



The Informer

League of Women Voters of the Plattsburgh Area

January 2012

Meet Your State Legislators

Really Good News from Betty Ann King

Thanks to the persistent efforts of Betsy Metz and Chris Mazzella (principal of Peru Central High School), the **Meet Your State Legislators** event will be held at Peru Central High School's Auditorium on **Saturday, January 21st from 9:30- 12:00**, and, best of all, Peru has made this venue available to us at no charge!!! Yippee!!!!

- All three of our legislators will attend and bring a little bit of Albany to us, donating their Saturday morning in order to meet our high school kids and their parents!!

- 16 of the 17 school districts we contacted have committed to send delegates, and we expect a good turnout for this positive event..

Hooray for our legislators, our schools, our sponsors, great government teachers, eager students—and all of us!!

If you are a new to **Meet Your State Legislators**:

Meet Your State Legislators (MYSL) is truly a wonderful event for students and their parents, who all receive invitations to see their students receive recognition for outstanding achievement. It is a morning where our three State Legislators—Assemblywomen Janet Duprey and Teresa Sayward and State Senator Betty Little—from Clinton and Essex counties bring a bit of Albany to high school students from all school districts in the CEWW BOCES . It is also a day when two students chosen from each school will be honored as delegates for their achievement and interest in government. These delegates are chosen by the students' school based entirely on your criteria and will receive official letters of commendation from the League of Women Voters, Certificates signed by all three legislators. They will also enjoy the opportunity to ask questions and interact with the legislators and other delegates throughout the BOCES district, and entry into the lottery drawing for one of two all-expenses- paid trip to *Students Inside Albany* from March 25-28th.

For educators, **MYSL** is an unparalleled opportunity for recognition of their schools' commitment to excellence in government programs. The program is based on Learning Standard 5 and the Key Ideas as outlined in the New York State Social Studies/Government Curriculum. **MYSL** is a big deal and the Legislators truly do a good job. Of course all students, teachers, and general public are invited, but priority for delegate questions and lottery entry for Students Inside Albany is reserved only for the delegates.

Please reserve Saturday morning January 21st to attend this event...Bring your friends too! It is so important to show our support for this event..Our democracy needs the vitality and informed participation of our youth.

MYSL Committee: Betty Ann King, Chair, Betsy Metz, Rita FitzGerald, Mimi McDowell, Edie Poland, Inge Sapp, Sally Sears-Mack, Kathy Schumacher, Mona White, and Kathie Wunderlich

Dates to Remember

NO FIRST FRIDAY

FORUM this month!! Too many other things:

Wednesday, 4 January 2012

Senior Center—10 AM

MYSL Committee Meeting

Board Meeting follows

Wednesday, 18 January

Albany

Annual League Lobby Day

Saturday, 21 January 2012

9:30-12:00

Peru Central High School

details in article at left.

Saturday, 28 January

1:30 PM

Site to be announced

Annual Membership Meeting

Penny Clute, speaking on

Women's Issues

Future First Friday Fora—

Friday, 2 February

Janine Scherline, Exec. Dir.,

North Country Cultural Center

for the Arts, will discuss new

administration's programs.

Friday, 2 March

Dr. Anita Bodrogi will speak on

alternative medicine and the

health care system.



WHAT IS NEEDED TO INCREASE VOTER PARTICIPATION IN NEW YORK STATE?

Betty Ann King

The League of Women Voters of New York State in its never-ending fight to increase voter participation is launching an informational campaign that outlines reasons as to why **over the last three federal elections, New York State had the 47th lowest voter participation rate of the 50 states and Washington DC.**

As stated in the briefing paper on Increasing Voter Participation prepared by the LWV NY:

“ 1 This low ranking can partially be explained by New York’s paper-based registration system, early registration deadline and other outdated voter registration policies, including the state’s long waiting period for changing party affiliation. Even in comparison to other inflexible states, New York has some of the most rigid voter registration policies in the country. In addition, it is one of only fifteen states that both do not allow any form of early in-person voting and require an excuse for absentee ballots.

