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Saint Louis Urban Debate League: “Challenging Minds, Changing Lives”

If you attended the League’s fall kickoff meeting on Sept. 9, you know what a phenomenal program the Saint Louis Urban Debate League is. For those who didn’t, we want to share this inspirational story.

Some 70+ Leaguers and friends heard the story of the Urban Debate League in St. Louis public high schools from its executive director, Ravi Rao, and two young, most-impressive debaters: Olivia Huddleston-Boatman and Isaac Singleton Jr., sophomores and debate partners at Metro Classical High School.

The students, in their second year in the program, demonstrated their presentation skills with their explanation of the value of program -- a program that challenges students through thorough research, study and preparation for debate tournaments.

For Olivia and Isaac, the Urban Debate League develops public speaking and debating skills, including both the affirmative and opposing positions as well as provides an opportunity to meet people. Asked about their favorite experience, Olivia commented, hers was the feeling of making “an-out-of-the-park argument;” for Isaac, it’s interrogating the opposition.

In his presentation, Mr. Rao cited some important facts about debate programs, and the St. Louis League in particular. **Debate programs:**

- prepare future citizens
- increase literacy -- 25% increase over non-debating peers, after one year
- increase the graduation rate -- virtually 100% (vs. 50% national average)
- increase the number of students going to college -- 75%, four year college matriculation rate
- increase in GPA - -10%

This year’s debate topic, which will be the same for students across the country, is “Resolved: that the United States Federal Government should substantially increase social services for people living in poverty in the United States”.

Currently in its 2nd year in the St. Louis Public Schools, 10 schools are participating this year. As stated in the Debate League brochure, the program is “committed to providing the academic and social benefits of rigorous, competitive policy debate opportunities that students in suburban school districts often enjoy to the students in urban public school districts. We believe policy debate to be among the most effective tools at narrowing achievement gaps by incentivizing study skills through competition.” (cont. on p. 2)

FROM THE CO - PRESIDENT

You may or may not have heard the phrase, "Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport". With the events of the last month you might think this is a new saying, but actually I may have heard it 20 years ago. It is one I think we should revive today. Our democracy works best if we all participate. We can not just sit on the sidelines or in the stands and watch what is happening on the field of our government. Registering and voting are one of the first things we all do. But there is more and not all that difficult either. We have many issues happening all around us on the field of government. The issues vary from health care, the environment, cap and trade, climate change, immigration, safety, Afghanistan, financial regulation, taxes, smoke-free places, funding of social services, roads, transportation --- and there are many more. I am sure you could add to this list.

Democracy embraces all levels from national, state and local. We need to do more than just watch TV or read newspapers. Each one of us should contact our legislators - national, state or local and let them know what we think about the issues. Do you know five or 10 calls or letters may be all a legislator hears from constituents, and what if you were one of those five - 10?

The easiest is to just pick up the phone and call. The message can be brief, you do not need to know all the details. You do not need to know a bill number. Let the legislator know the two or three things that you think the legislation should accomplish or the things you oppose. That is it and will probably take less than five minutes and cost maybe a dollar or so. Democracy is worth that. If you want to say more, an email sent through the legislators website is a great way to participate. It is up to you. Our democracy depends on us.

If you do not know the phone number of your legislators, the League office can readily provide that information, call 961-6969.

Linda McDaniel, Co-President

Pizza and Politics Series

LWV co-sponsors these community forums in collaboration with FOCUS St. Louis and Metropolis. This series is being hosted by the Holden Public Policy Forum at Webster University at the Sunnen Lounge Webster University, 175 Edgar Rd., Webster Groves, parking in Lot H or on-street on Garden at 6 pm.

Wed. September 23 - former state representative Margaret Donnelly, Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services Director

Wed. October 28 - Jon Hagler, Missouri Department of Agriculture Director

Wed. Nov. 18 - The Term Limit Debate: Representative Chris Kelly and Ed Martin

3rd annual "Women Walk Before They Run"

- A Celebration of Women's Leadership

Sat. September 26 - 9 a.m., Tilles Park, McKnight and Litzinger Rds. Ladue; Fee: \$20 (\$25 after 9/18)

Proceeds support the UMSL's Institute's 21st Century Leadership Academy. For more information or to register, visit: www.umsl.edu/~iwpl

Urban Debate League (cont. from p. 1)

"Debate works", Mr. Rao explained, improving grades and vocabulary, making students more engaged and letting them make more friends. Involvement in the program also includes six, two-day tournaments each year and a week-long debate institute at St. Louis University. The program has trained some 20 teacher/coaches. More than 100 students participated last year. The goal is to increase student participants 100% this year.

