



# League of Women Voters of Albany County Bulletin

October 2011

**Democracy is NOT a Spectator Sport**

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## President's Message

Dear League Friends,

This fall, we are concentrating on the basics of the league: voter registration, voter education and open and accountable government. Our voter service activities include administering the resident commissioner elections for the Albany Housing Authority, candidate events and our first foray into producing an online voters guide. As I write this, we have four candidate events being organized. Please watch for the dates and times and a great opportunity to volunteer. Mary Ann Lettau is heading up these efforts.

Some dates important for voting to note and share with your friends and neighbors are: Oct 14 is the last day to register to vote in general election; Nov. 1 is the last day to apply for absentee ballot by mail; and Nov 8 is Election Day. We will again be reporting the results of elections once the polls are closed on November 8. see Marggie Skinner's article and volunteer.

The League has a long tradition of working to ensure openness by monitoring local government. To that end our speaker in September spoke on civic activity and responsibility and we are reinvigorating our Observer Corps. Please see the article in this issue and plan on attending our kickoff meeting Oct 19 chaired by Judi Campbell and Jan Messina.

The League is not the only organization concerned with civic education and training as a means to prepare citizens to take an active role in our democracy. The New York State Bar Association is advocating for the continued inclusion of civic education in public school curriculum. Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and retired NYS Chief Judge Judith Kay are working together on a program to engage young people's interest in learning about civics and the nation's political structure. Please go to that website at [www.icivics.org](http://www.icivics.org) to see games for students and guides for teachers.

And last but not least, I hope you are reading this electronic version of our bulletin. Transitioning from a paper based world to one embracing electronic communication is a challenge. I look forward to the new opportunities afforded by this change and

## **Poll Reporting**

LWVAC will again be conducting poll reporting on Election Night. It's a simple task of going to the polls at closing time, writing down the results and going home and calling in the results - the LWVAC makes money from each polling place that is reported. Those who have done this before will be hearing from Marggie Skinner in the next 2 weeks. We always need more people; if you'd like to help, email Marggie at: [mps3@yahoo.com](mailto:mpskinner3@yahoo.com).

hope you do to.

Yours in League,  
Mary Berry, President  
League of Women Voters of Albany County

## Reinvigorating Our Observer Corps - Come Join Us!



We are in the process of reinventing the Observer Corps, a core function of the League! What is an Observer Corps? According to LWVUS,

*Observer Corps are a structured way for individuals to exercise their right to know. They help ensure that citizens are aware of the decisions that impact their lives and they promote government transparency and accountability. An observer is an individual who attends a governmental meeting, notes what happens at the meeting, and reports back to the League and (hopefully) the community. By attending public meetings of local governmental bodies/agencies, observers learn more about what their government is doing. They learn about the issues facing their community and are empowered to take action, if warranted. They also learn how issues are being addressed. Observers keep elected and appointed officials on notice; they let them know that someone is watching what decisions are being made and how they are being made. They help ensure that the issues facing their community are being handled "in the sunshine," in the open. Ideally, observers are monitoring both the issues being discussed as well as the process by which they are being discussed. While not every item up for discussion will relate to a League's priorities, ensuring that the meeting is being conducted in an open and acceptable way is critical to all of the League's efforts and the health of our democracy.*

Here are some facts about Albany County you should know:

Besides Albany County government, there are 3 cities, 10 towns and 5 incorporated villages within Albany County, all of which have Boards and committees that meet regularly. Albany County alone has 14 committees that meet monthly. Judi Campbell and Jan Messina are working to identify all League related issues that these government entities meet about, but obviously they can't do it alone, so please help out by volunteering to **attend our Observer Corps kickoff meeting on Wednesday, October 19, at 7pm in the small meeting room at St. Sophia's Church on Whitehall Rd., Albany.** We will provide the details of the meetings that are of greatest interest to the League, and all the volunteers need to do is agree to attend an occasional meeting (most are monthly or bi-monthly), wear something (shirt, pin, etc.) identifying yourself as a League member, and send a short report back to Jan and/or Judi about the relevant topic. We will then pass the information on to the Board and publish the reports in our League Bulletin.

We need to make the politicians aware that we are paying attention and we are informing the public. Over time, we hope to influence them to be better at representing all the people, not just their specific political parties or themselves. So please join in - there is no large time commitment, and a simple report is all

the followup required - no other meetings, reports or time required! This is the League in action - join in to make a difference!

