



THE LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS
of Schenectady County New York

BULLETIN

www.lwvschenectady.org

March 2015

You are invited to a
Luncheon Featuring Rowie Taylor
Executive Director, Schenectady YWCA
“Women’s History and the YWCA”

Wednesday, March 18
Noon- 2 PM

Turf Tavern
40 Mohawk Avenue, Scotia

Contact: Ruth Bonn, 384-0804 or email: rooty@nycap.rr.com by **March 11**
See p. 5 for reservation form and entrée selections

March Events

Tuesday, March 3, 3:30 PM

**Vote for Update on League Position on
Constitutional Convention**

1060 Parkwood Blvd., Schenectady
Contact: Cheryl Nechamen, 346-4820

Wednesday, March 11, 5-7 PM

**The New York State Grand Jury:
Should It Be Changed?**

Panelists: Robert M. Carney, Mark Caruso,
Robert Keach, III
Schenectady County Central Library
99 Clinton St., Schenectady
Contact: Helga Schroeter, 370-5042

APRIL EVENT

Thursday, April 16, noon

Planning the New Family Literacy Center

Speaker: Karen Bradley
Director, Schenectady County Public Library
Schenectady County Central Library
99 Clinton St., Schenectady
Contact: Cheryl Nechamen, 346-4820



Message from the Steering Committee

The League has long been interested in the role of money in politics. Money is important early in the process, during campaign financing, and later, when the occasional elected official engages in corruption.

In the coming year, the League will be conducting an update of the League's position on campaign finance to determine whether contributing to a political campaign qualifies as protected speech under the First Amendment. Specifically, the study will examine the rights of individuals and groups to express their political views through campaign contributions and how those rights can be reconciled with the League's position.

The League's current position on campaign finance, last updated in 1982, states that "the methods of financing political campaigns should ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process."

One could view campaign contributions as an exercise of the right of free speech, but the public's right to know would be enhanced by knowing the source of those contributions. A candidate's stand on issues cannot help but be influenced by money from big donors. Publication of the names of donors and the

membership of contributing organizations may allow the public to anticipate a candidate's future actions in office.

We in New York State are painfully aware that some of our elected officials are corrupt. Ethics reforms that the Governor and Legislature have proposed to either limit or disclose outside income could help curb corruption. Again, knowing the source of the money tells us a lot about in whose interests a politician is acting.

At the local level, we will be discussing an updated position at the March 3rd Board meeting on the process of delegate selection for a State Constitutional Convention.

We also have an interesting program coming up on the grand jury system on March 11th with a panel discussion presenting the viewpoints of the prosecution and the defense. The participants will discuss whether changes need to be made in light of recent events nationwide concerning the grand jury system.

Also, we will have another opportunity to hear from Rowie Taylor, Executive Director of the YWCA, at a luncheon at the Turf Tavern. We're so glad that we could reschedule the luncheon with Rowie that was canceled due to bad weather in December. We hope you'll join us on March 18th.

Cheryl Nechamen, Lead

STEERING COMMITTEE

Cheryl Nechamen	(346-4820)	Lead for February- April 2015
Joan Elliott	(346-4414)	Lead for May- July 2015
Ruth Bonn	(384-0804)	Lead (completed)
Carol Furman	(346-2746)	Lead (completed)

Bulletin Editor: Cheryl Nechamen (346-4820)

Mission Statement: The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We work to increase the understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

Update on Constitutional Convention Delegate Selection Position

We are inviting all interested League members to the March 3rd Board meeting to discuss a proposed updated position on the process of delegate selection for a State Constitutional Convention. The last time a call for a constitutional convention was on the ballot was 1997. The State League did not support the call for a convention due to concerns about the delegate selection process.

The following is an excerpt from http://www.lwvny.org/LLresources/SBR_StateNews/2015/January/Final-Materials-to-Bd-on-Con_0115.pdf where more information may be found.

