



TENNESSEE VOTER

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee

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Winter 2014

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Presidents' Message

First of all—LWVTN is so thankful for all our local Leagues and members statewide who worked very hard throughout the midterm election season to help our fellow citizens. We've had a tremendously positive response to our information on the Amendments, which was posted on the LWVTN website and at Vote411.org. We wish we could have reached even more people, but we learned a lot this cycle and will apply it next time.

Since its inception in 2010, **Vote411.org** has recorded a 1,675.8 percent increase in number of sessions, so we must be doing something right! Many thanks to **Judy Raines** for coordinating the LWVTN www.Vote411.org portal and to local Leagues that provided their voters with region-specific information. This process is unique, and it is League.

Unfortunately, we have lots more work to do. In Tennessee only 29 percent of registered voters turned out. Going forward, we must make sure everyone who *can* vote gets to do so, and for all those who *can't* or *don't* vote—we need to learn why. We are in the business of making a difference in Tennessee!

Throughout this Voter you will see evidence of the work that we all do. The Action Committee has finalized the draft of the 2015 League Priorities for the upcoming legislative session, and, once approved by the Board, we ask you to share these priorities with your legislators. Between now and the January start of the General Assembly, we should talk to our legislators. Let them know how we feel about issues and find out their perspectives. Coffees, breakfasts, forums—however each League chooses: reach out to Tennessee's governor, senators, and representatives. And let LWVTN know how it goes. Don't forget that all League members can attend the Action Committee meetings in person or by conference call. If you want to be on the list for emails about upcoming meetings, contact Action Chair **Barbara Gay** (see her column).

We hope you have taken the time to respond to the Action Survey sent out late November. If you value knowledge about particular issues, this will put you on the path to receiving it. Contact the office if you have not received the Action Survey email.

It is not too early to put the state Convention on your calendar: April 24 to 25 in Murfreesboro. We have returned to the two day format to enable most of you to participate in this important meeting (see **Michele Brandenburg's** article).

It has been a busy year. We wish you all the best in your continuing League work and look forward to your successes! Let us know how we can help.

In League, Co-presidents **Margie Parsley** and **Jo Singer**

Mark Your Calendar for LWVTN Spring Convention

April 25-26, 2015 in Murfreesboro, Tennessee at the

DoubleTree by Hilton • 1850 Old Fort Parkway

by Director Michele Brandenburg

Hosted by **League of Women Voters of Murfreesboro**, the 2015 LWVTN Convention will return to a two day format—much preferred in feedback from members. Participation in Convention is important. It's when LWVTN elects state Board members and makes decisions on budget, program, and League studies. This is your opportunity to help guide the Tennessee League's work for 2015-2016. You will also have the opportunity to voice your concerns about the League to both incoming and outgoing board members. Your voice is very important to ensure a vital League.

The Steering Committee is planning a dynamic agenda that will address pertinent topics. The Saturday evening dinner will include presentation of the Martha Ragland Award (see **Amy Greene**'s article for details).

Look for Convention registration and agenda details in the spring issue of the *Tennessee Voter* to be published the first week of March. And if you can volunteer to help, contact **Michele Brandenburg** at 865-659-5318.

Martha Ragland Award

by Director Amy Greene

The League of Women Voters of Tennessee looks forward to presenting the **Martha Ragland Award** to an outstanding League member at the Spring Convention on April 25, 2015 in Murfreesboro. This award was first presented to JoAnn Bennett in 1995 at the LWVTN's 75th Anniversary Gala. It has since been given out every other year to a League member who has demonstrated committed service to their state and local Leagues, as well as their community.

The most recent recipient was **Judy Poulson** in 2013. Currently LWVTN secretary, she has served the state board for many years. She has served several local League boards as well as the LWVUS national board. Poulson also has represented the League on the Tennessee Advisory Committee on Open Government, the Tennessee Help America Vote Act (TN HAVA), and on the Tennessee Commemorative Woman Suffrage Commission, which organized a celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment's ratification on August 18, 1920 guaranteeing women's right to vote.

