



The LOCAL VOTER
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
SYRACUSE METROPOLITAN AREA

SEPTEMBER 2011

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 State: www.lwvny.org
 National: www.lwv.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 13th
 Primary Day
Sept. 24th
 Day trip to Seneca Falls
Oct. 18th
 Syr. Board of Education Forum
Oct. 25th
 City Council Forum

To receive your *Local Voter* by email, please contact us at league@lwvsyr.org. You will help the environment as well as save us printing and postage costs. You will also be able review the newsletter in **COLOR**
 Thank You!

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STAYING INFORMED ON THE ISSUES AND EVENTS

Local: www.lwvsyr.org
 State: www.lwvny.org
 National: www.lwv.org



Saturday, September 24, 2011

Day Trip to the National Women's Rights Historical Park & National Women's Hall of Fame

9:30 AM—5:00 PM

The Syracuse Metro League of Women Voters has arranged a trip to Seneca Falls for League members and friends. We will car pool to Seneca Falls leaving Syracuse at 9:30 am from various locations depending on who has signed up for the trip and the number of participants. A visit to the Women's Hall of Fame is scheduled for 11:00 am, followed by lunch, and then a tour of the Women's Rights National Park including a visit to the Elizabeth Cady Stanton home.



The cost is minimal—\$2.00 to enter the Hall of Fame and lunch on your own.

Please let us know if you will be joining us and if you are willing to help us out by driving.

Call : 448-7199
 Email: league@lwvsyr.org

Deadline for responding: September 16, 2011

Join us and bring a friend -

This is a great opportunity to start off the new league year; see and learn how it all began; and introduce others to the League.

BOARD NOTES

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We hope you can join us for our trip to Seneca Falls on September 24th. It will be a terrific way to introduce the league to any of your friends or colleagues who are not already members of the Syracuse Metro LWV. Why not pass along the date and invite them to join you and learn more about the history and the mission of the League? Details on page 1 of this newsletter.

Thanks to most of our current League members, who have already renewed their dues payments for the current membership year (July 1, 2011– June 30, 2012). If you have not done so, please send in your check using the form on the back of this newsletter as soon as possible.

Our condolences to the family and friends of **Patricia McAfee**. Pat was a former member of the Syracuse Metro LWV.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Linda Ervin
Julia Fuleihan

Minna Buck, Membership Director

NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES

Thanks to all who have helped out this year with this very important Voter Service activity. A schedule for the coming year will be available soon.

If you have not participated in this League activity in the past, you will find it a very rewarding and moving experience.

Please contact Voter Service Director Susan Bush to volunteer.

sjbushywca@cnyemail.com

Phone: 424-0040



Officers

Co-Presidents... Joan Durant, Joan Johnson
Secretary... Open
Treasurer.... Rhonda Hungerford

Directors

Advocacy... Audrey Benenati
Fund-Raising... Open
Membership... Minna Buck
Program.... Rae Rohfeld
Publications... Joan Johnson
Public Relations... Janet Mallan
Voter Service... Susan Bush

Off-Board Positions

Budget Director.... Roberta Millert
Nominating Committee.... Open
Technical Support... Roberta Millert
Fundraising Coordinator... Nina Tamrowski

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. For more information please call the League office at (315) 448-7199 or e-mail to league@lwvsyr.org

Diversity Statement

The Syracuse Metropolitan League of Women Voters is committed to diversity and pluralism, which means there shall be no barriers to participation in any League activity on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, or national origin.

Please let us know your email address.

- It is the most efficient way to communicate
- You will be notified of upcoming local events
- LWV National & State Action Alerts

Your e-mail address will not be shared or sold.

Please respond to league@lwvsyr.org

FROM YOUR CO-PRESIDENTS

How can you enhance your membership in the League?

Why not serve on one of our many committees?

ADVOCACY – CHAIR AUDREY BENENATI: The committee supports league positions to officials, legislators, or the interested public. Members might write, or help write letters to the editor. They might contact appropriate officials by letter, phone or email. Members can observe meetings of public bodies, such as the county legislature, common council or town/village boards.

