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.

President's Message

Dear League Friends,

On the day that I am writing this, I am planning to attend a candle light vigil in memory of Nelson Mandela. He has said of himself that he was not an extraordinary person. But he did extraordinary things. This evening’s vigil is to remind us that we too can speak out for democracy and equality. Nelson Mandela knew the power of the ballot. And so does the League. We continue to try to expand and protect the voting rights of citizens and we study and promote issues that give us a more responsive and equitable government.

This winter edition of our newsletter is focused on giving our readers an inside view of how the League makes a difference. First, I call your attention on this page to the policy on inclusiveness. With its adoption and dissemination, we promote the values and core beliefs which guide our actions. For those who are long familiar with the League, these have shaped our actions over many years; for new League members, your review of these principles will help to understand the foundation for our policies, positions and programs. Second, we have chosen to augment the publication of our inclusiveness policy by providing several articles which illustrate how policies translate into practice.

I hope you will take time from your busy schedules to read these articles. Not only do they illustrate how we put our philosophy into practice but also they underscore our major functions of advocacy and education. Our involvement this year as observers of the county’s charter review commission work is an example. Although the League does not support candidates for public office we do support public positions after we have studied the issues and reached consensus on them. This article outlines the League’s deliverance of position-related testimony. It’s a perfect example of the League in action.

In addition to such locally-oriented projects, we participate in national and state initiatives to study issues and weigh in on them. The article on our involvement in a new state study group is an example. While this work is just beginning, it represents an exciting opportunity for League members to learn more about
term limits and ballot access and to be able to influence policy making at the state level.

League functions, however, are not limited to large scale civic participation efforts such as these. Despite the fact that we have no paid staff, we continue to provide community service through a large network of volunteers. As we concluded 2013, team members who organize and produce election candidate and issue forums reported that we had surpassed over 700 audience members at these events. Each audience member came out of a forum knowing more about the candidates and the issues than they knew when they came in! Another team completed a bi-annual election process for tenant commissioners on behalf of the Albany Housing Authority. And, as our article on newly sworn in naturalized Americans shows, yet another group of dedicated volunteers has continued to welcome new citizens and educate them to the voter registration process.

Lastly, I encourage our readers to do more than glance at the directory of those who make all of this possible. We see many members at our monthly meetings but there are many other ways in which League members can maintain their involvement. Each of the directors and committee chairs are eager to involve new volunteers in helping to carry out our mission. Together we can and do make a difference.

Yours in League,
Lois Griffin, President
League of Women Voters of Albany County

League Adopts Policy on Inclusiveness

As a result of an LWVAC board decision to revisit our by-laws and practices, a series of review sessions were conducted since spring, 2013. By-law revisions are underway and will be made available for adoption prior to a membership vote at this spring's annual membership meeting. During the review process, however, there was discussion about the degree to which League values and philosophy has been expressed in the promulgation of policy statements. There was consensus that a policy describing the League’s position on inclusiveness would enhance the operations of the League and inform its practices. The following policy has been adopted.

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

1. We recognize that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision-making;
2. We believe inclusiveness enhances our organization's ability to respond effectively to changing conditions and needs;
3. We affirm our commitment to reflecting the diversity of Albany County; and
4. There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the League on the basis of economic position, gender, race, ability, age, sexual preference, creed, or national origin.
Charter Review Commission Study Team Provides Public Testimony

On December 11, 2013 Aimee Allaud provided testimony at a public meeting of the county's Charter Review Commission. The full text of her remarks are available on our website (www.lwvac.org). This testimony represents a milestone in the work of a League study team co-chaired by Ann Brandon and Judy Wing. The recommendations have evolved from positions developed by the League over a period of more than 40 years. They represent examples of means to creating greater accountability and efficiency in county government.

Since the 1970's, the League has advocated for a county executive form of government and has supported measures to strengthen the executive authority of such a position. In the 1990's the League was instrumental in getting changes to the county charter approved which further strengthened the executive's powers by allowing the office rather than the legislature to appoint department heads. The League's recommendations for this current opportunity to revise the county's charter would seek to further strengthen the executive's powers by allowing for appointment of the heads of agencies and commissions (such as mental health boards and planning commissions) and for securing veto power for legislatively-driven budget decreases. At present, the executive can veto only increases.

Study team members have been attending the bi-weekly meetings of the Charter Review Commission since July 2013 and reports of each are also available on the website. Other League recommendations include legislative initiation of an independent redistricting commission, a medical examiner position to replace elected, non-physician coroners and widespread promulgation of the county's administrative code.

The Charter Commission will be offering its recommendations to the County Legislature in the near future. They anticipate concluding their public input process by January 31, 2014. If the League wishes to review and analyze these final recommendations and determine our positions either for or against what will be proposed, then volunteers will be needed. Depending on the nature of the recommendations (a smaller sized legislature, a medical examiner proposal?) there may be the need to not only research the pros and cons of the recommendation but also to organize advocacy and education efforts on behalf of whatever positions the League decides to support. If you are interested in participating in ongoing efforts on behalf of the League maintaining a strong public role in this process, please contact Ann Brandon at either 518-439-4332 or email her at ambrandon2@gmail.com.

Assemblywoman Fahy Addresses League Members at Annual Holiday Luncheon

A strong turnout of League members met on December 10, 2013 at the Normanside Country Club in Elsmere for the League's annual holiday luncheon. The event was highlighted by League member and guest speaker, Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy. Many thanks to Assemblywoman Fahy, who delighted League members with her personal view of her first year in the New York State Assembly. She described her year as "fascinating, and a privilege to serve as a voice, especially for the voiceless." Highlights of her first year were organizing a freshman legislators' breakfast for the 25 "newbies," and coalition building around the Women's Equality Act Agenda (WEQA). She supports the Assembly holding firm on the full 10-point legislative package of the WEQA. She described her priorities as education and jobs for the 109th AD.

