



# THE VOTER

A Publication of the League of Women Voters of Johnson County, IA  
Website: <http://www.lwvlc.org>  
November/December 2009

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## From the President

Election season is upon us. LWVJC held Candidate Forums in Coralville, Iowa City and North Liberty. The issues seemed to focus on fiscal themes. I hope you took advantage of these opportunities to enhance your decisions as a voter.

LWVIA held a Legislative Update on Saturday, October 24 in Altoona, Iowa. LWVIA Board hosted, with lobbyist Amy Campbell moderating, presentations on the topics of focus for LWVIA this year: Mental Health, Pay Day Lending, post-Election audits, Women's issues, and Sentencing Reform. Check out the

updates at <http://www.lwvia.org>. Plan now to join us for **Lobby Day in Des Moines on February 16, 2010.**

Be sure to read about the program **Water In, Water Out** organized by our Regional Governance Committee. *Study without action is futile, but action without study is fatal.*

Save the date: Saturday, December 5, 2009, for the **LWVJC Annual Holiday Brunch**. Lolly Eggers and committee have a fun, engaging program – no, I think party – planned as our kick-off toward the **LWV 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary** in February 2010. Invite a friend!

As always, I encourage you to invite a friend to attend a League activity. Share what the League means to you and ask them to join!

Polly Horton  
*President*

## Calendar of Events

*December 5*  
Holiday Brunch  
9:30–11:00 am  
Blackstone Restaurant  
(On the far east side of Iowa City, off Scott Blvd, near the corner of Rochester Ave and Scott Blvd.)

### Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

## **Water In, Water Out**

On Thursday, November 12, the League presented a forum on water issues in Johnson County. The LWV Regional Governance Committee has spent the past year focusing on these issues and believes that League members found the issue not only interesting, but enlightening.

The well-attended program, "Water In, Water Out: What's the Problem" was held at the Coralville Public Library. Four experts on the subject spoke prior to discussion by all: Mary Skopec, supervisor of watershed monitoring and assessment for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources; Amy Bouska, U.S. Department of Agriculture Johnson County Soil Conservation District; Carol Sweeting, Community Relations Officer for the City of Iowa City Public Works Department; and James Lacina, Environmental Health Coordinator for Johnson County Department of Public Health.

The Committee prepared the following background paper for members. It raises some of the complicated issues on the subject of "water in, water out" that the panel explained and expanded on. We encourage all to read it, even if you weren't able to attend the program. It will be worth your while.

### **LWVJC REGIONAL GOVERNANCE WATER IN, WATER OUT; WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?**

Johnson County is among the fastest growing counties in Iowa. In 2000 the County's population was 111,006; in 2008, 128,094, a 15.4 percent increase. With such growth comes an increase in development, both commercial and residential, and in the need for services throughout the county: schools, transportation, fire and public safety, emergency services, energy, water and waste water treatment.

The League of Women Voters of Johnson County has for a number of years been looking into the concept of regional governance in the County. We examined the possibility of a "regional" or "metro" government, but determined the time was not right to seek such a solution to the area's growing problems. Consequently, the League has been looking at services

that might be delivered regionally. Our current research has been on the delivery, distribution and disposal of water. Ultimately we hope to answer the question as to the need for and feasibility of regional water and sewer systems for Johnson County.

Initially, this issue seemed fairly simple. You turn on the faucet and get water, you flush the toilet and things are taken care of. Simple. So the League committee took trips to the Iowa City Water Plant to see where city residents get their water, and how. We visited both the Iowa City and new North Liberty Waste Water treatment plants to see how disposal of waste water is handled. We interviewed the directors and managers of these facilities. We found out how many of the County's cities have water/sewer systems and how many don't. For the most part, residents who live in cities are served by municipal systems which function well.

Next, we interviewed officials of the County Planning and Zoning and the Health Departments, representatives of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Johnson County Soil Conservation District, and Senator Joe Bolkom, who is always knowledgeable about environmental issues. We heard the director of the Iowa DNR give an environmental report card, including a report on the water quality of Iowa's rivers and streams. Iowa received a C- (unacceptable). The worst rivers and streams are in our area of the state, southeast Iowa. The entire section of the Iowa River that runs through Johnson County is listed as "impaired" (unsupporting of aquatic life). homes are sold.



**WATER IN, WATER OUT  
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## **Water In, Water Out, CONTINUED**

Then we took a look at how the rest of the area's population gets its water and disposes of it – those folks who live in the unincorporated areas of Johnson County. Things became murkier. They get their water from wells (individual or community); the water comes from several aquifers (underground layers of rock and soil capable of holding or transmitting large amounts of water to wells or streams). They dispose of it, and waste, with septic systems (on site tanks in the ground which separate solids and liquids and send partially treated liquid drainage into the surrounding soil). The septic systems can be individual or joint (serving a number of homes). Other waste water treatment systems, such as mounds, are also possible.

Why is this murkier? Because we don't know how many septic systems there are in Johnson County! No record of septic systems was kept in the County until 1965 when permits began to be required. Since that time, 6,601 on site waste water treatment permits have been issued. And, we don't know how many of them the soil can handle. Historically, there has been no inspection of septic systems, but beginning this past July 2009, septic systems will have to be inspected whenever homes are sold.

This takes us back to that C- report card on water quality and raises the question of what is going into those rivers and streams...and from where. And we haven't even addressed the issues of agricultural and large agri-business runoff or pollution from industrial sources or runoff from spraying fertilizer and herbicides on lawns. (A great deal of the County's land is agricultural (80%) and the Johnson County Land Use Plan calls for protection of agricultural land). It also takes us to a look at the probable need for a county-wide geological assessment showing waterways, drainage patterns, water table, soil types and depth, topography, location of rock formations, wetlands and woodlands!

Finally, we found the complicating issue of jurisdiction. No one level of government has over-all jurisdiction to plan, implement and enforce "water in, water out". The federal government makes laws, such as the Federal Clean Water Act, which must be carried out by state and local governments. The State of Iowa also passes legislation and the DNR has certain areas of oversight and enforcement, the cities or County have public health and planning responsibilities.

So what does the future hold for "water in and water out" in Johnson County?

## **Save the Date—HOLIDAY BRUNCH, DECEMBER 5**

WHEN: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2009—9:30am to 11:00am

WHERE: BLACKSTONE RESTAURANT, IOWA CITY

**PROGRAM:** To celebrate the approaching 90th anniversary of the League of Women Voters there will be a quiz on the history of the League and women's suffrage. Have fun! Win prizes!

**MENU:** Brunch includes scrambled eggs, sausage links and crisp bacon strips, fresh fruit, mini puff pastries, coffee, tea and juice.

**Cost:** \$17.50 per person. This includes tax and gratuities.

**RESERVATIONS:** **Send your check, email or call Julie Pulkrabek by December 1.**

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