



League of Women Voters of Albany County Bulletin

September-October 2015

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Pot Luck Dinner and Public Policy Forum: Our Annual Program Kick-Off Event

WHEN: Tuesday, September 29

5:30 arrival, 6:00 Dinner, 6:30 speaker and discussion

WHAT: Dinner, discussion, and re-engagement in League activities- please bring an appetizer, entrée or dessert to share

WHERE: St. Sophia's Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany

RSVP to Julie Elson, jelson510@earthlink.net, tel: 482-0981

Why it is Important to Attend:

This is a presentation on the topic, "Raise the Age for Youthful Offenders," a LWNYS initiative to determine whether it wants to adopt an advocacy position for juvenile justice reform efforts similar to those of LWV Ohio. That state League has embarked on a campaign to reform judicial treatment of youthful offenders and some of the policy issues have relevance to the New York State system. New York currently has the cut-off for adult consideration in criminal justice matters at 16 or 17 rather than 18 years of age and is only one of two states in the country to do be below the majority threshold.

The speaker, Kate Breslin, is President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, and has a long history of policy development and action for social change.

Members will have an opportunity to understand the implications of the current state policy. Subsequent LWNYS produced materials will also assist our League in preparation for more intensive study and analysis. We will be asked to complete a League concurrence process at the conclusion of this meeting. Each local league will determine whether or not members support the position on "raise the age" similar to what the state league adopted in Ohio. If concurrence is achieved, this would become the basis for legislative lobbying to get the law changed during the 2016 Legislative session. Although in 2015, Governor Cuomo through Executive Order acted to remove youths aged 16 through 18 from adult prisons, full implementation of change within the juvenile justice system would require Legislative approval through changes in law and infrastructure funding.

Mission

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.

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.

Board and Committees

President
(Aug-Oct) Paula Philo
(Nov-Feb) Margaret Danes

Secretary Loretta Simon

Treasurer Marggie Skinner

Directors
Julie Elson (Program)

Margaret Danes (Membership)

Barbara Frankel
(Voters Service)

Susanna Martin
(Voters Service)

Lois Portnick (at large)

Linda Brown (website)

Herb Gordon (at large)

Aimee Allaud (Bulletin)

A complete list of committee chairs is available on the LWVAC website, www.lwvalbany.org under Contact Us.

Electronic Bulletin

MEMBERS can receive our Bulletin electronically or by US mail. If you wish to receive our Bulletin electronically, please send an email to bulletin editor, Aimee Allaud, 85aimee@nycap.rr.com, or 482-2617.

Raise the Age: Facts and Background on our Speaker

New York State is one of only two states that prosecutes all youth as adults when they turn 16 years old, even for non violent crimes.

Young people are incarcerated with adults in local jails while awaiting trial and then matriculated into the greater adult prison population if found guilty.

Legislation to push the age of criminal responsibility from 16 and 17 to age 18, meaning that most crimes committed by people in this age would be treated as juvenile offenses, failed to pass in the 2015 Legislative Session.

To discuss the advocacy efforts, strategy and prospects of "Raise the Age" legislation, Kate Breslin, President and CEO of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA), will give an overview of the issues and lead discussion. She has spent her career in support of social policy solutions that improve the lives of people in the US and abroad and currently plays a leadership role in statewide coalitions focused on health. The SCAA is a non-profit organization engaged in research, community education and advocacy on state policy issues affecting disenfranchised populations.

President's Message

September gives us the opportunity to begin again after having the summer off. Come to the Pot Luck dinner on September 29 to enjoy a thought provoking program, delicious food and the company of old friends.

September also gives us the opportunity to start something new. If you are a new member, please join us. We'd like to get to know you. If you are a seasoned member, bring a friend who is new to the League.

Try something new. Help out with an upcoming voters forum, join a committee, attend a Board meeting. Did you know that Board meetings are open to all members? We'd like to hear what you have to say. We encourage you to get involved. Being involved and working with other members will make you feel as though you're really a part of the League.

I'm looking forward to seeing you soon!

Yours in League, Paula Philo

LWVAC Board Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month, at St. Sophia's Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, 7 PM. Sept 8, Oct. 20, Nov.17, Dec. 15.

All members are welcome to attend.