FUND RAISING—COORDINATOR NINA TAMROWSKI: Join Nina to brainstorm and execute ideas for events or activities including our annual letter campaign and other possible funding sources.

MEMBERSHIP – CHAIR MINNA BUCK: The Membership Committee works on recruiting new members, connecting them with those having similar interests, and encouraging new members to attend events.

PROGRAM- CHAIR RAE ROHFELD: The Program Committee plans and presents programs for members and the general public. Committee members may brainstorm and implement program ideas, identify appropriate speakers and locations for events.

VOTER SERVICE- CHAIR SUSAN BUSH: This committee registers voters at naturalization ceremonies or other locations and help at candidate forums as greeters, time keepers and moderators. They contribute to compiling the *Election Guide* by developing candidate questions and contacting candidates, Members may speak to various groups on topical issues. They also monitor local public housing elections.

PUBLIC RELATIONS – CHAIR JANET MALLAN: Help Janet get attention to our programs and other good works that we do. This may include designing, writing or editing flyers, posters, brochures or brief articles. Follow-up calls to media contacts can help bring the media to our events as well as encourage them to include our activities in their newspapers, calendar events and websites.

For more information and to volunteer, give us a call at 448-7199 or email us at league@lwvsyr.org

Joan Durant

Joan Johnson

CALENDAR

Tuesday, September 13, 2011	Primary Day—Polls open Noon—9:00 PM
Saturday, September 24, 2011— 9:30 AM—5:00 PM	LWV trip to Seneca Falls to visit the National Women’s Rights Park and the Women’s Hall of Fame
Tuesday, October 18, 2011— 6:30 PM Henninger High School	Syracuse Board of Education Candidates’ Forum Sponsored by Parents for Public Schools, Syracuse Metro LWV, Spanish Action League
Tuesday, October 25, 2011—6:30 PM Nottingham High School	Syracuse Common Council Candidates’ Forum Sponsored by Parents for Public Schools, Syracuse Metro LWV, Spanish Action League
Tuesday, November 8, 2011	Election Day—Polls open 6:00 AM—9:00 PM



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NYS
2011 LEGISLATIVE SESSION SUMMARY
BARBARA BARTOLETTI, LWVNY LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

I have been walking the halls of Albany for the past 3 plus decades and this certainly was one of the strangest sessions that I have been a part of. It doesn't quite rank up there with the bombshell of former Governor Spitzer's resignation (2007) or the democratic Senate coup of 2009. However, it was certainly a strange 6 months. After Governor Cuomo's election where he promised a new day in Albany with new openness (which he immediately demonstrated by opening the Governor's hall in the 2nd floor of the Capitol and removing the barriers beneath his State Street office), Albany became a very closed and secretive place. Shortly after the session started, the Legislative Office Building ("LOB") was closed to the outside so you could not access it from State Street. It became very difficult to maneuver your way around the legislature, especially once people descended on Albany during the budget deliberations. Legislative staff complained about their inability to get to their workplace in a timely manner or as the weather got nicer the difficulty of going to the food vendors or farmer's market, one of the highlights of spring in Albany. As the session wore on, openness of government became a real issue for the League and its good government colleagues, not just an annoyance.

If we were to try and count the number of open leaders' meetings, we could stop at one, and that included negotiations on the budget as well as all legislative issues. The Governor has held almost no open press conferences. There were press availabilities where only the press was allowed in unless you were directly participating in the press conference. This Governor's mode of operation appears to be negotiating behind closed doors and using the force of his high approval ratings and his personality to accomplish his goals on both the budget and legislative issues. The major issues on his agenda included an on-time budget, ethics reform, a 2% tax cap, and marriage equality. All of these issues were accomplished thereby fulfilling his goals for the first 6 months of his administration.

Below you will find a summary of the major issues from this session, including some on the League's agenda that we can count as major accomplishments for the 2011 session. Work still needs to be done on other issues important to the League, notably re-districting reform and campaign finance reform, which were not addressed in this session.

