



League of Women Voters of Albany County

October 2009

Educate

Participate

Advocate

"Hottest Pollster" John Zogby to Speak

Tuesday, October 27, 5:30 to 7:00 pm

College of St. Rose, St. Joseph's Hall, 985 Madison Ave., Albany

Mr. Zogby will talk on how the 2008 election saw dramatic changes in polling across two dimensions—a changing face of the electorate toward younger and more minority representation and a changing climate for polling using interactive, internet based tools.

see page 2 for more information

Sponsored by the League and the College of St. Rose
Parking available across the street at the Massry Center for the Arts
Open to the Public

**Attention:
LWV New Members
Please Join us
for Coffee and Pastries
Sat., October 3, @ 9:00am**

We would like to get to know our newest members of Albany County League of Women Voters. Please join us Saturday morning, October 3, 2009, from 9:00 to 11:00 am at the home of Carol Webster, 24 Fox Hollow Greene, Delmar, NY. You will have an opportunity to meet LWV members, learn more about the League and how you can become involved. Please rsvp Carol Webster at 439-1491 or email me at cwebster2@nycap.rr.com .

Hope to see you Sat., October 3, @ 9:00am for coffee and conversation.

Government Consolidation Committee Meeting October 1, 7:00 pm

Contact Loretta Simon at 478-0051 or
Judy Thomson at 439-0370

The committee on government consolidation should be an engaging and interesting study. We expect not only to read a variety of studies but also interview state and local officials and organizations to get a well-rounded understanding of the issues. Results should be far reaching as we enter into the consensus process with other leagues throughout the state. Come join the newest study!



League of Women Voters of Albany County

Website: www.lwvalbany.org Email: lwwac@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

First I want to thank Betsey Swan, our current state league president, for organizing the Executive Mansion tour and luncheon at the Pump Station, for our local league. And she did this at the same time as the state board was holding its bimonthly meeting. What a gal! About 50 of us enjoyed the tour and lunch on a beautiful September day.

We have an exciting program coming up on October 27th at St. Joseph's Hall, the College of St. Rose. Renowned pollster John Zogby will talk about the latest trends in voting. Check out the details elsewhere in the newsletter.

On the morning of November 14, we will meet at the Pine Bush Discovery Center to hear Willard Bruce discuss solid waste, recycling, and the Albany landfill. December 15 will be our holiday luncheon at Normanside Country Club with John DeRosier, Times Union Editorial Cartoonist as our speaker. We hope you can get to all of these programs.

Mary Ann Lettau will be busy in October with more debates - probably Colonie Town Supervisor, maybe Bethlehem, and another chance to meet the candidates in the city of Albany. And there is more to do, including help needed for the Housing Authority Commissioner elections October 13th. This is the busiest month for Voter Service,

but also the most exciting. Read Mary Ann's report and check our web site for the latest information.

The new voting scanners and paper ballots got their first test in some districts for the primary election. They will again be used in November. If they are at your polling place and you have any comments about their use, contact Aimee Allaud (85Aimee@nycap.rr.com) who has been following the long and convoluted process for getting new voting equipment.

Yours in League,
Ann (ambrandon2@verizon.net)

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.

John Zogby

Speaker on October 27 - see page 1

In a recent online article in the Huffington Post, John Zogby, President and CEO of Zogby International was cited as "by all accounts the hottest pollster in the United States today." LWVAC members have the exciting opportunity to hear him speak at our October meeting. We, along with the College of Saint Rose, offered him an invitation to come to Albany on October 27 to address League members and the public at 5:30 pm in the College's Saint Joseph Hall.

Zogby is noted both nationally and internationally for the accuracy of his predictions and for his political analysis. He provides opinions to the pages of the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Christian Science Monitor, to name a few. He polls extensively throughout the world, at last count in 62 countries.

Zogby holds degrees in history from both LeMoyne College and Syracuse University and is listed with Leading Authorities, the Capital Speakers Bureau in Washington, DC and the National Speakers Bureau in Chicago. He lectures all over the world but on October 27, he'll be here in Albany at our invitation, so please plan to attend. Because this event is open to the public and hosted at the College of Saint Rose, (and because Zogby did the polling for President Obama) it's likely that there will be both a strong turnout for him and also limited seating, so please plan to arrive early.



