



# THE NASHVILLE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Nashville

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[www.LWVnashville.org](http://www.LWVnashville.org).

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Date	Time	Place	Description
<b>Monday March 8</b>	11:30	TALS, TASW Conf. Room	<b>State Action Committee.</b> 50 Vantage Way, Suite 250 (in Metro Ctr), TALS/NCSW Conf Rm. Every 2 weeks. <a href="mailto:bdevaney@comcast.net">bdevaney@comcast.net</a> , 665-9057 or <a href="mailto:mparsley99@comcast.net">mparsley99@comcast.net</a> , 352-7551. Bring a brown bag.
<b>Thursday March 18</b>	12:00	Green Hills Library	<b>“Third Thursday” Lunch. Charter Schools.</b> GH Library, 3701 Benham Ave. To order box lunch, \$8.00, contact Jo Singer, <a href="mailto:gjosinger@aol.com">gjosinger@aol.com</a> or 794-2781, by March 16. Or bring a brown bag.
<b>Thursday April 15</b>	TBA	TBA	<b>“Third Thursday” Lunch. Mass Transit.</b> Watch for details.
<b>May 1-2</b>	TBA	Club-Hotel	<b>LWVTN Spring Council,</b> Club-Hotel Inn & Suites 2435 Atrium Way.
<b>May 2</b>	11:00	TBA	<b>LWVTN Gubernatorial Debate,</b> Details forthcoming.
<b>Wed. May 5</b>	5:30	Acorn Restaurant	<b>League Annual Meeting and Dinner.</b> Acorn, 114 28 <sup>th</sup> Ave. N. (Near Centennial Park). Gather at 5:30, greet your friends, and dine at 6:00.

### CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NASHVILLE: THIRD THURSDAY LUNCH

As we look for solutions to improving public education, few have stirred as much controversy as charter schools—schools that hover between the public and private sector. Beginning in the 1990’s, the charter school movement was seen as a way to provide more school choice to communities.

Alan Coverstone, Metro Schools’ Director of Charter Schools, will join us to speak about the many challenges and opportunities presented by charter schools in Nashville. The topic is especially timely when we consider:

- New state legislation raises the cap for the potential number of charter schools in Nashville to 20
- Metro Superintendent of Schools Jesse Register and State Commissioner Tim Webb announced plans to seek a charter program to partner with the school system in turning around Cameron Middle School
- Mayor Dean recently announced the creation of a statewide charter school incubator, The Center for Charter School Excellence, to be based in Nashville.

Join us as we gather at the Green Hills Public Library, 3701 Benham Ave (behind the GH Post Office) at 12:00 **(note the new time)**. To order a box lunch for \$8, please contact Jo Singer at 794-2781 or [gjosinger@aol.com](mailto:gjosinger@aol.com) no later than March 16. Or simply bring a brown bag. Bring a friend and enjoy another lively League lunch!

### THE NASHVILLE VOTER IS GOING GREEN!

To save trees and paper, we will send future editions of The Nashville Voter via email to members who have given us their email addresses and will send paper copies via snail mail only to members who have not. This change is consistent with LWV positions on the environment—our contribution to Going Green. Using email saves the League mailing costs and enables you to hear from us more quickly. If you wish to receive your voter via email **and** by regular mail, please let us know by contacting [LWVNash@gmail.com](mailto:LWVNash@gmail.com).

## SOME ALTERNATIVES TO BALANCING THE BUDGET ON THE BACKS OF VUNLERNABLE TENNESSEANS

**LWV Goal for the 2010 Legislative Session: Maintain as much capacity as possible to meet the basic human needs of vulnerable populations, including children and persons with mental and physical health needs.**

The Governor's proposed FY 2010 budget cuts would have a disproportionately negative effect on disadvantaged populations, including persons eligible for TennCare, children and adults with mental and behavioral health disorders, and people with disabilities. Some important programs have been maintained (such as the Pre-K program and the Basic Education Program), and others (such as the Behavioral Health Safety Net, Community Health Centers, and DCS juvenile justice community grants) would be spared as a result of proposed withdrawals from state reserve funds and federal stimulus money.