2 New York also has a number of out-dated requirements for ballot design that may contribute to voter confusion and errors.

There are many possible opportunities to increase rates of voter participation in New York State through common sense solutions that have been implemented, to varying degrees of success, in other states beginning in the 1980s. These fall into three general categories:

- **Voter registration modernization.** Paperless forms of voter registration have decreased costs and increased accuracy of the voter roles in a number of other states. Registering and voting on the same day is a proven method of increasing voter participation.
- **Early voting.** Many voters across the country now cast their votes before the traditional “Election Day” marked by the Tuesday following the first Monday in November.

While the impact of early voting on turnout has been debated, it has become popular for its convenience as voters chose to vote to suit their own schedule.

- **Better ballot design,** poll worker training and voter education. Improving the often confusing design of New York’s ballots, improving and standardizing the training of poll workers, as well as providing such basic voter education as online ballots, could improve the voting experience of New Yorkers.

This paper and the accompanying Power Point presentation are intended as an overview on strategies other states have used to make voting more flexible and accessible, and some of the considerations for potentially implementing them in New York. It does not intend to suggest that every voting innovation mentioned should be adopted in New York.

However, by putting this information together in one place, we hope to facilitate conversations about which of these methods, individually or in combination, might help raise levels of voter participation in our state. Some of the reforms mentioned below may not be feasible for the demographic or geographical makeup of New York. Others could be expanded, scaled down, or modified to meet the specific needs of our state.”

Please visit the LWV NY website (www.lwvny.org/) and review both the power point presentation and the background paper. This is information that will be needed for the League to conduct a forum on Increasing Voter Participation as requested by the State League.

Please consider actively participating in this project. I can think of nothing closer to the League’s mission than promoting change that will encourage and increase Voter Participation.

Weigh in with your opinion. I will post responses on our website.

TO THE WOMEN OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS IN PLATTSBURGH...

We hope that every one of you has had a Happy Holiday.

Within the spirit of strong women and at the same time recognizing our need to support and nurture those of us who have experienced losses, injuries, and illnesses in 2011, we wish you a better 2012.

Please stay in touch, voice your opinions and concerns and, perhaps most important, if you need help, help us to understand what we may be able to do to brighten your day.

We will be there with you in a heartbeat!!

Dr. Ed Romanowicz Addresses Our December First Friday Forum on Hydraulic Fracturing

reported by Betsy Metz

At our December 2 First Friday Forum, Dr. Edwin Romanowicz discussed Hydraulic Fracturing, frequently called *hydrofracking*, with a focus on the Marcellus and Utica shale fields, which are estimated to have vast gas reserves. These areas were formed during the Inland Sea period - Marcellus, 360-400 million years ago and Utica, 500 million years ago. The formation is thicker in eastern New York, then becomes very thin in western New York near the Ohio state line. Pennsylvania has the same pattern. The northern border extends approximately 2/3 of the distance to Lake Ontario & somewhat parallels I-90.

Vertical shafts have been used for years in drilling oil wells. *Hydrofracking* is technically horizontal drilling made possible by the invention of gyroscopes which are attached to the drill bit. A steel casing is designed to protect the surrounding earth and water from contamination. 99.25% of the slurry used in *hydrofracking* is composed of sand and water. The sand supports the fracture. The remaining 0.75% includes chemicals used to control iron, corrosion inhibitors. Methane gas is trapped in the shale. Carbon dioxide escapes into the air; heavy metals precipitate out. Upflow water is very hot and toxic. 3.6-7% of the gas is released into the air through leakage and venting during *hydrofracking* [30% higher than in other methods of extraction]. The lifespan of a well is approximately 30 years, with possibly 2-3 *hydrofrackings*.

