

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of SCHENECTADY COUNTY, NEW YORK

BULLETIN

March 2008

MARCH EVENTS



Greening Schenectady

“Go Green Without Going in the Red.”

*A program sponsored by the League as part of
The Climate Change Coalition of Schenectady*

To be held at Proctor's Robb Alley

Wednesday, March 12 from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Hear speakers:

*Phillip Morris, CEO of Proctor's
William Sweet, Vice President of Engineering & Construction for the Golub Corp.
Bill Connor and Dan Goldin of the LEED- certified Clifton Park Public Library
Karen Villeneuve and Chris Reohr from NYSERDA*

**Learn about green construction and why its good for all of us.*

**Learn about programs offered by NYSERDA for homes & businesses.*

More information inside.

FRIENDLY LUNCH

Tuesday, March 25, 2008 at 12:00 noon

Social Services Commissioner Dennis Packer will give us an update on how the 2008 Schenectady County budget will affect the Department of Social Services The Social Services Building at 106 Erie Blvd.

Bring your own lunch

Call Connie Young at 393-7061 to let us know that you are coming.

PRESIDENT's COLUMN

Greetings,

We are proud to congratulate one of our members, Melinda Myers, who was recently honored by the YWCA as their 'Unsung Hero' for her years of community service. We join the many others who thank her for her dedication to our community!

Many thanks also to our 13 intrepid members who turned out for our annual pot-luck planning meeting at Sonia's on February 13th, another snowy night. This is always an important meeting in which we identify positions at the national (or state) and local levels that need addressing.

Regarding national positions, we agreed with the NYS LWV to recommend that Leagues nationally study 'the advisability of using the National Popular Vote Compact to elect our president and vice president.' We also recommended that Health Care Reform be brought up for review at our national convention in June in order to increase education and advocacy on this issue. An additional concern was raised that global warming is not specifically mentioned in our national positions.

Our positions at the local level were also reviewed. These will be brought to a vote at our annual meeting in June. Items discussed dealt with the manager form of government, the environment, and health care reform. Watch for more on our local positions in the May newsletter.

This month you received a letter from Athena Pagnotti, chair of our finance committee, and me inviting your continued financial support for the Schenectady League. We have become a very active League in recent years and would like to share our programs with more in our community. We have received generous contributions from individuals like Dr. Balasubramaniam specifically to support LeaderSpark and from local businesses to support such programs as Take Me to Vote and our 'Who's Who.' However, most of our annual dues go to support important activities at the national and state levels. So we annually invite your consideration of additional financial support to build our local programs.

We always appreciate whatever level of support you choose. We greatly value and benefit from your membership, your interest, your skills, your time and your financial support. Thank you! Joanne

Judicial / AT Court Committee Report

Helga Schroeter, Co-chair

The committee met on January 31 at Helga Schroeter's house. Joan Elliott, Linda Muralidharan and Helga Schroeter reported that they had attended January's AT Court session in County Court. Two clients graduated that day from the court, and several new clients were observed.

Laura Zelig reported that she had talked with Debbie Slack of the Public Defender's office to get several committee questions answered. A pattern appears to have been worked out about the proceedings in AT Court, and defendants seem to get the needed support services once they have been diagnosed and admitted to the program.

The committee then discussed options to advocate for a City Court level AT Court to make it a reality. Lack of special funding is a major obstacle. It was decided to invite Administrative Judge Mark Caruso to another meeting of the committee in a few weeks to solicit his support for the court. The committee will also continue to monitor the county level AT Court and visit other specialty courts to find out what makes them successful.

The committee also discussed the need for better funding for mental health services in the county. It was decided to refer this issue to the Health Care committee to ask them to study it at the local level.

The judicial program as stated in the Schenectady League's local program underwent review for the annual program planning meeting on February 13. It was decided to streamline the wording of the Judicial program in effort to clarify the language.

