

NEW YORK STATE VOTER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEW YORK
VOL. 85 NO. 1
OCTOBER 2008

LWVNYS Welcomes New Executive Director

A member of the League for more than twenty-five years, Laura Ladd Bierman became the executive director of the LWVNYS in July.



Learn more about Laura and other "Comings and Goings" on page 2.

First Call To Convention 2009

The League of Women Voters of New York State will hold its biennial convention at the Doubletree Inn in Syracuse, May 15-17, 2009. The theme of the convention is "Fair, Vibrant, and Strong."

Fair,
and
Vibrant
Strong

This year a pre-convention workshop, which will begin with lunch for all participants, will be held on the afternoon of May 15. This program will focus on the broader healthy league issues including such things as the membership and leadership initiatives being introduced by national.

"We hope that all of our Local leagues plan to come together for convention," says LWVNYS Membership Director Marcia Merrins. "It will be a most exciting, informative, and enjoyable event."

Mark your calendar for May 15-17 and Convention 2009.

In a Word: VOTE!



Heidi Mack and Elinor McDade, LWV The Hamptons, registering voters on Main Street in Sag Harbor.

Discover what local Leagues have been doing this election season on page 8. Find all the tools you need to be ready for Elections 2008 on pages 4 and 5.

Helped Wanted at the Polls

While time is running short for 2008, poll worker shortage had been a crucial issue for at least the last several years, and is expected to get worse.

Learn how your League can help on page 5.

A Win for Domestic Violence Advocates

In a major victory for advocates for domestic violence victims, Governor Paterson signed a bill on June 24, expanding access to civil orders of protection for all victims of domestic violence. LWVNYS had joined a coalition to fight for the legislation and it paid off.

Read more on page 6

LWV Weighs in on Tax Caps & Circuit Breaker

by Marian Bott, LWVNYS Off-Board Specialist, Education Financing

On August 19, 2008, the League weighed in on Governor Paterson's Program Bill 62, introduced as S8736, imposing a tax cap on school district increases, and A11838, a need-based real property tax circuit breaker program and millionaire's tax. The League opposed both of the bills on the grounds that they represented one-house bills designed to provide political cover for the upcoming elections rather than the series of serious recommendations for real property tax reform and education finance reform outlined in the Suozzi Commission preliminary report, available on-line at www.cptr.state.ny.us/reports/CPTR.

As predicted, each bill was passed by one chamber and went no further.

In formulating its positions on these two bills, the League drew upon its updated financing K-12 education and real property taxation positions to recommend:

- Awaiting the final Suozzi Commission report before tackling the issues of education finance and property tax reform;
- True implementation of a foundation approach to education, with annual cost-of-living adjustments. Under this approach the funds to provide a sound,

The League opposed both of the bills on the grounds that they represented one-house bills designed to provide political cover for the upcoming elections...

basic education would be provided by the state, after subtracting a reasonable local contribution;

- Creation of a reserve fund for education that would stabilize foundation funding (generated primarily by the state income tax) in times of economic downturn;
- Folding the entire STAR program into a real property circuit breaker program;
- Implementation of additional Suozzi Commission recommendations for cost saving as part of the reform package;

- Raising any additional state funds necessary to fund a foundation approach to education;
- Implementation of a tax cap only in conjunction with an entire reform package.

The League has had a long standing interest in education finance and property tax reform, having studied these issues over the past twenty-five years as part of ongoing investigation into the manner in which New York State funds crucial services. The League last updated its positions in these areas in 2006, when, after a year-long study, it determined that:

- The state should adopt a foundation approach to funding education;

Tax Caps continued on page 7

2008 UN Briefings— Global Warming

by Betsey Swan

On Tuesday, December 2, 2008 the League will sponsor its annual briefings at the United Nations. This year's event will be "Briefings on the Impact of Global Warming on Women and Children Around the World." The briefings will begin with an optional tour and lunch in the delegate's dining room, with the briefings to follow in the afternoon. The cost is \$55 for League members, \$45 for students, and \$70 for others.

In conjunction with this year's briefing, we are pleased to offer individual sponsorships for \$250. Each individual sponsor will be listed as a patron in the program and will receive a complimentary ticket for the tour, lunch, and admission to the briefings.

Tours are scheduled prior to and following the briefings. The tour cost \$12, and the luncheon is \$40. League members registering for all three—the tour, the briefings, and the luncheon—pay only \$100. The League has also chartered a bus from Albany for those who need transportation. The cost is \$40 round trip. The bus will leave from Crossgates Commons (between PetSmart and Walmart) at 7 a.m. and return by about 10:30 p.m.

Registration forms were included in the September *State Board Report*, or contact Stephanie Lopez at the LWVNYS office 518-465-4162 or Stephanie@lwvny.org.



Ready for Action? Planning for the 2009 Legislative Session

by Edna Vincenti

LWVNYS Vice-President, Advocacy & Issues

It is time to identify our 2009 Legislative Agenda. In November, the Issues and Advocacy Committee—including all Off-Board Specialists—will meet to establish our legislative priorities. In order to determine this, we will use three criteria:

- Review of "unfinished business" of the 2008 legislative session
- Input from the League's off-board specialists and the legislative director
- Local League recommendations.

The last item is where you come in. We need your local League input. We hope that all Leagues will participate in a program planning meeting. It's a great opportunity for you to connect with new members and give them insight into how the League works as a grassroots organization.

What we ask is that your League set up a session before November 1, 2008 (check with your local League Leaders to see when yours is scheduled), that you visit the Web page and read the Action and Advocacy section in the last State Board Report, and that you attend your local League program planning meeting.

At the meeting, consider the following when determining your recommended issues:

- Is this issue "unfinished business" from the 2008 legislative session?

continued page 6

Leagalities: *the Business of Being in League*

Martha's Memo

After the Elections, Then What?

by Martha Kennedy, LWVNYS President

Despite the fact that probably 99 percent of my communication is either verbal or typed these days, I still seem to have an extraordinary number of pencils occupying space on my desk. I suppose the quick memo to self, to-do list, or ever-present, almost-completed crossword puzzle, justifies the presence of these reminders of simpler times. To be inspired by them might seem unlikely, but such is the case. Thanks to their presence, I am reminded of a demonstration of strength in numbers—easy enough to snap one pencil in half but if you gather multiple pencils together, they become virtually impossible for the average person to break. The benefits derived from that strength in numbers and the value of teamwork is certainly well known by League members. Our long and proud history is built upon that very basic fact and we continue to reap the benefit of this whether it is at the local, state, or national level.

We are currently in the midst of our best opportunity to increase that strength. Every four years, the League is given a gift of sorts—the election of our country's president brings our democratic process to the forefront—and the League is truly at its most visible. This is the time when people turn to the League. This is the time when we are given the opportunity to make people aware of the work of the League in all areas. This is the time when we are able to enhance that strength that comes in numbers as we grow our membership. While the whole process may seem overly long at times, the reality remains that in a few short weeks, the presidential election will be over. Regardless of the number of debates or candidate forums, regardless of the weather on election day or the number of people who do vote, the election will have taken place and that chapter of our democratic process will have come to an end. However, the League's mission as a nonpartisan political organization, to "encourage the informed and active participation in government and influence public policy through education and advocacy" does not end with an election. Make sure that you do your part during the next few weeks not only to ensure the integrity of our electoral process, but also to strengthen the voice of our organization through some serious recruitment. Make sure that all those people that care about the issues being discussed during this campaign season know where to find their teammates when the next phase of that work begins after the election. Make sure that you help the League to grow.

As is clearly demonstrated by the various items included in this publication, the League year is well under way. Please do take time to read about the various issues and events and support them both locally and on the state level. The United Nations Briefing Day on December 2 and the LWVNYS Convention in Syracuse May 15-17 will represent the sort of "book ends" for our statewide gathering opportunities this year.

Finally, I am especially pleased to welcome two new faces to our state level organization this fall. We are delighted to add long time LWVNYC member and its former co-president, **Toni Coffee**, to the LWVNYS Board of Directors. I look forward to working with Toni and know she will bring much to our board. In addition we welcome **Laura Ladd Bierman** as our new Executive Director. I know that those who have had the opportunity to work with Laura in the short time she has been with us share in my enthusiasm and confidence that our organization will benefit greatly under her direction. I truly do sense the beginning of a beautiful relationship.



