



League of Women Voters of Albany County

February 2010

Educate

Participate

Advocate



Breakfast With Your Legislator

Saturday, February 6, 9:00 am-11:30 am

Beltrone Living Center Lakeview Restaurant, 6 Winners Circle, Colonie



Senator Breslin, Assemblymen Canestrari, Gordon, McEneny, and Reilly have been invited to join us for breakfast and discussion of priority issues for the 2010 NYS Legislative Session.

Barbara Bartoletti, LWVNY Legislative Director, will moderate.

(Look inside for 2010 State League priorities.)

To give more people the opportunity to learn about the League and NYS government, we are offering a two-for-one deal. If you bring a guest, you and your guest pay for only one breakfast!

Call or email Lois Griffin with your reservation(s).
ohgriffin@gmail.com or 765-4733

Cost is \$14.00. If you have to cancel after reserving, call Lois. She will attempt to fill your spot.
Deadline for reservations is February 3.

Directions to Lakeview Restaurant at Beltrone from Wolf Road

Going South on Wolf Road, turn left onto Metro Park Road

Going North, turn right onto Metro Park Road
(across from the Hess Station)

Left onto Winners Circle

At stop sign take a Right continuing on Winners Circle
Follow the signs for The Lakeview Restaurant & The
Beltrone Living Center

Use the Special Events Parking Area, located on the left
hand side off of Winners Circle Drive
Enter the Building at 1 South Entrance.

Redistricting Reform: Visions for NYS Future

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2:00-4:00 pm

Rockefeller Institute, 411 State St, Albany

Invited Speakers:

Governor David Paterson
NYS Legislative Leaders

Confirmed Speakers:

Dr. Gerald Benjamin, Dean, SUNY New Paltz
Blair Horner, Legislative Director, NYPIRG

Moderated by:

Susan Arbetter, Capitol Correspondent,
WCNY TV

Light Reception to celebrate LWVUS's 90th
Anniversary following panel presentation.

All welcome!

Co-sponsored by LWVNYS and
Rockefeller Institute of Government

League of Women Voters of Albany County

Website: www.lwvalbany.org Email: lwvac@lwvalbany.org

Ann Brandon, President

Carol Webster (439-1491) and Martha Kissinger (439-6833), Membership Co-Chairs

Laura Ladd Bierman, Newsletter Editor



From the President

By the time you read this, the state legislature should be gearing up to pass wonderful new ethics reform legislation. Let's hope that was the New Year's resolution of each of them League members around the state are calling on them to "Fix Albany Now!" See the enclosed flier for our legislative priorities for the 2010 legislative session. You will have the opportunity to hear from our legislators at our Breakfast Meeting on February 6th where we can exchange ideas on ethics reform, campaign finance reform, and redistricting. Bring this flier to the breakfast, read up on these issues on the state league website (lwny.org), bring a friend, and have a stimulating morning interacting with your legislators.

Thanks to each of you who responded to our finance drive letter. If you are still thinking about a donation, it's not too late! It is through the very generous donation of Bea Herman that we can offer the "2 for 1" deal for our February breakfast meeting. We know that League members are our best recruiters of new members and hope you will take us up on this offer.

We are delighted that Ruth Dinowitz will chair a committee to select two high school students from Albany County to represent our League at the 2010 Students Inside Albany Conference in April. This conference is an excellent opportunity for student participants to learn about our state government.

We also hope to generate interest in government and voting among high school students with the Vote 18 project. Some of our Albany Leaguers are preparing to launch this project in the spring. Call Maggie Moehringer for more information.

Remember, the State Voter has gone electronic. If you wish to receive it in your email (bimonthly), pass on your email address to Don Kennedy (dkennedy2@nycap.rr.com). It is still available in the printed version for \$20 for the year. Call the state League office at 465-4162.

I hope to see you on February 6th for breakfast!

Yours in League, Ann

League Diversity Policy

The LWV, in both its values and practices, affirms its belief and commitment to diversity and pluralism, which means there shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the LWV on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin or disability. The LWV recognizes that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision making. The LWV subscribes to the belief that diversity and pluralism are fundamental to the values it upholds and this inclusiveness enhances the organization's ability to respond more effectively to changing conditions and needs. The LWV affirms its commitment to reflecting the diversity of America in its Board, staff and programs.

Great Issues Group Meetings for the Winter and Spring

The Great Issues group will begin meeting on Monday, February 8, and will continue to meet on alternate Mondays through May 17. We will once again use the Great Decisions workbooks from the Foreign Policy Association as the basis for our discussions. Topics this year include Kenya/East Africa, China, Financial Crisis, Russia, Persian Gulf, Peacebuilding, and Special Envoys. Our discussions tend to be spirited. LWV members who are interested in joining can contact Katie Henrikson at 439-4308 or khenriks@nycap.rr.com.

