

## TRANSGENDERED MEMBER, LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

BY PHYLLIS FRYE:

My name is Phyllis Frye. I'm an attorney in Houston, Texas and I want to welcome you to the first conference, International conference, on Transgender Law and Employment Policy. Now we've got a lot of newcomers here who have not made the last two days of committee work, and we are glad you're here, but for those of you who have been here for the past two days for committee work, would you please raise your hands? (Applause)

(Here is introduction similar to those before; therefore it is skipped here.)

Before we crank it up with our two speakers, I want to tell you a story. I have been plaguing you with stories during the whole conference, and guess what, I am going to plague you with some more. But I want to tell about the League of Women Voters because it's an organization that means a lot to me.

I joined the League of Women Voters in December of 1977. One of my neighbors was a very good and supportive member of the League. She was also a very nice person, and she knew this was very early in my transition. The neighborhood was ugly -- Yeah, I guess that's a nice way to put it. She reached out, and she said why don't you come to one of our local meetings in the surrounding neighborhood.

The League became an oasis. The League became an oasis to me for a very long time, and I needed that. It was one of the few places where I could go each month where there were some nice people, and those people weren't going to give me any trash.

One of the committees I became involved with was the Natural Resources Committee. That was back in the days when the Houston League was doing studies on local flooding. They were very happy that I was there because I was a professionally licensed civil engineer from Texas A&M. They were very happy that I was there because I was the only engineer on their committee. One of the suggestions I made was to quit trying to take all the water off the streets when it flooded. Instead, realize they're going to flood. Build the roads so that they will channel the water to the bayous faster. That will be less inconvenience and the houses won't flood. They thought that was pretty good. We put it in our policy. We have been lobbying every since then, and low and behold, a couple of years later when the flood plain came in, they started building holding ponds and lowering the streets. It kind of made me feel good.

Now don't think that there were not some skeptics in the League because there were. There were also some people that didn't like me. But the League people that I've met over these 14 years are for the most part very progressive people. They're insightful people and they're concerned people.

Notice I keep saying people, rather than women because there are men who can join the League. The League is open to men. The reason why we have retained the name League of Women Voters is because we came out of the women's suffrage movement, and therefore, it goes to our history and to our roots as not being able to vote; just as NAACP has many white and Hispanic members, but it has its roots and its historical tradition.

I remember at one annual meeting -- this was before the cross-dressing ordinance was repealed -- and I asked them at the annual meeting if they could do something about the ordinance. To this day, I firmly believe that some of those League members did something. I think they did a lot of the behind the scenes work to smooth the skids. I also believe that my acceptance by the League was partially responsible for my getting an audience with the decision-makers in City Government. Probably it may have had something to do with the reason I never was arrested when I stormed the bastions of City Government trying to get rid of that damned law that made us illegal just for being who we are.

I remember my first State League convention. It was in Dallas. I was told by our local League president that I was welcome to go, but no one wanted to share a room with me. It shattered me. It really did. In tears, I called many people I knew in the League. I called the president back with a list of 20 people who were going and said they would share a room with me. So don't take peoples' garbage; okay?

At the State Convention, I challenged the League to begin to lobby against the Texas Homosexual Conduct Law. Several conventions later I won a majority of those delegates and many other state officers, and the League now is officially on record for lobbying against that law.

Several years later, two women who were in charge of the host committee for the State Convention, then it was in Houston, they were in charge and they knew all the stuff I'd taken from some state members. So what did they do? They made me the floor manager for the State Convention and I had a ball. I really did. That was their way of helping me thumb my nose at some of the State folks who were still carrying a gudge.

I have been elected several times to be leader of League neighborhood units, and I have been appointed to the Board of Directors several times. Recently I was surprised by a call from the Nominating Committee. I was asked if I would allow myself to be nominated to be one of their vice-presidents. So, I allowed my name to be placed on the slate. When the current president at that time heard that I'd been nominated, she asked me if I would start early and she'd put me in that position at the next Board meeting. So now Phyllis Frye, who is a transgender person, open and out of the closet, is the organizational vice-president of the Houston League of Women Voters.