

The Voter of ODC



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April General Meeting

Hargraves Center

215 North Roberson Street, Chapel Hill

April 19, 2007

10:00AM

Anita S. Earls

Director of Advocacy

UNC School of Law Civil Rights Center

Speaking on

Minority Voting Rights and Drawing of District Lines

Anita S. Earls has a law degree and has practiced many years in Civil Rights Law, in a private law firm as well as for the United States Department of Justice. She was recently involved in the Chatham County Redistricting effort.

Annual Meeting

May 16, 2007

John Dancy

former NBC News correspondent,

four time Emmy award winner,

currently Visiting Lecturer In Public Policy Studies

Sanford Institute of Public Policy

“Television News is for People who Watch Television:

Why TV can’t cover politics”

A Southern Season Restaurant

University Mall

Chapel Hill

6:00 PM

Upcoming Events

Apr. 14

Human Rights Conference
McKimmon Center, NCSU

Apr. 19

April General Meeting
Hargraves Center

May 16

Annual Meeting
A Southern Season

President's Message

by Jan Richmond



Spring! Sunshine Week! Clouds overshadow Open Government Laws. Many of you are aware that the LWVNC entered a coalition with the NC Press Association to audit government agencies and local public institutions. The *Raleigh News & Observer* asked the LWVODC to gather public information in Chatham and Durham counties from the sheriff's office, city councils, county managers and the school districts.

Sunshine Week is March 11 through 17th and by the time you receive this newsletter you will probably have read articles in the local newspapers regarding this event, such as the Wednesday, March 14, articles featuring my efforts to get copies of public records. Several of our members, on short notice, came to the rescue and requested the sample of records. I want to thank Cynthia Wertz, Joyce Colaiace, Sally Coughlin, Else Cunningham, Bessie Carrington and Carol Rist for their assistance in this pursuit.

Some experienced quick responses and were readily accommodated. I was not one of those fortunate ones. I took the Durham School District and embarked on an adventure where I wasn't welcomed, was questioned and could easily have become discouraged. But we all know that League women don't become discouraged easily. On Feb. 7th I hand carried to the administration building of the Durham Public Schools my written request for all non-privileged correspondence by school board members during the month of January. Thinking the Superintendent of the School District is the keeper of Public Records, I asked for his office. Immediately I was questioned as to why I wanted that office and when I explained, was directed to the Public Affairs Office. During step number two at the Public Affairs Office I was asked why I wanted this information. Of course a citizen is not required to tell why he/she wants information in order to obtain records, and I so notified the clerk. I was then informed my request would have to go through the school board liaison. I obtained her name and was informed she would contact me.

I am writing this article on March 9th and I still don't have the records. Subsequent contact was sporadically made with me. It took a week for the liaison with the school board to call me. After being questioned as to what type of records I wanted she stated she would notify the board members. That was February 14. The following week I called her and she stated she had nothing for me but had given my request to the school board members. I stated I would have to call the Superintendent and did. He was in a meeting. Describing the nature of my call, I asked that he contact me and am still waiting for that call. However, a message from the liaison followed and asked for my patience in this matter.

From the Durham Public Schools' website 2105-Public Documents: "The minutes, accounts, and other nonconfidential records of the Board of Education are public documents. They are in the custody of the Superintendent. The Superintendent or designee shall make such records available to the public, upon request and with reasonable notice, during regular business hours. (Legal Reference: GS 132-6.2 Adopted Effective: July 1, 1999)"

(Continued on p. 3)

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Directors 2006-2008

Cynthia Wertz
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(Voter Editor)
490-5718

(President's Message—continued from p. 2)

The last I heard was from a school board member who called on March 6. He wanted to let me know that he knew the North Carolina Press Association was doing an audit and he had spoken with them. Unfortunately he had deleted most of his January mail and didn't want to have the expense of hiring a consultant to retrieve the information. I can understand that, but why are public officials deleting public information if they know we have the right to access that information? I was informed the records have been sent to the liaison and they will have to be reviewed by the school district's attorney prior to release.

The NC State law, Public Records Law, G.S. 132, defines public records as any document that is made or received by a public official in connection with public business. Public officials must provide access to those records unless there is a specific statutory provision that allows them to withhold the document. In addition, copies of records must be provided "as promptly as possible". The Durham School District could improve its responsibilities in this area. Tax paying residents of a school district deserve reasonable access to the superintendent and he certainly should be able to communicate and answer telephone requests. If she or he is going to delegate public record responsibilities to another person, delegation should not delay access.

If my experience was typical, citizens will find it extremely difficult to navigate the DURHAM SCHOOL SYSTEM. It is not user friendly and seems more focused on discouraging than providing public accessible to information.