League in Profile

Carol Webster

In September of 2005, I found myself moving from St. Louis to the Albany area with my husband who accepted a position at U Albany. My life in St. Louis for 22 years had been happy and busy focusing on rearing young children and working full time as a social worker in the health care field. Friendships through work, church, neighborhood and our children's school were well established in those 22 years. So, the challenge of building a new life here in Albany was a bit daunting. I did not spend a whole lot of time grieving the loss of what was but began to think this could be an interesting opportunity to try things I had never explored or put off until another day when I had more free time. I knew I did not want to be employed full time as a social worker but social service issues especially health care are very important to me. Initially, I chose the more familiar avenues to me to get involved with advocacy work through volunteering for Hospice and the Literacy Advocacy Program. However, I had always heard about the League of Women Voters as an interesting organization that drew members who were a diverse group of educated individuals who were involved with a variety of social/political issues. I never thought of myself as particularly political but something in me said contact them and find out more about the LWV. Early on I met Martha Kennedy who so graciously provided a ride for me to attend the 2005 Annual Holiday Luncheon which was held at the U Albany Alumni House with the speaker being Kermit Hall, then President of U Albany. It was a wonderful event, good food, a stimulating presentation about the Judiciary System and most of all a warm embracing feeling of friendships beginning. I have since joined in on book discussion groups, attended a number of programs that featured speakers on political topics of local interest, assisted in voters registration, attended debates that the LWV has sponsored and most recently through the gentle persuasion of Martha Kennedy accepted a membership committee board position. The LWV membership is filled with friendships waiting to happen and endless projects to improve the quality of your daily life.

Our Busy Voter Services Elves

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY and busy, if you're involved with the League's Voter Services activities. Since last newsletter, we've sponsored 4 candidate events. Several were high-profile and received some print notice, from the Times-Union, Metroland and Spotlight, and some TV and radio coverage. The candidates for Albany Mayor in the Democratic Primary debated on September 2, at the Albany Main Library. To say the least, it was an overflow crowd, estimated at 250. Thanks to Ruth Dinowitz for moderating under intense circumstances, and thanks to helpers Nell Stokes-Holmes, Tina Lord, Paula Philo and Janet Reilly. Our co-sponsors were CANA, CACC and West Hill Ministerial Fellowship.

On September 8, we held a candidate event, with Pine Hills Neighborhood Association, for the Albany Auditor position. About 100 voters attended. Unfortunately, this was not followed by a Treasurer debate, as we hoped, because the incumbent was not available. Our volunteers: Nell (again!!-thanx), Janet, and Barbara and Ray Warner.

Two debates for Council Seats for Albany's 1st and 7th Wards were planned for August 26, co-sponsored by the Delaware Ave. Neighborhood Association. Kudos to Marggie Skinner who showed up to moderate, on the chance

(more Voter Services news on page 5)



Albany County's Long Term Care Plan is Unveiled and the Debate Continues



Marian Schwager

The LWVAC has been instrumental in its educational efforts surrounding long term care policy in Albany County. First it focused public attention on the emerging controversy surrounding a new Albany County Nursing Home during and after its June 10 community forum. Now it has the opportunity to continue the debate by reading and responding to the newly published county plan for long term care. On September 10 county executive Michael G. Breslin issued the long-awaited plan. Copies are available by going to the county website at www.albanycounty.com/ltc.

County Executive Breslin has said that he listened to public comment and while the League's forum isn't referenced in the plan, there are aspects of our June 10 forum's content throughout. Unfortunately, all of the interesting and innovative ideas in this plan are likely to be overshadowed by the emotions surrounding the decision to expand more community based options while closing the existing nursing home. Emotions run high on this issue and it will be necessary for those interested in this topic to shift the discourse toward facts.

The information in the plan is likely to continue polarizing taxpayers. The policy issues raise real questions about how to use our resources to benefit the most folks in the ways they most desire, while ensuring that the neediest are well served. The plan is a good start but more information is needed. For example, on page 6 we learn that the reason the operating deficit is as high as it is (\$18 million) is because the staffing is extremely rich (71 per cent richer than it's comparison to the Rensselaer county nursing home.) The "math" contained in the plan would indicate that if the new nursing home desired by some advocates gets built, county costs will rise by \$3.7 million dollars but 231 fewer individuals will be served. What will happen over time as the debt service for this new building must be paid for 20 or more years but increasingly service models favor options other than large nursing homes? The proposed plan eliminates the new home but "purchases" skilled nursing beds for 100 hard to serve persons in the 10 private nursing homes. It also dramatically expands assisted living but will cost the county \$18.4 million dollars less than it spends now and serve 888 more people. More information needs to be provided so that people can understand the "specifics" of how this plan can play out for both existing and potential clients and current county staff over the next two years.

It's hoped that league members will continue to advocate for a public discourse. Already we've made an impact because two aspects to the plan appear to have developed in direct response to some of the comments aired during the League's June 10 forum. For example, on page 1 the plan references the landmark, September 8 court decision (*Disability Advocates, Inc. v Paterson*) which successfully argued against segregated institutional settings when people with disabilities could be served in existing community-based housing. Senior staff attorney Sim Goldman, one of our June 10 presenters, speculated that the institutional bias for long term care could be successfully argued in court. Apparently, he was right. It's unclear from the plan how many of the approximately 230 current residents are people with disabilities but the Plan addresses this issue with two innovative proposals: to enrich the Medicaid rates to providers willing to accept the hard to serve and to offer more "in home" health care to such individuals who are currently served by community residences so that they don't need to transition to nursing home care.