Each local League may nominate a member who is active in upholding the League's principles and positions, along with leadership qualities as **Martha Ragsdale Ragland** did through her activism. For more information about Ragland's life, visit <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1097>. Nomination forms are currently being sent to each local League and also are posted on the LWVTN website: <http://www.lwvtn.org/>. Completed entries are due by February 1, 2015. They may be mailed to: LWVTN Martha Ragland Award, PO Box 158369, Nashville, TN 37215-8369, or emailed to Amy Greene at amg0721@gmail.com.

What Does the LWVTN Do With Our Money?!

by Treasurer Marian Ott

The per-member-payment (PMP) that local Leagues send to the LWVTN is a significant portion of a local League's annual budget (though less than the PMP paid to the LWVUS). In good League-like fashion, the money is carefully spent and benefits local Leagues and their membership. Major expense items in the LWV Tennessee Budget include:

- **Insurance for Leagues in the state:** The LWVTN pays for a general liability insurance policy that covers LWVTN as well as all the local Leagues. If a local League needs a "certificate of insurance" for an event, it possible to get one based on this policy. (Contact LWVTN Treasurer **Marian Ott** at treasurer@lwvtn.org for details.)
- **State Lobbyist:** The LWVTN retains a lobbyist to work on behalf of state LWV issues. The focus for the lobbyist's effort is based on an annual statewide membership survey conducted by the LWVTN Action Committee. Frequent scheduled conference calls are held during the legislative session so LWVTN members across the state can participate remotely in Action Committee work.
- **Administrative Support:** While LWVTN has not had an office in years, it has a contract for administrative support. This includes work with the Action Committee Action Alerts, on weekly Legislative Updates during the Legislative Session, and assistance to the LWVTN Board in communicating with members via the Emma email service.
- **Special Advocacy:** In both the August 2014 elections (judicial retention) and November 2014 (Tennessee constitutional amendments), LWVTN spent extra effort (and money) on advocating for LWVTN positions, primarily by advertising

VOTE411 and the LWVTN.org websites on radio spots across the state.

The PMP paid to LWVTN is less than a third of the funds needed for its annual budget, yet LWVTN has not raised the local PMP in many years. Instead, there has been a renewed fund-raising effort, and a deliberate policy to use reserves. For more information about the LWVTN finances, please contact **Marian Ott** at treasurer@lwvtn.org.

LWV Oak Ridge Receives Major Grant for Environmental Education

The **New Mexico Community Foundation** has awarded **LWV Oak Ridge** (LWVOR) a \$19,930 grant to conduct environmental education in the Oak Ridge community. Such local League grants can be facilitated through the LWVTN Education Fund, which holds a 501(c)(3) tax designation. The goal of this grant is to expand knowledge and understanding of environmental management processes and remediation actions in the Oak Ridge community. As part of the grant, LWVOR will conduct two major education programs.

The first is a **Citizen's Academy**—modeled after one established by LWV Knoxville/Knox County (LWVK/KC)—which will provide areas of the community, not part of the Department of Energy (DOE), insight into how the environmental management process works, the constraints on the decisions that can be made, and how and when stakeholder inputs must be made to the DOE and their contractors. In addition to presentations and roundtable discussions, the Academy will offer site visits and hands-on activities to directly involve participants in collecting information and assessing for themselves current areas of concern.

The second educational project is **Rainbow Academy**—an environmental day at Rainbow Camp, an Oak Ridge summer camp for K-12 students. The Rainbow Academy will provide educational information for both the campers and their parents. This effort is designed with an emphasis on reaching minority community sectors.

Both efforts involve development of various age-specific materials designed for technical and non-technical audiences. The content is being prepared for all learning styles: reading, hearing, and doing and also will be translated into Spanish.

Thanks To Our Contributors!

by **Treasurer Marian Ott**

We are pleased to recognize our stellar LWVTN contributors from July 1, 2014 through November 15, 2014. Your contributions make the LWVTN's work possible—Thank you!

Contributions to LWVTN Lobbyist Fund

Annette Bickers * Dr. Elaine Breslaw * Berdelle Campbell * Mary Ann Davidson
Charles Davis * Lee Fairbend * Sarah Faulkner * Jo Ann Garrett * Mark and Jane Heald
Victoria Heil * Marian Ott * Judith Poulson * Gayle Ray * Mary Ann Reeves
Marjorie Reynolds * Nancy Stewart * Carol Straughn * Roberta Toth * Kent and Karen Weeks
In addition various other Nashville members contributed with their dues renewal.