If you are requesting public information from an agency and it is denied, talk with them and ask them to cite the law that trumps G.S.132. Keep and ask the following:

“North Carolina’s public records law, Chapter 132 of the General Statutes, provides for public inspection and copying of most records made or received by state or local governments and their subdivisions, regardless of the physical form of the record. If you contend that the document I have asked for is not a public record, please advise me of the specific statutory authority for that position.”

LWVODC field trip to the General Assembly

Members of LWVODC who took part in the field trip to the General Assembly on March 14 were brought up to date on legislation of interest to the League by Bob Hall of Democracy NC, LWVNC Lobby Corps Director Mary Klenz and LWVNC lobbyist Paula Wolf. Members sat in on a meeting of the Senate Committee on Health Care. When the chair of the committee, Senator Stan Bingham, asked all League members present to rise, he was surprised to see among those standing, committee member Senator Ellie Kinnaird and a male member of LWVODC, Karsten Rist. Senator Bingham evidently doesn't know that the League has numerous male members, including Speaker of the House, Joe Hackney.

Mary Klenz is still looking for a few good persons to join the LWVNC Lobby Corps. Lobby Corps members are assigned to an area of interest, such as redistricting or campaign finance reform. They keep informed on legislation pertaining to that subject. They attend committee meetings and speak before the committee when the League wishes to make a statement. Key lobby corps members have already been identified. They need League members who are willing to keep informed, keep in touch with the key lobby corps member and attend sessions which the key lobby corps member is unable to attend. If you are interested in being a lobby corps member, contact Mary Klenz at klenzm@bellsouth.net, or call her at 704-542-9858.

If you haven't yet signed up to receive the LWVNC weekly report from the legislature, send an e-mail to Paula Wolf at wolf@deltaforce.net. Give Paula your name, address and phone number and tell her you want to receive League Legislative Updates.

Welcome to our newest member:

Jeanne Allen
4123 New Bern Place
Durham, NC 27707-5328
Phone: 401-8246
jeanneallen@democracy-nc.org

Be a Couch League Observer

Although no one knows the League is watching, you can now follow the proceedings of some governmental bodies through the magic of Internet technology.

You can watch from home, at a time of your choosing. Be aware that you may need to have Windows Media Player and other free software on your computer, and some files may be a little slow to load.

Durham County Commissioners: you can see a video of the bi-monthly meetings and agendas at this address: http://durhamcounty.granicus.com/viewpublisher.php?view_id=2. Meeting videos are arranged by date, with the most recent at the top of the list.

Durham City Council: similarly, Durham City Council bi-monthly meetings and agendas can be viewed at http://durham.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=2.

Chapel Hill Town Council: if you are not able to attend live meetings, you can see them on cablecast, which of course you can also record on your home system for later viewing. Cablecasts are on Time Warner Cable of Chapel Hill Channel 18 at 7:00 p.m. and are rebroadcast at 9:00 a.m. the morning after the night meeting. Generally, the meetings are also cablecast on Durham Cable Vision Channel 8 at 1:00 p.m. on the Friday following the Council meeting. If you want to be notified in advance about agendas and activities in Chapel Hill, subscribe to notification list at <http://www.townofchapelhill.org/list.asp>

Other elected bodies are not available electronically now, but usually you can obtain agendas and then minutes online.

Warning: This viewing could become addictive.

Why I joined the League

By Else Bolotin
2nd Vice President

I was born in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, spent my adolescence under the Nazi occupation. I spent a year in Canada in 1947 and then studied psychology at the University of Leiden.

I immigrated to the US in 1954 with my Dutch husband, who was a chemical engineer. He was hired by Proctor & Gamble in Cincinnati, Ohio, because there was a shortage of engineers in this country at that time. In fact, both of us worked at P&G, because they also hired me.

I worked for P & G until we started a family. When the baby was about a year old, I found it difficult to be home all day with the baby, focusing on diapers and feedings, and I started looking for other activities. Someone told me about the League of Women Voters

I joined the League in 1961. I was delighted to find a group of stimulating women who were interested in political topics and especially local affairs. I was fascinated with a completely different system of government than I had experienced in Holland and I was eager to learn.

At a regional meeting, I spoke up about a social issue, and the next day I had a call, asking me to chair a committee. You see that the League has not changed! We studied the jail system, visited all the local and regional jails and wrote a report, which we had to present to each of the 14 League Units. In the meantime we had two more children.

I joined the Board and served for three years. During that time, I polished my speaking skills and overcame my natural shyness. The jail study led to my involvement in setting up a Halfway House for ex-offenders, and eventually to my continuing my studies in social psychology. Later I received my doctorate in clinical psychology. I had an independent practice for about 25 years, in Lexington, KY and in Bellevue, WA.