Budget

The budget was an on-time budget done behind closed doors, again "three men in a room," with one early open leaders' meeting. The first time the public saw a completed budget was when legislators began voting on it. The budget reduces state aid to school districts by \$698 million which includes \$608 million of federal spending cuts. Overall school aid was decreased by \$1.3 billion to \$19.6 billion and municipalities had their aid reduced by 2%. This state budget does not include new taxes and does close the \$10 billion deficit. Notably this budget also merges agencies and public authorities to generate \$50 million of savings and cuts the state workforce expenditures by \$450 million. Savings will also be generated by eliminating 3,700 prison beds.

Ethics

Since ethics reform was one of the agenda items for the Governor, he spent a good deal of political capital across the state setting the stage for negotiations on this issue. However, the negotiations were done behind closed doors with the Speaker and Majority Leader - classic "three men in a room." What was different about this was the amount of energy, time and money the Governor extended in bringing the issue of ethics to the top of voter awareness and interest. The Governor also had Albany's recent, rather sorted, ethical scandals to back up his call for ethics reform. The good government advocates who have long championed ethics reform were brought in during the last week of the negotiations to give input and participate in the final language sign-off.

To be sure, this is not our vision of an ideal bill; many of the elements are the product of compromise that occurred in closed-door negotiations without public hearings on the bill. Nevertheless, this legislation represents a significant improvement over the current system and we supported it.

During the negotiations we repeatedly urged the Governor to affirm his commitment to campaign finance reform early in the 2012 legislative session. The league will continue to push the Governor to fulfill his commitment to this important issue.

Tax Caps

A 2% tax cap was a Governor's campaign pledge throughout the 6 months of his first administration. Much money was spent by both proponents and opponents on the tax cap issue. Lobbying filings will be interesting to see exactly how much money was spent on this issue. It became clear as the session was winding down that the tax cap and NYC rent regulations would become linked what, by the end of session was called, "the Big Ugly." Closed door negotiations around the tax cap and mandate relief became an end of session sticking point that took days to resolve. New York City Assembly Democrats were adamant about extending rent regulations and Upstate Republican Senators were equally adamant about the 2% tax cap which the Senate had long since passed in January. Mandate relief was deemed not to be sufficient by many of the stakeholders particularly by municipal governments. Eventually the "Big Ugly" included about \$100 million in mandate relief, most of which dealt with relief concerning school districts.

Because of the Governor's high poll ratings and the extensive political advertisements on this issue, there was never a doubt that the Governor would prevail on this issue. The "Big Ugly" passed on the last day of session at about 8:00 pm with little debate in

either the Senate or the Assembly. Several upstate Democrats did not vote for this legislation because they felt it would be devastating to their local governments and school districts. Downstate Democrats and many rent advocates were also not happy with the rent regulation in the bill; however, after 2 rent extensions, they felt that they had no choice but to vote for it. Senate Republicans, however, wanted the 2% tax cap badly, as did Senate downstate Democrats; that combination of votes assured its passage.

The League opposed the tax cap, preferring a circuit breaker system instead. We attended many press conferences on this issue and encouraged members to communicate with their legislators.

Marriage Equality

During the last two weeks of session, advocates on both sides of this issue took over the capitol building. The third floor was impassable because the Sergeant-At-Arms shut down the lobby behind the Senate Chambers. It was extraordinarily difficult for working lobbyists to move around the third floor housing the legislative Chambers. State Troopers were everywhere and the noise level by the advocates was deafening with Hasidic rabbis and pro-marriage equality advocates screaming and waving signs in each others' faces. There were religious hymns sung hour after hour until it became unbearable enough that most lobbyists left the building. What was remarkable about this last week in particular was that the Senate Republicans spent hours and hours in closed door conference debating this issue; this went on for 5 days culminating on Friday with a marathon 8 hour session. The legislative press corps occupied some of their time trying to guess which Republican Senators would vote for marriage equality.