Contributions to the LWVTN Operating Fund

Bob and Sue Bredensteiner * Charles and Marion Burger * Chloe Cerutti * Stewart Clifton * Alfred Denny
Patty Derycke * Nancy Dorman * Virginia Dunlap * Glenda Eastridge * Sarah Faulkner * Linda Flood
Barbara Gay * Amy Greene * Barbara Haynes * Victoria Heil * Seiko Igarashi * Nancy Lofaro
Theresa and Jack Love * Mary Maduska * Peggy Maguire * Joyce and Robert Manyik * Doris Martinson
Marian Ott * Margie Parsley * Judith Poulson * Anne Roos * Marti Salk * Marcia Silverstein * Mary Sullivan
Kent and Karen Weeks * Shirley Wooten

Contributions to the LWVTN Education Fund

Charles Davis * Linda Dyer Doran * Sarah Faulkner * Victoria Heil * Margaret Norris, MD
Stephanie Smullen * Jane Wheatcraft

LWVTN Action Committee Update

by **Action Director Barbara Gay**

Thank you to all League members who worked so hard on the Amendments during the midterm election cycle. Amendment 2, which League positions support, passed and the visibility of the **Vote411** digital Voter Guide website increased.

The **State Action Committee** has revised LWVTN's nine Priority Issues for 2015, simplifying and clarifying the language. This document will be available soon on the LWVTN home page. We will provide more information on each issue for those interested in the history and in-depth background reports. We hope each local League across the state will have at least one member join our meetings via conference call if not in person; we ask those representatives to find a substitute when they are unavailable.

An exciting group of **Action Issue Chairs** has stepped up to help follow the 2015 Legislative Session. Issue Chairs keep each of the Action subcommittees informed about relevant filed legislation. They also help write the **Action Alerts** sent to LWVTN members and attend the State Action Committee meetings (in person or via phone). These meetings are scheduled every other week on Monday at 11:30 am Central Time in LWVTN Lobbyist **Stewart Clifton**'s office; the next meeting is Monday, January 5, 2015. Issue Chairs for 2015 are:

- Education: **Debby Gould** and **Karen Weeks**, both Nashville
- Elections: **Hazel Thornton**, Nashville
- Environment: **Barbara Devaney**, Nashville
- Health Care Reform: Open
- Immigration: **Mary Ann Reeves**, Oak Ridge
- Judicial Selection: **Jane Wheatcraft**, Hendersonville
- Open Government: **Vivian Shipe**, Knoxville
- Responsible Budget: **Barbara Devaney**, Nashville
- Revenues: **Diana Page** and **Karen Weeks**, both Nashville

While **Barbara Devaney** has graciously volunteered to cover both Environment and Responsible Budget, we are recruiting a co-chair to assist with each of those positions. Barbara plans to attend many of the Finance Committee meetings for the state Senate and House but needs another League member to share this commitment. Regular attendance at these important meetings lets legislators know that their decisions have an impact on real lives and remind them groups such as the League care and are concerned. Please contact **Barbara Gay** at 615/297-4145 or barbara.b.gay@gmail.com, if you have questions or are interested in working with the Environment, Responsible Budget, or Health Care Reform subcommittees.

With League support, Lobbyist Clifton sends a weekly Legislative Report to all LWVTN members via Emma email. The report details legislative process and action on all bills pertaining to LWVTN priorities. The annual Action Committee survey has been emailed to all members. We look forward to every member signing up to receive information on at least one of the priority issues this year. Legislators respond when they hear from voters (especially constituent voters) and appreciate hearing from League members about priority issues with background information (remember state legislators do not have research staffs).

Also Save the Date & RSVP for the Annual Clifton Government Relations Legislative Skills Training & Tour

**Tuesday January 6, 2015, 9:30 am to noon in Legislative Plaza—Room #16
by LWVTN Lobbyist Stewart Clifton**

Stewart Clifton writes: You are receiving this invitation because I think you might be interested in participating. I'm also sending to some friends and past participants who might want to recommend to friends and co-workers. Please **forward** or let me know contact info and we will send to those you suggest unless we know they have already attended. Please note that this skills training is on a fairly basic level. Experienced lobbyists may know most of what we will discuss. If you have already attended, please be aware that there is no huge reason to attend again, although I do learn a few things every year and try to incorporate new information.

