The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

In This Issue
- Annual Fall Potluck Dinner
- President’s Message
- League Study on Ballot Access
- League Day at the United Nations
- 2014 LWVUS Convention
- Calendar

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Annual Fall Potluck Dinner
Tuesday, September 16
St. Sophia’s Church
440 Whitehall Rd, Albany, NY

Dinner 6:00 PM
Program 6:45 PM

Speaker Topic: LEAGUE SUPPORT OF NYS Constitutional Amendment on the Redistricting Process
Sue Cypert, 1st V-P, LWVAC will present information

Please join us on Tuesday, September 16 at 5:30 when we will begin with a meet and greet, wine and appetizers!

REMEMBER: our annual potluck is open to new, old and potential members and kicks off our fall programming!

Bring your delicious pots of food to share, listen to our speaker and become recharged to take an active role in our League's coming year of programs and events! In lieu of food, you may pay $5 at door.

RSVP to Julie Elson, jelso510@earthlink.net, or 482-0981.

President's Message

A Strong Storm Echoes our Strong Spirit

Neither rain nor sleet, nor downed trees and flooded streets stay your LWVAC board of directors from their appointed board meeting. And I mean that literally. Twelve of us met Tuesday, August 5 after the terrible rain and hail storm here in Albany. Many drove around stalled cars in flooded streets and debris in the road to meet at St. Sophia’s.

Our meeting was devoted to plans for our coming year and to re-structuring the board. Jan Messina, our 1st Vice President resigned for personal reasons. She will continue with her work on State Issues. We thank Jan for her service and wish her well. We appointed our 2nd VP, Sue Cypert, as 1st VP and our
Policy on Inclusiveness

The League of Women Voters in both its values and practice is committed to inclusion and diversity. This means:

We recognize that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision making;

We believe inclusiveness enhances our organization’s ability to respond effectively to changing conditions and needs;

We affirm our commitment to reflecting the diversity of Albany County; and

There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the League on the basis of economic position, gender, race, ability, age, sexual orientation, creed or national origin.

Secretary, Stephen Winters as 2nd VP. Barbara Frankel and Susanna Martin will serve as co-Voters Service chairs.

This latter dynamic duo have been busy planning for our Vote 411 campaign and for our election forums in October. Visit our web site www.lwvalbany.org for all the details and for other information including dates, times, locations of meetings and for our revised by-laws which were approved at the Annual Meeting. Also remember to like us on Face Book.

Wishes for a speedy recovery to Board member Lois Portnick being treated for a broken hip suffered from a fall in her home.

We look forward to seeing all of you at our pot luck on Sept. 16 at St. Sophia’s. At that time, we’ll be briefed on the State League’s support of this November’s vote in favor of a constitutional amendment to change the legislatively managed redistricting process. Also, as you read through this issue of the Newsletter you’ll notice a busy fall schedule of meetings and an interesting opportunity to work with other league members on a statewide initiative to develop public policy positions on ballot access issues. Our thanks go out to Karen Wagner who provided excellent summaries for this issue of the topics which will be considered. You’ll also enjoy a fascinating window into how the LWVUS operates at its’ conventions through a first hand report by one of our convention delegates, Sue Cypert. Lastly, we thank area artist Carol Coogan for giving permission to reprint an excellent political cartoon she recently prepared for a local newspaper. Hats off to Aimee Allaud for securing it and shepherding the Newsletter into press.

It’s no wonder that Board members are a hardy bunch in braving the elements to attend a meeting. The League’s agendas and activities reflect that strong and determined spirit and here in Albany provide a sound basis to forecast a busy and exciting year!

In League,
Lois Griffin

Reprinted with permission from Carol Coogan and Altamont Enterprise.
New League Study this Fall on Primary Voting and Other Ballot Access Issues

Last year at the New York State League of Women Voter's convention, it was voted that leagues throughout the state will conduct local studies in order to come to consensus on several methods for improving candidate access to appear on primary and general election ballots. With current headlines in the news on court challenges to primary contenders and a series of upcoming November elections, this is a timely and important topic. This fall our league will help determine if some alternatives would be beneficial to the democratic process in New York State. This action is consistent with the League's ongoing concern about New York State's low voter participation rate and high incumbent reelection rate.

After the convention vote, a statewide research committee was formed and consisted of Lori Dawson of the Saratoga league as Chair; Jane Park, Broom and Tioga Counties LWV; Karen Wagner, Albany County LWV; Aimee Allaud, Albany County LWV; and Sarah Podber, LWVNYS Staff. The research committee has been preparing materials for local leagues to use when they conduct their consensus meetings. The consensus discussions are scheduled for November for the Albany County league with a deadline of January 31, 2015 to present consensus findings to the state league. In preparation, a study committee will be formed. The first study committee meeting will be held on October 2 at 9:30 am in the Berkshire Bank, 255 Delaware Avenue, Delmar. All members are invited to attend and should contact Aimee Allaud at 85aimee@nycap.rr.com to confirm attendance.