Looking toward the 2014 Session, she predicted that the State Budget and the education formula will be priorities; as a former school board president in Albany she is very concerned about the approximately 75% of 700 school districts in NYS than have less funding that five years ago due to the recession.
Newly Naturalized Citizens Made Welcome by the League

LWVAC member Monique Roeth, assisted by Judy Grose-Johnson attended 9 naturalization ceremonies in 2013, with about 55-60 new citizens sworn in each time. This service has been provided by the League for many years and is available to all who come to Albany for their swearing in ceremony, regardless of whether they are residents of the county or not. The League’s services include giving to these new citizens the LWV pamphlet "First Vote" along with a voter registration application. Those who are greeted are encouraged to fill out applications while they were waiting for the judge. Sometimes, League volunteers at these events have helped the citizens fill out their voter registration application. During these events, League volunteers normally receive between 25-30 applications but have had as many as 50 new applications received during a ceremony. The volunteers deliver the completed applications to the Board of Elections after the ceremonies. During the ceremonies, the presiding Judge acknowledges the League as being available to answer any questions about voting. New citizens frequently ask about whether they receive an ID voting card. Other frequently asked questions concern the consequences of checking the "no party" line, how to find out where to vote and who to vote for, and where to get a passport.

Congratulations and thanks to Monique and Judy for their commitment to bringing this information to new citizens. Ceremonies are held at the federal courthouse on Broadway in Albany in the morning. Upcoming ceremonies are January 17, February 21 and 24, and March 21. If you are interested in participating, please call Monique at 533-7444, or moniquelbt@mac.com

—

League Begins Two New Studies

On January 10, 2014 LWVAC members learned about the initiative of the State League to conduct two new studies until spring of 2015. The kick off meeting was chaired by Jan Messina, who is a member of the state study team as well as being a board member of LWVAC. The meeting was facilitated by Sarah Podber of the State League. These studies, approved by delegates during the 2013 State League Convention, are designed to develop a potential policy foundation for the both local and State leagues on the issues of elected office term limits and expanded access to primary election voting by changes in ballot access procedures. Both of these topics have been of interest to the LWVUS for many years and have been gaining attention nationally through current changes in a number of states. There are both legislative and constitutional amendment responses that might be proposed once the studies and consensus process concerning the pros and cons on these two topics have been conducted. For local leagues such as ours beginning to investigate these topics, the State League has made both research resources available on its website as well as technical assistance from staff. Interested League members are urged to contact Jan Messina at janmessina@verizon.net for more information.
**Calendar**

**January 10** Term Limits and Ballot Access LWVNYS Study Workshop, 9:30 A.M., Berkshire Bank, Delaware & Elsmere Avenues. Sarah Podber of the LWVNYS team will guide us for this first meeting. (See article)

**January 11** "The Stone that Started the Ripple," A Modern-Day Reunion of the Suffragists, original play by Patricia A. Nugent, past-president, LWVSaratoga, 7 P.M., Skidmore College, Filene Auditorium, $10 to support LWVSaratoga, lwvsaratoga@gmail.com to reserve.

**January 14** LWVAC Souper Supper, Guest Speaker, Dr. Alice Green, Director of the Center for Law and Justice, topic, "Mass Incarceration and Universal Suffrage," 5:30 P.M., Bethlehem Public Library, 451 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, N.Y., contact Tina Raggio, 439-7569, or e-mail traggio@nycap.rr.com, for more information.

**February 3** LWVNYS Advocacy Training Day, 10am-2pm, Empire State Plaza Convention Center, Meeting Room #5, with LWVNYS Legislative Director and Issues Specialists. Registration fee: $10, call LWVNYS office, 465-4162 for more information and to register.

**February 3** LWVAC Great Decisions Discussion Group. Meetings are at 9:30 am, every other Monday, starting on February 3, 2014. Contact Judi Campbell at 478-0016, jcamp5223@gmail.com, for details about joining the group.

**February 4** LWVAC Board Meeting, 7 P.M., St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 16 Elsmere Avenue, Delmar; call Paula Philo, Secretary, 475-9213, for directions. Meetings are open to members and the public. Note: Members are invited to attend at 6:30 for an update from the League's County Charter Revision Committee. The Board meeting will follow.

**February 8** Save the date for Newly Elected Legislators Breakfast, 9:30 A.M., First Congregational Church, 405 Quail Street, (parking lot adjacent to church). Meet and greet our legislators for Albany County. Catered Breakfast. Details to follow.

**NEWS FROM THE LWVNYS -- See what we're doing on the League's advocacy agenda:**

The League's Legislative Agenda is now available at www.lwvny.org and will be the focus of the February 3 advocacy training meeting at the Empire State Plaza (see calendar). Visit the link for more information:

http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs102/1102704766323/archive/1116165668230.html

Recent League press conferences, testimony, memos, etc can always be found on the state League website at www.lwvny.org. Recent activities include the following:

League, NYPIRG and Citizens Union Urge Governor to make Campaign Finance and Ethics Reforms Top Priorities in State of the State Message, January 6, 2014, Press Release

League joins other organizations in a letter to Governor Cuomo asking for continued funding for Cancer Services Programs (December 19, 2013)
Membership 2014 - Join & Make a Difference

Name: ___________________ Telephone: ___________________

Address, City, Zip:
__________________________________________________________

Email: ___________________________________________________

___ Individual Membership $60/year
___ Household Membership $90/year
___ 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

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