

## Saugerties League of Women Voters

### CALENDAR

**Tuesday February 19, 2008 General Meeting 7PM Frank Greco Center Identity Theft**

**Tuesday February 26,2008 Possible Village Candidates forum 7PM  
Board meeting at 6 PM**

### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Happy Valentine's Day and Presidents' Day to one and all. It seems as if we have at least one celebration per month. The bad news was that we had to cancel our January meeting when our speaker became ill. The good news is that we were able to reschedule Alice Haberski's presentation on identity theft for our February 19th meeting. See details below.

Our County Election Commissioners have an important decision to make this month concerning the voting devices we will be using for our elections. They have to provide at least one accessible Ballot Marking Device per precinct for the 2008 election. What they select now is probably what we all will be using later. So, it is crucial that their choice be prudent and cost-effective. The New York State LWV, along with other good government groups, supports the use of a paper ballot scanner system. For further information visit the League's website at [www.lwvny.com](http://www.lwvny.com), and New Yorkers for Verified Voting at [www.nyvv.org](http://www.nyvv.org).

The LWV of the United States is holding its biannual convention June 13-17 in Portland, Oregon. If anyone is interested in becoming more involved in the League, convention is a wonderful learning experience. If you would consider attending, please call Mary Finger (246-4067) or Sally Colclough (246-2945) for further information.

Hope to see you all on February 19th.

### FEBRUARY 19<sup>TH</sup> MEETING - IDENTITY THEFT

The League of Women Voters of Saugerties is sponsoring a program on identity theft. The guest speaker will be Alice Haberski, Director of the Consumer Fraud Bureau of the Ulster County District Attorney's Office. She will be discussing the problem of identity theft and offering ways to make us less vulnerable to this crime. The public is invited to attend this presentation. Bring friends and family.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Welcome new member **CATHY TREES**

## **BUS TRIP**

Mark your calendars and save this date, Saturday, April 26th, for our **Spring Bus Trip to New York City**. There will again be two pick up points, Saugerties (old Grand Union plaza) and Kingston Plaza ( back of former

Ames). The round trip ticket price is \$30 . Departure times are Saugerties at **7:30 A.M.**, Kingston at **8 A.M.** We will leave NYC at **7:00 P.M.** for our return trip home. Spread the word and plan on a fun filled trip. For reservation please contact Dolores LaChance at 246 4507 or [dlachance@18msn.com](mailto:dlachance@18msn.com)

Dolores LaChance

## **VOTER SERVICES**

The League will be hosting a candidate's forum for Village elections on Tuesday, February 26 at the Greco Senior Center at 7pm. There are 3 trustee positions up for grabs this year and although the filling deadline is February 12, I am of the understanding that there will be more than three candidates running and am confident the forum will be necessary . Please stay tuned Lighthouse Channel 23 for updates.

Suzi Filak

### *Capitol Beat*

## Volume 1, Issue 1

2008 began as always with the State of the State address given by Governor Eliot Spitzer to start his second year in office. The Capitol was abuzz with anticipation about how the Governor would try to resurrect himself after what was a disastrous first year in office. Would the Governor extend an olive branch to the legislature and make this session a more collaborative and cooperative one? Would the vitriol that followed the "troopergate" scandal continue to suck the air out of Albany as it did last summer and fall or would the petty bickering and name calling end? Many insiders in Albany believe that until the 2008 legislative elections are over, the Senate will do whatever it can to stymie and weaken the Governor. A special election will also occur soon for the seat being vacated by the retiring Senator James Wright, Republican of Jefferson/Oswego/St. Lawrence County who will become an energy lobbyist. This special election will be hard fought and until then, Senate majority is down to one vote.

The Governor began his State of the State Address by extending his condolences to Majority Leader Joe Bruno on the loss of his wife, Barbara. Mr. Spitzer then went through a litany of issues he will promote as solutions to the problems that New Yorkers consider to be their top priorities. It was clear from the tone of his speech, plus by the many time he mentioned legislators by name, that this was an attempt to show the legislature that he was willing to work with them cooperatively. It was much less a "steamroller" speech and much more a "lets govern together" speech. The speech included the following initiatives:

- **Education Accountability** – the Governor restated his commitment to improving the quality of our schools that was begun last session with his 2007/2008 budget, where a formula was enacted designed to direct aid increases to the highest need school districts. In this State of the State, the Governor was clear that unless investment is tied to accountability that increased aid would be wasted and our educational system would not become an engine of economic growth and opportunity. The Governor also reiterated several measures to further enhance the initiatives he began last session.
- **Higher Education** – the Governor talked about strengthening our economy while making higher education affordable for every New Yorker. In his State of the State, he endorsed recommendations made by the Commission on Higher Education including:
  - o **Full-Time Faculty:** The Commission found that existing levels of full-time faculty in New York’s public higher education systems are well below the levels in comparable institutions in other states
  - o **Research and Development:** Our colleges and universities play an essential role in conducting research and development activities that foster economic growth, and the State should encourage world class research efforts, which could include making funding available to underwrite meritorious scientific and technological research projects.
  - o **Community Colleges:** Students seeking to transfer from community colleges to senior colleges often do not receive full credit for the courses they have completed. The resulting duplication of classes drains both the wallets and financial aid eligibility of those students who can least afford the added burden.