The second idea potentially attributable to League efforts is on page 9 where the intent is to create an "age-friendly" set of building regulations to adhere to "universal design." This is done currently in Suffolk County and was also suggested at our Forum.

(continued from page 3)

Voter Services

that the challengers would attend. They didn't but Marggie, Tina and I did, for which we were commended in several blogs and articles, for at least trying!!

Bethlehem Town Hall, on September 9, was the site for a debate between the two candidates running for Supervisor on the Independence Party line. Every chair was filled, with a good stand-up crowd at the back. My thanks go to Ann Brandon, Paula Philo, Aimee Allaud and Loretta Simon for their invaluable help. The whole event can be viewed at www.SpotlightNews.com—click on “Multi-Media”.

There were attempts to have several more debates but one of the candidates in each opted out.



FOR AN ENCORE: more candidate events. October 6, at the Albany Public Library, 6:30, with CANA; all those running in the City of Albany in the General Election will be invited. The planning for the debate between candidates for Colonie Town Supervisor is underway. And there will probably be one for Bethlehem Town Council candidates. You'll hear more!

VOTER REGISTRATION. Materials and information have been available at all public League events. We'll be participating at the SEFCU Fall Festival at SUNY and at a citizenship day at Mildred Elley.

VOTERS GUIDES. Almost 2000 have been distributed throughout the county by various of our members, especially to the libraries.

ALBANY HOUSING AUTHORITY elections will be held on October 13th. We will have a debate for the four candidates who are running for two seats as tenant commissioner on October 8th at 6:30 pm.

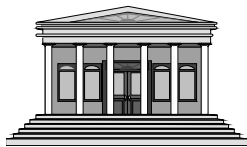
You too can be a League volunteer!!!!!!

1. Call Carol Webster (439-1491) before she calls you to help tenants vote for their representatives on the Housing Authority Board. We need 40 people. This is a great public service—please help.
2. Distribute the remaining Guides Part 1 and step up to distribute Part 2, coming up shortly—to wherever you go in your community where people congregate!!!
3. Voter Registration. Is there a happening in your neighborhood where we could table and register voters?? Don't keep the info to yourself—give me a call.
4. Help out at a candidate event.

As always: questions, comments: Mary Ann Lettau, 489-0212, mlettau1@yahoo.com

Two new potential League members - Twin Girls!

Jenny Stromer-Gally delivered Audrey Joan and Bridget Lorri on August 12th. Audrey was 6 pounds, 6 ounces and was 20" long. Bridget was 5 pounds, 10 ounces and was 19 and 1/2 inches long. Jenny says, “we're doing quite well. The infants are growing like little weeds, and already are sleeping less and looking around more. It's been a joy to watch them.” Congratulations, Jenny!



Ethics Reform Testimony by Our State League President

The state League weighed in on ethics reform legislation with testimony before the **New York State Commission on Public Integrity** regarding staff legislative proposals to amend the **the New York State lobbying act**. On September 8th, Betsey Swan, State League President, discussed the League concerns regarding the proposed ethics reforms.

She began by saying, “In general, we believe the set of seven proposals constitute a meaningful attempt to more realistically regulate all forms of lobbying and to make the activities of lobbyists more transparent. This is admirable and something for which the League has long advocated. We do, however, have some concerns that the proposals may be insufficient to achieve their stated goals and that, in some respects, they may represent a move away from prohibition in favor of disclosure. If this is the intended consequence, it is unacceptable. From the League’s standpoint, the role of prohibition is to limit the tit for tat that we witnessed in its most ugly permutations during this legislative session. We believe that limitations are both desirable and necessary to reign in its most flagrant exercise. Transparency is the necessary corollary, which serves both to inform voters of pressures brought to bear on elected officials and adds legitimacy to the system. A system of regular reporting and meaningful consequences for non-reporting is essential to restoration of the public trust. Given the limited period of time, we would like to focus on concerns with the proposals and areas in which we believe they fall short.”

After commenting on the main proposals, Betsey concluded with the following: “The process of regulating human behavior is both an imprecise art and subject to human fallibility. While we, as engaged citizens, are constantly asked to develop ideal systems with which to regulate our public lives, the success of any undertaking is dependent on the integrity and vigilance of those administering the system and overseeing imposition of penalties. It also presupposes adequate funding to translate integrity into meaningful action through enforcement of sanctions for noncompliance. This year we have experienced a legislative system in extreme meltdown. It has brought legislative activities to a halt and further eroded public perception of state government.