Scientists have identified toxic substances, some of which, such as radon gas are radioactive, but also occur naturally in the earth. Many chemicals are carcinogens. Drilling companies, however, are protected by the "Halliburton Loophole" in the Clean Air and Water Act, so are not required to disclose contents of chemicals used in *hydrofracking*. The drilling process uses 3-6 million gallons of water per well; a similar quantity flows through the Saranac River in 11 minutes. 10% of the water injected comes back up the well. The back flow is often disposed in public sewage treatment facilities. DEC emphasizes lined containment wells surrounding drilling sites. Some of the water used in *hydrofracking* can be recycled. Cost of remediation to contaminated ground water varies from small to huge. Regulations governing various areas are not standardized. In some areas drilling companies are required to remove waste water. Storage is typically in open lagoons until treated. Problems arise if the impermeable membrane degrades or excessive amounts of rain cause contents to overflow.

The actual surface footprint is small in horizontal drilling. Heavy equipment used in drilling is removed in several months to several years. However, roads degraded during the transportation of heavy equipment are not repaired by the drilling companies.

Pros and cons of hydrofracking:

Pros:

- Small footprint after fracturing in comparison to coal's huge area

- Lower carbon footprint in natural gas depending on procedure
- Political and economic benefits - jobs

Cons:

- Contamination from wells, very toxic & volatile chemicals in flow back, fractures - Cornell study identified large greenhouse gas emissions.
- Degradation to infrastructure
- Contamination from bisection of old, unused gas wells during *hydrofracking* at new site

Questions which must be resolved:

- What is the industry definition of hydro fracturing? [note: good information in *Scientific American* magazine]
- Is there sufficient regulatory oversight by DEC?
- What can be done to identify problems?
 - Conservative tracer
 - Regulation of flow back and chemical usage
- Is industry prepared for a mishap?
- Is technology improving the process?
- What inputs do local governments or citizens have?

Additional discussion included:

- Potential aquifer contamination - *hydrofracking* is typically around 8,000 feet; aquifers are at 2-3,000 feet depth. However, in New York fracturing is more shallow. The prevalent Potsdam sandstone does not have deep fractures so is not prone to conducting any uncontained contaminants from a drilling site up to the aquifer.
- Some of the gas produced could possibly go into the world market.
- Earthquakes are not a major issue.
- DEC is currently conducting hearings for public comment.
- All agreed that the need for much greater conservation of resources in the US is imperative - per capita consumption is double that of Europe.

Incidentally, our League's study group on aspects of HYDROFRACKING will get underway soon after this year's Meet Your State Legislators. If you are interested in joining this group, please call Betty Ann King (310-1164).

Reminders Regarding First Friday Fora

In **February** our speaker will be Janine Scherline, the newly-appointed Executive Director of the North County Council on the Arts, who will forecast the programs of the new administrations, and, in **March**, Dr. Anita Bodrogi will speak on alternative medicine and the health care system.

We have kept our FFF costs at \$12.00, but this amount no longer includes a beverage, which, except for water, will now be your responsibility over and above the \$12.00. We hope you will understand!



Stasia Arcarese Sends Her HELLO FROM FLORIDA!

Thinking of you all with those "frigid" temps, at least according to Florida standards. It has quieted down during the holidays here in Florida. Many went back north for family activities.

The League has also quieted down for the holidays. The redistricting meeting that was held in December was very enlightening. The 2010 census revealed Lee County's population as 618,754. Based on that figure, the target population per district is 123,751. The census found that the county's five districts ranged from 171,064 people - 38 percent over the target number - to 94,635 - 23 percent under it. The officials from the cities of Cape Coral and Fort Myers and Lee County explained the process and the challenges they had devising districts that satisfied both the electorate and the elected officials. With the use of computer software, they showed the different configurations that were being considered and the population of each district. After public hearings and voiced opposition from parts of the community, a finalized version of the new boundaries for election districts was shown. The State of Florida is still working on their redistricting.