The Governor will propose in his budget the establishment of a higher education endowment, which initially would be at least \$4 billion dollars.

- **Property Tax Relief, Cap, and Reforms** – the Governor obviously has recognized the angst of the New York taxpayer when it comes to property tax increases in the state. He spent much time during the speech outlining both the challenges and his approach to relieving the property tax burden on state taxpayers. These included:
  - o **Direct Relief:** The Governor’s Executive Budget will provide another round of property tax rebates targeting the most amount of relief to middle class homeowners.
  - o **Mandate Relief:** The Executive Budget will include a series of mandate relief proposals and initiatives to help school districts and local governments control costs.
  - o **Property Tax Commission:** Governor Spitzer will appoint a bipartisan Commission with Moreland Act investigatory powers to examine school district property taxes. The Commission will be headed by County Executive, Tom Suozzi.

Last year, Governor Spitzer initiated a Middle Class STAR Rebate program targeting over \$1 billion in relief directly to 3 million households with incomes below \$90,000 upstate and \$120,000 in the higher cost New York City metropolitan region. The League opposed this STAR Rebate program and will continue to advocate the League’s alternative approach to property tax relief.

- **Health Care** – the Governor spoke extensively on his initiatives for improving both access to health care and quality health care. He spoke about chronic disease management targeting childhood obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. His initiatives under this issue include:
  - o Enacting the Healthy Schools Act an issue that was introduced last session and was caught up in the end of session acrimony. The Governor has restated his intention to submit similar legislation with the executive budget incorporation this session many recommendations, which were made by the legislature during last year’s debate on the issue. This proposal will include funding in the executive budget.
  - o Health insurance for all children – last session the Governor and the legislature proposed expanding children’s access to healthcare by allowing subsidized coverage under to

all 400,000 Child Health Plus for children from families with income up to 400% of the federal poverty level – which would make health insurance accessible children. The government current eligibility limit is 250% of the federal poverty level. The federal blocked the proposed expansion of New York’s version of the federal program, Child Health Plus. Therefore:

- The Governor’s Executive Budget will include full funding for the planned expansion of Child Health Plus, which will provide access to health insurance coverage for all of the 400,000 uninsured children in New York State.
- State support will be provided, along with an increase in family contributions tied to income level, to fully fund the planned expansion of Child Health Plus from 250% to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- The Department of Health is streamlining enrollment and renewal procedures to ensure that eligible individuals are able to get and keep coverage under Child Health Plus, Medicaid, and Family Health Plus.
- The Governor also proposed the use of electronic health records to provide individuals with the ability to access their individualized health care information whenever and wherever they choose. The Governor feels this will improve the quality and efficiency of care while reducing health care costs and medical errors.
- The Governor also noted that there is a serious shortage of physicians in rural and poor urban areas throughout New York. Over ¼ of the State’s population live in areas designated “underserved” by proper health care providers.
  - To help alleviate this shortage the Governor’s Executive Budget will propose programs to provide physicians and clinics grants and enhances reimbursement rates designed to encourage new primary care and specialist physicians to establish or join existing practices in rural and inner-city underserved communities.
  - Specifically, the Budget will propose a new education loan repayment program tied to service in underserved communities.
- Campaign Finance Reform – in the last paragraph of his State of the State address, the Governor spoke briefly about items from the last year that were not finished. In that paragraph, he mentioned campaign finance reform.

As many of you are aware, reform issues were prominently part of the Governor’s 2007 Inaugural State of the State address. During the 2007 regular session and long into the summer and fall, the League met frequently on the second floor with the Governor’s top staff. Local League participated in forums bringing the issue to the public and putting our state Senators and Assemblymembers on the record. We also testified in late June before the Senate Elections Committee. The Governor, last session, made campaign finance reform a condition of getting a legislative pay raise which was another of the League’s initiatives; a pay raise for judges. This initiative suffered because it was linked to legislative pay raises and subsequently to campaign finance reform. The League made it clear at that time that these substantive issues should not be linked and should stand on their own merit. We will continue to advocate for these pay raise issues in the 2008 legislative session.

Campaign finance reform will remain a top priority issue this session and we will continue to work with the Governor’s office to put forward comprehensive and real campaign finance reform. We will also vigorously urge that following the Senate hearings on campaign finance reform the Senate needs to come forward with a bill and the Assembly needs to again pass it’s legislation. Both houses then need to go to conference committee with their bills so that their differences can be worked out. This is

an election year and we intend to beat all legislators over the head with this issue until there is comprehensive campaign finance reform.

These are a few of the League issues which were addressed in the Governor's State of the State address, if you would like more information on his address, please visit the Governor's website: <http://www.state.ny.us/governor/sos/index.html>.

Like the first day of school, much comradery and good feelings marked the first day of the legislative session. There were several receptions following the State of the State address where legislators and lobbyists gathered to wish one another a happy new year and wallow, for at least a day, in good feelings. Next week the legislature returns, the battle begins, and the League will be there.