New Members

Elise Van Allen - Albany

Suzanne Perry - Loudonville

Julie Shapiro - Albany



Welcome!

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan citizen organization that promotes the informed and active participation of citizens in government, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

This newsletter is published by the League of Women Voters of Albany County, 12 Coventry Road, Glenmont, New York 12077 and mailed to League members. The frequency of publication is as follows: one mid-summer issue followed by nine monthly issues from September to May.

League in Profile

Jan Messina

Back in July of 2008, a good friend of my family was getting married, and we were invited to the wedding. At the reception, I found myself sitting next to the bride's aunt, Maggie. Since we hadn't gotten to know each other very well having met only once or twice before, it was fun and interesting to be able to talk together. In the course of several conversations that night, Maggie spoke about her membership in the League of Women Voters. I picked up on this and asked a few questions, because I had a long standing interest in the organization primarily from things I had read in newspaper articles. I retired back in May of 2006 after over 30 years in state service, and became a volunteer in several organizations. But I didn't pursue my interest in the League right away, and my time was taken up with many things. The timing was right however, when I spoke with Maggie that night, and I joined the League shortly after that July wedding.

I find my membership in the League a wonderful way to become informed and educated. The spectrum of topics covered by the League is incredible, and the information we provide to our community is a service found nowhere else. I am proud to be a part of this effort! I attended the 2009 LWV Convention and recently was elected to be the Action VP. When I faced retirement in 2006, I knew it was important to retire TO something, not FROM something. There were so many organizations I wanted to get involved with, and the League was on my list! Although it took some time and a little help from my friend Maggie, the League is one organization that makes me feel like I am really giving back to my community in a positive, tangible way.

Board Recruitment

Looking to make a difference, meet new people, or get involved in your community? We have just the thing for you. Join the LWVAC Board!

We are beginning to recruit members to join our LWVAC Board for the coming year. While board members, according to our bylaws, are "elected", they for the most part are volunteers who want to become more intimately involved in the running of the League, the issues it takes on, government, voter service, advocacy, education, and all the other good things we do.

We are a VOLUNTEER organization, and we are only effective through volunteer effort. Officers and committee chairs can ALWAYS use a co-officer, co-chair or willing committee member, and are always interested in involving and training the next generation of board members. Are you interested in becoming more involved in advocacy, government at any level, voter service, the study of issues, the education of the public and students? Do you have administrative skills that you would like to volunteer? If you are interested to become more involved please contact Lori Keegan-Brady (475-0396, lkeeganbrady@nycap.rr.com), Marian Schwager (439-0344, schwager@nycap.rr.com), Martha Kennedy (439-4559, dkennedy2@nycap.rr.com) or Carol Webster (439-1491, cwebster2@nycap.rr.com) and we can give you more information about what it means to be on the board.

Fix Albany Now

LWVNYS 2010 Legislative Agenda

Steps To a New and Better State Government

Redistricting

Create an independent redistricting commission to draft the New York State legislative and Congressional political boundaries for the 2012 elections.

Campaign Finance Reform

Support lower contribution limits and increased disclosure. In particular, support stronger and effective campaign finance enforcement with increased civil and criminal penalties for violations.

Ethics Reform

Put in place a new independent ethics oversight agency and tougher enforcement. Make the legislature more open and accountable through continued rules reform.

Election Reform

Improve election processes that extend and encourage voting, including no-excuse absentee balloting and Election Day registration.

LWVUS Program Planning

Every two years state and local Leagues participate in the LWVUS Program Planning process by making recommendations concerning program issues – *this is how we remain a grassroots organization.*

The Program Planning process is an important League tool for identifying issues for study. It gives members and Leagues the opportunity to balance the pros and cons, assess possible support, and consider the viability of issues. Local League recommendations are compiled by the national board which then recommends a program for the next two years. This proposal is voted on by the delegates at the national convention in June, which will be held this year in Atlanta, GA. In evaluating possible issues, any issue should have widespread member interest; be timely; and government action should be the most effective way to address the problem. Before making any recommendations, Leagues need to consider the ramifications of new studies in terms of people power and money.

If you want to suggest a new study or review of a current position, email Marian Schwager (schwager@nycap.rr.com) or call her at 439-0344. The board will discuss any recommendations at the February 2nd board meeting. You are welcome to join us at the meeting.