Martha Kennedy

Greetings from Grand Street

Is Who Will Win the Real Question?

by Laura Ladd Bierman, LWVNYS Executive Director

So, who's going to win in the November election? And, is that the most important question for this election?

I have lived in many places, and every time that I've moved, I have sought out the League. I always knew it would include a group of people who like to learn, talk, and become involved in the important issues of the region. But, what I like most about the League is its commitment to "process." Leagues are always ensuring that whatever is happening in the town, the school district, or the state, they are following the correct process. I had a League friend in Illinois who was a teacher. She had been fighting with her superintendent for months about a certain policy with which she disagreed. Finally, one day, he just said "OK." She won, and he changed the policy. But, she was furious. How could he just do that? He was, of course, very confused. She had received what she wanted, she told him, but he hadn't followed the established process. He was supposed to take the change to a committee, get input, propose a revision—follow all the steps—before he changed the policy. Being a true League member, she was upset that he hadn't followed the process. The process was there to ensure fair and open consideration of an issue. Only a League member would be upset even when winning a fight!

The staff at the state League office is here helping all of you ensure a fair and open process that involves informed voters and decision makers. We applaud all of your efforts—voter registration drives, candidates forums, lobbying, educating activities, and more. Please use us to facilitate your activities and strengthen your programs. Ask us, and we'll share others' ideas, materials and programs!

Efforts by the office staff recently have included distributing almost 39,000 *Voters' Guides Part 1* (with a Spanish version also available); *Voters' Guides Part 2* with candidate and ballot proposal information will be available shortly. New publications on voting rights for special populations, including college students, individuals with criminal convictions, homeless individuals, and individuals with physical or mental disabilities are now available on the Web site. The Web site has a new look, which provides easy access to all voter information and deadlines. Check it out and pass the word for others to view.

"The Impact of Global Warming on Women and Children Around the World" will be the topic of the annual United Nations briefing on December 2 in New York City. And, the Youth Leadership Initiative, including the LeaderSpark and Students Inside Albany programs, is already in the planning stages. Some Leagues have already conducted one LeaderSpark session this year. Call us for tips and information to organize these in your own Leagues, too. These activities, in addition to answering hundreds of phone calls and e-mails with questions on registering, absentee ballots, polling places, and voting machines, have kept the office lively and energized.

So, who's going to win in November? As an individual, I do have an opinion, but as a League member, that isn't the most important question. Instead, have we done everything we can to ensure a fair and open election with a large and educated electorate—that's what I want to know? Let the State League office help your local League ensure that across New York State.

I look forward to meeting many of you at the State Convention in Syracuse in May, 2009! And, don't forget to vote!



Laura Ladd Bierman

Comings and Goings: New Executive Director, Board Member

A member of the League for more than twenty-five years, **Laura Ladd Bierman** was named the new executive director of the LWVNYS in July. She will lead the staff with experience from four different local Leagues in three states, serving in a number of positions, including study chair, newsletter editor, board member, vice president, and president. Laura has a BA in political science from Colgate University and a MA in public administration from the University of Virginia. Laura spent much of her early professional career in health care planning and has provided financial and consulting services to a national membership organization for the past ten years. Laura served on the Glenview, Illinois, school board for more than eight years as a member, including two years as vice president. She currently is a member of the school board for the Bethlehem Central School District in Delmar, N.Y.

"I am honored and excited to be the new Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of New York State. I first joined the League when I moved to Albany in 1982," explains Laura. "I had been living in Washington, D.C., working on legislative and policy issues. I feared that, in moving to Albany, I would not stay informed and active in politics, so I joined the League and attended 'brown bag' lunch meetings at the Albany Public Library. I have since been a member of four different local Leagues in three states."

For **Toni Coffee**, the newest member of the LWVNYS Board, this is the second time around. She joined the LWV of Port Washington-Manhasset in



LWVNYS Board of Directors member Toni Coffee

1961 and was appointed to the LWVNYS Board by then president Pat Ames in 1969. She was editor of "Facts for Voters" and also wrote the "Legislative News," the League's newsletter about the workings of the State Legislature, until 1976. During the following years she served on the Port Washington School Board and was also editor of the Barnard College alumnae magazine.

Toni and her late husband moved to Manhattan in 1993, and for the years 2006-2008 she served as a co-president of the LWV New York City. She has also been chairman of the committee for the LWVNYC's Annual Awards Luncheon and is currently editor of its newsletter as well as liaison with the State Board. Toni, in addition to providing representation from our largest League, will focus on publications updates, formulation of the new LWVNYS Strategic Plan, and Web content development.

The New York State Voter is published four times a year by the League of Women Voters of New York State. Subscriptions are available for \$6 a year. Free for members. Reprinting permitted if *The New York State Voter* is credited.

The League of Women Voters of New York State (LWVNYS) is one component of a unique tri-level organization. Members of the LWVNYS are also members of the League of Women Voters of the United States and, wherever possible, members of a local League as well. Membership is open to all.

President: Martha Kennedy

Executive Director: Laura Ladd Bierman

League of Women Voters of New York State, 62 Grand Street, Albany, NY 12207.

Phone: 518-465-4162; Fax: 518-465-0812; E-mail: <lwny@lwny.org>

Web site: <www.LWVNY.org>

Editorial Services and Production: Patty MacLeish, Ideas into Print, Newport, R.I.

Printed at Scotsman Press, Syracuse, N.Y. © 2008 LWVNYS

League Adopts Centennial Plan

By Betsy Swan, LWVNYS Fourth Vice President, Development

The process that began a little more than a year ago has come to fruition with the adoption of the Centennial Plan by the LWVNYS Board. The need for the Centennial Plan came about as the board realized that there needed to be a reevaluation of League goals and a review of League methods in order for the organization to thrive as we approach our centennial. Following input from local Leagues at last fall's Ida Trager Workshops, the LWVNYS Board approved a draft of the "Centennial Plan" in March meeting. With that input, further revisions were made, and the final version of the Centennial Plan was approved at the September LWVNYS Board meeting. (The final version is available on the League's Web site.)

The board responded in particular to concerns about centralization of services. A few commentators were concerned that centralization of services would weaken local Leagues and turn the League into a top-down good government organization, like Common Cause, that discourages or diluted grass-roots advocacy or advocacy at the local level. One commentator was concerned that the League should tread lightly in planning to centralize any operations because centralization of certain operations would not necessarily lead to cost or time savings. The plan was revised as necessary to preserve the strength and character, and efficient operation of local Leagues, and centralization of services was dropped as a goal.

There were other concerns, as well. A few commentators objected in principle to the state League providing free services to local Leagues and suggested that any services should be provided on a fee-for-service basis. One commentator suggested that the state finance operations on an as-needed basis by raising the state per member payment that local Leagues pay to the state. I believe changes to the draft plan to accommodate these two concerns would have been ill-advised. Just as New York State is a state of great disparities, local Leagues are widely disparate. Some function as highly professional organizations, with large budgets and many members. Others have few members and limited budgets – sometimes the result of the rural nature and relative poverty of areas in which they operate. While local League responsibility for local operations should and will remain the norm, assistance may at times be necessary to bolster the health and function, and sometimes to maintain the existence, of local Leagues. It was the need to become less reliant on per member payments that impelled development of the Centennial Plan. That need was compelling over a year ago when we began to think about the plan; it is more compelling today in light of the national League's stated desire to increase national per member payments at a rate of 4½ percent per year for the indefinite future.

My thanks to all who had input into this prolonged process and special thanks to those who took the time to communicate their praises and concerns about the draft document.

Are You A League Leader? Do You Know One?

by Terry Lowenthal, Nominating Committee Chairperson

Every two years at convention, the members of the League of Women Voters of New York State elect their leaders for the next board term. The Nominating Committee is now actively seeking candidates statewide to become a part of the talented and dedicated group which leads LWV activities at the state level. We welcome your input in the process; indeed, we depend on nominations by local League boards as well as by individual League members.

In accordance with our current bylaws, the positions to be filled for the 2009-2011 term are:

- **president;**
- **four vice-presidents;**
- **secretary/treasurer;**
- **five directors; and**
- **nominating committee chair and two committee members.**

Candidates for the LWVNYS Board should be committed to the mission of the League, experienced local League leaders skilled in organizational development, visionary, responsible, and cooperative. All League members are encouraged to nominate individuals for the board. For each candidate you recommend, please complete a separate "Recommendation for LWVNYS Board" Form. Your local League president has copies of the form, or you can find it on the state League Web site in the September *State Board Report*. Make as many copies of the form as you need. You may nominate any number of candidates—including yourself!

