

# The Maryland Voter



Published by the League of Women Voters of Maryland  
President: Nancy Soreng

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editor: Carol Blackburn

## Election 2010

### The Online Interactive Voters' Guide

“The LWV *invented* the concept of a voter guide. Now they’ve *reinvented it!*”  
- Comment from a Maryland candidate

At the National convention in June, the LWVUS invited all local Leagues to use Thevoterguide.org. This site allows candidates to enter their responses online, lets Leagues download the information and easily create printable voters' guides, and also provides customized ballots and easy online comparisons for voters. It also allows displays of ballot initiatives. We called it the Interactive Voters' Guide, or IVG.

Since the Maryland candidate filing deadline was in early July, it was a bit of a rush to get things ready. Every single race on the ballot throughout the state was created on the IVG, including Central Committees. (A few that appear only during the Presidential election cycle have not been created.)

The state league and eight local leagues opted to use the system to collect information from candidates; the other seven local leagues chose to work with traditional methods, since they had already prepared paper questionnaires. Some of the information collected via email and paper was later uploaded to the IVG.

All the Maryland legislative candidates, the state-wide candidates, and the US Congressional candidates and their responses were included in the Interactive Voters' Guide. Many candidates uploaded pictures. Of the 24 jurisdictions in Maryland, nine had all their local candidates' responses on the IVG, 12 counties listed candidates by name only, and three counties did not list any local candidates on the IVG.

Elisabeth MacNamara, LWVUS President, said in a late October e-mail that the Vote411.org site had had 600,000 visitors and more than 5 million page views. Since most voters look for information the day before and the day of the election, it's possible that total number of visitors may have reached 1 million.

Twenty-one states were represented on the Interactive Voters' Guide.



- Of the 2178 races on the IVG, 424 (20%) were in Maryland.
- Of the 4277 candidates and ballot initiatives on the IVG, 1048 (25%) were in Maryland. During the primary, we had more than 2000 candidates in the system.

For a little state, those are some big numbers! Many thanks to all the voter services people who worked hard to collect the information and to help make it available to voters via hardcopy and the internet!

### ***Comments about the IVG***

**From a candidate's page:** VOTE411.org is nothing short of amazing. It brings election information into the 21st Century. Now, everyone can be an **informed voter**, even if you don't follow the news in newspapers or on TV. Every voter, no matter where they live, can go to VOTE411.org, and find information about their state candidates. The site is user-friendly. It's organized so that all the candidates for an office are listed together on one page. You can click on any two candidates and compare them side-by-side. If you want, you can save and print your own personalized sample ballot, and take it with you to the polls.

**Yahoo News:** The [League of Women Voters of Maryland](#) also publishes a viable election guide. You can personalize a voter's guide to your county's issues and candidates from their searchable website.

**On Facebook from a Maryland resident:** "I'm quite impressed with the League of Women Voters' web site. Just fill in your address to get information on the candidates and build a customized ballot. Given the mis-information that's been coming in the mail, this is very helpful." *with the follow-on comment:* "WOW! Thank you! At this point, the only people I would trust are the League of Women Voters!"

*Janeen Grohsmeyer, Online Services Director*

### **Civic Literacy Health Report**

The Maryland Commission on Civic Literacy cordially invites you to the unveiling of the first Maryland Civic Health Index Report.

DATE: December 8, 2010

TIME: 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Miller Senate Building

RSVP to Michele Milligan at [mmilligan@msde.state.md.us](mailto:mmilligan@msde.state.md.us)

Phone 410-767--0358

The Maryland Commission on Civic Literacy with funding from the Center for Civic Education and the Maryland Council for the Social Studies has commissioned the Maryland Civic Health Index Report. Reports such as this have done a great deal to shed light on civic engagement, community participation and the condition of social studies education in other states across America. Some initial data on Maryland's civic literacy is available at <http://civic.serve.gov/MD>.

# The Budget Gap in Maryland

*An interview with Neil Bergsman of the Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute by Nancy Soreng*

## ***Tell me about the Budget and Tax Policy Institute.***

The Maryland Budget and Tax Institute is a small research center that focuses on state finances and programs. We try to provide information and analysis that is timely, accurate and useful for activists, nonprofit advocates and the public. Our work focuses on promoting good financial management for the state while protecting services for low- and middle-income Marylanders.

We're a project of Maryland Nonprofits. We get our funding from national and local foundation grants, Maryland Nonprofits, and individual contributors.

## ***What did you do before you began working here?***

I had a 23-year career in state government. I worked at the state Department of Budget and Management for most of that time. I estimated revenues and ran the Capital Budget Office under Governor Schaefer. I directed the Office of Budget Analysis under governors Glendening and Ehrlich. I've also been a staff analyst for the General Assembly and Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Juvenile Services.