The League is a partnership of the St. Louis Public Schools, the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues, and a local private non-profit advisory board. LWVSTL board member and debater Kathleen Farrell, Professor and Chair of the Communication Dept. at St. Louis University, is a member of the board.

If you'd like more information on how you might get involved, including making a financial contribution to volunteering to assist the program, contact ravirao@urbandebate.org.

Fall tournaments: Fridays and Saturdays: Oct. 23-24, Nov. 6-7, and Dec. 11-12. Tournaments are open to public.

For more information on the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues click on

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/06/05/60minutes/main557188.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody>, a "60 Minutes" that highlights the program in Baltimore: "Debate Makes A Comeback At Inner-City Schools".

St. Louis County ELECTIONS NOV. 3

- All require a simple majority.

CITY OF CHARLACK - Prop. A

\$.10 annual license tax for each sq. ft. of commercial warehouse space.

CITY OF FLORISSANT - Prop. A

increase the annual business license fees for various commercial businesses.

CITY OF KIRKWOOD - PROP. 1

prohibits "smoking in enclosed places of employment and enclosed public places for the purpose of reducing workers and citizens exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke".

VILLAGE OF UPLANDS PARK - PROP 1

every supplier of telephones and every person engaged in the business of providing telephone communication services or similar services to pay a monthly license fee of eight (8) percent of the gross receipts derived from the transaction of business in the Village for each monthly period following January 1, 2010.

CITY OF VALLEY PARK - PROP. 1

an annual business license tax on the occupation of operating a billboard in an amount equal to two percent (2%) of gross annual revenue from each billboard structure operated.

VILLAGE OF VELDA VILLAGE HILLS - PROP 1

imposes a gross receipts utility tax on the gross receipts of public utilities of 5%.

LINDBERGH R-VIII SCHOOL DISTRICT - PROP L

authorizes each year to eliminate the reduction in the operating levy for school purposes as provided under Missouri law.

RIVERVIEW GARDENS SCHOOL DISTRICT, SPECIAL BOND ELECTION -PROP R

- 4/7 MAJORITY REQUIRED

authorizes district to borrow (\$15,000,000) for acquiring, constructing, renovating, expanding, improving, furnishing and equipping school sites, buildings and related facilities and issue GOBONDS for the payment thereof, resulting in an estimated increase to the debt service property tax levy of \$-0/\$100AV. If approved, the adjusted debt service levy is estimated to remain unchanged from the current debt service levy of \$1.01/\$100 AV.

SAVE THE DATE

APRIL 24, 2010

The Celebration of the LWV'S

90th Anniversary

SPECIAL ELECTIONS **to fill Vacancies**

St. Louis City and Co. Nov. 3

Polls open from 6 am to 7 pm.

St. Louis City - to fill the vacancy in the 4th State Senatorial district, caused by the resignation of State Senator Jeff Smith. Information: <http://www.stlelections.com/>

St. Louis County - to fill the vacancy in the 73rd State Representative District caused by the resignation of Steve Brown. Information: <http://www.stlouisco.com/elections/>

Candidates selected by party leaders and file for office by Sept. 29th.

Info: Secretary of State's site: www.sos.mo.org

*Absentee Balloting Begins - Sept 30
Registration Closes - Oct 7*

TRIBUTES & MEMORIALS

IN HONOR OF

Joyce Guard's marriage to Harold Schuetz from Sydell Shayer.

IN MEMORIAM

Rachel Haskell from Jeanne Morrel-Franklin.

Tributes & memorials can be sent to the League office: LWVIS 8706 Manchester Rd. Ste. 104, St. Louis MO 63144.

Please include your name, the person to be notified with address and occasion. Contributions to LWVIS are tax-deductible.