## League in Profile: Paula Philo

I was born and raised in Bay Shore, Long Island. I became interested in current events and politics in high school. I attended SUNY at Albany and have lived in the area ever since. I worked for the NYS Office of Mental Health and the Division of Housing and Community Renewal.

While my children, Laura and Brian, attended school, I served on the PTA board and was one of the founders of the New Scotland-Whitehall Neighborhood Association and a Brownie and Girl Scout leader for many years. Through these organizations, I became aware that one can accomplish many things by working with others toward a common goal.

I am now retired and live in Glenmont with my husband, Ken. I joined the League 3 years ago, because of my interest in current events and politics. This is my second year as Secretary for the LWV of Albany County Board of Directors.

## Long Term Care Study Group

In June 2009, the League of Women Voters and the College of Saint Rose sponsored a forum on long term care options. At that time, the legislature had been promoting the construction of a new nursing home, while the County Executive was advocating expansion of other options for residents of long term care and closing the county home. Since then, the County has submitted a Certificate of Need Application to the Department of Health seeking permission to construct a new 200 bed facility with 30-adult day slots and 20 ventilator beds at a cost of \$70.5M (\$47M is expected to be Medicaid reimbursable).



The League wants to gain a better understanding of the County's plans for the construction of a new County Nursing Home building in the context of the County's overall plan for a long term care system that includes Albany County NY Connects, assisted living programs, and other community based services.

This summer a small group of LWVAC members began meeting both as a group and also with significant stakeholders such as county legislators and employees and nursing home and home health agency administrators. Recognizing the critical need to assure Albany County residents the full range of long term care options, our study group is gathering the information needed to inform League members and the public. An interim briefing paper will be presented to the Board in December at which point the next steps in this effort will be determined. We may offer educational forums and develop position papers as needed. As with all issues, the League is looking to encourage the active and informed participation of Albany's residents by increasing the public's understanding of this important fiscal and policy issue.

The next Long Term Care Study Group Meeting will be on October 12th at 7 PM in the library at St. Stephens Church, Delmar (corner of Elsmere and Poplar). Richard Iannello, Director of the Albany Guardian Society, has been invited to speak (not yet confirmed).

We welcome all members and friends to join us for this meeting and the study group. If you

cannot attend and still would like to join the study group, please contact Arleen Stein at aurell@nycap.rr.com.

## Voter Services Update - A Busy Fall Season

Mary Ann Lettau

Leaves are falling, squirrels hoarding, birds flying South-and that means we are in high gear! Aah, Autumn.

### **Albany Housing Authority Tenant Commissioner Election**

The Albany Housing Authority Tenant Commissioner Election was more labor-intensive than we anticipated. Various delays, glitches and complications ---most of which could have been prevented by various parties and from which we have learned a lot! (for next time?)---caused us to send out several SOS's to our members through Constant Contact. There was a rousing response. The following persons answered the call to duty: Jane Allen, Maggie Moehringer, Annette Argyros, Lois Griffin, Janet Vine, Shirley Anderson, MaryAnn Hannon, Judy Ramsey, Loretta Simon, Steve Winter, Martha and Dave Kissinger, Marty Teumin, Ann Brandon, Alice Schrade, and Bob Webster, who helped Carol at home.

It was an opportunity to meet new people and enjoy excellent conversation and humor. Several came daily, some helped at least 2 days.

At this point (9/27), we are finished with the 5,431 item mailing, finally. Next comes the 2 candidate events and then the public count of mail-in ballots on 10/12. It's good to remember that this was a new process for us all--Housing Authority, candidates, tenants and League. We are being paid as an organization-a "win" for us. And our goal is that by making it more efficient for the tenants to vote, we will have double the turnout of 2 years ago (it was 8%) -- a "win" for the voters.

A big shout-out to Carol Webster whose organizational skills and attention to detail helped us to produce a League-worthy project. For her-the Gold Medal for Quality Assurance!!! Kitt Jackson at the CACC offered invaluable assistance with her folding machine. Thank you to her and all our praise-worthy volunteers, on behalf of the membership.

### **Candidate Events**

Mary has already thanked our members who helped out at the Bethlehem Supervisor event on September 1. There was an audience of at least 200 for this important program.