By Friday, outside the Capitol were satellite trucks from all over the state, as well as CNN and MSNBC news media. About 5:30pm on Friday, rumors abounded that there had actually been a Republican coup in the Senate but then rumors abounded all day long particularly in this age of social media. The Senate galleries and the million dollar staircase were overflowing with hundreds of advocates in favor of the marriage equality legislation. When the 32nd vote (Stephen Saland of Columbia and Dutchess Counties) was cast, cheering erupted from the galleries. Social media quickly spread the word and the advocates outside of the Senate Chambers exploded with cheers and emotions which quickly spilled out of the Capitol building and into the streets. The four Republican Senators who eventually supported the marriage equality legislation included Senators Alesi, Saland, McDonald and Grisanti; the only Democrat to vote in the negative was Senator Diaz.

As expected, the vote on marriage equality was the last vote taken before the session ended. The amendments to the marriage equality bill negotiated all week by the Governor's office and the religious communities had to be passed before the actual full bill. Generally, these exemptions provided that religious and affiliated groups were protected from lawsuits for refusing to provide marriage services to same-sex couples. Finally, the legislation contained an inseverability clause which provided that if a court found any part of the marriage equality act to be invalid, the entire legislation would also be invalid; this provision is important to Republicans because it means that the marriage legislation would be at risk if the religious exemptions were successfully challenged in court

Redistricting

Redistricting reform was one of the major items left incomplete at the end of this regular session despite continued pressure from the good government groups and the Governor. Legislation creating a new and more independent process was introduced early in the session by Governor Cuomo and Speaker Silver S.3419/A.5388 and co-sponsored by 96 members of the Assembly, both Republicans and Democrats, but did not pass either house. On March 14 the Senate did pass a one-house hastily drawn flawed Constitutional amendment, which could not be effective before 2022, in response to criticism by Reshape NY that they had gone back on their pledge to support independent redistricting.

So the Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment ("LATFOR") will continue its work as it has for several decades and hold its first public meeting in Albany on July 6. The Governor has pledged to veto any legislature-drawn lines which must pass both houses as legislation. In the meantime, editorial boards are calling for the legislature to return in special session to deal with redistricting reform when it deals with other unfinished business. The League and Reshape NY will continue our advocacy for an independent commission through the summer.

Other Issues

Issues left undone this regular legislative session included medical exchange legislation implementing the federal Affordable Care Act, which if not enacted by July 1 will cause New York State to lose \$100 million in federal funding. The League distributed a memo in support of this legislation which passed the Assembly but was not considered by the Senate.

Another important unfinished issue of the League is implementation by New York State of the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE); this act would lengthen the process for absentee ballots giving our military men and women and citizens working abroad 45 days to complete and return their absentee ballots. This implementation would force a change in the New York primary election date from September to an earlier date. The Legislature will have to act on legislation in 2011 to implement MOVE to be compliant with the federal elections in 2012 or will have to receive a waiver from the US Department of Justice and US Department of Defense.

Also, during the legislative session, the League continued to support a moratorium on hydrofracking in New York State until the results of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) study of the effects of hydraulic fracturing on water quality and public health are completed. The League distributed a memo in support of the moratorium, as well as letters to the Governor, Attorney General and the Commissioner of NYS DEC.

NEWS AND NOTES

OFFICES TO BE FILLED NOVEMBER 8, 2011

NYS STATE OFFICES:

3 Justices of the Supreme Court

ONONDAGA COUNTY OFFICES:

County Executive
County District Attorney
County Comptroller
17 County Legislators

CITY OFFICES:

2 City Court Judges
City Auditor
2 Councilors-at-Large
5 District Councilors
4 Commissioners of Education

TOWN OFFICES:

19 Town Supervisors
Various Council Members, Clerks, Highway
Superintendents, Justices & Receivers of Taxes

VILLAGE OFFICES:

Camillus: Mayor, 2 Trustees
Village residents will also vote on whether or not
to dissolve the village.