Please send your suggestions, by November 15, directly to Nominating Committee Chair, Terry Lowenthal, 12 Mystic Lane, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

Leagues Shed Light on Health Care

by Donna Packard-Mahoney, LWVNYS Off-Board Specialist Health Care

In keeping with the League's mission to educate communities on public policy issues, the LWVNYS in concert with the Capital Region local Leagues (LWV Albany, LWV Rensselaer, LWV Saratoga, and LWV Schenectady), will hold two forums on health care reform. The first event is planned for October 25 at the Rockefeller Institute, 411 State Street Albany, and will concentrate on the health care platforms of the presidential candidates. The program will include discussion of what the impact each of the candidates' platforms will mean for the voters. The issues of access, cost, equity, and quality will provide a theoretical basis for discussion.

The plan for the second community event is a one-hour, state-wide, interactive televised program to be broadcast by PBS during the first three months of the upcoming legislative session. The focus of the program will be health care reform in New York State with a view on the current effort for reform underway through the Partnership for Coverage.



Regional Directors— Something Old is New Again!

by Marcia Merrins, LWVNYS Second Vice President, Membership

If you have been reading my missives over the past year, you are aware of our efforts to improve our liaison efforts with local Leagues. Some approaches have been successful while others failed. I thought we might resurrect an approach we have tried in the past—regional directors.

We will be using a conference call among several local Leagues, sometimes in a region, about four times a year. Each group will have a regional director who will take the lead on the conference call. She will set the time and date and number to call. The regional director's job—and yours—is to maintain communication so we can work together. Sometimes it may be to simply brainstorm about the best way to approach a problem or resolve an issue. Sometimes your League may need some face-to-face assistance, and your regional director would be the first person to contact.

I thank all the board members who have taken on these assignments as regional directors. They are all wonderful leaders, and I hope you will enjoy getting to know them and all they have to offer.

Regional Directors Local League Assignments

Edna Vincenti

516-627-1987 edna.vincenti@vincenti.com
Nassau County ILO, East Nassau, Central Nassau, Greater Five Towns, Long Beach, Port Washington-Manhasset, Great Neck, Rye/Ryebrook/Port Chester

Rosemary MacLaughlin

914-232-5735 rosem@bestweb.net
LWVs of Bronxville, Larchmont/Mamaroneck, New Rochelle, Bedford/Lewisboro/N.Salem, Westchester ILO, The Hamptons, Putnam County MAL Unit

Helene Chaika Fausold

607-351-8024 hcfausold@stny.rr.com
LWVs of White Plains, Brookhaven, New Castle, Scarsdale, Shelter Island, Smithtown, Huntington, Suffolk Co. ILO

Kathy Dorman

315-280-0434; kdorman@oneidacsd.org
LWVs of Schuyler, Chemung, Steuben County, Broome/Tioga, Cortland, Rivertowns, Somers

Carol Huxtable

315-822-5283; dchuxtable@peoplepc.com
LWVs of Cooperstown, Oneonta, Mid Hudson, Rockland, Columbia

JoAnn Ross

716-631-9351 jross18@roadrunner.com
LWVs of Geneva, Rochester, Orleans, Rochester, Plattsburgh, Livingston, Chautauqua

Georgia T. DeGregorio

585-787-9692 georgiatd@frontiernet.net
LWVs of Syracuse, Greater Oneida, Utica Rome, Buffalo/Niagara, Tompkins, Cazenovia, Cortland

Barbara Thomas

518-885-9769 barbandbob220@verizon.net
LWVs of Saratoga, Warren County MAL, Rensselaer, Albany, Schenectady, New York City, Harrison

Amending the Bylaws

In preparation for the LWVNYS convention in May, it is time to consider changes to the League's bylaws. The bylaws are the basic set of rules under which the LWVNYS operates. Therefore, it is important for local Leagues to evaluate carefully the existing bylaws. Do they reflect what we are actually doing? Are they too flexible or restrictive? What changes should be made to enable the League to operate efficiently and effectively in the 21st century? Amendments to the bylaws can only be made at state conventions.

Our bylaws committee will review the current bylaws and any changes suggested by local Leagues. Proposed amendments will be reported to the board at its February meeting. The board will consider the changes and make recommendations, which will be sent to local Leagues. All proposed bylaw amendments will be included in the Convention Kit. Those amendments that are recommended by the State Board will be voted upon by the delegate body. Non-recommended amendments may be brought to the floor by a motion. In order for the bylaws committee to consider changes being proposed by local Leagues, such changes must be sent to the state League office by December 12, 2008.

A form that will allow Leagues to organize its changes in a clear manner is available on the LWVNYS Web page (www.LWVNY.org) and was included in the September *State Board Report*. Because bylaws language can be complex, please use the form in suggesting your changes.

TRAVEL

in the BEST of Company!

with members, friends and spouses of the

**League of Women Voters,
Peace Links and the United
Nations Association**

International cultural tours featuring home and school visits, Embassy visits, cultural exchanges, well as highlights and pretrip study material.

Share experiences • Discover the world • Enjoy new learning experiences • Expand your horizon!

www.travelwiththeleague.com

1-800-762-4216

**Travel Concepts
International Inc.**

Recognize Your Favorite Leaguer Add a Name to the Sustainers' Plaque

Looking for a lasting gift to honor a League leader from your League? Look no further! For a gift of \$200 or more, your honoree's name will be added to the Sustainers' Plaque and is permanently displayed in the state office as well as proudly exhibited at state conventions. For more information contact the LWVNYS office at 518-465-4162 or lwvny@lwvny.org.

www.LWVNY.org: The One-Stop Guide to Election Day 2008

by Maggie Moebinger Second Vice president, Voter Service

You've no doubt heard lots of hyperbole describing the 2008 election. It is historic. It is important. But as election day approaches, the most important issue is preparing citizens for the voting booth. This year, I think we have put together a package of voting materials that is our best. Head to our Web page today and you will find voting rights information for special populations. Links on using your county's ballot marking devices, and our venerable Voters' Guide, parts 1 & 2—in Spanish and English.

The LWVNYS has also prepared a series of five new pamphlets, entitled "Your Right to Vote in New York State," related to voting rights for different special populations: college students; individuals with criminal convictions and those detained in jail; homeless individuals; individuals with mental health disabilities; and physically disabled individuals. The pamphlets have been reviewed by our election law/voting systems specialist and by representatives from service organizations for the populations represented. Each pamphlet addresses the special needs of that population and have been published on the LWVNYS web site (www.LWVNY.org) in both print-ready-pamphlet PDF format and as HTML documents. Local Leagues should feel free to use the information in your local publications or to reproduce the pamphlet format at will, free of charge.

While some basic voting information will be included, the pamphlets are meant as supplements to a more complete voter guide, such as the LWVNYS Voter Guides Part 1 and 2. The beauty of publishing to the web is that we can change these documents as our information becomes better, more accurate and reflective of the needs of these populations.

Let your community, your local library, your area colleges, your friends and neighbors know the League is the place to go for Voter Service.

The LWVNYS Web page (www.LWVNY.org) has been redesigned for the election season. From the opening page (at right, top), visitors to the site can link to myriad election information. In addition to the League's well-known Voters' Guide (right), there is information on voting machines, absentee ballots, student voting, important deadlines, and Voters' Guides for special populations.

ELECTION DAY TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2008

Polls are open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. in all NYS Counties.