On Thursday, September 8, we cosponsored an appearance by the 2 candidates for Albany City Court Judge. The other organizations were the Delaware Ave., Lincoln Park and 2nd Ave. Neighborhood Associations and the Capital Area Council of Churches. There was plenty of interest and a large crowd-SRO. Also, several candidates for Albany County Legislature made an appearance to speak about their goals, should they be elected. Thanks to Julie Elson and Tina Lord.

A major event will be held on November 2, a debate between the 2 candidates for Colonie Town Supervisor. Two years ago we had an audience of about 250; this year, the contest is very heated and I expect even more voters. This is cosponsored by the League, Colonie Chamber of Commerce and CACC.

We have received a request for an event for the Albany School Board, one for a race in the Hill Towns and will try to have a 2nd evening with the Bethlehem candidates.

Lois Griffin and I sent out letters and materials to 20 high schools and 6 colleges several weeks ago. We got one response from a big high school that wants to copy the voting information for 200 students!

[www.vote411.org](http://www.vote411.org), the national, League sponsored on-line voters' guide, is proceeding in Albany County. This online guide will have information on the candidates, as well as responses to questions we posed to the candidates. It's easy to use and we'll send out an email alerting all members when it goes live. We are pairing with the Spotlight Newspaper. It is going slower than we hoped due to the demands of other projects but we should be up and running soon.

Lois Griffin and I spent a pleasant afternoon at the Sheridan Ave. Neighborhood Fair. We registered 3 new voters who are young students and gave out the specialty pamphlets.

One more looooong month in this election cycle. Please consider helping out at a candidate event when you receive a Constant Contact message.

Comments/suggestions/complaints: Mary Ann Lettau, 489-0212; [mlettau1@yahoo.com](mailto:mlettau1@yahoo.com)

## "It's Now or Never for the League"

These were the opening and closing words from guest speaker Dr. Stephen Schechter at the annual pot luck dinner held on September 19, 2011 in St. Sophia's Church in Albany. Dr. Schechter addressed almost 40 new and old League members who gathered around brightly decorated tables to enjoy good food, make new friends ,greet old ones and gain a greater insight into the importance of their active participation in the League. Dr. Schechter came to this kick off meeting of the League's annual calendar of events and activities in order to provide us with a context for increased participation in our Voter Education and Observer Corps activities. These two committees need additional members who are able to commit to a series of important projects over the year. Prior to the presentation, both initiatives were described by committee chairs and each have additional articles appearing in the Bulletin. Dr. Schechter's remarks were geared toward describing his perspective on how important these core functions are not only to our continuing strength as an advocacy organization but also to our role in local civics and political life.

Below are the major themes of his presentation, "Why the League needs to draw on the courage of its convictions now more than ever:"

1. the current political climate creates challenges for democracy because of extreme partisanship, populism in which leaders are pandering to their publics and economic stagnation;
2. the League's reputation for being a public watchdog and educator is invaluable in these times;
3. the major good that the League can do is to let elected officials know that they are being watched;
4. the voters need to know when elected officials are doing something amiss ( e.g. Campaign Fair Practices Committee);
5. the public needs to be made aware of positive examples of bi-partisanship when they occur;
6. citizens need both reminders and opportunities to become aware of the roles that they can play in shaping the future of our civic and political lives( e.g. attending League-sponsored debates).

Dr. Schechter knows the value of these League activities because for over 30 years he's been a major figure in both academic and grass roots organizing for civic education. He is a professor

of political science at Russell Sage College in Troy and is the former director of its MAT Social Studies Program. He is also the director of the national Council for Citizenship Education and was the primary author for the NYS Department of Education of the required 12th grade core curriculum for civics education, Participation in Government. Dr. Schechter was gracious enough to stay beyond his time to answer numerous questions and engage in discussion with members of the audience .

## League Cooks Are the Best!



Quite satisfying! The first League meeting of the year held at the St. Sophia Community Center on Monday, September 19th which is the traditional "potluck" get-together was once again an enjoyable evening of meeting and greeting friends and acquaintances. There is something about a gathering of people and food that lends itself to a successful social occasion. This is especially true when the event offers the opportunity to sample a delightful assortment of supper dishes and desserts, and anyone who has attended a League "Pot Luck" in the past knows it's an evening not to miss. Our members, many of whom are thoroughly engaged in work, family, volunteer, and other activities, are also more than just competent in the culinary department. This was attested to by the many appreciative comments by fellow members. Simply put, it was quite a treat. Following supper, there was a raffle for several unique prizes including a coffee table book on wines and several beautifully framed prints.