ANTI-GLOBAL WARMING COALITION TO GIVE GREEN BUILDING PROGRAM

Nancy Peterson, Environment Committee Chair

The LWV Environment Committee has played the lead role in planning and organizing the “Greening Schenectady” program. The Climate Change Coalition of Schenectady County is sponsoring this program on March 12, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Proctors Theatre Robb Alley. The program is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Nancy Peterson at 374-5810 or Carol Furman at 346-2745.

Speakers will include Phillip Morris, CEO of Proctors, on the energy efficient strategies being implemented at the theater; William Sweet, Vice President of Engineering and Construction for the Golub Corporation, on the company’s plans to construct a LEED-certified* administrative building in College Park; an architect, Bill Connor, and a board member, Dave Goldin, of the LEED-certified Clifton Park Public Library, and two representatives from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), Karen Villeneuve, residential specialist and Chris Reohr, LEED specialist. They will speak on NYSERDA programs that benefit both homeowners and commercial developers. (*LEED=Leadership in Energy and Energy Design)

Mayor Brian U. Stratton will welcome speakers and audience members, and will receive the Coalition’s first annual Green Star award for leadership in strategies to mitigate climate change in city operations through energy efficiency. City Council member Barbara Blanchard and Phillip Morris will also receive awards.

Members of the Schenectady coalition include the Schenectady County League of Women Voters; ECOS: the Environmental Clearinghouse; the Green Sanctuary of the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady; the Schenectady County Environmental Advisory Council (SCEAC) the Science Club of Schenectady County Community College, and other environmental organizations. This same coalition sponsored the to Step It Up rallies in 2007.

The Environment Committee is always happy to see new faces at their meetings, which are on the first Monday of every month at noon. The next meeting is March 3rd. If you are interested in attending please call Nancy Peterson at 374-5810 to find out the location.

Fair Campaign Practices for the Capital Region, Inc.---What’s it All About?

Submitted by Julie Burgess

Purpose The purpose of Fair Campaign Practices for the Capital Region (FCP) is to promote a climate in which candidates conduct honest campaigns. Candidates are encouraged to conduct campaigns openly and fairly, to discuss issues, to refrain from personal attacks on the character of their opponents and not to use campaign materials that distort the facts. Candidates are asked to sign a Fair Campaign Pledge to uphold these principles.

Joint Project This organization is a joint project of the Interfaith Alliance of New York State and the Leagues of Women Voters in the Capital District. The Board of Directors is composed of four members from the Interfaith Alliance and two members from each of the Leagues in Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady Counties.. The representatives of our League are Joan Elliott and Julie Burgess. Among those who recognized the need and worked to establish FCP were two of our members, Sally Embley and Gene Rowland.

Complaint Process FCP accepts written complaints about alleged unfair campaign practices and determines whether these actions are unfair. A hearing pool of twenty respected community members is appointed with representation from each of the four counties. From this pool, hearing panels are selected which hear evidence and determine when unfair campaign practices have occurred. The electorate is then informed of the results through the press and a website. Last fall there were twelve hearings including some involving candidates in Rotterdam. Currently serving as hearing pool members from Schenectady are Joan Elliott, Helen MacDonald, Eugene Rowland, Faith Weldon and Jean Wilkinson.

Hearing Pool Expansion The hearing pool will be expanded this year, adding two or three people from each county. For more information or if you are interested in joining the hearing pool, please call Julie (393-9887) or Joan (346-4414). Training will be provided. Other volunteers will be needed to help with obtaining candidate lists and mailing the candidate pledges.

BORDER RELATIONS Friendly Lunch on February 26th

Reported by Joanne Tobiessen

Another great meeting on a snowy day: Professor Vicki Martinez spoke at Union College about her 'mini-term abroad' with 11 students last November-December. Students had the opportunity to learn about border and immigration issues first-hand as they traveled along our southwestern border with Mexico, from Los Angeles/San Diego and Tijuana to El Paso and Juarez.

Tijuana was a laboratory for the students to study all of the issues, from the US built fence (made of old landing strips from the first Iraqi war) to the economics of poverty and trade to the constant daily movement of cross border travel (in 2003, 251,000 people crossed daily just to work). Students experienced the 3-4 hour wait for tourists returning to the US from Mexico, while those workers with laser visas have a 1 ½ hour wait daily.