METRO NEWS (USPS-400-810) is published quarterly by the League of Women Voters Information Service, 8706 Manchester Rd., Ste. 104, St. Louis, MO 63144, 961-6869. Periodicals Postage paid at St. Louis, MO. Subscription is \$1.00 per year. The dues members pay and contributors include \$1 for the cost of a subscription to the Metro News. Postmaster: send address changes to Metro News, c/o League of Women Voters Information Service, 8706 Manchester Rd., Ste. 104, St. Louis, MO 63144. Agnes Garino, Editor

Voters in St. Louis County will see two propositions on the Nov. 3rd ballot.
Both require simple majority.

PROPOSITION E-911 - Emergency Communications

Shall St. Louis County establish an emergency communications system fund to establish, operate and maintain an emergency communications system and for which St. Louis County shall levy a sales tax of one-tenth of one percent, to be paid into the fund for that purpose? YES NO

The tax would raise \$13.6 million a year to finance a program that would include:
•An \$80 million countywide emergency communications system, including radios, towers, and computer equipment.

•The spending of \$10 million for equipment to allow police and fire dispatchers to know the location of callers using cell phones. The new system would meet a federal requirement that operators of emergency communications system reduce their radio bandwidths by Dec. 31, 2012.

• A \$10 million upgrade to the county's siren system.

Cost: e.g. \$20,000 vehicle purchase = additional \$20 in sales tax.

Background: In November 2008, county voters rejected a 1.85 cent countywide use tax that included money for the communications system. Nearby jurisdictions -- Jefferson County and St. Charles County-- recently approved sales taxes for communications systems.

PROPOSITION N - To prohibit smoking in enclosed public places.

Shall the Revised Ordinances of St. Louis County be amended by enacting and adding thereto a prohibition of smoking in enclosed public places in St. Louis County, all as set forth in Exhibit A of Ordinance No. 24,105 on file with the St. Louis County Administrative Director and the St. Louis County Board of Election Commissioners? YES NO

The St. Louis County Council passed the ordinance and the St. Louis County Executive signed the bill. A court order put the issue on the November ballot. Adds to County Ordinances Chapter 605, "INDOOR CLEAN AIR CODE." on line at: <http://www.stlouisco.com/spotlightshowall.cfm>.

Basic components of bill:

- scope - applies in all unincorporated and incorporated areas of St. Louis County
- purpose - "to promote the health, safety and welfare of the residents of St. Louis County by decreasing exposure to secondhand smoke; and to create smoke-free environments for workers, patrons and visitors to places of employment and all other public places within the County."
- 605.040 - Prohibitions of smoking in enclosed places of employment and other public places. Smoking is prohibited in such places as libraries, educational facilities, health care facilities, entertainment and recreation places, theaters, shopping centers, retail, restaurants, convention facilities, places of work. Refer to ordinance. Also prohibits: smoking on sidewalks, driveways and other open areas within 15 ft of building entrances.
- requires posting "No Smoking" signs or symbol.
- "It shall be the responsibility of employers to provide smoke-free workplaces for all employees." 605.050.
- Establishments may declare entire establishments and facilities, and outdoor areas.
- Exceptions include: private residences, private clubs, permanently designated smoking rooms not to exceed 20% of guest rooms, cigar bars (with restrictions), casino gaming area, drinking establishments (must post on exterior a "certificate of exemption issued by the County Dept. of Revenue), and areas designated and posted as smoking areas at Lambert Airport. 605.060
- Does not preclude more extensive prohibitions by property owners, business operator or public entity.
- Enforced by St. Louis County Department of Health
- Penalties: if convicted individuals \$50 for each offense; employers up to \$100 -1st offense; up to \$200 - 2nd offense within one year; up to \$500 for each additional violation within one year.
- Effective: January 2, 2011.

Proponents arguments:

- it's a health issue
- St. Louis County joins many cities, states, and countries in approving smoking restrictions
- better than no restrictions, although would like a tougher bill
- employees do not have the option of leaving a facility that allows smoking, could be forced or need to resign
- County could lead the way for Missouri to pass a state-wide law

Opponents' arguments:

- doesn't go far enough, too many, unfair exemptions, weak bill would be hard to improve
- restrictions should also be in neighboring jurisdictions, i.e. St. Louis City and St. Charles County
- should be a state-wide restriction
- interferes with individual and employer rights
- people can choose NOT to go to places that permit smoking.