## ***So what is a budget gap, and how big is Maryland's?***

Maryland has to balance its budget every year. So, we don't actually end the year with a budget gap. The budget gap we are worried about now is a projection for the year that begins next July. Our revenues are \$1.6 billion short of the amount it will take to fund all of the education, healthcare, public safety and other services the state currently provides.

## ***How did the gap get so large?***

The revenue shortfall is directly related to our massive national economic recession. Maryland gets most of its revenue from sales tax and income tax. These sources are very sensitive to economic conditions. The economy has hit our revenues so hard, that Maryland will collect about the same revenue next year that it did in 2008. But there are more people in the state now. There are more public school students and more college students. There are many more Marylanders who need medical assistance and more kids in foster care. The state has cut over \$4 billion from its budget since the start of the recession. For three years, federal Recovery Act dollars have helped to meet these needs. Also the state has transferred millions of dollars from other special accounts – like transportation and environmental programs. Now the federal Recovery Act dollars will be expiring, and other state special accounts may be running dry. The \$1.6 billion will need to be balanced through spending cuts.

## ***What are some of the cuts to state programs and services that have been made in the last couple of years?***

Most people don't realize that since 2007, we have cut back on the growth in education spending. We're investing half a billion dollars less annually in public schools than the amounts called for in the "Thornton Formula" prior to the recession. Aid to local governments for roads and local bus systems has been cut more than 90 percent. Other local programs – like health departments and community colleges – have also received deep cuts in state funds. Service providers from physicians and hospitals to community

mental health clinics and addiction treatment programs have had cuts to their funding. I could go on and on. The cuts have landed everywhere.

***Because Maryland, unlike the federal government, cannot pass an operating budget that is not fully funded, what are the options that Governor O'Malley and the General Assembly have for the 2011-2012 budget?***

The Governor has announced that he intends to balance the budget with "a steady diet of cuts." But that diet will make us sick. Also stupid, unsafe and poor. With

such a large gap, cuts of that size will have to hit schools, health programs, public safety and supports for the most vulnerable Marylanders.

The governor and legislature should take a balanced approach which includes expenditure reductions and also new revenues. But there's no one step that will solve the whole problem. The state needs a broad strategy. Reforming the corporation income tax so that profitable, multi-state companies can't dodge their fair share of Maryland tax is one possible option.

## **Health Care Reform and the U.S. Constitution**

### *Annual LWVMD Constitution Day Program*

Constitution Day, September 17, was again celebrated by the League of Women Voters of Maryland. Our fourth annual observance in co-sponsorship with the University of Maryland School of Law and the University of Maryland, Baltimore was in the law school's Ceremonial Court Room. ***Health Care Reform and the U.S. Constitution*** was the topic expert panelists discussed from 12 noon to 1:00 p.m.

LWVMD President Nancy Soreng welcomed attendees to this program. Professor Mark Graber, the law school's new Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Development, and Professor of Law and Government, served as Moderator and gave a brief overview of current health care reform issues. He introduced the panelists: UMDSL Dean and Professor of Law Phoebe Haddon, UMDSL Professor of Law David Super, and Professor of Law Leslie Meltzer Henry.

Leslie Henry said that 67 percent of the world's constitutions include the right to health care. The U.S. Constitution does not directly do so, although Article 1 alludes to tax and spend for welfare and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment touches indirectly on health care. She spoke of a moral right to health care. If it is not a federal right, should it be a state right per constitution? Nearly half our states' constitutions specifically do mention health. Some states without this are considering amendments. In the United States the state of Oregon is the leader in health care, but a constitutional amendment there has failed to pass three times.

There has been an evolution of a constitutional right to health care, David Super declared. He spoke of the importance of a written constitution. We do change our constitution without amendment, as was done with the New Deal, he said. He referred to Professor Bruce Akerman's concept of "the living Constitution" coming out of the Civil Rights and other movements and noted Akerman rejects "creeping policy." The recently approved affordable

health care legislation will cause the federal government to take on the overwhelming costs and the states a smaller cost. Compensatory financial aid will go to certain states for special impacts to them such as Katrina or immigration.

Phoebe Haddon spoke of the political context for health care. She asked why people are so passionate about the affordable care legislation? A mandate to give dollars to private health care corporations provokes strong reaction. Responding to her request for a show of hands, everyone in the audience indicated support for the concept of universal health care. She said the question is, Where is the battlefield for the health care act? It could be decided in the Supreme Court. Should it be in the next Congress or should it be in the courts? What are your rights? How about the right to be free of this health care act? Dean Haddon believes the courts are the wrong place to argue this fate. Basically, autonomy issues are the crux of this issue. She thinks the legislature should resolve the issue since it is basically a political decision, not a moral decision like the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

After a question and answer period Moderator Mark Graber gave a brief wrap-up. Health care reform will result from being a moral right and a product of political legislation. He urged the audience to re-read the U.S. Constitution to try to understand what in it is important to addressing this issue.

