



THE LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS
of Schenectady County New York

BULLETIN

www.lwvschenectady.org

November 2015

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday, November 3, 6 AM- 9 PM

Election Day!!

Monday, November 16, 7-9 PM

Money in Politics

Speaker: Blair Horner

Legislative Director, NYPIRG

Fenimore Gallery, Proctors Theatre

432 State St., Schenectady

Contact: Joan Elliott, 346-4414

Tuesday, December 1, noon- 2 PM

Raise the Age Concurrence & Board Meeting

1st Reformed Church

8 N. Church St., Schenectady

Contact: Helga Schroeter, 370-5042

Thursday, December 3

League Day at the United Nations

New York City

Contact: Ruth Bonn, 384-0804

Holiday Luncheon

Wednesday, December 9

11:45 AM- 1:30 PM

Speaker: Ken Harris, Executive Director, Albany Guardian Society

“The Village Movement and Livable Communities”

Schenectady County Community College

78 Washington Ave., Schenectady

Entrees: Cornish Game Hen with Maple Mustard Glaze
 Salmon with Honey Balsamic Glaze
 Rigatoni Pasta

* Please call if you have dietary restrictions

Cost of the luncheon is \$25. **Please make your reservation by December 1st.** Contact Cheryl Nechamen at 346-4820 or cnechamen@msn.com. Your reservation is a commitment to pay unless we are able to fill unexpected vacancies with last minute reservations.

Message from the Steering Committee

“Money in Politics” will be examined by our League at a talk on November 16th. A study and consensus will follow later in the fall. The Citizens United decision has brought widespread attention to the issue of the corrupting influence of money, an issue which has been a longtime action area of the League of Women Voters.

In a new book, The Republic of Conscience, Gary Hart, senator, presidential candidate, diplomat and professor, puts the issue in the context of the founding principles of our democratic republic. These principles were set forth as essential if the new republic were to survive for posterity, unlike republics of the past. The four principles upon which our nation's government is founded are: 1) **Popular Sovereignty**- government is by and for the people, not a small group of individuals, 2) **Civic Virtue**- what we would call civic duty- citizens need to be involved, informed, to vote and to pay taxes, 3) **Concern for the Common Good**- care for the health of the “commonwealth”, the things that we, the people, hold in common: the air, water, public lands, common defense, waterways, roads and transportation systems, and the air waves and 4) **Resistance to Corruption**- the founding fathers thought of corruption as *putting special, narrow or personal interests ahead of the common good, ahead of the public interest*. Our government is massively corrupt by this definition.

What brought us to this point? Hart answers, “...staggering campaign costs, political contributions, political action committees, special interest payments for access, and, most of all, the rise of the lobbying class.”

In the 1970's there were 160 registered lobbyists; now...around 13,000. Access is key. Connections help. A few minutes of a senator's time, (and more of a staffer's) and contributions to a reelection campaign follow. Businesses spend \$34 on lobbying for every \$1 spent by various groups representing consumers or taxpayers. So whose voice is heard? Hart contends that the lobbying industry has become so influential that it is “nothing less than an unofficial but enormously powerful fourth branch

of government”... a branch which is accountable, not to the people, but to special interests. The \$2.6 billion now spent on lobbying expenses is more than the entire budget of the U.S.Congress.

The cost of running for office has increased astronomically. Spending in the 2014 election was three times that in 2010, pre-Citizens United. In the current presidential election, just 158 families and their companies have contributed almost half of the money---most through channels legalized by Citizens United. An individual can now give a candidate a contribution up to the federal limit, and then give an unlimited amount to the candidate's super PAC. “Dark money” (from nonprofit “social welfare” groups and other nonprofits like business leagues which are not required to reveal their donors) paid for over half of the ads aired by outside groups in the 2014 election.

Requiring the licensees of our air waves to give a certain amount of air time to candidates is the single best way to fight the influence of big money, Senator Hart believes. The air waves are part of the nation's common wealth, he notes; they are only leased to communications companies. The overturning of Citizens United is also essential to reduce legal corruption. And citizens need to rise up and protest; to “have the courage to drive the money changers from the temple of democracy and recapture government of the people, for the people, and by the people.”

