League of Women Voters of Albany County
Bulletin
March-April 2015

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.

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WELCOME TO THE
POT LUCK SUPPER MEETING:
BAKKEN BREAKOUT
THE CRUDE OIL INVASION OF NEW YORK

WHAT: Supper and Discussion - Pot Luck dishes to be provided by our members. Please contact Julie Elson at 482-0981 or email your RSVP to jelson510@earthlink.net. Appetizers, soup, salad, entrees, desserts are welcome and there are facilities to reheat. Please let Julie know what you will be bringing to share.

WHEN: Wednesday, March 11
5:30pm - Social Time
6:00pm - Supper
6:45pm - Program, details below

WHERE: Bethlehem Public Library, 451 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY

WHO: Guest Speaker, social activist Sandy Steubing, representing People of Albany United for Safe Energy (PAUSE)

WHY: PAUSE is a grass-roots group of individuals who have come together to promote safe, sustainable energy and fight for environmental justice. Ms. Steubing has a long history of commitment to community action for social and environmental issues. She will provide an update on the group's actions to curtail rail transport of crude oil through the city and county of Albany. This program is an educational service of the League. Although the League does not have a position on the banning of crude oil transport here in Albany, individual members can ask questions and participate in this discussion in order to inform themselves and develop their own opinions on the topic. This is part of our ongoing commitment to monitor this important local issue. Members are encouraged to read the bulletin article elsewhere in this issue on League Action and Local Programs in order to understand how we, as a League, develop action strategies in response to issues of concern.

Board and Committees
Officers
President: Lois Griffin
(518) 487-4671,
griffinocee@gmail.com

1st Vice President

2nd Vice President:
Stephen Winters, 432-0797

Treasurer:
Marggie Skinner, 489-5311

Secretary:
Karen Wagner, 482-2895

Directors
Aimee Allaud (Communications),
482-2617

Mary Berry
(Ex-Officio - Past President)

Margaret Danes
(Membership/Observer Corps), 438-7218

Susanna Martin
(Voter Services), 861-5264
President's Message

This is the 95th year of the League of Women Voters. Has the League made a difference? Is the world a better place now than it was in 1920? All around me, I hear people moaning that the world is going backwards, that we are worse off. The pendulum does swing backwards. Women had the right to vote in some states in the 1700's, but by 1807 that vote was revoked in the last state, New Jersey. In 1848 the first Women's Rights convention was held in Seneca Falls. It took the work and suffering of women to finally gain the vote through the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920. The League grew out of the Suffrage Movement. Although I wasn't around in 1920, I have been around for a long time. And it seems to me that we have made progress and the League has made a contribution to that.

If you saw the movie "Selma," you were graphically reminded that people marched and died for the right to vote. Some of the gains from that movement have been lost through recent decisions of the Supreme Court. What has also been lost by many is the belief that the vote is extremely important. People who supposedly have the right to vote are not exercising that right. The League is studying why that is so and working on ways to make voting more accessible and to encourage people to use their franchise.

We in the League believe that the voter should be informed and we disseminate unbiased voter information through our forums, written material and our electronic Vote 411. Org.

Let us not get discouraged by setbacks, or by the fact that progress may take a long time. But let us continue to be active and informed citizens and to help others to be the same.

This month's bulletin focuses on ACTION! What can we do in our community and state to bring a sane voice and constructive criticism to current policy and legislation? You are the key to that! Read the articles and the LWVNYS's 2015 Legislative Agenda and make that call to our Action Chair, Paula Philo, 475-9213, paula.philo@gmail.com, to get connected to the League's action agenda.

In League,
Lois Griffin

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.

UPDATES AVAILABLE ON SCHEDULE FOR GREAT DECISIONS STUDY GROUPS

The League website www.lwvalbany.org now has an updated program schedule for the morning global issues/great decisions study group. Thanks go out to Judi Campbell who is relocating and will no longer coordinate the morning group's scheduling and meeting sites. There are now two facilitators to contact if you would like to join or get additional information. They are Monika Schneider at moschnel@verizon.net or 475-1327 or Martha Kennedy at Dkennedy2@nycap.rr.com or 439-4559.

Additional updated information will be posted as soon as it is available. The afternoon group is coordinated by Linda Hunt at lshunt@nycap.rr.com or 432-3212. Scheduling information for that group is also available on the website. Since these groups operate independently, it is possible that program topics are not identical and the website should be consulted both for timing and topics.
MEET BOARD MEMBERS

STEPHEN WINTERS
I joined the League of Women Voters of Albany County because I believe and support the mission of the LWV. Even before joining, I had some general awareness of the League through my work at a local homeless shelter. It received assistance conducting a non-partisan Voter Registration Drive when we saw that a person without a permanent address had the right to VOTE! From that time forward, I was very impressed with the manner in which the league conducted itself...whether it was an issue study group examining multiple viewpoints or a candidate forum than included ALL the candidates for an elective office. I myself volunteered at candidate forums, voter registration drives, information tabling about issues the league has studied and the Students Inside Albany (SIA) a NYS League Education Foundation program. So, the next step “In League” with our Albany County LWV was the request to serve on the Board of Directors in the capacity now as Second Vice President. Yes the League of Women Voters is NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY!!

