



League of Women Voters of Albany County

Bulletin

July/August 2016

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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

National League Convention Calls for Change

The League of Women Voters of the United States held its bi-annual convention in Washington DC June 16-19, 2016. Our state league sent 41 delegates including, from Albany, Margaret Danes, president and board member Patricia Sibilia. Summaries of convention findings, including the major address by CEO Wylecia Wiggs Harris, can be found on their website at www.lwvus.org.

In an energetic and positive call to action, Dr. Wylecia Wiggs Harris asked our membership to embrace the need to grow as a 21st century organization. The following are key points from her address.

"If we work together to embrace change, we can pick up the mantle of those who came before us...to 'finish the fights' of this generation, and for generations to come."

"We need to accelerate the pace of change within our organization to keep pace with the changes occurring in society at large."

"We can either evolve, or we cede our legacy to others."

"As we shift from conceptual conversations. It is important to acknowledge that our journey will, at times, be uncomfortable and maybe even scary. We won't always be able to dot the "I's" and cross the "T's"."

And reaction from a friend and potential donor. "She was impressed that a 96-year-old, iconic organization was willing to engage in a conversation about its own evolution...and take action to reinvent itself to continue to serving the needs of voters."

"We have discussed the need to evolve and change for a while, and we need to turn these conversations into-and execute-a Winning Plan of our own....to be strong and relevant for the next generation."

"Finally, I'm asking to adopt the Making Democracy Work campaign which will give us the organizational focus and strategic alignment necessary to demonstrate greater collective impact, relevance, and visibility. This is the beginning of our Winning Plan."

Over the coming year the LWVAC will be working on ways to address this challenge with new activities, plans and processes. The address by Wiggs Harris stressed the fact that we have a rising electorate and the diversity within it requires new methods not only for communication but for affiliation and action.

League on the basis of economic position, gender, race, ability, age, sexual orientation, creed or national origin.

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

Quick Links

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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, 482-2617, or 85aimee@nycap.rr.com.

President's Message

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

This quote from the late Martin Luther King, Jr. echoes a similar thought from the late Elie Wiesel -- "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.

Powerful dictates from two men who endured oppression and suffering based on prejudice and hate. Decades later it would be a huge step for civilization to report that such heinous acts were no longer a part of our society. Unfortunately, we cannot say so.

Just recently we had the horrible shootings in Orlando, the shootings of black men by police, and then the vindictive retaliation in Dallas with the shooting of police officers maintaining an orderly presence in a "Black Lives Matter" rally. Tragic and painful happenings in different areas of our country.

On a much smaller scale but equally hateful was the recent burning of the Gay Pride flag at the First Lutheran Church in Albany. And so when there was a dedication ceremony for the new flag, there was a good turnout of support from civic leaders and members of the community. Aimee Allaud, Steve Winters, and I attended in a show of support from the Albany League as well. We listened and applauded the many thoughtful and moving speeches. For me the strongest directive came from Mayor Sheehan who stated, "Hate and ignorance will not win out."

And if we all stand united in protest against these acts both here and elsewhere, perhaps we can make a real difference. For once we can passionately say, "Silence is not golden."

Yours in League,
Margaret Danes

LWVAC Board Meetings are generally held monthly (see calendar) St. Sophia's Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany.
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Albany County Charter - Still Needs to Change and the League has been a Player in the Debate

In last November's election, the voters overwhelmingly rejected Proposition One to change the County Charter. And it wasn't because our aged Charter doesn't need a major overhaul. A 2014 Charter Review Commission had recommended a rather large set of changes. But after the Legislature reviewed the Commission's work, they decided to put to the voters in the mandatory public referendum a set of proposals of their own, ignoring the recommendations of their own Charter Review Commission. Two of the most controversial aspects concerned whether and how to reduce the size of the legislature- the largest in the state- and drawing voting lines in the future by a legislatively dominated process rather than by independent citizen review as was originally recommended.

Through the League's work we defeated their Charter reform proposal. The sound defeat of the County's ill-conceived plan supports our belief that there is agreement amongst the voters that citizens have the right to review and vote on the specifics of how our County government should change particularly for potential legislative district downsizing and the Census related redrawing of district election lines. All of this came on the heels of the County needing to once again pay \$1.7 million in legal costs after its drawing of district election lines was deemed to have violated the federal Voting Rights Act - the third such lawsuit in as many decades resulting from its own redistricting efforts.

But the big question now is whether or not we will get another Charter reform proposal on the ballot this November, and whether it can be something that the League can support. League members have been meeting separately with relevant legislators, contacting the press and attending each meeting on this important process. There have been updates provided to members via our Constant Contact email distribution network. Here is where the proposed changes to the Charter currently stand.

Peter Crouse (R-24th Loudonville) put forward three proposed Local Laws during June's Law Committee meeting. His proposal is co-sponsored with 3 other Republicans, with the idea that these new proposed laws would be on the November ballot. The League was active in getting the legislature to move for more public participation for this process and we have helped to publicize a Public Hearing on Tuesday, July 26th. A fourth proposal, by Chris Higgins (D- 5th Albany) was not approved for discussion at the public hearing. The matter for public discussion will therefore be 3 proposed local laws which are described below. To prepare for this public discussion, we met on July 18 to determine how these changes comported with our existing positions on the Charter revision. It was agreed that for now we are maintaining our current positions. The most prominent of them are:

- Reduce the size of the County's Legislature by 14 members from 39 to 25
- Establish a non-partisan, independent and inclusive reapportionment commission to permanently reform how County Legislative districts are drawn.
- Replace the County's four part-time elected Coroners with a single full-time Medical Examiner (a licensed physician) appointed by the County Executive, subject to confirmation by the County Legislature.