Senator Hart points out that a republic is an ideal to be worked toward; it can never be a finished achievement; there must be a continual struggle between the tendency toward self-interest and a concern for the common good. Self-interest is predominating now in the US; the ideal of the democratic republic is languishing in critical condition. Government which is driven by narrow self-interest, destroys a sense of community, of common good and of nationhood. It is hard to imagine any politician now saying, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

Ruth Bonn, Lead

Blair Horner To Give Views On Money In Politics

Blair Horner, Legislative Director of the New York Public Institute Research Group (NYPIRG), will give his insights on "Money in Politics" when he speaks to the LWV of Schenectady County November 16th at 7 PM in the Fenimore Gallery at Proctors Theatre in Schenectady.

Mr. Horner has been observing the New York State Legislature for more than 30 years and often appears on television to advocate for government reform including campaign finance reform. Considered knowledgeable about government and politics, he often is the "go to guy" for reporters covering the State Capitol. He and the LWVNYS lobbyist and advocate, Barbara Bartoletti, often team up together to comment on good government issues in response to press questions. Mr. Horner also provides regular commentary on current events for WAMC, the local public radio station. NYPIRG, with which Mr. Horner has been affiliated for most of his career, is the largest student-directed research and advocacy organization in the state.

Mr. Horner is expected to compare New York and U.S. money in politics. Mr. Horner's presentation will be the start of the League's study to update its position on financing of political campaigns. The current League of Women Voters of the United States position "takes a collective approach to financing political campaigns." It focuses on achieving political equity in areas of combating corruption and undue influence, ensuring equitable competition and protecting the rights of citizens to know and

fully participate. This position has enabled the League to advocate strongly for openness in campaign finance and against big money and its influence on elections and government.

The 2010 United States Supreme Court decision in Citizens United versus Federal Election Commission has changed the environment in which financing of political campaigns is carried out. In restudying the issue of money in politics, the League will investigate the Constitution's First Amendment interests of candidates and donors, particularly as compared with equitable competition, preventing corruption and undue influence; and enhancing voter participation. The First Amendment has been at the center of the campaign finance debate since the 1970s. A key provision says, "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..."

The League hopes to make the issue of money in politics and first amendment rights understandable to League members and all citizens although it acknowledges that any education and discussion of these issues must attempt to be comprehensive, and thereby will be complex.

February 1, 2016 is the deadline for reporting the League's position on money in politics. A national position would then be expected in April 2016 if consensus has been achieved.

Joan Elliott

STEERING COMMITTEE

Ruth Bonn	(384-0804)	Lead for August – November 2015
Carol Furman	(346-2746)	Lead for December 2015, January, February, June 2016
Cheryl Nechamen	(346-4820)	Lead for March – May, July 2016

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.

Concurrence Meeting on “Raise the Age”

The Schenectady LWV will hold its concurrence meeting on Tuesday, December 1st at noon, with a Board meeting to follow (bring a bag lunch), at the First Reformed Church at 8 N. Church Street. The concurrence involves partial agreement with the Ohio LWV position on juvenile justice. While the Ohio position is very detailed in terms of implementation, the NYS League is looking for a broader position which will allow for more flexibility in response to specific legislative proposals, while allowing us to advocate for changes.

The League has positions on alternatives to bail and on alternatives to incarceration, but no specific position dealing with juvenile justice. The concurrence is meant to allow the NYS League to advocate for changes in the age of criminal responsibility. Only New York and North Carolina have continued handling of 16 and 17 year-olds in the adult criminal system; all other states have raised the age limit.

The concurrence will address the following four points:

- 1) Children under the age of 18 are not adults and their handling within the juvenile justice and criminal court system should relate to their stage of development.
- 2) Children should not be held in adult jails.
- 3) Rehabilitation is the purpose of the juvenile justice system.
- 4) The legal rights of children should be protected.

More information may be found on the LWVNYS website at www.lwvny.org.

If the concurrence is adopted, these principles will form our position on juvenile justice. The Judicial Committee members will present the pros and cons for each of the four points. Please join us on December 1st to participate in the concurrence process of this important issue!

Helga Schroeter, Judicial Committee Chair

Voter Services

The LWV of Schenectady County partnered with the New York Alliance for Donation in promoting organ, eye and tissues donation and participated in National Voter Registration Day on September 22nd.