Initial research of the state committee focused on several aspects concerning primary voting and broader ballot access - the closed primary system in New York State, fusion or cross endorsement voting in general elections, ranked voting methods and the Wilson Pakula Certificates law of 1947. These topics will help leagues to answer the relevant questions. Does our current election system effectively produce candidates that represent the voters? Does it encourage voter turnout, prevent fraud/corruption, encourage competition, and employ best practices that ensure a thriving and functioning democracy? Discussion materials help frame possible answers by citing relevant research and analysis of these practices throughout the nation. To aid Albany League members in preparing for the coming discussion, the research committee has provided the following summary information on the topics:

The goal of a primary election is to select a party's candidate for the general election. There are three types: closed, open, and hybrid. New York State has a closed system which means that party affiliation is needed in order to participate. In an open system voters are able to declare party affiliation on Election Day. Another open system method does not require voters to affiliate with a party.

New York employs for its general elections a cross-endorsement or fusion voting process as a way to include minority parties in an election. Candidates can be nominated by several parties and in New York, voters in a general election can vote for a candidate using the party line of their preference. Voters do not have to be enrolled in a political party in order to vote in a general election. Voting for a cross-endorsed candidate on a minority party line gives the public information regarding the relative strength of specific party preferences but most of the winning candidates tend to be from one of the majority parties and not all minority parties engage in cross endorsements.

In addition to fusion voting, New York has a law called the Wilson Pakula Certificates of 1947 that requires a candidate to get authorization from the leadership of a political party prior to running as a candidate on that party's ballot line if they themselves are not members of the party whose endorsement they are seeking. Governor Cuomo considered eliminating this but has dropped the initiative.

In many election systems, multiple candidates are encouraged to compete. In such systems, it is difficult for any candidate to achieve a majority of the votes. Frequently in such systems there is a complex process for ensuring that the final winner has demonstrated wide scale support. One method is to require a runoff election in the event that no one gathers a large percentage of the vote (frequently 40%). In an effort to avoid the substantial cost of a separate election, in some states, a type of ranked choice voting system is being incorporated in an attempt to both improve voter turnout and result in representation that is more reflective of the electorate. New York does not used ranked voting.

Instant Runoff and Top Two Voter Getters are examples of ranked choice. Instant Runoff is used in multi-candidate contests when there is the potential for no one candidate achieving a majority of the vote. It is a concatenated listing of all candidates running for a specific office that each voter gets the opportunity to rank regardless of party affiliation. This is done in conjunction with the standard one vote for the candidate of choice.
The reason for this method is that the goal of an election is for a candidate to win with a majority of the votes. If a majority is not achieved, instant runoff can save money by providing the Board of Elections backup data expressing the voters' ranking of all candidates and a mathematical formula can provide the final results that are the most reflective of the majority of the voters' wishes from the election. A special election is then no longer necessary.

Another example of ranked choice voting is used in primary elections. In the Top Two Voter Getter system any voter can vote for any candidate for a given office regardless of party affiliation. The top two candidates from the primary go on to the general election. This means that there could be a general election without representation from a majority party or a general election with two candidates from the same party.

Consensus decisions this fall on the topic of Ballot Access will be focused on:

- Which do you prefer?
  - Opening New York State primaries to nonaffiliated voters or
  - Continued use of the current closed primary system
  - Do you support the adoption of ranked-choice voting in New York?
  - If yes, do you support the adoption of
    - Instant Runoff Voting? Or
    - Top Two Vote Getters?
  - If you support Instant Runoff Voting, which elections do you support its use?
  - Do you believe Wilson-Pakula should be repealed?
  - Should New York retain fusion voting?
  - If yes, should fusion be retained only
    - With Wilson-Pakula?
    - Without Wilson-Pakula?
    - With or without Wilson-Pakula?

For more information, see LWVNYS website, www.lwvny.org, State Studies Materials.

League Day at the United Nations
Thursday, Nov. 13
Briefing on: "Water for Life"
The International Decade for Action, 2005-2015

Join League friends for a day at the United Nations: a tour of the facility, lunch in the Delegates' Dining Room, and a briefing by UN affiliate experts on the global scarcity of clean water and its impact on gender.