Current Public Policy Positions 2008-2010: Grouped in 4 Categories

Due to space limitations, these are the highlights. For more detail go to www.lwv.org and look under the “Issues” heading.

1) Representative Government : *Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive.* Voting Rights, Election Process, Citizen Rights, Congress and the Presidency

2) International Relations: *Promote peace in an interdependent world by working cooperatively with other nations and strengthening international organizations.* United Nations, Trade, U.S. Relations with Developing Countries, Arms Control, Military Policy and Defense Spending

3) Natural Resources: *Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest.* Natural Resources, Resource Management, Environmental Protection and Pollution Control, Public Participation, Agriculture Policy

4) Social Policy: *Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans.* Equality of Opportunity, Fiscal Policy, Health Care, Immigration, Meeting Basic Human Needs, Child Care, Early Intervention for Children at Risk, Violence Prevention, Gun Control, Urban Policy, Death Penalty

Update on SWMP

The Capital Region Solid Waste Management Partnership Steering Committee met December 8, 2009 to review the elements of the new Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP), a draft of which was to be shared with committee members on December 15, 2009 with written comments to be received by January 29, 2010. After committee member comments are incorporated, a Steering Committee Meeting will be scheduled, probably mid to late February to present the final Draft SWMP.

The major elements to be covered by the final Draft Solid Waste Management Plan will be:

1. Redirection and Recovery of Materials - which includes promotion of waste management in all sectors, support for product stewardship initiatives at the state level, continuance of promotion and expansion of local recycling infrastructure, development of organic waste processing capacity, designation of additional mandatory recyclables
2. Land disposal
3. Implementing Agency
4. Interim Measures
5. New laws and regulations
6. Implementation Schedule

As emphasized by Willard Bruce in his talk to the LWVA in November, a major impediment to the SWMP is the current lack of control over wasteflow. In order to move forward, an implementing agency, for which State legislation is needed, must be created. At issue is the nature of this agency, should it be an Authority, a Consortium, or some other model by which communities commit to supporting a comprehensive regional solid waste management program through financing and wasteflow. Convincing municipalities to commit to the SWMP will be a challenge, yet the larger the region, the more communities involved, the more robust the facilities, recycling and diversion efforts will be.

On a very positive note, the City of Albany has just expanded its designated residential mandatory recyclables. Where formerly, only plastics 1 and 2 were recyclable, the city is now directing that plastics 3 through 7 as well be placed in household recycle bins, thereby more than doubling the percentage of trash diverted from the Rapp Road landfill. A new promotional brochure is being distributed: <http://www.albanyny.gov/Government/Departments/GeneralServices/TrashRecycling/TrashAndRecycling.aspx> and a new website www.capitalregionrecycling.com where a commercial recycling brochure can be found.

Additional information about the SWMP is available at www.capitalregionlandfill.com. The Elements of the SWMP which is labeled presentation under the December 8 meeting provides an excellent summary.





Consolidating Local Government and Services

Consensus Meetings

The consensus meetings will be held on **Monday, March 15** at the Bethlehem Public Library at 6:30 p.m. (after the Souper Supper) and on **Thursday, March 18** at 9:30 a.m. at the Albany Public Library. Consensus questions for your consideration will be included in the next newsletter.

The issue of how best to improve local government efficiency is complex. Varied circumstances preclude arriving at a single strategy across the state. Currently, local Leagues has no criteria by which to evaluate local proposals. Our LWVAC study group continues to read and research articles, reports, and web sites and contact various experts in preparation for the consensus meetings. In addition to the information presented below, you are encouraged to read the materials on the LWVNYS web site, http://lwwny.org/consolidation_sss.html.

Local Government in New York State

New York has a complex layering of 1,607 general-purpose local governments composed of 57 counties, 932 towns, 62 cities, 556 villages all of which have taxing power. Villages lie within towns, but cities do not. Therefore, village residents pay taxes to three entities, village, town and county, while city residents pay taxes only to the city and county. Towns completely cover the state, leaving no unincorporated areas within counties. According to the Attorney General's web site, Albany County has 106 local government entities, including school districts, and 53 town special districts. Among these are 1 county, 3 cities, 10 towns, 6 villages, 13 school districts, 20 fire districts, 12 fire protection districts, 13 lighting districts, 13 water districts, a drainage district and nine other special districts.

The vast majority of general purpose governments were established prior to 1920. Since then the state has seen tremendous changes in population size, economic activity, transportation systems, and settlement patterns. Some villages and towns have larger populations than some cities and counties. Taxes on commercial and industrial growth outside villages and cities do not accrue to the villages and cities, although impacts from such development may demand increases in their budgets for services such as police and street maintenance. New York's annexation laws do not allow cities and villages to grow their boundaries organically to match the development outside their boundaries.

