

# *Bulletin of the Alexandria League of Women Voters*

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20 East Oak Street, Alexandria, VA 22301

League web site [www.lwvalex.org](http://www.lwvalex.org)

## Must See Television

At 8 p.m. on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> the two major party candidates for Governor of Virginia will participate in a televised debate in Richmond with Judy Woodruff of the Public Broadcasting Corporation as moderator. In Alexandria, the debate may be seen on Channel 26. The Virginia State League and the AARP are the co-sponsors of this debate. Questions about issues of interest to League members are sure to be asked.

## The Voter Guide

The Voter Guide containing the League's questions for candidates in state wide races and the three House of Delegates races in Alexandria will be published in the Alexandria Gazette Packet. Look for it in the issue for the week that begins Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>. It will contain the League's questions and the answers from state wide candidates and the three candidates for House of Delegate districts in Alexandria. At the same time it's published in the newspaper, we'll post it on our web site for the Alexandria League.

## At Home in Alexandria

A some local civic activists have begun a group modeled on similar groups in other localities, to help older residents who want to continue living in their homes by helping them to find volunteer and professional services.

See <http://athomeinalexandria.com> for more information

## Vote on November 3 (or Sooner)

Election Day is the first Tuesday in November, but absentee voting is already underway. Important improvements in the way absentee voting is conducted were instituted with the 2008 Presidential election. The new rules can be very helpful in our jurisdiction. For example, if you're putting in a long work day in the District of Columbia on November 3 and aren't likely to get home before the polls close, you are eligible to vote absentee. Anyone who will absent from Alexandria during the hours the polls are open qualifies for an absentee ballot. We need to spread the word about how easy voting absentee is.

## The Walk to Fight Breast Cancer

The annual walk will commence at 8 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 24<sup>th</sup> at the AMC Hoffman Center Theatres, 206 Swamp Fox Road, off Eisenhower Avenue.

The walk fund supports free mammography and other diagnostic screening for women without adequate insurance.

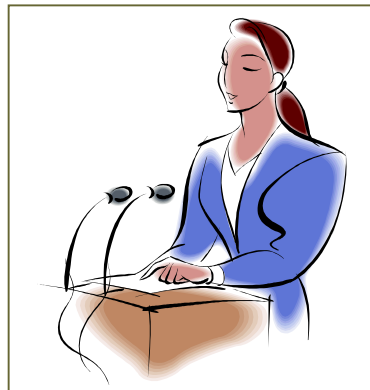
See [www.alexcanerwalk.com](http://www.alexcanerwalk.com) for more information.



## First Chance to Speak Out....

The City Council will hold its first budget hearing for its fiscal year 2011 budget on Saturday, Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> as part of its public hearing docket on that day. Lower real estate values will continue to constrain public spending. This will be the first opportunity to tell Council how to set their spending priorities, a process that will be on going from now until budget adoption next May.

Call the City Clerk at 703 746-4500 to reserve a speaking slot or get more information.



*Your Voice is Needed!*

## President's Letter

By Katy Cannady

On June 30, during its last public hearing, the outgoing City Council made an outstandingly bad decision. It voted to change the date of the City Council election from May to November. Only Councilwoman Pepper and retiring Councilman Gaines voted against this bad idea. Now absent any further changes, the next election for City Council will co-inside with the election of the President of the United States in 2012.

This presents a myriad of problems. As a practical matter it will be harder for the mostly volunteer part time work force that puts in long hours every election day for nominal pay to conduct the election. It might necessitate the purchase of newer voting machines that could process the votes more quickly.

Let's assume that we have the same level of turnout that we had in the 2008 Presidential election. Since I have League of Women Voters' DNA as it were, it's impossible for me not to hope for high turnout for every election. Ninety percent of the people who come to the polls will be there to vote in the presidential election. Many of them

will even be unaware that a local City Council election is taking place simultaneously. Does anyone think any mention of the local election will appear in any network television program or newspaper with an area wide circulation? Those are the news outlets the vast majority of citizens depend on. They provide little local coverage now. With the competition for attention a Presidential election provides, little will be reduced to none.

Please see *President's Letter* on page 3



*Some will be unaware of local election issues during a Presidential Election.*

*President's Letter from page 2*

I estimate that ten percent or so of voters will be people like me. It's also part of my DNA to vote every time I get the opportunity for every office to be decided. While I and others like me are making City Council choices, the line of people waiting to vote will be getting longer and more impatient. A certain proportion of those in that long line will simply walk away before they ever make it to a voting machine. It's understandable. That does not make it any less outrageous that elected officials using the mantra of making it "easier to vote," created this situation.

One of our new council members has already suggested an alternative. Newly elected first term Councilman Frank Fannon has suggested that we hold the next Council election in 2011. The Council we elected last May would continue in office for one more year after that election to complete the three year term it was elected to serve. Another possibility which is supported by some individuals active on the

Democratic Committee is to lengthen the Council term to four years. That way every Council election would be held in the year before the Presidential election when candidates for the General Assembly are the only other offices up for election, except when the county clerk who has a longer term, is also on the ballot. Either of these plans could work and both need further examination. For now, the important thing is to let the Council members know that they need fix the mess left to them by the previous Council. We need a plan that gets us away from electing the President of the United States and the Alexandria City Council on the same day.



*Campaign Workers are a Finite Resource*

## Testimony Before City Council

By Katy Cannady

Recently I became president of the Alexandria League of Women Voters. I speak today as their representative. The League is the only organization to do a detailed rigorous study of voting in local elections. The study was completed in 1999, but it is still the only study of its kind done for Alexandria in modern times.

The League members who designed the study created two focus groups, one of people who never voted in local elections and one of people who almost always voted in local elections. The study committee also did a telephone survey. I quote now directly from page 2 of our study regarding the feedback from this methodology:

"We asked our survey respondents whether various election reforms would make them more likely to vote.

- The reform that garnered the most support, about half of all respondents and about three quarters of nonvoters, was voting by mail.
- About one-third of all respondents found that keeping the polls open more than one day would encourage their voting, but about two-thirds of nonvoters wanted voting on more than one day.

Please see testimony on page 4

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· In contrast, both voters and nonvoters felt that the current poll hours of 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. were convenient and that moving the election to a different time of the year would not make them any more likely to vote.”

So there you have it, an actual study based on actual opinions of voters and nonvoters. Ignoring actual data in favor of facile assumptions is never a good way to reach any decision. Changing our election law two weeks before the end of this Council term is a reckless, haphazard way to do the public’s business. It is unseemly.

This is particularly so because our quirky state law decrees that once the date of the Council election is changed to November; it cannot later be changed back to May. “What is done cannot be undone,” moans Lady Macbeth as she wanders through the night. Like her, you could do something that cannot be undone and bear the blame if it turns out badly.

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