on the League Members Only Page and included in the next issue of the *NC Voter*. **Let’s start a discussion of what our advocacy is and ought to be!**

NONPARTISAN POLITICAL ORGANIZATION – AN OXYMORON?



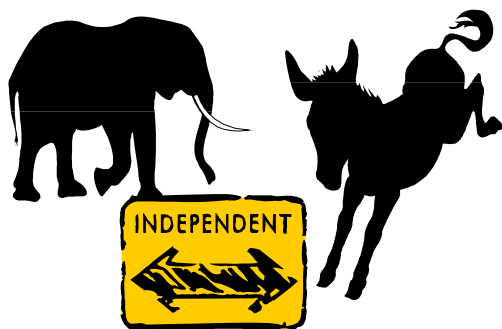
Judie Burke, above, President

In the words of Carrie Chapman Catt *“Is the (League) political? Certainly, but not partisan.”*

Its members are as free as other women to join and vote with the party of their choice. They make no pledge otherwise in joining the League.” Thus was established a core principle of the League of Women Voters – that as an organization, we neither support nor oppose parties or candidates; as individuals, we are encouraged to be politically informed and active. It is the League’s long established reputation for non-partisanship that gives our relatively small organization a seat at the table on issues large and small. The League of Women Voters advocates on issues, not candidates or parties.

Simply put, this means that those who speak on behalf of the League, i.e. presidents, voter service chairs or others who are designated (advocacy or issue chairs) refrain from public support of one or another candidate or party during the term of their appointment. But members are free to work and speak on their own behalf for the candidates and party of their choice, where they serve as examples of citizen participation in our democratic process.

So if you’re not one of the exceptions mentioned above, advocate for your choices this election year. League issues ... make the spirit of Carrie Catt proud.



ADVOCACY - HOW IS IT DONE?

So much to be done! How can we do it all? Members need to be educated on issues and kept informed; that’s what the State Board can do. Legislators need to be made aware of our positions; that’s what the State Board and local League members together can do.

Thanks to work done by the Board and local League members over the last year, a very active Advocacy Committee has been operating. The State Board conducts visits to and tours of the state legislature to acquaint League members with the people and processes of state government. A number of Leagues and individual members have taken advantage of this opportunity to lobby their local representatives. If you haven’t been there but would like to see democracy in action, call or email Mary Klenz at the League office, 919 783 5995 or lwwnc@bellsouth.net. When the legislature is in session, the State Board sends email updates and “calls to action” to help League members stay up to date on pending legislation. .

Here are some things you and your League can do to educate and advocate:

- o **Join** the legislative update email list. Sign up at <http://lwwnc.org>.
- o **Stay informed** by reading the legislative alerts, the *NC Voter* and information posted on our web site. Checking the new Members Only page of our web site to read what other members have posted can be informative and interesting. While you’re there, tell us your story about educating and advocating,

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Bev Kawalec, Chair, Advocacy Committee

“The highest office in a democracy is that of citizen.”
Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter

DOES ADVOCACY WORK (and does it matter)?



Mary Klenz, Chair, Volunteer Lobby Corp

The answer is **YES** to both questions. Most recent examples for the LWV NC, working in coalition with others, are the passage of a refundable state earned income tax credit, same day registration for early voting and public funding of elections for three of the eight offices for Council of State. In the last decade the LWVNC also worked to pass the public funding for judicial elections for the NC Court of Appeals and Supreme Court elections and the repeal of the state food tax. In all cases, the role of the local Leagues was critical to passing the legislation.

Advocacy matters because it takes League issues out into the community. It educates and energizes members, brings issues to the forefront, provides opportunities for relationship building and moves lawmakers to act. Through advocacy, the relevancy and visibility of the League is increased to members, the public, among policymakers and with organizations.

Working in coalition with others is a vital part of effective advocacy today. It enables the LWV to build on its strengths of nonpartisanship, process and study. Coalition members draw on each other's resources and develop relationships around issues of common concern. They increase the number of voices at the table, enhance the discussion and broaden the perspectives of those involved.