In addition to general purpose governments, there are 1,811 special-purpose districts in New York with elected boards and the ability to impose taxes and/or issue debt. Many of these special districts operate outside of citizen and local press oversight and have election days outside of the General, Village or School District elections, resulting in low voter interest and turn out. In addition to these districts, the state has 1,302 local government entities with independent boards able to impose costs and/or issue debt with little local control. These entities tend to have appointed boards, although some are elected by a select group of people. Finally, New York has thousands of other boards and councils with out taxing authority, most operating within a town or county and under the control of local government.

Evaluating Proposals to Consolidate or Dissolve

In some cases, if a village were to dissolve, residents outside the village would see their property taxes increase because village residents have essentially been subsidizing services rendered outside the village. Conversely, village residents likely would see their property taxes decrease. How to measure whether consolidation of entities or services would lead to more efficient delivery of services is another question. Measurement often must go beyond merely measuring an increase or decrease in tax rates.

Questions arise regarding whether an essentially rural town is the best entity to provide services to the more densely populated, urban-like area. Usually, a town special district is created to provide the services to that specific area. Conversely, as the population density of an area within a rural town begins to increase, residents looking to form a village government to provide multiple services currently provided by a multitude of districts face the prospect of paying their village taxes and town taxes, even if the town were not to provide them with any services. If a village were dissolved, would special districts be created to provide services, continuing three layers of taxing entities?

Unfunded state mandates are seen by some as the primary reason local property taxes are high. Some villages studying consolidation have concluded they would be better off incorporating as cities so they could benefit from a share of county sales taxes and increased state and federal aid.

(continued from page 5)

Consolidating Local Government and Services

Given all the possible scenarios, determining whether an action is fair for all the citizens involved is complex. Not all costs and benefits can be measured by an increase or decrease in taxes paid by any particular group. Quality of services to be delivered, loss or gain of services, increase or decrease of employment, impacts on community identity and a potential decreased participation in governing are some of the effects that must be evaluated. Since the affected citizens must vote on proposals to consolidate or dissolve their local governments, educating voters regarding all costs and benefits is critical to good decision making. On the other hand, recent legislation provides counties with the power to mandate dissolution of local governments within their boundaries, subject to certain conditions, including a county-wide referendum with special majority requirements.

Other Options to Achieve Efficiency and Lower Costs

Consolidation or dissolution are not the only options to be considered in seeking increased government efficiency and decreased costs. Sharing or contracting out of services should be explored, and studies conducted to date for municipalities consider many options. Studies done for municipalities so far include opportunities for sharing services. Options available to achieve efficiencies include cooperative agreements, mergers, consolidations and dissolutions.

Grant Programs

To encourage inter-municipal cooperation in studying options, the NYS Department of State, through the Local Government Efficiency (LGE) Grant Program provides technical assistance and competitive grants to two or more municipalities for projects that would achieve savings and improve efficiencies through shared services, with high priority grants available to plan for sustainable reductions in the cost of police, fire and highway services. Entities eligible for grants include counties, cities, towns, villages, special improvement districts, fire districts, public libraries, association libraries, water authorities, sewer authorities, regional planning and development boards, school districts, and, in certain instances, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).

Capital District Secure Detention Facility: Example of a Shared Service

An example of a share service operating in the Capital District is the secure juvenile detention facility shared by Albany, Saratoga, Schenectady, and Rensselaer Counties which opened in November, 1997. Forced to find another alternative when the NYS Division of Youth closed a facility 80 miles south of Albany, and with financial assistance from the State, the counties undertook a needs assessment and feasibility study. The ingredients which helped bring this project to fruition included political and civic support; fact based assessment and proposal; a community-based, non-profit board; visible long-term savings in transportation costs, multiple transfers to different facilities, and overtime wages for sheriff's departments; and a location acceptable to the community. The local facility also is more accessible to families and social workers. Building this facility involved some "creative" financing and special concerns such as security.

Make Your Views Known

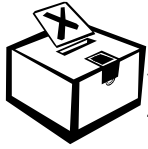
Given the New York Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act passed in 2009 (also known as the Attorney General's Act), it should be easier going forward for local governments to explore and pursue shared delivery of services and other options for more efficient governing. With a framework of standards by which to measure future proposals, local leagues will be better prepared to participate in the public dialogue regarding the value and feasibility of such proposals. Be sure to attend at least one of the consensus meetings in March to make your views known on this critical topic.