LWVNY CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

Joan Durant and Joan Johnson attended the LWVNYS 54th Convention in Albany, May 20-22, 2011.

It was a busy two and a half days of workshops and meeting where new state league officers and directors were elected; a budget was adopted; and the current program/positions were approved with no changes.

Guest speakers included Albany County Executive Director, Michael Breslin; former Vermont Governor and former Ambassador to Switzerland, Madeleine Kunin; and CEO/President and renowned pollster John Zogby.

REDISTRICTING IS NOT DEAD— The League of Women Voters, along with other good government groups, still believe there is time to form an independent redistricting commission to draw the lines for New York's congressional and legislative districts.

The New York State Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment has held a series of public hearings across the State to gain input from citizens on how these lines should be drawn now that the results of the 2010 Census are known.

Syracuse League Member **Donald Goulet** made the case for redistricting reform at the July 19th hearing in Syracuse.

The Task Force is headed by Senator Michael Nozzolio and Assemblymember John McEneny. There is still time to return to Albany in a special session to draw impartial district lines. Contact Senator Nozzolio and Assemblymember McEneny, and your local state legislators, and let them know New Yorkers want a fair, non-partisan redistricting committee.

RECENT LEAGUE ACTION ON HYDROFRACKING

The League of Women Voters of New York State continues to advocate for a thorough review of the benefits and pitfalls of drilling for oil in the Marcellus shale areas of New York State. In a letter to New York State DEC Commissioner Joseph Martens on July 18, 2011, the League requested that the public comment period with respect to the updated SGEIS be extended beyond the 60 day period to one that enables full review of all the comments and to further allow for additional scientific study of the points raised during the comment period that state drilling in the Marcellus shale will likely impair the environment, human health and property values. A second letter dated July 28, 2011, and authored by the presidents of the Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania Leagues, was sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requesting that the EPA restores the Clean Water Act. Restoring the Clean Water Act is critical to states where extraction of natural gas from Marcellus Shale may threaten rivers, streams and wetlands. To see the complete text of these letters, go to the LWVNY.

2011 LWV VOTERS GUIDE—FACTS FOR VOTERS

Included in this newsletter is our annual Facts for Voters brochure. The brochure reviews our new voting machines and answers questions on deadlines to register and other questions relating to voting.

HOW TO JUDGE A CANDIDATE

DECIDE WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR IN A CANDIDATE

What are their positions on the issues? Are they issues you care about?
What are their leadership qualities and experience – Intelligence? Honesty? Communications skills?

FIND OUT ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

Call your local Board of Elections
Call your local political party headquarters
Check out candidate's websites and campaign literature
Pay attention to television and radio ads and reports
Read your local newspaper
Attend debates and forums
For incumbents, check their voting records on the issues you care about

LEARN ABOUT THEIR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Look at their background and experience – are they prepared for the job?
Observe their campaigns – do they accept speaking engagements to debate?
Do they avoid serious questions?

LEARN WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE CANDIDATES

Talk to your neighbors, friends, relatives, political volunteers

LEARN ABOUT ENDORSEMENTS

LOOK INTO CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

FOLLOW OPINION POLLS

SEE THROUGH DISTORTION TECHNIQUES

Name calling? Rumor mongering? Catchwords? Passing the blame? Promising the impossible? Evading Issues?

SORT IT ALL OUT

What candidates' views on the issues do you agree with?
Who ran the fairest campaign?
Which candidates showed the most knowledge of the issues?
Which candidates have the leadership qualities you are looking for?

PRIMARY DAY

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2011
POLLS OPEN NOON UNTIL 9:00 PM

There will be several primaries in the Republican and Conservative parties on September 13th. In the Town of Lysander there will be a primary on the Independence party line for a town justice race. There are no Democratic primaries. **REMEMBER** New York State is a closed primary state and you can only vote in a primary on your designated party line. Additionally, if you are not enrolled in a party you can not vote. Polling locations will also be reduced. **A list of primary candidates is**



Co-President Joan Durant—Syracuse Metro LWV