We are collecting recipes for dishes that travel well. Please bring a copy of the recipe anytime you bring a dish to a League meeting. Eventually we're hoping to have enough recipes for a LWVAC cookbook. If you brought a dish to the September potluck, but didn't bring the recipe, you can email it to Paula Philo at [paula.philo@gmail.com](mailto:paula.philo@gmail.com) or to Margaret Danes at [mdanes@nycap.rr.com](mailto:mdanes@nycap.rr.com). Here are two recipes from the dinner. They are both perfect for the fall.

### **Maple Fruit Crisp (From "Quick Vegetarian Pleasures" courtesy of Jean Kerr)**

#### Fruit:

- 5 Medium apples, any kind except Delicious
- 2 Firm, ripe pears, Anjou, Bartlett or Comice
- 2/3 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
- 2 tb. Golden raisins
- 3 tb pure maple syrup
- 1 tb unbleached flour

Peel, core and thinly slice apples and pears. Combine in large bowl with cranberries, raisins and syrup. Mix well. Sprinkle on flour and mix again. Place fruit in 8 x 8 inch pan, smoothing top.

#### Topping:

- ¼ c unbleached flour
- ¼ c oats
- 2 tb finely chopped walnuts
- ¼ c firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp salt
- 5 tb unsalted butter, or margarine
- 3 tb pure maple syrup

Combine all topping ingredients except syrup. Mix well. A pastry blender works well for mixing in the butter. In small amounts put mixture over top of fruit. (It will be sticky and will not spread well). Drizzle the syrup over all. Bake at 350 for 40-50 minutes, or until filling is bubbly and apples are tender. Serve warm or at room temperature. Serves 4-6.

### **Honey of a Chicken (courtesy of Marian Schwager)**

4 split chicken breast, skin removed

1/3 cup chili sauce

3 T. honey

2 T lemon juice

1 T oil

½ tsp dried thyme

Preheat broiler or grill . In a small bowl, whisk together all ingredients except chicken. Grill or broil and baste with sauce for about 20 minutes. (Do not baste for the last five minutes of grilling.) Serve with rice or buttered noodles.

## Free Webinar on Debate Moderating

On October 6th at 2 PM, the LWVUS will present an interactive "Do's and Don'ts on Debate Moderating" webinar in which two moderators (one experienced and one new) respond to "sticky" questions and issues that may arise during a debate. Register for this webinar [here](#) and you will receive information on running a debate/forum and submitting your own "sticky" questions or situations for the moderators.

## Naturalization Ceremony

Early Friday morning usually once a month at the Federal Building on Broadway in downtown Albany around fifty or sixty new citizens are added to our country. They come from every continent in the world and the diversity continues to be amazing. As one judge said it is the happiest ceremony to take place in his court room. There is often beautiful singing of patriotic songs and this last time there were even refreshments.

This is important to the LWV because we set up a table outside the courtroom and hand out several important things; first of all we loan out toys to keep the children entertained during the ceremony, then we have a supply of quarters in exchange for dollars for people to feed the parking meters, and last but not least we provide them with forms for voter registration. If they live in Albany County we deliver these to Albany County's Board of Elections, otherwise they need to mail them. Of course, we also give out information on the LWV and our voting literature. I always find this ceremony emotional and fight back the tears, but then I always cry at weddings too.

Written by Judith Wing, substitute helper, on behalf of Monique Roeth and her friend Judy Gross-Johnson.

## Calendar

Oct. 4, 6:30 pm	Board Meeting
Oct. 12, 7:00 pm	Long Term Care Study Group at St. Stephen's, Delmar Invited Speaker: Richard Iannello, Director, Albany Guardian Society
Oct. 19, 7:00 pm	Observer Corps Meeting at St. Sophia's, Albany
Nov. 1	Board Meeting
Nov. 2	Colonie Town Supervisor Candidate Event
Nov. 8	Election Day and Poll Reporting

## State League News

### **Redistricting**

With our coalition, ReShapeNY, we have continued to keep pressure on the state to enact redistricting reform in a fall special session through both testimony and through the media.

Thanks to our local Leagues in Syracuse, Buffalo, Rochester, Binghamton, Westchester and NYC for presenting testimony at each of the LATFOR hearings. In some cities, press conferences were also organized and attended by local members. And other local Leagues have submitted Letters to the Editors in their local newspapers. Thanks to all who helped make the League visible and active on this issue.