League of Women Voters of NYS and
League of Women Voters of NYS Education Foundation

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Dare Thompson, President

League of Women Voters of the US,
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Tel: 202-429-1965, www.lwv.org

Elisabeth McNamara, President

Decision Will Be Needed on Support of Ballot Item for New Albany County Charter

As we stated in the last League bulletin, a question on making changes in the Albany County Charter will be on the November ballot. The Charter was deemed in need of codification and revisions. The League initially endorsed the draft proposed by the Charter Revision Commission. We provided both public testimony to this effect and generated media coverage of our support. This draft was then subjected to further revision by a selected review committee of members of the Legislature. In their review, provisions endorsed by the League were eliminated. Contentious meetings of the Legislature resulted in defeat to restore the original provisions and the newer, controversial amendments to the Charter Revision Commission's document were thus adopted. The following items now in the draft are of most concern to the League.

There will be no mention in the November ballot of the original recommended plan to reduce the size of the legislature. Instead, the ballot will endorse a plan for the legislature to redraw its own lines every 10 years when a new census is released. Presumably the size of the legislature could be reduced but the decision would be solely within the deliberations of the legislature, affording no role for the public in downsizing the state's biggest county legislature. The provision for an independent redistricting commission to draw these district lines was also eliminated. The redistricting work would be done by a committee within the legislature itself. These provisions eliminate citizen involvement in determining both the size of the legislature and the composition of electoral districts within the county.

Given these changes, it is unclear whether or not the League will continue to endorse the revision of the Albany county charter. Board members will be soliciting member input during the next months.

Dues and Contributions OR The Mystery of the Red Dot

DUES: When we amended the by-laws a year ago, we affirmed that our dues year is the calendar year, but we are very generous and carry people through October if dues are not paid. We are not changing that, but we want to remind those of you who have not paid your 2015 dues that we do need your payment. (If our records show that you owe dues for 2015, there will be a red dot on your mailing label.)

New members who join at this time of year get a free ride- your payment any time from now until the end of the year will cover your dues for 2016.

CONTRIBUTIONS: More importantly, we have been very active with voter service activity with Barbara Frankel taking on that responsibility. We are more visible with candidate forums, election information at vote411.org, voter registration activities and more. These activities cost money and the good news is, voter education qualifies as tax exempt educational activity. Your contributions to the League of Women Voters of NYS Education Foundation can be used for this and is tax deductible for you.

So- when you send in your dues check, send a second check payable to the LWVNYS Education Foundation. If you have already paid your dues, one check to the fund will be greatly appreciated and the money will be well spent.

Marggie Skinner, Treasurer

Four County Leagues Withdrawal from FCP Signals New League Emphasis on Core Functions

Four Leagues of Women Voters of the Capital District announced August 14 that they are withdrawing from participation in the FCP, Fair Campaign Practices for the Capital Region, Inc. This was founded in 1999 to promote fair and honest political campaigns.

Barbara Thomas, designated as spokesperson for the Leagues of Women Voters of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady Counties, said the Leagues made the decision "regretfully" but they no longer believe that they can be effective in carrying out the organization's original purpose which was to improve the tenor of political campaigns in the four counties. Political campaigns are increasingly influenced by Political Action committees (PACs) over which candidates have no control. The FCP will solicit other community organizations in an effort to sustain its operations. This withdrawal marks the end of 16 years of participation in monitoring area campaigns. We have reprinted the press release below so that those unfamiliar with its history and purpose can appreciate its value to the community.

In light of the FCP withdrawal and the need to focus resources effectively in an all-volunteer organization, the leagues in all four counties are increasingly directing efforts towards voter education and voter registration. The League of Women Voters in Albany county has partnered with several community organizations in holding candidate forums throughout the county. In a 10 day period at the end of August we held four candidate forums to packed audiences and beginning September 21 will be conducting a full week of voter registration drives at all Food Pantry locations. In April, volunteers registered voters at all locations of the Albany Public library. Volunteers continue to staff data gathering efforts to solicit positions on key issues from primary and general election candidates for the interactive voter education software, vote 411. This tool provides voters with a valuable means of comparison of the candidates' perspectives and values.

August 14, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Four Leagues of Women Voters of the Capital District announced today that they are withdrawing from participation in Fair Campaign Practices for the Capital Region, Inc. that was founded in 1999 to promote fair and honest political campaigns.

Barbara Thomas, designated as spokesperson for the Leagues of Women Voters of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady Counties, said the Leagues made the decision "regretfully" but they no longer believe that they can be effective in carrying out the organization's original purpose which was to improve the tenor of political campaigns in the four counties. Political campaigns are increasingly influenced by Political Action committees (PACs) over which candidates have no control.