We conducted voter registration at six sites this year on five different dates and handed out 94 voter registration forms to be returned later and collected 183 completed forms. Of these, 28 people signed organ donor forms. We also handed out 7 absentee ballot requests and delivered 10 completed absentee ballot requests to the Board of Elections. In 2014, we conducted voter registration at nine sites and collected 71 completed forms, and handed out 38 voter registration forms to be filled out later and 8 absentee ballot requests.

In October, we partnered with AAUW conducting four candidate forums for local elections in the

City of Schenectady and the towns of Glenville, Niskayuna and Rotterdam. The forums were taped by Open Stage Media and rebroadcast on local access stations.

On Election night, November 3rd, we will again partner with AAUW and collect election results to report to local media at as many election districts as we have volunteers to cover. We receive a modest payment for every polling place for which we are able to give a report and the proceeds are used to cover the expenses of taping the candidate forums.

Last But Not Least: EVERY VOTE COUNTS--
--DON'T NEGLECT YOUR DUTY AS A CITIZEN
--- BE SURE TO VOTE ON ELECTION DAY
NOVEMBER 3rd, 2015

Kay Ackerman, Voter Services Chair

Holiday Luncheon

Ken Harris, Executive Director of the Albany Guardian Society, will speak to League members at the Holiday Luncheon on December 9th at 11:45 AM about the village movement and livable communities. The village movement has gained popularity in recent years as it allows seniors to “age in place”. Seniors pay an annual fee to the village which acts as a liaison to services performed by younger members of the community. Livable communities, in which land use, housing and transportation are designed around walkable neighborhoods, fit in well with the village movement. Join us for lunch at Schenectady County Community College. Cost of the luncheon is \$25.

We will collect donations to support Bethesda House at the luncheon.

The **Health Committee** is working with the Schenectady Coalition for a Healthy Community on a Falls Prevention project for seniors living in Schenectady County. Our first meeting took place on October 22nd with providers and Harrison Moss from the NYS Department of Health. We will plan a second meeting in November to focus on specific possible interventions which have proven successful in other communities. If you are interested in working with the Health Committee, please contact Carol Furman at 346-2746.

Join us for the annual League Day at the United Nations on Thursday, December 3, 2015

This year’s event provides briefings by UN experts on two topics: global healthcare issues and educating the youth of the world. A delicious lunch in the Delegates’ Dining Room and tours of the United Nations facility are also available. A roundtrip bus is available from Albany to NYC for \$45. For more information, check out the LWVNYS website and register at https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/INvmPPc4Hpebf0PLNzaRnw.

New member Kathleen Pierone

Kathleen is a former Albany LWV member. She is a Contract Manager for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Division of Child Care. One of her current contracts is providing mental health services for children in daycare affected by Superstorm Sandy in New York City and Long Island. She will retire this fall.

Kathleen, a clarinet player, is in the process of establishing a not-for-profit musical organization for piano and organ competition, dedicated to her step-mother's talent and memory. She is committed to the League mission and will participate in programs as her time permits.

Do You Believe that Working New Yorkers Should Earn a Living Wage?

The State League is forming a Living Wage Committee and needs members from local Leagues to look at the economic situation in their communities to determine what an appropriate wage is in their area. Barb Thomas is chairing the Living Wage committee, but only has one member so far. She needs and wants more members. She lives in Saratoga Springs, so is local, and can be reached at barb.lwv@nycap.rr.com. Contact her if you want more information or to find out how you can help move the issue along.

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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, 2015 – June 30, 2016

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 _____

Voter Services Voter Registration _____ Candidate Forums _____ Voter Information _____

Computer Skills Graphics/Layout _____ Databases _____ Website Work _____

Facebook _____ Electronic Publicity _____

Other Technical Skill? (Describe) _____

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November Calendar of Events

Tues. Nov. 3...Election Day!

Mon. Nov. 16...Money in Politics
7-9 PM, Proctors Theatre, Schenectady

Holiday Luncheon

Wednesday, December 9, 11:45 AM

**Speaker: Ken Harris, Executive Director,
Albany Guardian Society**

**“The Village Movement and Livable
Communities”**

Schenectady County Community College
78 Washington Ave., Schenectady