Indicative of the complexity of our border relations, Mexicali was founded by Chinese, many of whom were hired to work on the large American owned farms in Mexico. Americans have long owned a lot of land in Mexico (perhaps 1/5 of all the arable land in the 19th C.) and are reportedly trying to take over the Mexican agribusiness in corn. A lot of people in Mexico are losing their livelihood due to these conglomerates.

In Arizona the class visited Coronado National Park which straddles both countries. This is where many immigrants come over (300-800/day). Students heard speakers on both sides of the immigration issue; Vicki recommended the documentary "Crossing Arizona" for us to hear both sides.

Crime and drug trafficking are border issues as well. However, an El Paso professor who studies this told students that the drug trafficking that occurred in the Arizona National Park was 'small potatoes' compared with his knowledge that the Colombian cartel has 'purchased' the state of Chihuahua and transports drugs on big trucks through official checkpoints.

'Safe houses' for immigrants were visited. Immigrants often pay thousands of dollars to 'coyotes' to get across the border, yet arrive without food, money or even shoes. El Paso also has safe houses and many undocumented immigrants. An artist from Bisbee, AZ, is opening a safe house in Naco, Texas to provide support for those (often from Guatemala) returned by the border patrol. Other advocacy groups are working on behalf of people living with the toxic waste of border factories, or trying to prevent more border related deaths (No Mas Muertes).

In Mexico there are over 3,500 foreign owned plants (maquiladoras). At one US owned factory, workers earn \$5/day producing hospital supplies. These minimal salaries lead to the development of 'colonia' (communities) with makeshift housing. One maquiladora worker who earns \$7/day, has tiny government housing and says things are better for her.

Vicki also mentioned the border writers who focus on issues of the Mexican family, male control, women's roles, factual events. Those who have written plays about the murder of many women in Juarez cannot get them produced in Juarez.

For Mexicans, the US is a place to work and shop. There are villages in Mexico with no men, as they have left to find work in the US. Most of the border town factory jobs in Mexico go to women. We have major economic connections between our two countries, complicated by historic corruption in Mexico, as well as great wealth and oil resources there. The US has also played positive and negative roles in the economics, politics and social issues of this region. Professor Martinez helped us see more of the complexities of the border issues.

RETHINKING COUNTERTERRORISM: Can We Create a Safer, More Compassionate World?

Submitted by Elaine Klein

This program, on January 29 at the Schenectady Library, offered a glimpse of how people who have had personal encounters with terrorism have chosen to take a positive outlook on life and have set out to promote education and friendship. The first speaker was a seventeen year old exchange student from Afghanistan, Asadulla S. (sponsored by the American Councils for International Education). Other speakers included Sally and Don Goodrich, whose adult son was killed on Sept. 11 in the second tower, and Dr. David Edwards, a William College professor of anthropology and an Afghan scholar. Kara Lozier, PAX Community Coordinator for Youth Exchange and Study Programs, explained the value of bringing Afghani exchange students to study in the U.S. as a way of changing people's perceptions.

The audience paid rapt attention as Asadullah gave an eloquent account of his life fleeing with his family from the Taliban. He spoke of "witnessing things no child should see," such as when, as a tiny child, he saw his neighbor blown up by a landmine. His family left their home in Bamyan and lived for years in mountain caves. He assisted them by fetching and carrying water jugs and tending sheep. Despite the fact that his schooling had been interrupted, once he had the opportunity, he managed as a teenager to study hard and be accepted for the Exchange Program. Asadullah spoke of the importance of education and helping others.

Sally and Don Goodrich are founders of the Peter M. Goodrich Foundation that works primarily in Afghanistan to support education and address the fundamental needs of fragile populations. Sally explained the lack of education in Afghanistan, and they showed a film that included homage to their son and footage of a new girls' school that Sally had envisioned, and raised the funds for.