The **Current Position on Convention Delegates** states:

A delegate body of workable size should be elected by a fair, nonpartisan process. In accord with League principles, delegates should reflect our society with representation of women, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic minorities. The candidates' positions on issues and convention goals should be widely publicized to enable voters to cast informed votes at their election. Present office holders should not be eligible to serve as delegates; however, they might be considered as consultants. A constitutional amendment will be necessary to meet some of these criteria.

The updated position on Convention Delegates addresses the following concerns with the position:

- Clarifies that these reforms are a consideration, not a necessary component, in deciding whether or not to support a constitutional convention. This is in fact how the 1996 board interpreted the position.
- Drops the ambiguous "workable size" and revises the representation language.
- Adds public financing for delegates, as was intended to be in the position according to contemporary materials.

Updated Position on Convention Delegates

The League supports the following reforms as positive factors in deciding on support for a constitutional convention. Delegates should be elected by a fair nonpartisan process that complies with federal voting rights provisions and eases ballot access to encourage participation by racial and other minorities. Public financing should be provided for candidates and their positions on issues and convention goals should be widely publicized to enable voters to cast informed votes at their election. Statewide office holders, state or federal legislators, and state judges should not serve as delegates.

Please join us at 1060 Parkwood Blvd., Schenectady on March 3rd at 3:30 PM to discuss the update.

The **Health Committee** plans to meet on April 13th at 10:30 AM in the Swanker Board Room of the Schenectady County Central Library, 99 Clinton St. to explore advocacy and other steps to support health outcome improvements in Schenectady. We have invited Erin Buckenmeyer from Ellis Medicine to speak with us about the action plan of the Schenectady Coalition for a Healthy Schenectady, to respond to identified health outcomes which are in need of improvement. If you are not receiving e-mail from the Committee and wish to be notified of changes or plans, please contact Carol Furman at 346-2746 or cfurman@earthlink.net.

The **Environment Committee** will meet on March 9th, at 12:30. Safety issues related to oil trains going through our area will be the topic of discussion. Contact Ruth Bonn at rooty@nycap.rr.com.

From the Observer Corps- Betsy Chase, Chair

Schenectady City Council Report

A number of issues and decisions have occurred at the Schenectady City Council meetings, as of late. One of the major decisions was the vote by a majority of City Council members to have a casino in Schenectady. The Gaming Facility Locating Board chose Schenectady as the Capital Region site for 'Rivers Casino and Resort at Mohawk Harbor'.

Since then, the majority of City Council members voted in favor of zoning changes. This will allow for buildings to be doubled in height from the original 58 feet tall to 110 feet tall, a total of 19,000 square feet of signage and pylon signs up to 80 feet high on the 60-acre site. Also approved was an ordinance that would allow for electronic message boards in the city to change every eight seconds rather than every minute.

Public hearings will be held to change zoning of three acres at State St. and Brandywine Ave. for development of the site into retail space.

There is an initiative by Housing Community Development for revitalization of neighborhoods by assisting buyers in buying and rehabbing properties.

Selling properties in the city's revitalization project is on the agenda, along with demolitions of blighted buildings.

City residents have voiced a number of concerns including:

- ~Possible negative effects of a casino
- ~Questions on the safety of fluoride in Schenectady water
- ~Lack of jobs and housing for the disabled and minorities
- ~Concerns on how the Police Department runs the new kennel for stray dogs.
- ~Continued concerns regarding robberies, vandalism, graffiti, loitering, littering, overall crime and calls for more policing of problem areas

There will be four City Council seats and the Mayoral position open for 2016.

Flora Ramonowski

Schenectady County Legislature

Occasionally we have spoken on LWV issues. There is no question that Legislators are aware that the LWV is paying attention to their activities, however, it is difficult to measure the effect of our presence.

Maxine Borom and Helga Schroeter

Judicial Committee Report:

A few issues of concern have been making progress at the state level. The Senate finally held a hearing on two appointments to the Court of Appeals and confirmed Lesley Stein and Eugene Fahey who immediately joined the court to catch up with the caseload.