The stark reality, however, is that proposed cuts affect some of the most important programs that serve vulnerable populations. They include cuts to TennCare services and provider reimbursements, Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities programs, and Children's Services programs. For a detailed list of affected programs, see the February 2010 Tennessee Voter, [www.lwv-tn.org](http://www.lwv-tn.org).

**The Recurrent Budget Crisis.** In solving the budget crisis, raising the sales tax is not an option. Sales taxes were raised in 1971, 1976, 1984, 1992, and 2002 but because of a shrinking tax base (due to exemptions, internet and catalogue sales, and shopping across state borders) revenues have fallen far short. Moreover, they fall disproportionately on lower-income taxpayers because a larger portion of their income must be spent on necessities of life (food, clothing, fuel, transportation) that are taxable. Of the 50 states, Tennessee is the fourth most biased in favor of higher income people. (*Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax System in All 50 States*. Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy, 2009. [www.itepnet.org](http://www.itepnet.org).)

**Alternatives to Cutting Spending to the Bone.** There are options to raise much-needed revenue and to modernize Tennessee's antiquated tax structure. Some short term strategies to raise revenues include:

- **Food and Business Tax Fairness Act** SB0502, HB1350 will close corporate tax loopholes and reduce sales tax on food. Closing loopholes will raise an estimated \$120-250 million.
- **Internet Parity Act** SB1741, HB1947 will level the playing field by requiring sites like Amazon to collect Tennessee sales tax if they pay in-state affiliates to solicit business and will raise \$32 million.

The most significant way to correct the tax system is to reduce consumption taxes and to add a broad-based income tax to our state's tax toolbox:

- **Tax Cut and Job Creation Act** SB3236/HB3596 will **eliminate** the state part (5.5%) of the food tax, **cut** 2% from the sales tax on other items, and **reduce** the business franchise tax by more than one-half. The revenue would be replaced by a two-tier tax on personal income with generous exemptions of \$20,000 for individuals, \$30,000 for heads of households, \$40,000 for couples and \$2,500 deductions for dependents. The tax rate will be 3% on the first \$30,000 of taxable income and 6% thereafter. The bill also raises revenue by an estimated \$200 million to \$400 million. The League has a long-standing position supporting reduction in sales tax and enactment of a broad based tax on personal income. Almost 70% of Tennessee households will pay less, according to Tennesseans for Fair Taxation, of which the League is a founding member. For additional information see [www.fairtaxation.org](http://www.fairtaxation.org).

### Other League Priorities in the 2010 Legislative Session

In addition to addressing budget and revenue issues, the League will be addressing the following issues:

- Pre-K: Maintain current funding level for state funded voluntary Pre-Kindergarten programs.
- Environment: Restore dedicated funds for land preservation; prohibit mountain top removal; maintain clean water enforcement; and support smart growth legislation.
- Elections: Oppose requiring photo IDs and proof of citizenship to vote.
- Open Government: Monitor.

**Actions: Write to your State Senator and Representative.** (contact info at [www.legislature.state.tn.us](http://www.legislature.state.tn.us)) and write to members of the **House and Senate Finance Committees**. The general message (feel free to paraphrase):

*Over the past two decades, Tennessee has established public-private and state-local partnerships to implement essential "infrastructure" services for children, families and vulnerable Tennesseans—basic public supports developed in our child welfare, education, health, human services, juvenile justice, mental health and disability services systems. These services are interrelated, so weakening public structure resources in one system erodes the strength of the foundation in all systems.*

*Proposed budget reductions would seriously erode the foundation of these partnerships and reduce the opportunity for Tennessee children to receive the services and supports necessary for success in school and in life and reduce the ability of vulnerable people to remain in their homes and contribute to the well-being of their communities.*

Individualize your message by mentioning specific programs or budget areas that are of particular concern to you. Written messages in your own words are the most effective.

## PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

A Friendly reminder...next month the US census questionnaire should arrive in your mail box. One of the shortest census forms in history, the 2010 Census questionnaire asks 10 questions and takes about 10 minutes to complete. Completing your census questionnaire is easy, important and safe, and your participation is essential to ensuring a brighter tomorrow for our community.

Required once every 10 years by the U.S. Constitution, the census will count every person living in the United States, both citizens and noncitizens. Census data are used to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives, re-district each state and determine the distribution of the Electoral College. Census data also directly affect how more than \$400 billion per year in federal funding is distributed to state, local and tribal governments. Most importantly, census data is critical in determining locations for new hospitals, improving schools, building new roads, expanding public transportation options and creating new maps for emergency responders.

By participating in the census, you can help create a better future for you and those important to you. Complete and return your form when it arrives. To learn more, visit [www.2010census.gov](http://www.2010census.gov).

## HEALTH CARE UPDATE

People in Tennessee need comprehensive health care reform now. Here are some tidbits:

- Every week close to 13 working-age Tennesseans die because they don't have health insurance
- Today in Tennessee family premiums for employer sponsored health insurance average \$11,565, projections in nine years are \$20,000.
- Tennessee's CoverKids program closed enrollment in November and while it will open again in March, hundreds of children in Tennessee have gone without care for three months.
- More than 14% of Tennesseans are uninsured, 68% in families with at least one full-time worker.

Some in Congress insist the public doesn't want health care reform. But a February 2010 Kaiser Health Tracking Poll found Americans agree delays in passing health care reform are more about politics than policy. While people may say they don't like current legislation, here are specifics that a majority feels are important (<http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8051.cfm>):

- Insurance reform (i.e., guaranteed coverage, no lifetime benefit caps): 76% (D-85%, I-79%, R- 64%)
- Tax credits to small businesses: 72% (Dems - 77%' Indies - 70%, Reps - 67%)
- Health insurance exchanges: 71% (Dems - 78%, Indies - 71%, Reps - 67%)
- Helping close the Medicare doughnut hole: 71% (Dems - 78%, Indies - 70%, Reps - 66%)
- Expanding high risk insurance pools: 70% (Dems - 79%, Indies - 67%, Reps - 61%)
- Providing financial help for low/middle income: 68% (Dems - 88%, Indies - 64%, Reps - 48%)

While we hear a lot about different philosophies in legislation for health care reform, a comparison of the Senate Bill (2009) and proposals by Rep. Boehner-R (2009) and Sen. Chafee-R (1993) reveal some striking similarities. The Chafee Bill outlined 12 steps identical to this week's proposal from President Obama and would have covered 92%-95% of Americans by 2005 if it had been enacted (<http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Checking-In-With/Durenberger-1993-gop-bill-q-and-a.aspx>).

## LWV of TENNESSEE: GUBERNATORIAL DEBATE MAY 2 AND SPRING COUNCIL May 1 & 2

The LWVTN will host a Gubernatorial Debate, May 2 at 11:00 am. Stay tuned for more information. Also come join your League colleagues from across the state at the LWVTN Spring Council Meeting to be held in Nashville May 1 and 2 from noon to noon at the Club-Hotel Nashville Inn and Suites, 2435 Atrium Way.

**LWV Board:** President, Lucy Chism; 1<sup>st</sup> VP, Jo Singer; 2<sup>nd</sup> VP, Barbara Gay; Secretary, Carolyn Harris; Treasurer, Marian Ott; Education, Debby Gould; Health Care, Sue Bredensteiner; Human Needs, Reba Holmes; Membership, Margie Parsley and Judy Raines; Metro Government, Mary Beth Ikard; Publicity, Jackie Crumley; Voter Editor, Karen Weeks; and Voter Services, Lynn Williams. Finance Drive, Kay Simmons (off-Board). Office Administrator, September Landers.