SUSANNA MARTIN
I am very happy to be a member of the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Albany County. I joined the league almost 2 years ago after retiring from private law practice in the city of Albany. A long time admirer of the work the league does, I finally felt I had the time to be of benefit to the organization.

My interest in the league is mainly in Voter Services and I am a co-chair of that committee. I am particularly interested in registration of minority voters, and hope to be able to work toward registration of more minority voters this spring. Since joining the league, I have been surprised to see the effort that goes into things I took for granted about the electoral process.

Having lived in the Capital District my whole life, I currently live with my husband (Rick) in Altamont. I have retired from the practice of law, but still am active in the legal community and am currently serving on the Merit Selection Panel for the selection of a new federal court magistrate. I am hoping to be able to contribute to the league for a long time to come. I am also looking forward to getting to know the members.

Albany Co League - A Real Trendsetter!
At our annual meeting last spring, we approved a significant increase in our annual contribution to the NYS League of Women Voters and created a committee to suggest ways to use this contribution to leverage more support for the state LWV. The committee, Joanne Esposito, Arleen Stein, and Marggie Skinner met with Kate Jankowski, development coordinator for the state LWV and came up with a challenge. Our contribution would be made if LWVNYS could raise $25,000 by February 14, the LWVUS' 95th birthday.

By Valentine's Day, the NYSLVW raised $27,045 from 160 gifts. The League Matters Campaign Chair, Joanne Esposito, said our $10,000 gift was critical in raising donations both at year's end and in the early part of 2015, when it is typically difficult to raise money. She is so proud of us. And, two other local Leagues-LWV of Mid-Hudson and the LWV of Buffalo/Niagara-are making first time gifts to the state League because they were inspired by our gift.

WE DID IT! Congratulations to all of us for supporting this effort. Without the state and national Leagues, we would not have the reputation and resources that we need to be the vital organization that we are.

ACTION, ADVOCACY AND LOCAL LEAGUE POSITIONS
The State League engages in lobbying efforts and advocates for its positions. Its legislative agenda is published on its website and members throughout the state are trained to come to Albany and participate in lobbying efforts. But, what lobbying or advocacy actions can local leagues take? The process of going from identifying issues to studying them to gaining consensus, to adopting a position and then acting on it is orderly, transparent and sometimes frustrating to members who see an important civic concern and wonder why the League cannot speak out on it.

We as a local League are faced with this issue right now. Although we continue to monitor the actions of elected leaders in securing safe passage of oil trains through Albany, we are not currently able to advocate for a ban on this form of transportation for crude oil. Our local position, as described in the following article on our 2014-2015 program
is to monitor activities in this area so that we keep ourselves and the public informed. This monitoring is an important action role of the League but it does not immediately translate into advocacy for a point of view.

Remember that each local League belongs to the NYS League which in turn belongs to the League of Women Voters of the US. Since the days of the suffrage movement, strength and influence have been gained by speaking with one voice. So, advocacy actions fall within a framework. Our local program agenda which articulates our positions on topics is voted on at each annual meeting. It provides a framework for us to take actions and it is described in this issue. Suffrage leader and founder of the League of Women Voters of the United States, Carrie Chapman Catt, defined action as Agitating, organizing, educating, pleading and persuading.

As you read through the local program initiatives for 2014-2015 please keep in mind that in June at our annual meeting we will be voting on the 2015-2016 slate of topics. These may be similar or different but they will be ones where we see a strong civic need for our actions. They will also be ones we can readily tie back to state or national positions based on study, consensus and adoption. Advocacy and action go hand in hand and this month, our 95th anniversary, we are particularly reminded of our origins and the joining of hands and voices, “In League.”

LWVCAC Local Program - Our Springboard for Action

The following summarizes those areas we have positions on. The primary focus of LWVAC action in 2014-15 has been on county government and on supporting our positions on Albany County Charter Revision through consistent attendance at the County Legislature meetings and committee meetings under the leadership of committee chair, Judy Wing (judywing@beverwyck.com). Of the positions described below, this is the only group with regular actions and a functioning committee.

While the other action priorities currently do not have operating groups and activities, Paula Philo, LWVAC Action Chair, is eager to facilitate committees on each one. Since taking League Action can have many facets - it can mean monitoring actions by attending meetings, contacting government officials, writing letters, obtaining information for a committee, it’s very likely that there is a role for you in this process! And, we need you in order to make our carefully-thought out positions visible to policymakers and citizens. If you would like to be active in any of these areas, please contact Paula at paula.philo@gmail.com.