While we continue to do further research, we feel we cannot support Local Laws F and G as they are currently written versus our consensus positions. Due to the vast size of Local Law H, more in depth review is needed and we expect to provide our written feedback after the Public Hearing, although we already clearly know that it doesn't meet our position on replacing the County Coroners with a Medical Examiner. These are the local laws to be discussed at the July 26 Public Hearing.

- Local Law F: Downsize the Albany county Legislature in two stages; first from 39 legislators to 33 in 2024, and then to 29 legislators in 2032.
- Local Law G: Redistricting changes that include having two Commissions, one to represent the Majority Minority Districts, and a general Commission of 7 individuals which would be chosen by Legislative leadership from a pool of people who were widely solicited via direct mail, email, Public Service Announcements, the media, paid advertisements, and the County website
- Local Law H: Changes to over 50 sections of the county charter
- While the bill sponsors were proposing how to stage the Public Hearing with regard to competing proposals, the Majority Minority District Legislators put out a Media Advisory to announce that they "will

use all legal means to stop public hearings and related efforts to enact local laws that downsize the number of legislative districts." It is unclear the extent to which this will be discussed along with the 3 proposed local laws

When the Charter Review Commission published their results, they published a supplemental report on reducing the size of the legislature. While they clearly stated that they felt the legislature should be downsized to 25, the size of the next largest county legislature in the state, they also said that "...reducing the size of the County Legislature is a profoundly important and complicated exercise, necessitating a complicated redistricting process." In the Commission's view, any proposal that imperils the voting rights of minorities, inappropriately favors some municipalities and communities over others, or threatens the viability of a robust two-party system in County government, would be a bad proposal and would call into question the validity of a reduction in size.

LWVAC Delegates to LWWNYS Students Inside Albany Conference Describe their Experiences as Empowering and Life Changing!

Introducing Colin Baker, 11th grade student at Bethlehem Central High School.



"The Students Inside Albany Conference, held by The League of Women Voters this year, was not only phenomenally run, but also life changing. Between meeting with our local legislators and inspired teens from across New York State, the conference was able to give me a greater idea of what I can do to serve our community for the future.

Throughout the week we spent in Albany, there were many notable activities we were able to engage in. One was visiting the Court of Appeals. The Court of Appeals is one of the most beautiful government buildings in New York State, in my opinion, and it was a great experience being able to see where our judicial system primarily works. We were also able to meet with our local legislators. This was an experience I know I will never forget. The League was able to set up each and every student with their respective legislators. I had the privilege of working alongside Senator Neil Breslin and Assemblywoman Patricia Fahy for the day and it was an experience that allowed me to learn more about how government works and really how busy and chaotic, yet organized, being a politician really is. We also were able to hear from phenomenal speakers on the topics of lobbying, the constitutional convention, and other areas pertaining to our government that will help us become more engaged citizens. Lastly, the social events the League was able to implement into the program were exceptional. Between bowling and a cruise on the Hudson River, we were all able to create friendships and establish bonds that didn't only last the week we were in Albany, but also a lifetime.

In all, I would like to personally thank the entire League of Women Voters for giving myself and other teens this opportunity to learn more about our government and the role that comes with being a citizen. I look forward to publicly serving in my community and I know that the skills, knowledge, and ideas I learned at Students Inside Albany will aid in my success in the future."

Introducing Abigail Goldfarb, 11th grade student at Voorheesville High School.

"My experience at Students Inside Albany was, in one word, empowering. I left the conference feeling informed and prepared to take on an active role as a citizen under a representative government. I had so many great experiences, learned so much about government at any level, and met lots of great people during the four days I spent at the conference. I think this program and the League's mission of educating youth is so important; it's important that people know how their government functions so that they know how to make change, and widespread knowledge about the specifics of New York State government is truly lacking among young people.

Every day during the conference, I met people who were passionate about what they did and who wanted to share their passion with us. I learned how lobbyists work by practicing lobbying through role-playing; I learned about the day-to-day functions of state legislators, and even saw bills that they were sponsoring. It was truly an honor to attend this conference, and it completely altered my perception of the way government works. Personally, I now feel far more equipped with the skills and knowledge I need to take a more active role within government at any level."

Each year LWVAC contacts local schools in the fall with information about the SIA Conference and solicits nominations from students and teachers for the conference held for three days in May in Albany. Colin and Abigail were selected to attend in 2016. If you know of a student you can recommend for the 2017 conference, contact President, Margaret Danes, stsophia@nycap.rr.com.

Calendar

Monday, August 8, 7:00pm Albany County Legislature
Albany County Court House. Legislative Chambers, 2nd flr.

Friday, August 26 Women's Equality Day 2016
Celebrate the 96th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution by joining with LWVAC efforts to register voters

Monday, September 12, 7:00pm Albany County Legislature
Albany County Court House, Legislative Chambers, 2nd flr

Tuesday, September 13, 6am to 9pm,
NYS State and Local Primary Election VOTE!

Membership 2016-17 - 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

"Best I can Do" is 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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