From the "Water for Life" website, http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/background.shtml:

Water is essential for life. No living being on planet Earth can survive without it. It is a prerequisite for human health and well-being as well as for the preservation of the environment. However, four of every ten people in the world do not have access to even a simple pit latrine; and nearly two in ten have no source of safe drinking water. Every year millions of people, mostly children, die from diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation, and hygiene. According to the World Health Organization, each and every day some 3,900 children die because of dirty water or poor hygiene; diseases transmitted through water or human excrement are the second-leading cause of death among children worldwide, after respiratory diseases. Water scarcity, poor water quality, and inadequate sanitation negatively impact food security, livelihood choices, and educational opportunities for poor families across the world. Water-related natural disasters such as floods, tropical storms and tsunamis exert a heavy toll in human life and suffering. And all too regularly, drought afflicts some of the world's poorest countries, exacerbating hunger and malnutrition.

Beyond meeting basic human needs, water supply and sanitation services, as well as water as a resource, are critical to sustainable development.

Registration form is available on the state League website or call state office at 465-4162 to register. Space is limited.
You know the saying about "herding cats"?

Imagine almost 700 people in one room, people who are smart and committed to important issues. People who want to make a difference. How does anyone get a group like that - something like 700 very independent cats - to listen to each other? To have one person, out of 700 (!), speaking one at a time and being heard! Then, imagine this mass of people with very strong opinions making decisions so that that incredible group can work together!

The League of Women Voters CAN DO THAT! It happened at the 2014 National Convention in Dallas, June 5 - 10.

Everything about the gathering in Dallas was exciting. Wonderful people! A great location & unbelievably good organization. (Actually, I shouldn't say "unbelievable organization - this is the LWV"). Important specific issues involving voting rights, money in politics, and climate change had been carefully prepared for consideration in plenary sessions, where issues and the business of being an organization, such as passing a budget, revising rules, electing leaders, had to be done.

So - back to the one huge room of 700 people. Add in with very well planned communications, big screens, multiple microphones, people available to help, and very hard to miss large signs letting speakers know "1 minute left". Add in league delegates from 48 states, DC, and several US territories. The representatives from Alaska & Maine and everywhere else travelled long distances to be in that one big room!

Can that really work? YES, because this is the League of Women Voters, and if anyone can do it, the LWV can. Add in the leaders of the League - president, officers - and yes, the parliamentarian! - and the important work of the league - OUR league - is done.

This is the first LWV National Convention I've attended. I've attended gatherings half that size that were chaos. This LWV Convention conducted its business as a working example of civil discourse. Representatives listened, debated, and voted. The work of the league was accomplished.

The League of Women Voters is a living, functioning organization that shows how a civil society CAN get things done. The advocacy issues the League has chosen are very very important, of course, and I knew about those. My astonishment in Dallas was how the League stands at the head of the line in proudly demonstrating how a democracy can get its work done. People are losing faith in our democratic process, but the League stands there firmly to show we can get our work done while staying dedicated to our beliefs.

OUR League is a proud organization with experience & commitment. Of course members disagree at times, but we "walk the walk". The League of Women Voters shows that respect for others, giving each person the right to be heard, and agreeing to work together - to listen & interact in a civil manner - works.

So, imagine that big room with 700 representatives - laughing, yawning, listening, dancing (we had move-around breaks with great music). Good ideas were debated, issues and leaders for the coming years were chosen, and the League of Women Voters did that, and more (there were many smaller sessions providing chances to meet others, learn new ideas, discuss issues) in a manner that we can be proud of.

The League of Women Voters is needed because of what it does and HOW it does its' work. Being at the 2014 National Convention in Dallas made me even prouder of OUR League than ever before. YOU can be proud of the League and proud of being a member.

Herding 700 cats? "Everyone" says it's impossible. That "everyone" should have been in Dallas!
Summary of LWVNYS Advocacy Efforts for 2014 Legislative Session

We went into this session knowing that it was going to be tough to get action on several of our positions. In an election year many “controversial” issues become election issues instead of being considered by the legislature. In addition, because of the current Senate rules under the coalition leadership in the State Senate, many of the League’s key issues were blocked from even coming to the floor of the Senate for a vote. This session, the League advocated for good public policy regardless of the election politics we encountered in the legislature. This approach saw mixed results with some successes.

A major success of the League this session was defeat of the education investment tax credit. First, the League was successful in keeping the tax credit out of the NYS Budget. But our efforts didn’t end there as the tax credit was then considered during the post-budget legislative session. The League succeeded again by preventing the bill from coming to the either house for a vote.

Funding for an additional 20 family court judges was included in the budget this year but legislation determining where these judges should be assigned still needed passage. The state League worked in coalition with the NYS Coalition for More Family Court Judges (over 100 partners) and encouraged our local Leagues to join the coalition, too (many did). We are pleased to report that the legislature passed a bill allowing for 25 more family court judges distributed around the state, addressing the unconscionable court delays faced by children, families and victims of domestic violence. The Governor signed the bill on June 26.