### **Voter Participation Project**

The League has recently received a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation to organize a comprehensive educational project examining different means of increasing the rate of voter participation in New York, including expanding opportunities for voter registration, early in-person and absentee voting and vote by mail, and better voter education and ballot design. In this project, we are researching the effect on voter turnout of different innovations in voter registration modernization and early voting, and associated administrative issues for election officials and security concerns.

A power point presentation on the research and the issue, with supporting documents, will be available this fall for local Leagues to use at a community forum. Encourage your local League to organize a forum to present the info to members and the public.

### **Hydrofracking**

Now that the DEC has produced its complete revision of the SGEIS (Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement) on gas drilling and hydraulic fracturing, the public has until Monday, December 12th to comment. In accordance with LWV positions on air and water quality, protection of watersheds, etc., it is critical that we identify areas that are weak or omitted and suggest appropriate revisions.

There are experts available to speak on this many different aspects of this topic, free of charge, for local Leagues. Call the state office for a list of speakers. Finally, the NY Times recently printed a Letter to the Editor from LWNYS President Betsey Swan on this topic. See a link to the letter on the state League [website](#).

### **Students Inside Albany Conference**

The Students Inside Albany Conference has been set for March 25-28, 2012. It's a bit earlier

this year so local Leagues need to start recruiting students NOW. This 3 day conference provides the high school students with the skills necessary to become active citizens and lobbyists. The only cost to the local Leagues is the transportation to and from Albany - the conference is free for students.

### **First Vote in Spanish**

First Vote, a guide to voting for new voters in NYS, has been updated, translated into Spanish and reprinted. The Spanish version is available from the state office for \$.10 each (\$10 per 100). It's a great document for high school seniors and naturalized citizens - and now for those whose first language may be Spanish.

### **Gifts to the League**

Did you know that you can make a gift to the League, obtain a current tax advantage, and receive income for life? We offer a vehicle with which to do this through the League's pooled income fund. Within certain parameters, you can choose which level of the League to benefit. For more information, contact [Betsey@lwvny.org](mailto:Betsey@lwvny.org).

### **State Voter**

The State Voter, the state League's newsletter is published electronically every other month. It is emailed to all members for whom the state League has email addresses. Anyone may subscribe for \$12 a year to a paper copy of the State Voter; just call (518-465-4162) or [email](#) the state office.

## **Saudi Arab Women's Vote: Does it go far enough?**

By Monica Sharp

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has said Sunday September 25th that women will have the right to stand and vote in future local elections and join the advisory Shura council as full members. Read more [here](#).

## **Meet Author Dorothy Roberts**

Meet award-winning author and expert on the interplay of gender, race, and class in legal issues Dorothy Roberts and hear her present from her new book, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-First Century*.

"Fatal Invention is an eye-opening, urgent, and ultimately inspiring exposé of the new racial science. Essential reading." --Danny Glover

While embracing a racial ideology rooted in genetics, Americans are accepting a genetic ideology rooted in race that makes everyone responsible for managing their own lives at the genetic level instead of eliminating the social inequalities that damage our entire society.  
--From Fatal Invention

In this provocative analysis, leading legal scholar and social critic Dorothy Roberts argues that America is again at the brink of a virulent outbreak of classifying population by race. A new race-based science is obscuring racism in our society and legitimizing state brutality against communities of color at a time when America claims to be post-racial.

Professor Dorothy Roberts will be speaking on Thursday, October 20 at the Albany Law School on New Scotland Avenue at 7pm in the Dean Alexander Moot Courtroom with a reception following. This talk is sponsored by the Albany Law School Health Law Society with assistance from the Russell Sage Department of History & Society and the Black and Hispanic Bar Association.

On Friday, October 21 Professor Roberts will be speaking at Russell Sage College in the Schacht Fine Arts Center, Art Wing A from 11AM to 12:20PM. This talk is sponsored by the Pre-Law Program, the Department of History & Society and the WORLD Program.

On Saturday, October 21 she will be at the Main Auditorium of the Albany Library on Washington Ave. from 2 - 4pm sponsored by a number of local community organizations.

All are Free and open to the public.

## Membership 2011-2012 - 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

For financial aid information, contact Monica Sharp, 475-9736

Mail to: League of Women Voters of Albany County PO Box 611,  
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