IMPORTANT DEADLINES:

Last Day to Register to Vote by Mail: October 10th

Last Day to Register to Vote in Person: October 10th

Last Day to Postmark An Application for an Absentee Ballot: October 28th

Last Day to Apply in Person for an Absentee Ballot: November 3rd

BMDs—Give Them a Try on Election Day

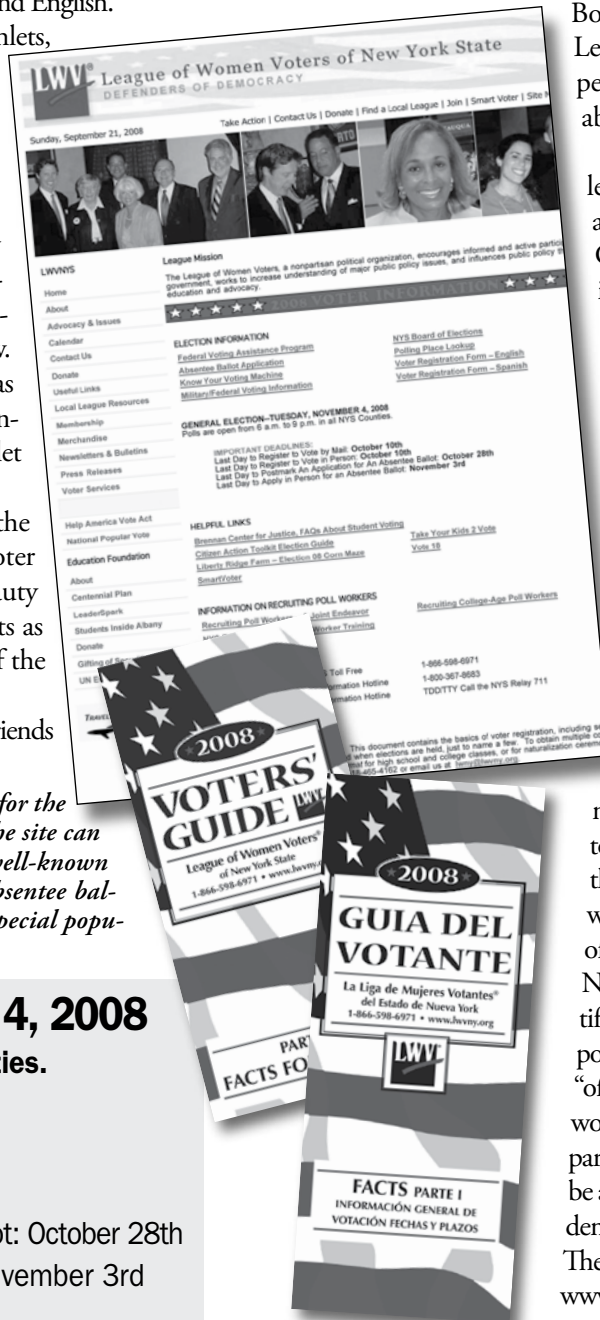
by Aimee Allaud, LWVNYS Off-board Elections/Government Specialist

This year is the first year voters in New York will be using the ballot marking devices, and we could use your help in two areas. First, we would be very interested in learning about individuals' experiences using the ballot marking devices in the Primary Day election in their polling places. A local newspaper reporter surveyed election commissioners in the Capital District (four counties) and found very little usage and no problems. Some anecdotal information from several Leaguers offered slightly different interpretations or variations on what the reporter described! Not unusual, but it could be very helpful to the local Boards of Election and the New York State BOE, if League members would provide details of their experiences. Please forward any post-election articles about BMD use to me also.

The next thing we ask is that League members lead the way in testing out the machines and the accompanying election procedures in "real time." Consider using the BMD at your polling place instead of the lever machine on General Election Day. No voter can be denied the right to use the machine. You do not have to provide any reason or documentation. And you will gain firsthand experience—and so will the election workers.

I have used the AutoMark in 2006-2007 and now in 2008 and found it very user-friendly. Find out for yourself how it works so you can be informed and help others to be informed. The more experience with the machine that inspectors have with it will be beneficial in the long run. "Test driving" the ballot markers can provide feedback to commissioners, the NYSBOE, and the vendor.

According to regulations approved by the NYS Board of Elections at its September 2, 2008 meeting, ballots marked by the BMDs are supposed to be counted on election night, at the close of polls in the polling place. Observing the election night closing would give us the opportunity to learn how this part of the process is working around the state. However, NYS Election Law only allows Poll Watchers (a certificate issued by a candidate or party) to remain in the polling place after you have voted unless you are there "officially." If you want to observe the poll closing, you would need to obtain that certificate, or if your League participates in election night poll reporting, you would be able to observe. However, you can ask the inspector to demo the machine and ask how the ballots are counted. The NYSBOE's regulations are posted on the Web site, www.elections.state.ny.us.gov.



"Other" Presidential Candidates: What's a League to Do?

by Maggie Moebinger Second Vice president, Voter Service

There are lots of candidates out there running for president, and they're not all colored Blue or Red. In the 2004 general election for president, New Yorkers were presented ballots with 8 party lines, each party with its own candidate. That's typical of many states. There were also "official" write-in candidates. So where, and how, do we draw the line in NYS for who appears on the ballot?

Candidates can run for president as the nominee of a party (determined at a party convention or by the state party committee), or as "independents." Candidates must run as "independent" if they are not running under the auspices of a party that is recognized as such in the NYS Election Law. That means that they must submit petitions with a defined number of valid signatures, and this year must do so by August 19.

So, what's a "party" in this state? To be recognized by the NYS Election Law as a party, the political organization must have polled at least fifty thousand votes for its candidate for governor in the preceding gubernatorial election. Therefore, in New York, the Independence, Conservative and Working Families parties are recognized, in addition to the two major parties (which are defined in the law as those parties receiving first and second place for their candidates in the preceding gubernatorial election). The Green, Libertarian, Rent is Too High, and Socialist Workers parties are not, even though they nominated candidates for governor in 2006.

As of this writing, the NYS Board of Elections has accepted petitions from the following independent candidates for the office of President/Vice President ("independent" because their parties are not recognized in NYS): Ralph Nader/Matt Gonzalez (Populist); Cynthia McKinney/Rosa Clemente (Green); Bob Barr/Wayne Root (Libertarian); Roger Calero/Alyson Kennedy (Socialist Workers); and Gloria La Riva/Eugene Puryear (Socialism and Liberation).

But that's not the end of the story. If a party is recognized in New York, and wishes to nominate a candidate at a convention (or in some other way by the state committee), they can do so. So, according to the election law, not just Republicans and Democrats, but also the Conservative, Working Families and Independence parties may nominate candidates for President (or, really, their electors) sometime before the September 16 cut off date.

A quick look around the Web will reveal many, many candidates running

for president nationwide. The LWVUS limits the field this way:

- The candidate must have made a public announcement of her/his intention to run for President.
- The candidate must qualify for the ballot in enough states to win a majority of electoral votes.
- The candidate must meet the Presidential Election Campaign Fund Act's minimum contribution threshold requirements for qualifying for matching funds, based on the most recent data publicly available on the Federal Election Commission Web site as of August 8, 2008.

Why do all of these candidates run? Why do people vote for them? Apart from the obvious "because they can" answer, here are some answers that are typically given:

- They don't feel represented by the candidates offered by the major parties.
- Voting for minor party candidates at least encourages more of a variety of candidates with a variety of viewpoints to run in the future.
- A strong showing by a third party candidate usually moderates the policies of the winner, reduces their impression that they've been given a "mandate." When a third party shows well, the major parties tend to come up with legislation based on its platform.
- Third parties make it more likely that our country's most vital issues are debated from every angle—that our leaders at least hear contrarian views.

Do they do harm by running – "split the vote," "steal votes away?" Some say that exit polls show that most of their votes are drawn from people who would not otherwise have voted. And after all, we have the right to vote for the candidate that represents our point of view. If their right to run is squashed, our rights are squashed.

So if you're wondering why it takes so long for us to get our Voters' Guides out in a presidential election year, that's your answer! Figuring out who is running, and making sure that all of the parties have had a chance to nominate a candidate, brings us well into mid September.



Help Wanted at the Polls—Recruiting Poll Workers in New York

by Marge Acosta, LWV Huntington

There are many ways activists can help in the implementation of new voting systems: working toward improved testing, security, auditing, transparency and oversight to name a few. However, in looking at the many problems we face, one practical and effective area where activists can make a difference, and many boards of elections (BOEs) would appreciate support, is in helping to resolve the dilemma of insufficient and untrained poll workers.

As our paper, (LWV Huntington, edited by Marge Acosta) states, there is a critical shortage of poll workers in the United States, which has directly affected the enfranchisement of many voters. The U.S. was 600,000 poll workers short of the number needed to run a smooth election in the November 2004 presidential election, and new machines in New York may mean that in 2009 some poll workers will choose to opt out of working on Election Day because of their fear or unfamiliarity with the new machines. This will leave an even greater potential gap at the polls to be filled by new recruits.

The paper discusses various strategies and results presented in reports by The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and the Citizens Union Foundation (CUF) on recruiting new, tech-savvy poll workers. Following is a model, based on some of these strategies, which local Leagues can utilize in working with local county boards of elections. Naturally, the model would have to be customized to suit the number of League members available to work on recruitment, as well as the needs of the local BOE.