This free, **introductory-level** legislative skills training will end around 11:15 or 11:30. It will be followed by a tour of Legislative Plaza and the state Capitol, which will end around noon. Obviously, the tour is optional but many find it helpful and I make up a bunch of stuff that may or may not be true as commentary, so you are encouraged to stick around for it.

The workshop will include:

- Overview of how the TN General Assembly operates
- Discussion of the current political and legislative climate in Tennessee
- Practical tips for lobbying and having effective meetings with elected officials
- Question and answer opportunities
- A current legislator sharing how advocates can be most successful and what they wish people knew about the General Assembly
- Maybe a little fun

This workshop/tour is presented from a nonpartisan perspective and does not talk much about specific issues. Still, it is for people who are broadly committed to the notion that we are all in this together and who want to work for a more just, thoughtful and tolerant society.

Please respond by email if you're planning to attend. Send name and organizational affiliation if any and/or issue(s) on which you plan to work. **Don't just show up.** In the event of too many interested participants, priority will be given to early responders. We will also provide some directions and information about parking to those registering. Contact: **Stewart Clifton**, stewartclifton@comcast.net or 615/305-2946.

LWV Education Issues Blog Now Available

In June 2014 at the LWVUS Convention in Dallas, an Education Caucus was held by the LWV Florida (LWVF) to gauge interest in sharing information about school choice and accountability. Ninety-two League members from 32 states attended the Caucus. It was agreed to form a national committee to track legislation and advocacy efforts regarding privatization of our public schools.

LWVF has launched a League Education Issues blog. They invite you to subscribe via <http://lwveducation.com>. Please contribute so members nationwide can better understand what is occurring in each state.

Contact **Sue Legg**, PhD, chair of the LWVF School Choice Project with any questions.



Reprinted from **THE NASHVILLE VOTER**

The League of Women Voters of Nashville

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www.LWVnashville.org

Medicaid Expansion in Tennessee (October 2014)

by LWVN Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

Just How Expensive is Politics

In an October 13 *Tennessean* article entitled, "Haslam must walk a fine political line on Medicaid," **Frank Daniels** describes the political challenges facing the governor as he considers and publicly articulates his thoughts about the possibility of Medicaid expansion. In May of this year, the legislature placed the expansion ball in their own court by requiring legislative approval of any decisions relating to Medicaid expansion. Governor **Bill Haslam** now has to craft and negotiate a plan that will expand access to health coverage for low income Tennesseans and pass legislative muster. Daniels ends his piece mentioning the 800 plus lives that could be saved through Medicaid expansion and states the following: "Politics should not be so expensive."

There is hope that after November elections, legislators will be less pressed to fight expansion and more inclined to work with the Governor to craft a Tennessee-branded expansion plan. While we wait and hope for anti-expansion heads to cool in the post-election season, let's review the ongoing costs of the decision to NOT expand Medicaid in Tennessee.

Money

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the federal government funds 100 percent of the cost of Medicaid expansion through 2016. The federal share then gradually declines to 90 percent by 2020. According to the Tennessee Division of Health Care Finance Administration, Tennessee would spend \$200 million in state funds but receive **\$6.5 billion from the federal government**.

Jobs

The Affordable Care Act contains several cost containment provisions including cuts to Medicare reimbursement. The Medicaid expansion, by reducing the amount of uncompensated care hospitals provide, was intended to offset loss of revenues from ACA cost containment provisions. While it appears that ACA cost containment has worked to slow the growth of health costs—health care price inflation is now at its lowest level in 50 years—hospitals throughout the state are struggling to provide the same level of uncompensated care with reduced revenues. Vanderbilt Medical Center, Baptist Memorial Health System, Erlanger Health System, and many rural hospitals throughout the state have had to

address budget deficits through layoffs, hiring freezes, and other cost containment measures. **This amounts to lost jobs, understaffed medical facilities, and injury to local economies.**