Although the Governor achieved some minor improvements to campaign finance in the negotiated state budget, comprehensive reform was not seriously considered this legislative session. The upcoming election in the fall prevented the legislators from agreeing to any real reform. Politics reigned over policy again this year for the Women’s Equality Act. While the Senate passed nine of the ten items, the Assembly steadfastly refused to split the Act and pass only pieces.

Another education related issue that the League actively opposed related to financing of special education services in New York City. The League successfully fought this bill last year when it was to be implemented statewide; it reappeared this year limited to New York City. The League continued to fight this bill because it would impose an additional monetary burden (over $200 million) on City schools during appeals of special education placements. This bill passed in the Senate but it never came to the floor of the Assembly for a vote.

One great success we had this year was passage of the National Popular Vote compact. The state League was very instrumental in getting the national League to adopt the study of the Compact for the National Popular Vote in 2008 and getting the position adopted in 2010. The bill commits our 29 electoral votes to the 136 that have already committed to the interstate compact. The compact will take effect upon reaching 270 pledged votes—the amount needed to guarantee a majority in the Electoral College.

The state League submitted comments on the Draft 2014 NYS Energy Plan addressing many aspects of energy issues, including climate disruption, energy conservation, pipeline infrastructure and the amount of natural gas estimated to be located within New York State. A report commissioned and funded by the League’s Education Foundation provided an independent evaluation of potential economically recoverable Marcellus shale natural gas in New York.

There were also a number of bills that we supported this session that did not pass both houses:

- **Nicholas’ Bill** would have required the safe storage of all guns not in the immediate possession or control of the gun owner to prevent access by children and others who should not have access to them;
- **Boss Bill** would have prohibited an employer from taking adverse employment action against an employee because the employee or a dependent made a reproductive health decision that conflicts with the employer’s personal beliefs;
- Transparency bill that would have required that committee and floor votes be made available online and that session and committee meetings be webcast;
- Election law reforms such as single primary in June and pre-registration of 16 and 17 year olds.

More information and details about each of these issues can be found in the memos posted on the state League website at www.lwvny.org.
Notice to Members
We are moving toward an electronic communication system and would like your help by indicating your preference for receiving the bulletin. Indicate by checking the space next to your preference, sign your name, and send to:
Aimee Allaud
85 Melrose Ave.
Albany, NY, 12203
Tel 482-2617, or email 85aimee@nycap.rr.com

Be sure to include your e-mail address! If you provide us with your e-mail, you will receive the periodic Constant Contact messages and updates on activities. Don't forget to check our website for information on topics and events, www.lwvalbanycounty.org.

___Send me the printed bulletin ___Send me the electronic bulletin only

Name: ___________________________ e-mail: _______________________

Calendar

Sept. 9  LWVAC board meeting, 5:30 PM, St. Sophia's Church, with food from La Empanada Llama; Informational meeting on LWVUS' Membership Leadership Development program followed by board meeting. See website calendar for details. If interested, contact Lois Griffin, griffinocee@gmail.com.

Sept. 9  NYS Primary Day; see www.lwvalbany.org and www.vote411.org.

Sept. 16  Pot Luck Supper: see front page

Oct. 2  Ballot Issues study committee, 9:30 AM, Berkshire Bank, 255 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, contact Aimee Allaud, 85aimee@nycap.rr.com. (see article)

Oct. 7  LWVAC Board meeting, 7:00 PM, St. Sophia's Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, 12203, contact Lois Griffin, griffinocee@gmail.com

Oct. 14  LWVAC General Mtg. 5:30 PM - Souper Supper, location TBD(check website) Program on Albany County Government/Legislature issues

Oct. 15  NYS Senate District 46 Candidate Forum, Masonic Temple, Altamont, New York, details pending, contact Susanna Martin, susannamartin@gmail.com

Oct. 23  20th Congressional District Candidate Forum, 7:00 PM, Clifton Park Library, 475 Moe Road, off Rte. 146, west of Rte. 87 north, co-sponsored with Leagues of the Capital District, contact Barbara Frankel, barbaremeg@mac.com. for more information.

Nov. 4  LWVAC Board Mtg., 6:00 PM, St. Sophia's Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, 12209; contact Lois Griffin, griffinocee@gmail.com.

Nov. 12 or 13  LWVAC General Meeting/Souper Supper, 7:00 PM, location TBD, check website, Program: LWVNYS Ballot Access Study and Consensus, contact Lois Griffin, griffinocee@gmail.com.
Membership 2014-Join & Make a Difference

Name: ___________________________________________Tel: __________________________

Address,City,Zip: ______________________________________________________________

Email: _______________________________________________________________________

___ Individual Membership $60/year    ___ Send me newsletters by mail
___ Household Membership $90/year    ___ Just use my email for newsletters
___ Student Membership $25/year

___ Contribution in support of my local League

___ Please send me more information

Scholarships are available on an individual confidential basis.

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

LWV of Albany County
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