The implementation of New York's new voting system is scheduled to take place in two phases: the introduction of Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) for voters with disabilities in 2008 and the replacement of lever machines by optical scanners in 2009. While the timeline for recruiting tech-savvy poll workers for the 2008 BMD training is unfortunately limited, many counties will accept applications through October for the 2008 general election; and initiating programs now will, hopefully, ensure a sufficient number of trained poll workers for 2009.

Ballot Question: A Constitutional Amendment

There will be one question on the ballot at this election. The question will be an amendment related to disabled veterans. Below is a discussion of the amendment

Form of Submission of Proposal Number One, an Amendment

Amendment to Article 5, section 6 of the Constitution, in relation to additional civil service credit for members of the armed forces of the United States.

The proposed amendment would eliminate the requirement that veterans who were disabled in the actual performance of duty in any war be receiving disability payments from the United States Veterans Administration in order to qualify for additional points on a civil service examination for appointment or promotion. Under the proposed amendment, the disability must only be certified to exist by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The proposed amendment would also update the reference to the "United States Veterans Administration" to instead refer to the "United States Department of Veterans Affairs" to reflect current federal government structure. Shall the proposed amendment be approved?

Discussion: Applicants for many jobs in New York state and local government are required to take a civil service examination, and applicants are appointed or promoted to these positions based on their scores on the examination. Disabled veterans who were disabled in the actual performance of duty in any war also receive a defined amount of extra points on these examinations to increase their scores, giving them preferential status on the lists of those who qualify.

The purpose of the proposal is to eliminate the requirement that disabled veterans be receiving disability payments from the federal government in order to qualify for additional credit on civil service examinations.

The State Constitution currently requires two things for the disabled veteran to qualify for the additional points: 1) the veteran must be receiving disability payments from the United States Veterans Administration; and 2) the United States Veteran Administration must certify that the veteran's disability exists at the time that the veteran applies for appointment or promotion.

The proposed amendment would eliminate the first requirement - that a veteran who was disabled in the actual performance of duty in any war be receiving disability payments from the federal veterans department in order to qualify for additional points on a civil service examination. Instead, the proposed amendment would only require that the United States Department of Veterans Affairs certify that the veteran's disability exists at the time that the veteran applies for appointment or promotion.

The proposed amendment would also change the reference to the "United States Veterans Administration" currently in this section to the "United States Department of Veterans Affairs" to reflect the Veterans Administration's re-designation as the Department of Veterans Affairs under Federal Law.

Pro: There is a long history (indeed, since the Civil War) of veterans, particularly disabled veterans, being afforded preferential treatment in qualifying for and being retrained for positions in the civilian world. Preferential treatment is a recognition of veterans' sacrifice and service to our country, and also serves to make military service more attractive. Voting against this amendment will continue the status quo, which makes it harder for disabled veterans to qualify for additional points on civil service examinations. This in turn makes it harder for them to be appointed or promoted to positions in the civil service.

Con: The League can identify no arguments against this proposal.

What Your League Can Do to Help with Poll Worker Recruitment

Meet with your county commissioners to inform them of the many ways other states and counties are resolving the problem of insufficient numbers of poll workers and offer to help set up various programs. Familiarize them with some of the many reports on recruitment. Two excellent reports are the Election Assistance Commission's "Guidebook for Recruiting College Poll Workers & the Citizens Union Foundation (CUF), 2006 Poll Worker Recruitment Program." Set up a liaison (perhaps one from each party) at the BOE who will be available to help with recruitment programs and endeavors. Help coordinate contacts between the BOE liaison and local colleges. Find out what the poll worker positions, requirements, hours, and pay are in your county:

While Election law says poll inspectors must be registered voters in the county or city in which they work and are required to be at the polls from opening to the close of poll sites, it seems counties have flexibility in filling various positions. For example, NYC has Information Clerks and Door Clerks as well as Interpreters, none of whom must be registered voters. They do not even have to be US citizens as long as they have resident status and live in NYC. The same is true for translators in other counties. However, all must be 18 years of age and fluent in English.

College students are usually highly intelligent, accustomed to learning new things, comfortable with computers and other new technologies and may bring skills that can solve technology-related problems. They make excellent recruits.

Enlist the aid of local colleges to create programs for poll worker recruitment. If possible set up a contact person at each college. Some programs that have been initiated at colleges including making poll work a required service-learning assignment; having classes (e.g. political science) awarding extra credit points for any student who served as a poll worker; and having related departments, such as career services, send an e-mail to all students announcing an Election Day job opportunity as a poll worker.

Activists may offer to run workshops/meetings at the college, give presentations to classes or simply man tables and bring forms during recruitment campaigns. Contact other organizations to recruit poll workers, such as Leadership organizations, Young Democrats and Republicans, Hispanic and civic organizations. This may simply consist of asking officials of these organizations to forward a form letter to members or a flyer on becoming a poll worker.

The Citizens Union Foundation found that online recruitment proved to be their most successful method with this age group, yielding 63.2% of the total applicants in the 18-24 year old age range. Craigslist.org was the largest source for applications, having provided CUF with 41.6% of their 18-24 year old applicants.

The full reports from the LWV Huntington—"Recruiting Poll Workers, a Joint Endeavor" and "Recruiting College-Age Poll Workers"—on poll worker recruitment are available on the LWVNY Web page (www.LWVNY.org).

Taxpayers Win Big with New Transparency Web Sites

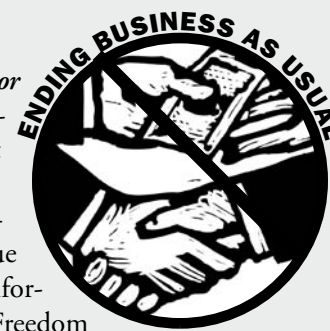
by Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director

The Empire Center for New York State Policy, part of the non-partisan and non-profit Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, unveiled SeeThroughNY.net, a new exciting interactive Web site, which will allow League members and the average citizen to obtain information previously only available by filing a Freedom of Information Law request.

An overview of the missions of the three Web sites which provide the taxpayer with information about where their tax dollars go:

- **SeeThroughNY** (www.seethroughny.net). The centerpiece of the SeeThroughNY Web site is the 260,000 state payroll records including the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government. The searchable databases include a complete list of state government employees, job titles and salaries; teachers' union and superintendent contracts for nearly every school district in New York State; the Legislature's pork-barrel "community projects" spending for 2008-09; and internal operations expenditures by the state Assembly and Senate.
- **Open Book New York** (www.osc.state.ny.us/openbook/) is a project by the Office of the State Comptroller that gives taxpayers unprecedented access to the financial information of State government. Easy-to-use online search tools identify spending for 113 State agencies and public authorities and display more than 60,000 State contracts. These tools will help you find out how much state government spends on everything from travel and employees' salaries to telephones and consultants. You can also search State contracts in real time to see who is doing business with the State.
- **Project Sunlight** (www.sunlightny.com) is a project by the Attorney General's Office—the first of its kind in New York State—offers a new prototype for how government should make information available in today's "digital democracy." The Web site provides easily accessible information about individual elected officials, campaign finance activities, legislation, lobbyists, state contracts, and registered corporations and charities.

These Web sites empower New Yorkers to make informed decisions about their government and should increase dialogue between government and its citizens.



Taking Action—Are You on the CATT List?

by Georgia DeGregorio, LWVNYS Grassroots Lobbying Coordinator

Have you received a CATT Action Alert? To be honest, I am discovering that the answer is “probably not.” But every member with e-mail can participate in this important League activity. Yes, even if you can't make a League Day meeting or be on a committee, *you* can be an active League member.

What is CATT? Carrie Chapman Catt was one of the founders of the LWVNYS and its first president. Her last name became the acronym for **Citizen Action Toolkit** which facilitates Action Alerts submitted by our League off-board specialists to the State Issues Committee for their approval.



Georgia DeGregorio

What are Action Alerts? When a specific issue or legislation is being either supported or opposed by the League, e-mails are sent to all League members on the database. When you open the e-mail, you will find background material related to the subject and a request for your zip code. Your representatives related to the issue (State Assembly, Senate, local county legislators, etc.) will appear along with a suggested e-mail letter to be sent to them. You can either send this suggested format or change it to suit your style and message.