Attendance at our program was excellent. Almost every seat was filled with Leaguers, students, and faculty. The first year law students were particularly enthusiastic about this opportunity to hear star faculty on the panel. Some were heard to say they would have been happy to have this program continue for two or three hours. The law school surprised attendees with a nice, informal reception afterwards.

*By Andrea Morris Gruhl*

### ***Help Plan for the Next 90 Years of the League!***

Some things never change even in these challenging economic times. The League of Women Voters Education Fund continues to be at the forefront of public policy issue education which allows citizens to thoughtfully engage in the democratic process. By making a gift of cash or securities of \$5,000 or more to the LWVEF Pooled Income Fund, you can receive an immediate income tax deduction for a portion of the gift's value and continue earning a quarterly return on the interest earned for life. Best of all, you can name your state and/or local League, along with the LWVEF, to benefit from the residual funds when you're gone. For more information, please contact the Development office at 202-263-1355 or [plannedgiving@lww.org](mailto:plannedgiving@lww.org).

ENJOY LIGHT LUNCH,  
SCREENING OF  
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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2010  
1:00 PM

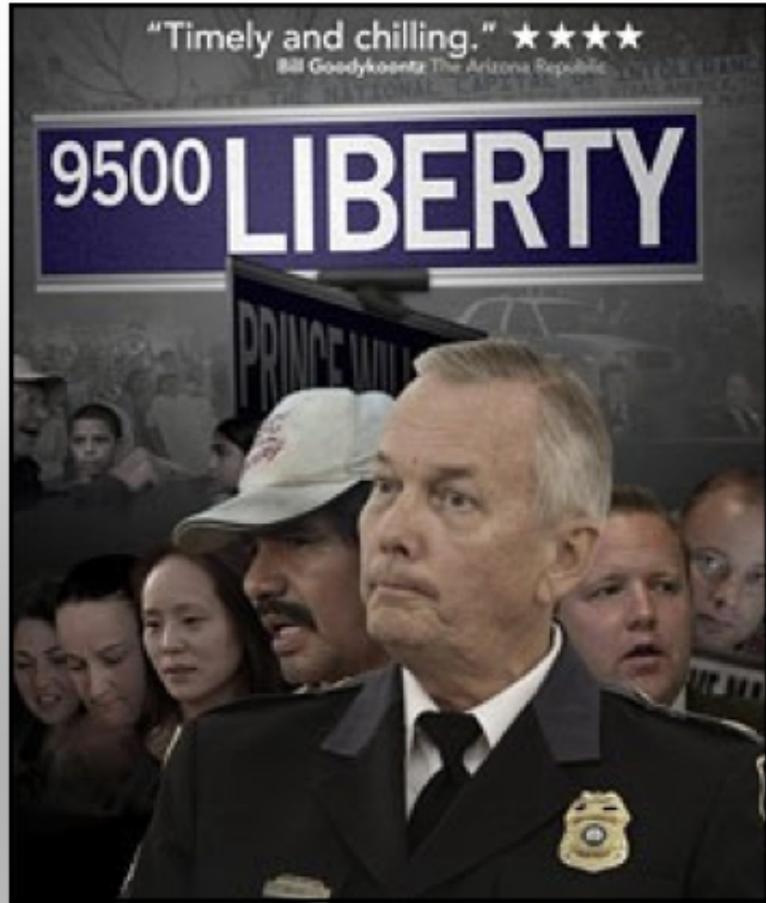
AFI Silver Theatre  
8633 Colesville Road  
Silver Spring, MD

**PANELISTS**

J. Thomas Manger  
Chief of Police  
Montgomery County, MD  
and  
Others to be announced

**MODERATOR**

Don Mooers, Attorney  
Immigration & Nationality  
Law



*John Grisham, author, writes:*

*"9500 Liberty makes it clear that when we, as a nation  
of immigrants, debate the immigration issue, we are  
defining our very identity as Americans."*



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VOTERS OF  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
MARYLAND**

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FALL FUNDRAISER & RAFFLE**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

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Yes, I/We will attend the LWVMC film and discussion on  
December 5, 2010.

\_\_\_\_ TOTAL NUMBER OF TICKETS @ \$35 EACH \$ \_\_\_\_

\$ \_\_\_\_ DONATION TO LWVMC-CITIZEN EDUCATION FUND

\$ \_\_\_\_ TOTAL ENCLOSED

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE AND MAIL TO: LWVMC-CEF,  
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