This body also has not been without criticism, both for its action and inaction, and for the public perception that it is a body motivated by partisan political concerns. In closing, the League of Women Voters of New York State implores the Commission on Public Integrity to rise above its partisan beginnings and to become the aggressive and nonpartisan body that this state needs.”

Read the entire testimony on the state League website, www.lwvny.org.

Spread the Good News

Nurturing the interests of the League’s diverse membership and attracting new loyal League members is the focus of the Membership Committee. I extend an invitation to you to join me as part of the Membership Committee to help plan our efforts to make this a dynamic year. If you are interested please call me, Carol Webster at 439-1491 or email me at cwebster@nycap.rr.com

New Members

Kathy Dopp, Schenectady

Lois Portnick, Delmar

Margaret Berman, Albany

Welcome!



The Mystery of Judicial Selection in New York

How does a person get on the ballot to become a Supreme Court Justice in New York? The highest court, the seven person Court of Appeals, is appointed by the Governor. Other judges are elected. Maggie Moeringer, our state league Voters Service chair, gave the following explanation of the process:

“ELECTION PROCESS FOR SUPREME COURT JUSTICES

New York has 12 judicial districts, which often include multiple counties. (Albany County is in the 3rd judicial district.) Trial courts within these districts at the Supreme Court level are presided over by justices who are elected for 14 year terms (or until they reach age 70, whichever comes first). Voters in almost all of the state judicial districts will elect one or more justices to these positions in November.

The process in place to nominate Supreme Court justice candidates separates the voters from direct involvement in the nominating procedures. On primary day this September, voters will be presented with a slate of delegates, by party, for whom to vote, not the judicial candidates themselves. These delegates participate in judicial district nominating conventions, where the Supreme Court judicial candidates are chosen. Delegates are typically individuals who are active in their respective political party organizations. In January 2006, this partisan method of selecting nominees was held unconstitutional by a Federal District Court as violating the first amendment rights of both voters and judicial candidates, but later held constitutional by the US Supreme Court, foiling this method of reforming the process. There are many opinions about how the process should be changed. Some support an amendment to the state constitution so that justices are appointed, not elected. In any case, this process is confusing for voters, and the League’s explanations are always welcome.”

Addendum - Candidates are often cross-endorsed by the parties, so the voter has no choice at election time. An ongoing topic for advocacy, the State League position follows:

In 1965, the League adopted a study of judicial selection and tenure. A position was reached the following year supporting merit selection of state judges by a broad-based, nonpartisan nominating commission.

JUDICIAL SELECTION AND DISCIPLINE

Statement of Position as **announced by the State Board, December 1966**

Judges should be chosen on the basis of merit. Ultimate control over a major governmental institution should rest with the people, however. Therefore the League supports:

1. The establishment of broadly based, nonpartisan nominating commissions, composed of lawyers and lay people, to propose a list of candidates for appointment to judicial vacancies or newly established judgeships.
2. Mandatory appointment by the appropriate chief executive from among the names so proposed.
3. Ratification or disapproval of the appointment by the voters after a suitable period of time.

A Tenure Commission should make available to voters an evaluation of the judge’s record in office prior to a retention vote.

A major breakthrough was made in 1977 with the passage of a constitutional amendment providing a merit selection plan for the Court of Appeals. This amendment and the implementing legislation, which followed its approval, established a process whereby the state’s top judges are appointed by the governor with Senate confirmation from a limited list of candidates recommended by the Commission on Judicial Nomination. This 12-member commission is balanced politically between lawyers and laypersons, and the power of appointment to the commission is shared by the governor, the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals and the majority and minority legislative leaders.

Learn more about the League position and other judicial related issues by going to www.lwvny.org and select "Impact on Issues.”

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALBANY COUNTY
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League Calendar

| <u>WHEN</u> | <u>WHAT</u> | <u>WHERE</u> | <u>MORE INFO</u> |
|------------------|------------------------------------|--|------------------|
| Oct. 1, 7:00 pm | Consolidation Study Committee Mtg. | | see page 1 |
| Oct. 3, 9:00 am | New Member Coffee | C. Webster's home | see page 1 |
| Oct. 5, 9:30 am | Great Decisions Meeting | N. Singh's House (khenriks@nycap.rr.com for info) | |
| Oct. 6, 7:00 pm | Board Meeting | Delmar Presbyterian Church | |
| Oct. 6, 6:30 pm | Albany Cand. "Meet and Greet" | Albany Public Library | see page 5 |
| Oct. 13 | Albany Housing Authority Election | | see page 5 |
| Oct. 16 | Deadline for Nov. Bulletin | LBierman@nycap.rr.com | |
| Oct. 27, 5:30 pm | Pollster John Zogby | College of St. Rose | see page 1 |