Dr. Edwards explained that there has not been a master plan for reconstruction in Afghanistan, and the school project was able to stay intact by working with the government.

The speakers are part of a network of people responding to terrorism by building a safer, more compassionate world. Their flyer stated, "Each of us has the power to respond to terrorism with positive, constructive actions that can help improve lives in places where terrorists seek to recruit new members. We can replace suspicion with respect and restore trust." Sally Goodrich noted, "The allure of terrorism does not match a life where there is actually opportunity." More information is available at: OurVoicesTogether.org



Don Goodrich
Asadullah S.
Sally Goodrich
Dr. David Edwards

Don Goodrich spoke briefly on a lesser known aspect of helping to rebuild a country by working with financial institutions to offer terrorism insurance to contractors, which enables them to take the risk involved with rebuilding. Don Goodrich stated, "For every act of violence, we have to have an act of kindness, or we devolve into violence."

WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP TO FIGHT TERRORISM IN A POSITIVE WAY

Visit the Schenectady County Public Library and look at the displays in the lobby. There are many ways that individuals or organizations can make a difference.

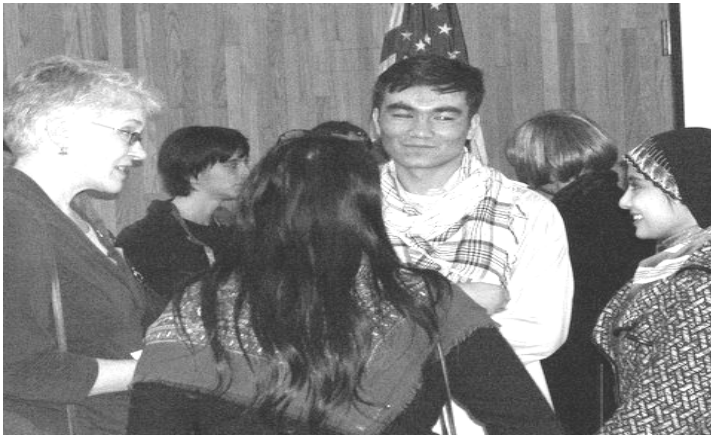
The Peter M. Goodrich Foundation partially funds the food, fuel, and clothing needs of fifty orphans in Wardak and staff members charged with educating, nurturing and protecting these victims of conflict. It is possible for donors to purchase and send small items like mittens, scarves, school supplies or toiletries. It is also possible to purchase sheep for a contribution of \$125 or a cow at \$600 to provide a source of food and income.

As an extension of its current support of an orphanage, it intends to purchase arable land in a safer location to relocate the orphans, if necessary, build a greenhouse and produce crops.

The Foundation continues to support the school it constructed in Logar and two schools built by others in Wardak. It contributes to the living and educational expenses of an internally displaced family within Afghanistan. Every dollar donated to the foundation goes directly to its projects. All administrative costs and Goodrich family travel expenses are borne by the Goodrich family. Nor does the Foundation pay administrative fees to its Afghanistan partners

Individuals who are interested may support the student exchange program by opening their hearts and homes to an Afghani student in the 2008-2009 academic year. They have been selected to receive a highly competitive U.S. government scholarship to spend an academic year in the U.S. and live with an American host family.

The Youth Exchange and Study scholarship was created in response to the tragic events of September 11th as a way to build bridges of mutual understanding between the U.S. and countries with significant Muslim populations.



The students selected have excellent English and are chosen for their leadership abilities and other traits deemed necessary to succeed in an exchange such as this. They are the top 1-2% of applicants for these scholarships. Thousands of students from Afghanistan apply and only 50 will be selected.