Lives

In a Harvard study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2012, researchers compared mortality and other variables in three states that expanded Medicaid and states that did not expand Medicaid. In this study, researchers found that Medicaid expansions in three states were associated with a significant reduction in adult mortality, specifically a 6.1 percent reduction in all-cause mortality. The greatest reductions in mortality occurred among older adults, nonwhites, and residents in poorer counties. When researchers at the University of Memphis applied these results to Tennessee, they learned that **TENNESSEE MEDICAID EXPANSION WOULD RESULT IN 853 FEWER DEATHS PER YEAR.**

Lower Rate of Uninsured

According to a recently conducted Gallop-Healthways Well-Being survey, our neighboring states of Arkansas and Kentucky lead the pack with the sharpest reductions in the uninsured rate since the ACA insurance mandate took effect at the beginning of the year. In Arkansas, the uninsured rate dropped 10.1 percentage points between January 2013 and mid-year 2014. In Kentucky, the uninsured rate declined 8.5 percentage points. **Results from this survey show substantial reductions in the uninsured rate for all states that implemented Medicaid expansions and state-run health exchanges compared to states that opted out of both these actions.**

Timely Access to Medical Services for Vulnerable People

New Medicaid enrollees are more likely to be medically vulnerable—individuals who self-report fair or poor health, people who are older and non-white. **A decision by state leadership to opt out of expansion locks out folks who need health care the most.** According to the Harvard study cited above, Medicaid expansion resulted in a 21 percent reduction in delayed care.

Public Trust

According to a December 2013 Vanderbilt poll, a substantial majority of Tennessee voters (63 percent) support Medicaid expansion. Many of Tennessee's physicians, hospitals, nurses, community health centers, and academic medical centers support expansion. Individuals and families with health care needs and the inability to pay market prices for private plan premiums also support the expansion.

The state's inaction on Medicaid expansion can weaken public trust, particularly since the state has had to recently defend a backlog of Medicaid applications and its treatment of eligible, but not yet enrolled people. Finally, as more and more "red" states such as Arizona, Utah, and Pennsylvania implement expansion or expansion look-a-likes, the pressure builds for Tennessee to get onboard. Should Governor **Bill Haslam** move forward with a plan to expand Medicaid, he will find eleven other Republican governors (or maybe more depending on the timeline) **have already taken advantage of an opportunity for their citizens that's too good to pass up.**



Health Care Reform and Medicaid Expansion in Tennessee (November 2014)

by LWVN Health Care Director Rashonda Lewis

ACA Enrollment Update

The second **Affordable Care Act Healthcare Marketplace** enrollment period opened November 15 and so far is running much more smoothly than last year's rocky roll out. The **healthcare.gov** website has been redesigned for easier plan shopping and faster enrollment. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that 13 million people will sign up during the current enrollment period. The initial 2014 enrollment period ran six months, however this time around consumers have only three months to enroll in a plan. Enrollment ends February 15, 2015.

As the new open enrollment period begins, there are a few important things to keep in mind:

- **IT PAYS TO SHOP AROUND.** This year's Healthcare Marketplace includes over 60 new health plan carriers, expanded provider networks, more price options within tiers (Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum) and increased premiums for many existing carriers. An individual or family tax credit amount could be different this time around too due to changes in income or family structure. We strongly encourage individuals and families without insurance and those currently enrolled in a Marketplace plan to visit healthcare.gov, review plan options, assess tax credit eligibility, and select the best option for you or your family.

- **TAX PENALTIES FOR GOING WITHOUT COVERAGE WILL BE HIGHER THIS TIME AROUND.** The 2014 tax penalty for opting out of coverage was \$95 for a single person. The 2015 penalty is \$325 or up to 2 percent of a household's income, whichever is higher. The law allows exemptions for people who do not file a tax return due to low earnings, households where insurance would cost more than 8 percent of household income, and for certain groups that have experienced hardship.
- **HELP IS AVAILABLE.** Get Covered Nashville has enlisted a cadre of volunteers to help people navigate healthcare.gov throughout open enrollment. For more information, including locations for application assistance, visit www.getcoveredtenn.org or call 615/724-1339.

