

Cook County League Adopts New Positions, Authorizes New Studies, Elects New Board Members President Stroger Addresses League

“Cook County government affects citizens every day, but they don’t realize it,” President Todd Stroger said in conclusion to his remarks following the Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Cook County. Over 100 League members and guests, representing 15 of the 16 local Leagues that make up the County League attended the event on May 21 at Brookfield Zoo. Educating citizens on just how Cook County government affects them is, of course, a key part of the mission of the Cook County League and is reflected in the activities of the League this past year, which have included a poll watching project; observing the County Board, Forest Preserve Board, and Board of Corrections; and visiting a County Board meeting and the Juvenile Court Building.

New League Positions

Chief among the activities was the completion of two studies on the structure and budget process of Cook County government. At the Annual Meeting the delegates adopted by concurrence several new and revised positions that the study committees had reached by consensus to improve county government. Among these positions are ones that stress the need for separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches of Cook County government. The League also now calls on a reduction in the number of votes needed on the County Board to override a Presidential veto from the current 4/5's, an unusually high number that makes it virtually impossible to override a veto.

As a result of observing the budget process for the last two years, the League is now calling for a budget process that is transparent, that is timely, that reflects oversight by the County Board or county departments throughout the year, and that utilizes appropriate benchmarks for assessing the budget. Another new position advocates transparency in all matters relating to the operation of Cook County government. In particular, the League is urging that a comprehensive organization chart be made available on the County’s web site, along with detailed information about the committees of the Cook County Board and employee positions. The League is also asking that all Cook County and Forest Preserve District ordinances and codes be available on the web site.

For more information about the positions, see the League’s web site at cookcounty.il.lwvnet.org. The Cook County League Board is now in the process of implementing a plan to educate and advocate for these positions (see *Get Involved* below).

New Studies

The Cook County League also approved a one-year study to review and possibly update the League’s current positions regarding juvenile justice in Cook County, as well as a two-year study of the employment practices within Cook County government. Approval of the studies was subject to getting a sufficient number of participants (see *Get Involved* below).

New Board Members

Elected to the Executive Committee of the Cook County League Board were **Donna Moore** (Homewood/Flossmoor) who will serve as Treasurer, **Cynthia Schilsky** (LaGrange Area), and **Penny Shnay** (Park Forest Area). They join continuing Executive Committee members **Sue Kravis** (Glenview) and **Millie Juskevics** (Chicago). Also elected to the Board were **Arline Doblin** (Winnetka/Northfield/Kenilworth), **Marjy Gilbert** (Palos-Orland Area), and **Betty**

Hayford (Evanston) for 2-year terms. **Peggy Boivin** (Homewood/Flossmoor) was also elected and will serve until 2008 along with continuing Board members **Priscilla Mims** (Oak Park & River Forest) and **Betty Rosenblum** (Glenview). In addition to these elected Board members, each local League in Cook County appoints a representative to attend and vote at Board meetings.

Also announced at the Annual Meeting were the recently-appointed members of the County League's Budget Committee: Chair **Bob Klonowski** (LaGrange Area), **Alicia McCray** (Park Forest), **Dolly St. Clair** (Glenview) and new Treasurer **Donna Moore**, *ex officio*. They will be preparing a two-year budget for presentation and approval at the 2008 Annual Meeting.

Tribute to Retiring Board Members

Recognition was given to retiring Executive Committee Members **Joan Ebner** (Park Ridge), **Mary Ellen Matthies** (Oak Park & River Forest) and **Dolly St. Clair** (Glenview) who have served since 2002 with Sue and Millie, and to retiring Board members **Daphne Daume** (Chicago) and **Mary Ann Tate** (Park Ridge). During the past 5 years, the Cook County League has been revitalized through their efforts, as well as those of many others.

President Stroger's Remarks

President Stroger, who took office in December of 2006, talked about his efforts to change a county government that he described as having become sluggish and reflecting a sense of entitlements. He immediately had to deal with both a short and long-term structural budget deficit with the understanding that raising property taxes was not a viable option. The budget that was passed in February that slashed about 2,000 employees and reduced department budgets has not been without controversy. The President also noted that he is planning on making changes to the budget process to reflect the fact that Commissioners are making more and more changes to what the President submits prior to the budget's passage. President Stroger predicted difficulties in arriving at a final budget in future years because of the continuing issues with costs vs. income.

In addition to talking about the budget, President Stroger also touched on steps his administration has taken to (1) improve the County's hiring practices (including strengthening the Office of Inspector General); (2) professionalize operations (such as updating the procurement code and making the procurement process electronic); (3) increase operational efficiency (such as obtaining a new electric supplier and privatizing support functions to reduce costs); (4) turn over the juvenile detention center to the oversight of the courts; (5) increase community and economic development opportunities within the county, (6) improve environmental policies (such as decreasing greenhouse gases through new lighting and experimenting with recycling old tires in road building), and (7) reorganize and restructure the way Cook County provides health care. With regard to the latter, President Stroger promised to take steps to enact the recommendations expected from the blue ribbon committee of experts in the public and private health industry he appointed. He noted that while progress has been made, it will take several years to make all the changes that are necessary.

The Cook County League will be watching and advocating to see that improvements are made.

Get Involved with the County League

All 1600 members of the 16 local Leagues within Cook County are automatically a member of the Cook County League. You can become involved by

- Joining a study committee

- * Cook County Employment Practices (2-year study)
- * Cook County Juvenile Justice Update (1-year study)

- * Joining a committee
 - * Action (to help implement the new and existing League positions)
 - * Observer Corps
 - * Voter Service Committee
 - * Fundraising Committee

- * Becoming your local League's representative to the Cook County League.

Contact the League at 312-939-5935 or at info@cookcounty.il.lwvnet.org for more information and to volunteer.