YES student, Asadullah S. talking with audience members at January 29 gathering

In both Afghanistan and the United States, our hope is to contribute to a new generation of citizens and leaders capable of devising solutions to complex problems. If you are interested in sharing your home with an exchange student, contact: Kara Lozier, Community Coordinator American Councils for International Education She can be reached at (802)442-8174 Office, (802)823-5006 Home, or by email at karalozier@yahoo.com

Malinda Myers....Unsung Heroine

Long-time Schenectady LWV member Malinda Myers was honored by the YWCA with the 15th Annual Unsung Heroine Award on February 10, 2008, as part of the YWCA's Black History Month Celebration. Malinda came to Schenectady, NY in 1943 and soon married David Myers. Her husband passed away a few years ago.

Malinda soon had an impact on the Schenectady community. She was hired by the City of Schenectady and worked for the Law Department for 35 years. She was NAACP president from 1959 to 1964, and membership greatly increased during her tenure, to over 900 members! Malinda was also very instrumental in the formation of the Schenectady County Community College and she has been on the Library Board of Trustees. She has been honored with the Schenectady County Human Rights Award, the LWV's Susan B. Anthony Award and the YWCA's Women of Achievement Award. Malinda has also shared her musical talent with the community through performances of spirituals and other songs, and she gave a sample of this talent, when she received the YWCA award on February 10. Schenectady has been truly blessed by Malinda's many years of giving of herself and we congratulate her on her latest honor.

Excerpted from Health Affairs, February 20, 2008

The U.S. Economy And Changes In Health Insurance Coverage, 2000-2006 Americans continued to lose their health insurance even as the economy improved.

by John Holahan and Allison Cook

Between 2000 and 2004, a period of economic recession, the number of uninsured Americans increased by 6.0 million. The number increased by 3.4 million (1.0 million children and 2.4 million adults) between 2004 and 2006, despite improving economic conditions. The dominant factor in both periods was a decline in employer-sponsored insurance coverage. Employer coverage declined most for self-employed or small-firm workers, in the South, and among non-citizens. The rate of employer coverage continued to decline even when the economy improved.

For children, the decline in employer coverage was offset by large growth in Medicaid and SCHIP in the first four years of the decade. As states experienced deteriorating fiscal conditions, they adopted policies that restricted growth in these programs. As a result, the number of uninsured children increased by 1.0 million between 2004 and 2006, after having fallen by 400,000 between 2000 and 2004.

The decline in employer coverage can be traced to greater increases in health insurance premiums and not to increases wages. As health insurance becomes more and more expensive, it adds more to the cost of a worker's total compensation package. To the extent that firms cannot shift this back to workers in the form of lower wages, they become less likely to offer coverage.

It is striking that the rate of employer coverage declined and the number of uninsured people increased even after the U.S economy rebounded from the recent recession. This erosion will likely continue, particularly for low-income workers, because the basic factors underlying it seem unlikely to change.

Comment by Don McCanne, former President of the Physicians for a National Health Program.

- *The fact that the number of uninsured continues to increase is certainly not news. But there are a couple of points in this article that should alarm us.*
- *A rebounding economy was unable to stop the decline in coverage. In spite of favorable economic trends, employers found their health benefit programs to be less affordable, and more dropped their employees from coverage. Clearly we will not be able to rely on improvements in the economy alone to expand coverage to more individuals.*
- *This report demonstrates that the decline in coverage is impacting all sectors of our society, though some more than others. This indicates that targeted programs cannot eliminate the problem since some sectors inevitably will be left out. Also alarming is the fact that incremental reforms more narrowly targeting populations is not working either.*
- *As an example, the greatest "success" in recent years has been insuring more children through the SCHIP and Medicaid programs. Yet the gain of 400,000 insured children during 2000-2004 was more than offset by a loss of 1.0 million during 2004-2006 (years of economic recovery). That certainly cannot be classified as a health policy success, yet that is the best we can show for all of our incremental efforts.*
- *When you look at the leading comprehensive proposals, policies are included to target the more vulnerable populations. Yet they are very weak on policies that will help the largest vulnerable group of all: middle-income individuals and families.*
- *Relying on improvements in the economy for most of us, with safety-net welfare programs for the poor, will never get us to a program that guarantees reasonably comprehensive care for all of us. It will require the adoption of a health care financing system that automatically includes all of us, for our entire lives.*