When would you be expected to do this? During the last legislative session, eight Action Alerts were sent from January to June. Among the issues/laws covered were childhood lead poisoning, smart growth, domestic violence, campaign finance reform. Most members take about five minutes or less to respond to the Action Alert. As mentioned above, the best part of this process is that it enables ALL league members to take part in our Advocacy work.

How do you become part of the database? E-mail the LWVNYS Program Coordinator, Stephanie Lopez, (stephanie@lwvny.org) with a note to put you on the CATT Action Alert data base. That's it! And for those who are wondering, this is a private database kept solely for the purpose of enabling League members to contact their representatives. The list is not sold or used for any other reason.

Any more questions? Contact me at georgiatd@frontiernet.net or 585-787-9692.

Meet the Issues and Advocacy Committee

The Issue and Advocacy Committee, including the Off-Board Specialists work as a team!

If you have any questions about issues and/or advocacy and requests for action alerts, please contact the Issues and Advocacy Committee:

Edna Vincenti, LWVNYS Vice President Issues and Advocacy (edna.vincenti@vincenti.com)

Georgia DeGregorio, LWVNYS Grassroots Lobby Director (georgiatd@frontiernet.net)

Barbara Bartoletti, LWVNYS Legislative Director (bbheck1@yahoo.com)

Betsey Swan, LWVNYS Legislative Analyst (faircamp@nycap.rr.com)

Martha Kennedy, President (dkennedy2@nycap.rr.com)

Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, (laura@lwvny.org)

Stephanie Lopez (stephanie@lwvny.org)

Off-Board Specialist (see LWVNYS Board of Directors/Off-Board Specialists for complete contact information in the September State Board Report.)

Alternatives To Incarceration: Debra Merryweather (dapearlie@earthlink.net)

Children's Issues: Ellen Kotlow (ekotlow@aol.com)

Court Restructuring: Helga Schroeter, (helgasquith@verizon.net)

Death Penalty: Ann Brandon (ambrandon2@verizon.net)

Domestic Violence: Georgia T. DeGregorio (georgiatd@frontiernet.net)

Education Finance: Marian Bott (sydneymab@aol.com)

Government/Campaign Finance Reform/Gun Control: Aimee Allaud (85Aimee@nycap.rr.com)

Great Lakes: Anne Ingleman (aingleman@yahoo.com)

Health Care: Donna Packard-Mahoney (dmahoney@nycap.rr.com)

Issues Analysis & Research: Deb Winslow, (deb182@earthlink.net)

Judicial: Lenore Banks (lenorebanks@gmail.com)

Lead Poisoning: Joan S. Rosenthal (joanmarv@rochester.rr.com)

Natural Resources: Roberta Wiernik (RFWiernik@aol.com)

Pay Equity: Lois Haignere (haigner@nycap.rr.com)

Transportation: Gladys Gifford (schuford@earthlink.net)

Urban Sprawl (Co-chairs): Ruth Bonn (rooty@nycap.rr.com)

Anne Huberman (anne.huberman@gmail.com)

Water Quality: Nancy Heinzen (nheinzen@nycap.rr.com)

Program Planning continued from page 1

- Is the issue likely to receive attention in the 2009 session?
- Is action on the issue supported by a League position? If uncertain consult the LWVUS Public Policy Positions and the LWVNYS Positions in Brief found in the September *State Board Report*.

Once the board establishes the priorities, the League will publish the 2009 Legislative Agenda brochure. The brochure is a valuable tool when it comes time to lobby local legislators early next year.

After your local meeting, get ready! The 2009 Legislative session will be upon us soon. Make sure you are signed up for Action Alerts so you can act on our priorities.

Join the NPV Study

By Lori Dawson, LWV Saratoga County



Delegates at the LWVUS Convention 2008 voted to study the advisability of using the National Popular Vote (NPV) Compact among the states as a method for electing the U.S. President. The text of the Compact, which describes the way the NPV will operate, is available on the LWVUS Web site. The LWVUS NPV Study Committee is researching and writing additional material, including pros and cons, which will also be posted online. Members of the Compact Study Committee are Chair Carolie Mullan of Texas, LWVUS Board member; Gail Dryden, California; Barbara Klein, Arizona; Sue Lederman, New Jersey; Jack Sullivan, California; and LWVNYS's own Carol Mellor.

As you may remember, the LWVNYS agreed at its 2007 convention to study the NPV. In October 2007, however, the study came to a halt when the LWVNYS was notified by the LWVUS that a state League cannot establish a position on the NPV Compact. LWVUS maintained that adoption of such a position would represent a state League adopting a position on a national issue. At the LWVUS convention in May 2008, however, delegates agreed to study the issue.

The LWVNYS NPV study materials that had been assembled last year are available on the LWVNYS Web site: www.LWVNYS.org Of course, the actual LWVUS NPV study and consensus questions will be put together by a national NPV study committee. The consensus is due May 1, 2009.

Local Leagues can check to see if local elected officials would be willing to speak for or against the NPV compact. Local colleges may also have someone who can speak to the issue. Leagues can also inquire at www.nationalpopularvote.com for a speaker.

What is the Compact?

The LWVUS position on the selection of the president calls for the direct-popular-vote method of electing the president, and the abolition of the Electoral College, but that will not be the focus of this study. Rather, the NPV will examine whether to join the Compact for the National Popular Vote. Under this Compact, each participating state would award all of its electoral votes to the presidential candidate receiving the most popular votes nationwide. NPV would take effect only when the plan had been enacted by a sufficient number of states whose collective electoral votes is 270, the number needed to win. This guarantees that the presidential candidate receiving the most popular votes nationwide would win enough electoral votes in the Electoral College to become president. NPV is state legislation in the form of an “interstate compact,” a legal vehicle that enables the states to address a common problem by coordinated action.

Campaign Finance Reform Project Update

by Betsey Swan, LWVNYS Fourth Vice President, Development

To follow up on the June introduction of its omnibus campaign finance reform proposal, the League has sent a questionnaire to all candidates for the New York State Senate and Assembly to assess the extent to which each candidate supports the League proposal.

Upon receipt of completed questionnaires the League will compile a Campaign Finance Reform Quotient (CFRQ) for each responding candidate. Those candidates who do not return the questionnaire will be listed as having a zero CFRQ. Results will be forwarded to the press and to local Leagues with suggestions for local publicity. Check the League's Web site to determine how your candidates responded.

A Win on Expanding Victims Protection

by Georgia DeGregorio, LWVNYS Grassroots Lobbying Coordinator

Coalitions can work! The June 24, 2008, press release given by The New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Inc. says it all: “Today, Governor Paterson took the final step to end New York's twenty-year marathon to expand access to civil orders of protection for *all victims of domestic violence*, by signing into law bill (S.6783 Winner/A.6060 Weinstein). [This] ensures New York will join the rest of the nation in providing those protections, regardless of marital, parental, or blood relative status, via Family and Integrated Domestic Violence Courts. This bill reached a critical milestone during the 2007-2008 legislative session with the highly celebrated first-time passage of the Senate bill, companion to the Assembly bill championed by Assemblywoman Weinstein for each of the twenty years.”

Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein, Chair of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, said: “It is inexplicable that New York is the only state in the country where unrelated domestic violence victims cannot obtain a civil order of protection because of our law's antiquated definition of who has access to family court. The current law's limited access to family court leaves half of the victims of domestic violence in New York ineligible for this protection, with no choice but to call the police and seek an order of protection in criminal court, or to suffer in silence.”

The League has a twenty-year history of supporting this effort, but many credit the final passage to the fact that a new umbrella coalition formed of more than a hundred organizations and individuals (including the LWVNYS) to press for passage through letters, e-mails, rallies, personal lobbying—to name just a few of the efforts. (For a more detailed history of the League's effort, see *Impact on Issues 2005-2007*.) The LWVNYS sent out Action Alerts through the CATT list serve. In addition, I visited Schuyler County League (See *Voter* Summer 2008) to discuss why it is so important for New York to join the forty-nine other states in providing this coverage.

There are many other areas that need attention from a legislative point of view, but for now we celebrate this very important step and thank Assemblywoman Weinstein, Senator George Winner and Governor David Paterson for their commitment and leadership as well as the innumerable advocates who have worked tirelessly to assist victims of domestic violence.

Pay Equity—What's Ahead?

by Lois Haignere, LWVNYS Off-Board Specialist Pay Equity

The LWVNYS is a primary member of the New York State Pay Equity Coalition (NYSPEC); other organizational members include NYSPEC's founding organization, Women on the Job Task Force, many unions including, women's and civil rights organizations such as AAUW, NOW, and NAACP, Girl Scouts of America, Capital District Labor and Religion Coalition, and the NY Women's Agenda. NYSPEC takes actions to provide pay equity for equally evaluated job titles and equal pay to employees in New York State.