Supporting Tennesseans in the Medicaid GAP on Legislative Plaza

On November 10, Medicaid expansion supporters rallied at Legislative Plaza in front of the Capitol with three families impacted by Tennessee's Medicaid Gap. The beautiful sun-filled day belied the severity of the conversation. **Linda and Larry Drain** described his postponing surgery and then their being forced to formally separate after 33 years of marriage in order to ensure Linda's continued TennCare eligibility for a seizure disorder. **Michele Fardan** told of losing her 37-year-old daughter, **Monika Laird**, in July to a pulmonary embolism because without insurance, she went too late to the hospital. And **David Adcox** described the incapacitating pain of degenerative spine disease without surgery because Tennessee has not expanded Medicaid benefits.

Media and supporters accompanied the four to the Capitol entrance as they took a book with nearly 48,000 signatures to Governor Haslam.



Tennessee Legislative Plaza and Capitol



Larry Drain speaks with the media



Supporters



Michele Fardan reflects



Merilee Wineinger offers an invocation

Medicaid Expansion

Governor **Bill Haslam** is reported to be in continued talks with Washington about Medicaid expansion for uninsured workers in Tennessee. The Governor has stated that he would like to make a decision before the 2015 Legislative Session starts in January. Results of the midterm elections nationwide and in Tennessee, however, continue to make expansion a difficult sell with legislators. The November 20 *Tennessean* reported that **Darin Gordon**, director of TennCare, told a group of medical students at Meharry Medical College this week that: "Gov. Bill Haslam gave him

the task in March 2013 to come up with a ‘Tennessee Plan’ that will satisfy the federal government for Medicaid expansion and simultaneously get past state legislators who don’t want anything to do with Obamacare.

“I told the governor, ‘I can tell you exactly what the federal government is going to do, and I can tell you exactly what the legislature is going to do,’ ” Gordon said. “Those things can’t be further apart. [The governor] said, ‘I have a task for you. I want you to thread the needle. Go right in the middle. Find something that has a chance that addresses both sides of concerns.’ That has not been easy.”

Gordon reportedly continued, saying: “discussions were ongoing, including dialogue this week. But he noted that an expansion would be a hard sell in Tennessee given the state’s experience in the mid-1990s, when it opened up TennCare under “the most ambitious expansion of health insurance the country had ever seen”— a program the state could not financially support and had to scale back” (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/health/2014/11/20/tenncare-director-tries-thread-needle-medicaid-expansion/70024868/>).

Advocates have heard the 1990’s excuse many times since Governor **Bill Haslam** declined to expand Medicaid on March 27, 2013 and continue to find it unpalatable since the Affordable Care Act provides states 100 percent federal funding through 2016 and 90 percent thereafter for new Medicaid enrollees. In Tennessee that’s some 300,000 adults who don’t have or are not the caretaker of an eligible child, are not disabled, or are not elderly. In other words, mostly low income working adults are being penalized. Since January 1, 2014, Tennessee continues to give up at least \$2.7 million in federal Medicaid expansion coverage every day.

Gordon’s comments bring to mind the Vanderbilt University poll on Medicaid expansion done in December 2013. A *Tennessean* report about the poll on December 14, 2013 stated: “Regardless of how you slice the data, the Vanderbilt poll reveals that most Tennesseans support expanding Medicaid to cover their fellow citizens of modest means. Among registered voters, 63 percent say that Medicaid ought to be expanded. It is not surprising that 89 percent of Democrats support the expansion. However, 64 percent of independents also support the expansion. Support is weakest among Republicans, but even so, nearly 42 percent of Republicans support the expansion of Medicaid.

“Among those Republicans who have an opinion on the issue, there is an important division in opinion that must be mentioned. According to the U.S. Census, the median household income in Tennessee was nearly \$43,000 in 2012. Among those Republicans who make less than the median income in the state, 67 percent support expanding Medicaid. However, only 33 percent of Republicans who make more than the median income support expansion. This income divide does not exist among independents and Democrats, since these groups support expansion regardless of wealth.

“When looking at how public opinion varies by both party and income, the only group that opposes Medicaid expansion are Republicans who make more than the median state income. This is a fact worth thinking about.” (<http://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/contributors/2013/12/15/expand-medicaid-poll-shows-voters-say-yes/4029673/>).

It is unfortunate that only 29 percent of eligible Tennesseans voted in the November midterm elections (source: United States Elections Project, University of Florida at <http://www.electproject.org/>).