After a hiatus of many years I found the League again when I retired in Chapel Hill. I decided that now was the time to give something back to an organization that I owed so much. I found that the women were just as stimulating and interesting as before, albeit older than in my early years. I have spent several years on the Board and find the issues as fascinating as years ago.

Human Rights Conference

APRIL 14, 2007

McKimmon Center of NC State University

The West Triangle and Wake County chapters of the United Nations Association are co-sponsoring "Human Rights, An Endangered Concept: The United Nations and the Advancement of Human Rights" at the McKimmon Center of NC State University on April 14th. The League of Women Voters of North Carolina is a co-sponsor of the event.

The Conference sessions will cover all areas of human rights: political rights, women's rights, economic rights, children's rights, religious rights, migrants' rights, racial and ethnic rights. The final session will be "The War on Terror, How Other Nations Have Coped". The scope is international, national and local with distinguished speakers and panels at every session.

For more information and registration information, go to www.nchumanrights.org. The registration deadline April 5th.

Ilana Dubster Kicks off Immigration Study

For the first time in fifteen years, delegates to the League of Women Voters 2006 National Convention voted to undertake a new study. Immigration will be the topic of this study. An LWVUS Immigration Study Committee has been formed which will do research and provide members with background information. The cover story in the February *National Voter* was the first material provided to members. Since immigration is regulated at the Federal level, study materials will be provided by the national League. At the same time, local Leagues are being encouraged to learn about immigration at the local level because the impacts of immigration are at the local level, and learning about immigration at the local level will help members understand the relationship of the Federal law and local impact.

Our speaker at the LWV/ODC February meeting, Ilana Dubster, gave a very interesting talk about the American Latino population in our area. Ilana hails from Brazil and was very eager to vote when she became a citizen of the United States, because she had lived under a dictatorship and had never voted.

Ilana had to get used to being called a Hispanic-American, because she had previously identified herself and others as Brazilian, Venezuelan, and Mexican etc. She is particularly interested in Hispanic philanthropy and has been very active in Hispanic-American relations. She was appointed by Governor Hunt to the Council of Latino Affairs.

There are 700,000 Latino-Americans in North Carolina. About 100,000 migrant farmers come and go in this state, and over 55% are legal. The process from entry to Citizen and Voter takes from 6-20 years. Here are some startling statistics: In Chatham County, among the 36,732 registered voters, 218 are registered Hispanics. Similarly in Durham County, 1638 out of 144,526 registered voters are Hispanic, and in Orange County, out of 516,255 registered voters 4578 are Hispanic. Ilana stated that Title 6 of the Civil Rights Act is important for the Hispanic Community. Title 6 applies to states where the Latino vote has reached 5% of the population. Latino citizens in North Carolina have a low voting rate because of lack of understanding of the electoral system and because of the language barrier. Ilana felt that a Citizen's Guide in Spanish would be very helpful.

A very lively discussion took place and interest in this topic was high among the participants.

For more information on the LWVUS immigration study, go to the LWVUS Web site, www.lwv.org. Click on "For Members" and then on "Projects and Programs." The materials are in the Immigration section.

A land transfer tax for Orange, Durham or Chatham?

Public officials and citizens in all three ODC counties are considering whether the land transfer tax would be the best way to fund much needed capital improvements.

What is a land transfer tax?

A land transfer tax is a tax on real property when ownership of the property is transferred between parties. The tax rate is usually a percent of the sales price or a set dollar amount per \$1000 of value of a sold property. The land transfer tax becomes part of the closing costs.

Local governments in North Carolina must be authorized by the General Assembly to collect a land transfer tax. So far, the General Assembly has only granted seven counties in the northeastern part of the state (Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Pasquotank, Perquimans and Washington) authority to levy a land transfer tax.

What is the proposal in Chatham County?

The tax as proposed by supporters in Chatham County would be a 1% land transfer tax which would apply to:

- All real estate sales
- Exchange of property (whether exchanged for money or other property)
- Deeds from nonprofit or religious organizations
- Certain leases or memorandums of leases longer than 10 years or that can be renewed beyond 10 years
- Timber deeds

The tax would NOT apply to: deeds of gift; foreclosure deeds (or deeds in lieu of foreclosure); deeds from any government agency; certain leases less than 10 years; property transfers in which nothing of value is required in return; and transfers required by law, will, estate settlement, merger or consolidation.

The tax revenues are restricted to use of the revenues to capital expenditures, such as water/sewer systems, solid waste disposal, schools, county-operated facilities and related equipment. It also can be used to retire county debt for any of these purposes.

Proponents of a land transfer tax for Chatham County report that the land transfer tax would provide substantially more revenue for the county than other revenue options such as a one cent sales tax, a one cent property tax or the county school impact fee.