NYSPEC's goal for the next legislative session is to pass the NYS Fair Pay Act (last session numbers A2712 and S3936) and have it signed into law by Governor Paterson. Given that the Supreme Court has rendered "unenforceable" the federal legislation against unequal pay for equal work, the League may want to assess what State-level legal protections are in place.

In addition to its legislative efforts, NYSPEC will continue its educational activities. This fall, NYSPEC will be focusing attention on continuing to get resolutions passed by city and county governing councils. The NY Women's Agenda (NYWA), an organizational member of NYSPEC, succeeded in getting the New York City Council to pass a resolution in June calling on the State Senate, Assembly and the Governor to pass and sign into law the NYS Fair Pay Bill.

At the September 4, 2008, Albany Common Council Meeting a similar resolution passed unanimously. I spoke in favor of the resolution for NYSPEC and Maggie Moehringer represented the LWVNYS, conveying the League's support of the pay equity and the resolution. As a result of the resolution passage WAMC provided special coverage concerning the NYS Fair Pay Bill on the September 5 local news. The Buffalo Common Council will be our next effort.

New York State Pay Equity Legislation has passed the State Assembly since 2002, but it has been held captive in committee in the Senate. Long Island NYSPEC organizations have designed a pledge for Senators to take indicating they will support pay equity legislation.

There seems to be a lot more attention to this issue and wide support. Rarely does anyone come out blatantly against this issue. In fact, it is noteworthy that, following the "Robach's Ruse" activity reported in the last *Voter*, the Senate Republicans are still using the Senator Robach bill (S7521) and claiming that it shows that the NYS Senate has passed legislation addressing pay equity, which indicates that the legislators know that this is an issue that the electorate cares about. It is important that we keep educating the electorate concerning what is holding up pay equity and that the "S" in S7521 not only stands for Senate but also for "Sham." The real enforceable pay equity bill is the NYS Fair Pay Bill.

Prognosis for the coming year is heavily dependent on who controls the Senate after the November election.

League Works to Keep Informed Consent a Part of HIV Testing

by Donna Packard-Mahoney LWVNYS Off Board Specialist Health Care

The end of session brings a higher level of momentum at the Capital, where I find bills of importance to the League's position require even greater diligence to keep up with the pace.

Two bills of significance that came forth late in game this legislative year focused on HIV written and informed consent. In early June, the State League became aware that the Assembly health committee was going to be voting on two pieces of legislation that would implement a considerable transformation of Article 27-f, the HIV testing and consent law in New York that protects the confidentiality and privacy of anyone tested for or exposed to HIV. The two bills challenging Article 27-f were sponsored by Assemblywoman Nettie Mayersohn and Assembly Health Chair Richard Gottfried. Assemblyman Gottfried's bill A.11461, written by the NYS Health Department, undermined consent by not ensuring patients would understand what tests they were agreeing to undergo. Assemblywoman Mayersohn's bill A.4813-C would have permitted doctors to perform HIV testing without informing the patient, removing the provision of CDC-recommended pre-test counseling, and would not have required health care providers to connect people who test HIV positive to medical care. It would have also removed the requirement for post-test counseling for people who tested HIV negative. The bill also reduced the fine for violating confidentiality from \$10,000 to \$5,000.

The LWVNYS views written informed consent and pre- and post-test counseling as good public policy signed onto a set of principles set forth by Housing Works, a national community-based AIDS organization. The principles stated that any changes to Article 27-f must include written informed consent and pre- and post-test counseling as required by the current law.

On the last Tuesday before the end of session, and despite a late-in-the-game companion bill for A.11461 sponsored by Senate Health Chair Kemp, both bills A.4813-C and A.11461 failed. The League will continue to be watchful that the development of further attempts of legislation to streamline HIV testing will protect, and not decimate, the confidentiality and privacy of anyone who has been tested for or exposed to HIV.

The other legislation concerned the League's work as a member of the Coalition for a Healthy New York to strongly urge the Governor to approve the Dormitory Smoking Ban (A.538a/S1955a). The Coalition was successful and the law took effect August 15, 2008. The State League did not achieve the same success when it worked in the same fashion to advocate for the need to increase smoking cessation assistance programs to respond to the widespread need stimulated by the increased cigarette tax that came to fruition in June.

Act Now—Lead Poisoning Prevention Bill in the Governor's Hand

by Joan Rosenthal, LWVNYS Off-Board Specialist, Lead Poisoning

A6399/CS6350-B, the Gantt/Robach Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act of 2008 was passed by the Senate in late June and revised in August to be the same as the Assembly bill. The bill will be sent to Governor Paterson in the middle of September.

This legislation will require the State to develop childhood lead poisoning prevention plans for the top thirty high-risk areas for lead, identify the sources of lead in these communities, and require removal of lead hazards before children are poisoned. The bill will also improve children's lead screening and reporting and provide modest tax credits to assist low income property owners in capital improvements to eliminate lead hazards. And most important during a time of difficult budget cuts – there are no unfunded local mandates and any new state obligations are dependent upon funding being made available.

There has been a delay in sending the bill to Governor Paterson, which is a good thing because it gives some advocacy groups more time to meet with some state agencies which object to parts of the bill. There are serious concerns at the State Taxation and Finance and at the Department of Budget that could lead to a veto. The bill should be sent to Governor Paterson in about two weeks. We need League members across New York State to marshal your resources and send letters to Governor Paterson urging him to sign this legislation.

Tax Caps continued from page 1

- Additional funding required to provide all children with a sound basic education should be provided by means of the state personal income tax, implemented in a progressive fashion;
- Cost-savings should be implemented by replacing the constellation of STAR programs with a real property tax circuit breaker program based on need and indexed to inflation;
- Stability in the funding of education should be increased by creation of an education reserve fund, calculated to stabilize state funds available for education purposes in times of economic downturn.

A tax cap would limit the growth in school property tax levies to 4 percent or to 120 percent of the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

New York State's School Tax Relief (STAR) Program includes a school property tax rebate program and a partial property tax exemption from school taxes. All New Yorkers who own and live in their home - whether it's a condominium, cooperative apartment, manufactured home, farm dwelling, apartment building or mixed-use property - are eligible for the STAR exemption on their primary residence.

The Suozzi Commission was established in January 2008 to examine New York State property tax and consider measures to provide relief. Preliminary findings were published in June and the final report is due on December 1, 2008. The Commission will be holding hearings throughout the fall and the League will assign members to attend those meetings throughout the state. The commissions remaining hearings are scheduled for October 22 in Yonkers, October 30 in Buffalo, November 5 in Rochester, and November 12 in Syracuse.

The Suozzi Commission's mandate was to explore property tax caps that would enable the state to lower property taxes while maintaining quality of education. It identified the Massachusetts model (a tax cap, adoption of a foundation approach, and state funding of the foundation amount not provided by property taxes) as having successfully reduced increases in education costs while maintaining quality. It rejected the California model of tax caps alone as being detrimental to quality of education. The Governor's bill, introduced as S8736, neglects half of the Massachusetts formula—state provision of foundation aid to fill the shortfall of individual districts existing after the tax cap is reached. Without the second part of this formula, New York risks an outcome that more clearly resembles the California model than the Massachusetts.

The tax cap is conceptually flawed because it addresses the concerns of downstate without addressing the concerns of upstate. Downstate many districts are property wealthy, with high overall taxes but relatively low rates of taxation. Upstate, although the taxes overall are not as high, the rate of taxation per thousand dollars of assessed valuation is often much higher. Thus, a cap may enable downstate districts to maintain program without reaching the maximum tax increase, where upstate increases at the 4% maximum might require drastic programmatic cuts.

This problem cannot be addressed adequately without full and dependable implementation of the foundation aid formula.

Similarly, although the Assembly bill moves in the direction supported by the League, it does nothing about the underlying STAR program; it merely adds another program to the panoply, without advancing the cost-saving mandate of the Suozzi Commission.

Furthermore, this problem has developed over the past thirty years to its current crisis as the shift away from approximately equal state and local financing of education to the state's current low of approximately 43 percent, with the remainder coming from the more regressive local property tax. Any meaningful system of reform must shift the funding paradigm from local responsibility to supplement state shortfall to state responsibility to supplement local shortfall.