According to FCP President Mick Drown, The Interfaith Alliance, Capital District Chapter will continue its participation in Fair Campaign Practices for the Capital Region Inc. (FCP) and plans to recruit other organizations to join with them to carry out the goal of supporting fair campaign practices and educating the public when unfair campaign practices have been used.

As volunteer organizations, the Leagues have had to make difficult decisions on where to focus their resources and have decided to focus on voter registration and education, candidate forums, and work on campaign finance reform, among other issues. In recent years, the Leagues have found it increasingly difficult to recruit its members for board of directors and leadership responsibilities for Fair Campaign Practices. The Leagues also noted a recent decline in complaints to FCP filed by political candidates and a decline in candidates' willingness to sign pledges to conduct fair campaigns.

FCP was founded by the Leagues of Women Voters of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady Counties and the Interfaith Alliance, Capital District Chapter, for the purpose of educating the public about misleading and unfair campaign practices which are used by some candidates to gain an advantage over their opponents. FCP tried to encourage factual accuracy and relevance in campaign literature and

advertisements. In its history, FCP heard complaints and issued 52 findings; complaints were filed in the four counties. Each year FCP has asked local political candidates in the four counties to sign a pledge that they would honor principles of fair campaigning and FCP has tried to publicize those principles that result in a climate in which candidates conduct honest campaigns.

Voting Rights Act Turns 50 - Congress Must Restore Its Protections

Letter to the Editor, *Times Union*, Published Sept. 7, 2015, by Aimee Allaud

August 6, 2015 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). This landmark civil rights legislation has protected voters from discrimination for nearly half a century. The VRA is one of the most significant laws ever passed by Congress and it changed America. But today, the Voting Rights Act does not offer the same protections it did in 1965.

Two years ago, when the U.S. Supreme Court gutted key provisions of the VRA in its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, vital voter protections were weakened. Since then Congress has done nothing to repair the damage. Congress currently has before it various proposals, but there's been no action, no legislation passed. As a result, voter discrimination at ballot boxes across the nation has become more pronounced and we are dangerously close to holding our first presidential election in 50 years without critical protections once embodied in the VRA. In NYS, five jurisdictions in NYC have received the protections of Section 5 of the VRA which require that proposed changes in voting procedures must be submitted to the US Department of Justice before they are enacted. As a result of *Shelby*, those jurisdictions are no longer subject to preclearance and the protections of the VRA.

Each and every eligible American voter deserves to be treated fairly and have free and equal access to the ballot. During the August congressional recess, voters should tell their congressional representative that the right to vote is fundamental to our democracy: Restore the VRA.

Calendar

- Sept. 21 Nat'l Voter Registration Week: LWVAC members volunteer at 19 local food pantries, contact Susanna Martin, 861-5264, susannalmartin@gmail.com.
- Sept. 29 LWVAC Pot Luck Supper and public policy forum, topic "Raise the Age," with guest speaker, Kate Breslin (see article), 5:30 PM., social hour, 6:00 PM, dinner, 6:30 speaker, at St. Sophia's Church hall, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, contact jelson510@earthlink.net.
- Oct. 20, 7 pm LWVAC Board Meeting, St. Sophia's Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, All members are welcome to attend. Contact Paula Philo, paula.philo@gmail.com. 475-9213.
- Oct. 20, 6-9 pm Albany City School Board, "Meet the Candidates" forum, First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, 405 Washington Ave., Albany, contact Barbara Frankel, barbaremeg@mac.com, Tel: 810-4180. Candidates for three seats on Albany School Board.
- Oct. 22 Candidates Forum for Bethlehem Town Supervisor and candidates for two Town Board seats, evening (see www.lwvalbany.org.) Bethlehem Town Hall, 455 Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY., contact Barbara Frankel, barbaremeg@mac.com, 810-4180.
- Oct. 27, 7- 9:15pm Candidates Forum: Colonie Town Supervisor and candidates for three Town Board seats, Holiday Inn, Albany, 205 Wolf Road, contact Barbara Frankel, barbaremeg@mac.com, Tel: 810-4180.
- Oct. 29 Candidates Forum: Guilderland Town Supervisor and candidates for two Town Board seats, evening (see www.lwvalbany.org), Guilderland High School auditorium School Road, Guilderland Center, NY., contact Barbara Frankel, barbaremeg@mac.com, 810-4180.
- Nov. 3 Election Day: VOTE!

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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