The Electronic LWVNYS

Check out the state League website, www.lwvny.org, for current information on Action items and Upcoming News and Events such as the recent comments concerning Gas Drilling in the Marcellus Shale and the upcoming Forum on Redistricting.

Also, take a look at the state League's facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/League-Of-Women-Voters-of-NYS/138506691184?ref=ts> (you can just cut and paste this address into your browser). You don't have to join to look - but if you join Facebook, you'll receive notices when new items are posted on the site!

And, don't forget to send Don Kennedy (dkennedy2@nycap.rr.com) your email address (if he doesn't already have it) to receive the new electronic *State Voter*. You can call the office, 465-4162, if you would rather subscribe to a paper copy of the *Voter*.



A Milestone Is Reached!

New Voting Machines Certified for Use in NYS

Aimee Allaud, LWVNYS Elections Specialist

At the December 15, 2009 meeting of the NYS Board of Elections, the four commissioners voted unanimously to approve two voting systems for use by NYS voters after an exhaustive two-year certification testing process. Both are precinct-based optical scan systems (Yea!) made by two different companies: Election Systems & Software (ES&S) and Dominion Voting Systems (Dominion). The ES&S system which has been selected by the Albany County BOE has a voter assist terminal ("AutoMark"), also known as a ballot marking device, which has been used for the past several election cycles. The optical scanner component was used in some election districts in the county as part of a pilot program in the 2009 elections. Now that certification of the two systems has occurred, all Albany County voters will be voting on the new voting system in 2010. That will mean the lever voting machines will be a thing of the past although there is still discussion going on about using them for school, village, fire district elections.

There is a pressing need for expanding the pool of election inspectors. Have you thought about becoming one? Requirements are very simple: you must be a registered voter in the county in which you live. Pay varies from county to county and training is a must, especially for the new equipment. Call the Albany County BOE, 4878-5060, for more information. Appointments for the position are made by the Democratic or Republican county chairmen, a requirement of the NYS Election Law.

Some of you may have participated in the LWVNYS Polling Place Survey for the General Election in November 2009. A summary of the results from the Survey participants (thank you if you were among the 121 who did) was contained in the testimony presented to the NYS Senate Elections Committee on November 30. Here are some of the highlights culled from our survey:

- Increase intensive voter education on all aspects of the new voting machines is mandatory.
- Better signage in the polling places about availability of accessible voting and how to use it is necessary. All inspectors should be required to learn how to operate scanners and ballot marking devices.
- Paper ballot design needs more attention to improve usability (size of font and characters, etc.)
- Ensuring privacy in the voting process must be addressed in machine placement in the polling place, as well as in the use of the paper ballot.
- Enlarging the pool of trained, competent election inspectors should be a top priority.

Membership 2009-2010 - Join & Make a Difference

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address, City, Zip: _____

Email: _____

Individual Membership \$50/year

Household Membership \$75/year

Student Membership \$15/year

Contribution in support of my local League

Please send me more information

Mail to:

League of Women Voters of Albany County PO Box 611, Slingerlands, NY 12159

Or Contact: Carol Webster (439-1491)

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALBANY COUNTY
PO Box 611
Slingerlands, NY 12159

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League Calendar

<u>WHEN</u>	<u>WHAT</u>	<u>WHERE</u>	<u>MORE INFO</u>
Feb. 2, 7:00 pm	Board Meeting	Episcopal Church, Elsmere	
Feb. 6, 9:00 am	Breakfast w/Legislators	Beltrone Living Ctr, Colonie	see page 1
Feb. 8, 9:30 am	Great Decisions Mtg	Contact K. Henrikson	see page 2
Feb. 9, 2:00 pm	Redistricting Forum	Rockefeller Institute, Albany	see page 1
Feb. 17	Deadline for March Bulletin	LBierman@nycap.rr.com	
Feb. 22, 9:30 am	Great Decisions Mtg	Contact K. Henrikson	see page 2
Mar. 15, 5:30 pm	Souper Supper	Bethlehem Library, Delmar	see pages 5-6
	Consensus Mtg. on Local Consolidation and Shared Services		
Mar. 18, 9:30 am	Consensus Mtg .	Albany Public Library	see pages 5-6
Apr. 15, 5:30 pm	Souper Supper	Slingerlands United Methodist Church	
	Topic: Climate Change		
Apr. 20	Equal Pay Day 2010	Legislative Office Building, Albany	
May 18, 5:30 pm	Annual Dinner & Mtg.	TBA	
	90th Anniversary League Celebration with Visit from Susan B. Anthony		