Local League News

READY, SET, GO.....

To ease the transition from the relaxed pace of summer, Leagues marked the start of the 2008-2009 League year with a variety of special events. A luncheon at the historic Stockade Inn has become traditional in the LWV Schenectady County. This year, kicking off the League's study of the advisability of supporting the Compact for a National Popular Vote, Christopher Pearson, Vermont legislator and secretary of The National Popular Vote Inc. was the invited speaker. The National Popular Vote was also the topic of LWV Rensselaer County's event on September 20. A public meeting at the library featured Lori Dawson, state chair of the NPV study, and other League members presenting pros and cons of the NPV Compact. The library arranged a display of books on voting and elections and also made periodicals and articles about the NPV available. League memorabilia were also put on display.

The LWV Saratoga County's September 17 Constitution Day celebration was funded by a \$500 grant from the LWVUS Education Fund. The grant was part of Safeguarding U.S. Democracy Project. The celebration also looked at the National Popular Vote Compact. Dr. Norman Enhoring, distinguished professor of history at Adirondack Community College, described the background and history of the Electoral College. Christopher Pearson discussed criticisms of the Electoral College and proposals for its change or elimination, emphasizing the NPV Compact. LWV Rochester/Metro also

focused on the Constitution. The topic of its September 4 League Day Luncheon was the "U.S. Constitution, the First Amendment, the Right to Freedom of Speech." Dr. Daan Braveman, president of Nazareth College and author of six books on the Constitution, moderated a panel consisting of Assemblypeople Susan John, Joseph Errigo, and Joseph Morelle.

LWV Albany County's Annual Pot Luck Dinner on September 25 focused on "Greening Our Communities" the LWV Albany County's theme for the year. This first event of a series, focused on "Making the Case for Improved Public Transportation" The speaker, Ray Melleady, is the executive director of the Capital District Transportation Authority.

Stepping out on their own two feet, the LWV Plattsburg marched in the September 13 Battle of Plattsburg parade. The League's theme was "Women in American History" in support of women's right to vote. On September 18, the LWV New Castle showed the film "The New Selling of the President 2008," which looks at the impact of the Internet on the presidential campaign. A panel discussion following the film included David Schwartz from the Museum of Moving Images; Steve Apton, executive director Jacob Burns film; and Allisson Fine, author of Rebooting America.

In a lighter vein, the LWV Saratoga County members and friends enjoyed a "Sundae So-

cial on Friday" on September 26. After indulging in sundaes, members and friends were invited to play Elections 101, "a fun-filled game with prizes to test election knowledge." The LWV Westchester County organized a "League Week" in September to attract new members. Use of public service announcements, You Tube, and articles and ads in local newspapers is planned. The cornerstone event of the week was a program on media literacy and the 2008 presidential campaign presented by David Schwartz of the Museum of the Moving Image. Membership was also the focus of the LWV Nassau's August 19 meeting. The DVD "Granny D Goes to Washington," a film about an 89-year old woman who walked from California to Washington, D.C. lobbying for campaign finance reform, was featured.

BACK TO SCHOOL

The LWV Suffolk County is promoting "Restorative Practices in Schools," which is described as "An effective and efficient way of handling issues that arise in a school environment." Restorative practices are seen as an alternative to more costly and less effective discipline and punitive methods. On August 20, the League provided a two-hour training session for League members and school administrators to introduce them to Restorative Practices in Schools. An Alternatives to Incarceration initiative, it seeks to "break the school to prison pipeline" and is supported by funding from Suffolk County. The League's role will be to voice support, spread the word and arrange for training. The International Institute for Restorative Practices Web site is: www.iirp.org.

The LWV of the Hamptons is running with "Running and Winning," a program for high school girls. The program's aim is to encourage more women to run for and win public office. Judi Roth who attended a workshop at the National Convention reports that it "knocked my socks off (had I been wearing any)." The League's aim is to do a program in a local high school in May or June. "Running and Winning" brings high school girls together with elected women officials for a day. The girls meet and interview the officials, and then run a mock campaign—selecting candidates, writing and delivering speeches, and making posters.



Dianne Slavin, Voter Service Chair (left), and Marion Hanna, LWV Huntington, at a Rock the Vote! voter registration drive at SUNY Farmingdale.

Graduating high school seniors are the target of the LWV Plattsburg's voter outreach effort. The League prepared and distributed voter registration packets to 1,194 graduating seniors in sixteen high schools in Clinton and Essex counties. Now in its fourth year, the "Voter Registration Packet Program," originated by Myra Decker, is getting more participation by schools each year.

The LWV Schenectady County is revving up for its fourth year of LeaderSpark, a leadership training program for high school students. More than fifty Schenectady County students have benefited from the training so far. Feedback from students has been universally positive. One graduate of the program, now at the Schenectady Community College, contacted the League last fall to ask if the League would do some leadership training with the student council at the community college which the League gladly did.

KUDOS

Joy Cordery was awarded the Carrie Chapman Catt award by the LWV The Hamptons for her "faithful and constant presence on the Hamptons Board." The LWV Suffolk County League gave Anne Marshall a certificate of appreciation for her numerous contributions to League, including Voter Service chair for five years and president in 2005-7. The LWV Saratoga County honored Mary Lou Claussen with its Carrie Chapman Catt Award for her many years of leadership of the LWV Schenectady County and her guidance in managing its merger with the LWV Saratoga County. The LWV Saratoga County honored Barbara Thomas with a LWVNY's Sustainers' Plaque in honor of her service to the State League and to the LWV Saratoga County. She has been president or co-president of LWV Saratoga County since 1990.



Members of the LWV the Hamptons marched in the annual Fourth of July parade. Their shirts, the banners, and the signs added to the message—"Vote!"

PHOTO: ARLENE HINKEMEYER.

Voter Service... Off And Running

Long, lazy summer days were rare in a number of Leagues whose Voter Service activities were running in high gear. The LWV Rochester/Metro, working with the Rochester Voters Alliance, registered voters at Top's Markets on six summer days, and at two college campuses—Nazareth College and SUNY Brockport. At the July 4th celebration at the Empire State Plaza,

strolling registrars from the LWV Albany County invited people to register to vote. In August, that League also registered voters at Washington Square Night Out, African American Family Day and Arbor Hill Carnival. LWV Albany is partnering with other community organizations, including the NAACP, in their voter registration efforts. The LWV Broome-Tioga had a table

at Juneteenth, a multi-ethnic celebration of the African-American experience and, in August, spent Saturdays registering people at Sam's Club and a local mall. Farmers' Markets were sites for registration activities of several Leagues including the LWV The Hamptons and LWV of Rensselaer County. The LWV The Hamptons members also registered voters outside the post office in East Hampton July 29–August 2. On August 26, the LWV Plattsburg handed out registration materials at a Business and Professional Women event. The League

also registers new voters at Clinton Community College—along with a bake sale, which surely increases the interest in the League table! Two unusual voter registration projects are worth special note. The LWV Albany's "Library Project" was initiated in July by member Maureen Cooley. A table was set up in the entrance hall of her town library and stocked with voting information including registration forms, absentee ballot requests and a simple display about the qualifications for voting. In the first week, more than forty items were taken indicating a need for information in the public. The project was even given publicity in the town weekly. A second table has since been set up in another library has been equally well used. Tables are set up for a month and restocked as needed. Adopting a table is a simple but effective way of contributing to the voter registration effort

In stark contrast is the effort undertaken by the LWV Suffolk County to register the homeless to vote. While at a meeting on voter registration at the LWVUS convention, League member Judie Gorenstein became aware that other Leagues in the U.S. were registering the homeless. She researched New York's laws and found that

About 30,000 people visit the Liberty Ridge Farm Corn Maze in Schaghticoke each year. This year, the farm decided to inject politics into the fun. People were invited to "Vote with your Feet" as they navigated through the corn maze and learn about the election process. Each visitor can cast a ballot no matter their age. The LWV Rensselaer County conducted a voter registration drive at Liberty Ridge Farm and provided ten questions for the farm's Election '08 Corn Maze.

LWV Suffolk County ILO designed and printed palm cards that were handed out at registration drives. The cards were personalized for each League in the ILO—LWV The Hamptons, LWV Huntington, LWV Brookhaven, LWV Shelter Island and LWV Smithtown. A more generic LWV Suffolk County version is available for the areas in Suffolk County not covered by a local League.