There is also a growing effort to address the funding issue for indigents' defense, after five counties settled a lawsuit brought because of woefully inadequate services.

The report from the Commission looking into juvenile justice services has come out with a

number of recommendations, including raising the age of criminal responsibility in adult court gradually from 16 to 17 and 18 the following year. A coalition of organizations which includes the Fund for Modern Courts has been formed under the name "Raise the Age" campaign. The State League has been invited to join and is going to consider the request at its March 18th board meeting. Finally, various proposals for grand jury reform are under consideration.

Helga Schroeter, Chair

League March Luncheon featuring Rowie Taylor, Executive Director, YWCA

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Entrée selections:

____ Baked Scrod

____ Chicken Florentine

____ Vegetarian Saute

***Please indicate any dietary restrictions**

Cost is \$20.

Please make your reservation by March 11th. Call Ruth Bonn at 384-0804 or e-mail rooty@nycap.rr.com. Send check payable to LWV Schenectady to Ruth Bonn, 47 Bruce Dr., Alplaus, NY 12008 or pay at the door. Your reservation is a commitment to pay unless we are able to fill unexpected vacancies with last minute reservations.

There will also be an opportunity to contribute to the YWCA Scholarship Fund for early education.

The New York State Grand Jury: Should It Be Changed?

The grand jury system will be the topic of a panel of experts in a program March 11th presented by the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County. Panelists at the session from 5 PM to 7 PM at the Schenectady County Central Library, 99 Clinton St., Schenectady will be: Robert M. Carney, Schenectady County District Attorney; Mark Caruso, head of the Schenectady County Public Defender's Office; and Robert Keach, III, civil rights attorney.

The panel will explain the grand jury system and its use from the prosecutorial and defense perspectives. It will also address whether changes need to be made. Recent controversial cases taken to the grand jury have raised issues about its secrecy and a process that favors the case brought by the prosecutor.

Mr. Carney has been a district attorney since 1990 and a lawyer for 26 years. Mr. Caruso has a decade each of experience as a former prosecutor and as a current defense attorney. Mr. Keach is in private practice and handles civil rights litigation.

Calling All Volunteers Interested in Videotaping League Programs

If you'd like to learn how to videotape, edit and upload League programs to the Web, the League can provide equipment and training. For more information, contact Cheryl Nechamen, 346-4820 or cnechamen@msn.com.

Mike Brewster, Pres.

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Our League goals are to educate citizens about government and public policy, encourage citizen participation in elections, and influence public policy relating to issues we've studied. Dues money makes working on our goals possible.

DUES for July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015

Return to: LWV of Schenectady County, P.O. Box 9135, Schenectady, NY 12309

New or Renewing Members Please Confirm this Contact Information

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

_____ \$60 Individual _____ \$85 Household _____ \$20 Full-time student

_____ Additional support for the League, dues plus \$10 contribution (\$70 or \$95 – circle one)

(Confidential arrangements for special payment or partial assistance can be made. Contact Connie Young at 393-7061 with any questions. Dues and contributions are not tax deductible.)

.....
_____ *I am sending my membership dues payment, but please consider me an **INACTIVE member**.*

.....
ACTIVE MEMBERS: The League depends upon the work of its members, even for a short task. Please check any activities that interest you. We appreciate your help.

Committees Judicial _____ Health Care _____ Working Group on Girls _____
Environment _____ Observer Corps _____ Housing _____ Education _____
Membership _____ Fundraising _____

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March Calendar of Events

**Tues. March 3...Vote for Update on League
Position for Constitutional Convention**
3:30 PM, 1060 Parkwood Blvd., Schenectady

**Wed. March 11...NYS Grand Jury: Should It
Be Changed?**
5-7 PM, Schenectady Central Library

March Luncheon

**Rowie Taylor
Executive Director, Schenectady YWCA**

“Women’s History and the YWCA”

**Wednesday, March 18
Noon- 2 PM**

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