*Capitol Beat*  
*Volume 1,*

*Issue 2*

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Oh! What an amazing League victory!! By now many of you have read Aimee Allaud's e-mail regarding the Elections Commissioners Association meeting, which was held in Saratoga Springs. I am going to provide the color to go along with Aimee's information.

The League's advocacy on the voting machine issue began five years ago and proceeded through the implementation process in the state legislature. Following that, local League advocacy became intense at the County Boards of Elections. When New York State did not meet the HAVA deadlines, the US Department of Justice sued NYS for noncompliance. Federal Judge Gary Sharpe ordered the NYS Board of Elections to put in place strict deadlines concerning the choice of machines that the County Boards of Elections could then buy. These machines must be in place for the 2008 September Primary and November General Election, one in every poll site to be used by disabled voters.

On Friday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, Bo Lipari, the League's representative to the Citizens Election Modernization Advisory Committee (CEMAC), called a meeting of that committee to give "advice" to the state Board of Elections Commissioners as to the pros and cons of the six machines being offered by the vendors for sale in New York State. Bo then issued a report detailing the problems with the DRE machines.

That brings us to the two-day Election Commissioners meeting held in Saratoga Springs, last Wednesday and Thursday. Because the Board of Elections meeting was held in Saratoga there was to be no live web casting of the public meeting, so I alerted all of the local television and print media to the importance of the decision to be made at this meeting. Four local television stations, and several news print media including: the AP, the Albany Times Union, and Gannett sent reporters. At 10:00 a.m. the Republican Commissioners announced that Peter Kosinski, the Republican Co-Executive Director had resigned that morning and was to be replaced by Todd Valentine, the current serving Chief Counsel to the Republican Commissioners (that in itself is an interesting story). They also announced that the machine selection decision had been removed from the morning agenda and would not be dealt with until 2:00 p.m. An insider told me that the Republicans did not want this debate in front of the press. Of course, once I informed the press of this, they made it clear that they were not leaving. From there, the day went down hill fast. The 300 people present for this meeting began to mill around in almost a siege atmosphere. The County Commissioners were angry, the press was angry, the voting advocates who filled the room were angry, to say nothing of the vendors and their lobbyists. I persuaded the press to interview the Democratic and Republican Commissioners as to the reasons why there was this delay and to also get them on the record as to which

way they would be voting. At 2:00 p.m., expecting that there would be a decision made, the room was packed. A Republican Commissioner then announced that the other Republican Commission was “absent” and that therefore, there was not a quorum and a vote could not be taken (of course, we had sat at a table next to this disappearing Commission during lunch). Again, more anger and frustration. A television reporter told me if they thought he was going to give up and go away, they were mistaken and that he would bring a live truck up to Saratoga if need be. In deed as the afternoon wore on and the “mysteriously disappeared” commissioner did not return, a live television truck made it’s way to Saratoga were the reporter went live for the 5 and 6 o’clock news cast. Of course, the print media was bogging all day long as events occurred OR did not occur. For most of the next 3 hours, there were no Republican staff or Commissioners in the room, which allowed the one Democratic Commissioner (the other was absent due to health concerns), a platform to explain the CEMAC meeting the previous Friday, the report Bo Lipari had given him and his legal reasons for not voting for the Liberty DRE machine.

At 5:00 p.m., both Republican Commissioners reappeared and apologized for their absence. They then proposed that a package of four machines be approved including the Liberty DRE. A vote was taken and since a majority of three votes was needed, it was voted down as the Democratic Commissioner voted “no.” The Democratic Commissioner then put a proposal on the table to approve three of the six machines excluding the Liberty DRE, since he felt that machine did not meet the legal standards in New York State. The Democratic Commissioner’s proposal was voted down by the Republicans and so we had a stalemate. An entire day of political maneuvering was finally over with, of course, no decision. That afternoon, the Governor’s office sent a representative to Saratoga and during a conversation with him I was told that the Governor did not want to end up being appointed the Special Master which would have been the case if a decision by the state Board of Elections could not be reached by Friday, the deadline set by the Court.

The next morning at 11:00 a.m. when the board resumed, it was apparent that the Republicans had given in (speculation was that there was a trade between Republicans and the Governor’s office, for what, we don’t know.) The Commissioners then began to vote of all six machines one by one. When the voting was over both sides had agreed to three machines. None of those machines were DRE technology. The League and our allies had won! The machines available to the counties will all be paper ballot/optical scan. Of course, they still need to go through the certification process, but it is most likely that one of the three machines will also be the machine likely to replace the lever machines in 2009.

Politically this is a huge victory for the League against a very well funded vendor and their lobbying firm. The voters of New York, of course, are the real winners and will use machines that are secure, accurate, recountable, and accessible. League members who went to see their County Commissioner or County Legislator and did other advocacy around this issue can be very proud of the work we did on behalf of the NYS Voter!

On the legislative front, the state budget hearings begin week. The League will be testifying at several hearings and the budget battle will go from there. For more information on the Governor’s Executive Budget, please visit: <http://www.budget.state.ny.us/>. Look for coming advocacy on issues the League cares about as they pertain to the budget.

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