Policymakers are working on changes in governance, tax reform, education and the environment that better meet the needs of the people in the new, more global economy. Advocacy by organizations like the League of Women Voters contributes to that work by asking the tough questions, seeking out the answers, educating and engaging the public on the

Advocacy, according to *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, is embracing a cause and attempting to shape public opinion in order to promote the interests of your community. Effective advocacy is both an art and a science-you can learn advocacy skills and techniques, but your efforts will not be effective if you do not also have passion.

It is both a right and a responsibility of citizenship to advocate and lobby. Embracing a cause, attempting to shape public opinion, and working to improve your community is active civic engagement.

issues and providing a place where people can work together for positive changes for themselves, their families and communities. When combined with study and education, advocacy is a valuable tool to further the mission and goals of the LWV.

What issue, local or statewide, do you care enough about to advocate for? Check with Mary Klenz or Bev Kawalec to see who else is interested in the issue at the state level, or check your Board if your issue is a local one. 2008 is a general election year; the League needs to be involved in the important issues of the day. **Be an Advocate.**

ADVOCACY HOW IS IT DONE?

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successes and less-than successes. They're all a learning experience.

- **Contact** your local legislators. Educating and advocating on local issues is one of our strengths.
- **Join** the Advocacy Committee. Advocacy committee members usually (but not always) concentrate on one or two areas, becoming expert in the pending bills and attending legislative and coalition committee meetings.



ADVOCACY – FROM THE START

Evelin Brinich - ODC and Member of the Advocacy Committee



The path to healthcare advocacy began almost subliminally for me, over a period of many years, as experiences and insights accumulated from many different streams: my roles as a parent, as the daughter of aging parents, as a health care consumer, and as a participant-observer of socio-political changes. All of these combined to help me develop a sense of what I believe in and finally compelled me to become a health care advocate.

I believe we must have healthy citizens and workers if our economy is to grow and our civilization is to flourish. Therefore health care must be recognized as a fundamental right of all citizens, regardless of their ability to pay. Our American experience makes clear that health care does not belong in the market place. Here's a personal example: When our daughter graduated from college in NYC she was without a job and therefore without health insurance. Because of our worry we bought her an interim insurance policy. However, this still left her navigating a system of in- and out-of-network providers and insurance bureaucracies, both of which were foreign to her. Since that time she has been living in Greece and Norway, both countries with national health insurance plans. In Europe health insurance is automatic for everyone — from part-time dishwashers to cooks and fashion-stylists.

I believe health care also must be affordable. In 1992 our family paid \$1 per person, per day for our BC/BS health insurance policy; in 2006 we paid \$16 per person per day in addition to what the insurance industry calls “cost-sharing” in the form of increased co-pays and deductibles.

There is something very wrong when a country as wealthy as ours has 47 million people without health coverage. There is something very wrong when the proportion of uninsured residents in NC now ranges from a low of

13.4% in Wake County to a high of 27.5% in Tyrrell County. And there is something very wrong when most of these uninsured are working families who cannot afford to pay the premiums demanded by the insurance industry. To put some numbers on this: from 2000 to 2005 the average health care premium for individual coverage in North Carolina rose by 25.6% to an estimated \$4,000. During the same time the median household income fell by \$3,345. Both of these changes occurred in a period when both productivity and corporate profits (especially insurance profits) grew.

These beliefs contributed to my decision to become a health care reform advocate. While some health care policy analysts argue that most of the people who are insured are satisfied with their insurance, I am convinced that a growing number of these “satisfied insured” are worried about the present situation. If you are one of these, we hope you will join our Health Care Reform Advocacy Committee and encourage the kind of changes that will establish quality health care at an affordable cost to all North Carolina residents.

SAY YES FOR FAIR COURTS - FAIR ELECTIONS

It's tax time again and that means it's time to remind friends and family (and your tax preparer) to say “YES” for fair courts and fair elections. Look for this box on your tax form:

N.C. Public Campaign Fund
 This Fund pays for a nonpartisan voter guide and helps fund judicial candidates who accept strict fundraising and spending limits. Do you agree that \$3 should go to this Fund? Filling in a circle below will not increase your tax or reduce your refund.

<u>You</u>	<u>Your Spouse</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> No