Program and Action Priorities of the LWV of Albany County, 2014-2015:

Albany County Charter Review Study
We will continue to follow developments in Albany County concerning revisions to the Albany County Charter and take action to support the positions on it adopted by the Albany County League.

LWVAC Position on the Albany County Charter
The League of Women Voters has since the charter creation in the 1970s held several positions enumerated below:

- Full appointment power for the County Executive with confirmation by the Legislature. This includes appointment of department heads, heads of agencies and bureaus, and members of county boards. The County Executive cannot be accountable to the Legislature and citizens of the county unless he or she has full appointment power.
- Full veto power for the County Executive with the possibility of a legislative over ride with a 2/3 vote. Currently the Executive cannot veto decreases to the budget.
- Appointed physician as Medical Examiner rather than elected Coroners.
- For clarity of procedures, support of an Administrative Code which is in the current charter but has not been funded. With the revised charter it is imperative that an administrative code be written to supplement the charter.

Long Term Care in Albany County
We will continue monitoring long term care options and issues in Albany County.

- In 2014-2015, the LWVAC will continue our study of long term care options and issues in Albany County. In 2011, the LWVAC members recommended that we conduct a study of these issues. The League committee completed the study; disseminated its findings; and provided public input to both the Albany county legislature and the New York State Department of Health. As a result of committee efforts to analyze and publish its findings, the League has met with the editorial board of the Times Union, has been covered by the press and has had a meeting with the county executive on this topic. In 2014-2015, it is recommended that the existing committee continue its educational and advocacy activities. 2014-2015 committee emphasis will balance the need to advocate for alternatives to institutional care for the frail elderly with specific attention to the ongoing
controversy surrounding the cost of building a new county nursing home. See our 2011 Long Term Care Study Report on the website.

Government Consolidation and Shared Services
The League will advocate for shared services and government consolidation where practical and feasible.
- In 2014-2015, LWVAC will continue activities and events related to the outcomes of the 2010 study on the consolidation and efficiency of local government. In July of 2010 the state League adopted a position which affords local Leagues with the authorization to undertake local government consolidation studies. The position allows for local League studies of sharing/consolidation issues by stating that “the League supports cooperative and transparent processes in which citizens have sufficient and timely information with which to make informed decisions about proposed actions, and well-defined channels for citizen input and review.”
- History: In 2012 the committee which had been drafted to work on the state League's 2010 position development was reconstituted. It was proposed that for 2013-2014 the committee would explore several county initiatives for the sharing or consolidation of services and would undertake specific study, assistance and informational activities related to one or more of these. As the committee's work progressed, members would be asked to approve any specific initiatives which appear to be consistent with the League's position to support cooperative efforts and government efficiencies.

Environment
We will monitor proposals for landfills in Albany County, based on our existing four-county solid waste position with the recognition of responsible and sustainable use of natural resources by municipalities. The League will monitor the environmental, public safety and health impacts associated with the transportation of crude oil shipments into the Port of Albany.
- Solid Waste in Albany County: In 2014-2015, LWVAC will continue monitoring proposals for landfills in Albany County, based on our existing four-county solid waste position (see website) with the recognition of responsible and sustainable use of natural resources by municipalities.
- The 2014-2015 initiative is to continue to monitor this topic in the event that there is action on the part of Albany County to consolidate landfills into a single entity and on the part of local municipalities within the county to consider other means of waste disposal.

Calendar

March is Women's History Month. 2015 Theme is "Weaving the Stories of Women's Lives," See The National Women's History Project, www.nwhp.org., for information on 2015 honorees and events

Tues. Mar 3, 7 pm LWVAC Board Meeting, St. Sophia's Church Library, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany
All members are welcome. Contact Lois Griffin, President, griffinocee@gmail.com

Sun. Mar 8, 11-4 pm "One Woman, One World"
Event in honor of the 104th International Women's Day
Gideon Putnam Resort, Saratoga Springs. See website for more information

Wed. Mar 11, 5:30 pm LWVAC Souper Supper Meeting
Bethlehem Public Library, see front page for details

March 15-21 Sunshine Week: Your Right to Know
The theme is "Open government is good government." Sunshine Week is a national initiative to promote a dialogue about the important of open government and freedom of information. Participants include news media, civic groups, libraries, nonprofits, schools and others interested in the public's right to know. See www.sunshineweek.org.

Tues. April 7, 7 pm LWVAC Board meeting, St. Sophia's Church Library, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany.
All members are welcome. Contact Lois Griffin, President, griffinocee@gmail.com
Membership 2015-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

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