How has the land transfer tax impacted residential growth in the six counties which levy the land transfer tax?

Supporters of the Chatham proposal report that none of the counties have seen reductions in residential growth since levying the tax.

- Currituck continues to be one of the top 17 fastest growing counties in the nation.
- Dare County has continued to experience growth that allowed them to REDUCE its land transfer tax to 1/2 percent and still cut property taxes to the lowest in the state.
- The other counties, not directly on the coast, also found that the tax has not slowed residential growth.

What do the counties which have the land transfer tax say about it?

In 2005, Chatham County Commissioner Mike Cross asked the county managers in the six counties levying the land transfer tax to provide comments on the impact of the tax in their counties. Here are some key points made by the county managers in 2005:

Perquimans County:

“We rely heavily on the tax for school projects. We rank 95th out of 100 in sales tax receipts, so this tax ...makes up for this.

Currituck County:

“In a word: schools. Our county is recognized as the 17th fastest growing county in the country. We have been able to build a middle school and renovate two elementary schools without incurring any debt.

Camden County:

“The land transfer tax has been a tremendous resource for Camden County...producing in excess of \$500,000 per year for capital needs. This is a major revenue producer considering our total county budget (2004-05) is less than \$10 million. “If it were not for this tax, we would be in a severely financially-strapped position.”

Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting will be held at A Southern Season Restaurant at the University Mall in Chapel Hill. There will be a cash bar at 6:00 PM, followed by the annual business meeting, dinner, and a talk by John Dancy titled, "Television is for People Who Watch Television: Why TV can't cover politics."

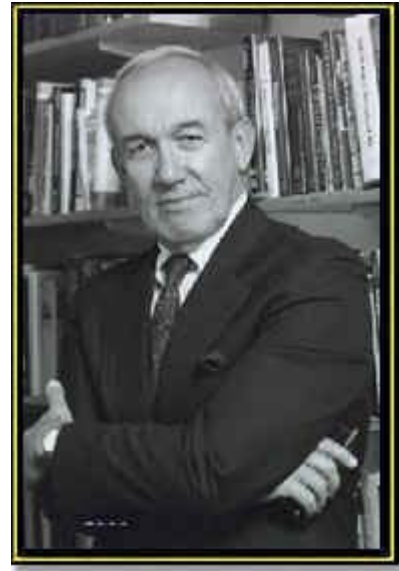
John Dancy's career as an NBC News correspondent ended in 1996. During his career, he covered every beat in Washington, DC, and worked as a foreign correspondent for the network in London, Berlin, and Moscow. During his time overseas, he covered the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and the reunification of Germany. He also reported on the diplomatic attempts that preceded the Gulf War.

During a break from foreign activity, Dancy covered the 1992 general election campaigns, an assignment that included extensive travel with presidential candidate Bill Clinton.

Dancy also anchored *NBC Nightly News*, *Meet the Press*, and *NBC News at Sunrise* before retiring as the most senior correspondent.

Over the years, he has earned numerous awards, including the Everett McKinley Dirksen Prize in 1987, the country's most prestigious award for coverage of Congress. He is also the recipient of four National Emmys.

The evening will begin at 6:00 PM with a cash bar, followed by the annual meeting, dinner and our speaker. Please make your reservation by filling out the form on page 3 and sending it to Joyce Colaiace by May 11.



The Voter...ODC...The Voter...ODC...The Voter

Yes, I plan to attend the League of Women Voters Annual Meeting on May 16.
Please reserve a place for:

Name(s) _____

Number of persons _____

Preferred menu: Herb Roasted Chicken _____
 Pan Roasted Salmon _____
 Grilled Vegetable Napoleon _____

Please make check out for \$30.00 per person payable to LWV/ODC.
 Mail to Joyce Colaiace,
 437 Fearrington Post
 Pittsboro, NC 27312

Deadline for reservations is Friday, May 11, 2007.

League of Women Voters of Orange, Durham and
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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization for men and women that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences policy through education and advocacy. Any citizen over 18, male or female, may become a voting member of the League. With that membership comes the opportunity to work on local, state, regional, and national program issues.

The Voter is printed on recycled paper.

League Calendar

March 23-25	LWV of North Carolina State Convention	Little River Golf Resort Carthage, NC
April 3 10:00 AM	LWVODC Board Meeting	
April 14	Human Rights Conference	McKimmon Center NC State University
April 19 10:00 AM	April General Meeting Anita S Earls, Director of Advocacy UNC School of Law Civil Rights Center	Hargraves Center 215 North Roberson Street Chapel Hill
May 16 6:00 PM	Annual Meeting Speaker, John Dancy	A Southern Season University Mall, Chapel Hill