On the educational front, many questions are arising with the proposed new standards for evaluating students and teachers. Many are saying that the new higher standards will result in lower scores and thereby reflect negatively on the schools. The superintendents are suggesting to raise them to a lesser degree. Of course teachers aren't happy with the proposals because if students don't do well, their jobs may be in jeopardy. I think that the State relies too much on scores and

not enough on what can be done to help those students who are in difficulty. Recently it was revealed that the graduation rate has decreased in Lee County. An investigation will be done to find out why. So many challenges with the diverse populations.

For the Red Sox fans here in Florida, a new stadium is being built in Fort Myers that is a duplicate of Fenway Park in Boston. It will be ready for spring training this year and will seat several thousand more fans. The Yankees also come down but play in another stadium.

Another issue that is getting a lot of discussion is the proposed mega Casino resort in the Miami-Dade area. We do have casinos in the Fort Myers area but are miniscule compared to what is being proposed. The opportunity of bringing in many dollars is enticing the government to seriously consider this proposal. Many issues have to be explored that are related to this type of development-similar to those faced in NYS several years ago.

On a more seasonal note, people have decorated their homes, for the holiday. It certainly looks like Christmas except that the warm temps and palm trees takes away that "magic" that the cool temps and snow provides.

Wishing you all a "magical" holiday and wishes for a healthy and happy New Year.

Take care.

And Some Musings from Sally Sears-Mack

As I write this on 26 December, a little of the snow we all hoped would bring us a White Christmas has at last arrived. Just enough to make our roads a little bit slick, but not enough to shovel—yet. No complaints!

Every month, I receive from the other LWV editors across the state wonderfully creative newsletters that I will share at our First Friday get-togethers. I also receive a LOT of notices from the state about great things we can all participate in, given the will and the time. I will include some of this valuable date in the Informer, but Elle Berger will be sending you most of the same stuff, via email.

On 8 December, I had the opportunity to take part in an Honors Forum at SUNY Plattsburgh on the topic, **Money & Politics: Who Owns Democracy?** Other participants were mostly college professors and student leaders, but Mark Barie, of the Tea Party, also took part. I was the one person who had participated in a political campaign at any time! It was an interesting evening, to say the least.

The information we received as participants was provided by National Issues Forums in Ohio, and was rather outdated, having been produced in 2000, well before the

Supreme Court's passage of the Constitutional Amendment that made corporations equal to private persons with respect to campaign contributions! I enjoyed being the one person in the room with practical experience in political campaigns, even though my last foray into that world resulted, alas, in my not being elected—a new experience.

I need your help!! Some of you may have new email addresses, which means that I may not be able to get your copy of the Informer to you with dispatch. Would you be good enough to let me know as soon as you have a new email address?? It will make both of our lives a lot simpler, and I thank you in advance.

While I'm on that topic, let me remind those of you who get paper copies of Informer that we must ask you to make a contribution of \$10.00 for this service. It will be easy for you to include the extra in your membership check when you renew your membership.

And, speaking of membership, we have a new member! **Welcome Mona White**, friend and traveling companion of **Rita FitzGerald**, also a very new member!! They represent our neighbors in the Westport area.



**If you wish you could do something about the current state of politics,
take heart—YOU CAN!**

Join the League of Women Voters of the Plattsburgh Area,
an organization that makes an impact in the community, the state, and the nation.

Membership Information

Name_____

Address_____

Phone (home)_____ (work)_____ Email_____

Membership Dues: _____\$50.00 Individual_____ \$70.00 Family

Please send your check, made payable to Plattsburgh Area League of Women Voters, to
Betsy Metz, 238 Champlain Drive, Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Nonpartisan: We do not support candidates, elected officials or political parties.

**From the Editor:
Some Additional Thoughts at Random**

Ed Romanowicz’s talk on Hydrofracking, the impact of which is of such vital importance to us here in the North Country, led me to a lot of reading and thinking. We are fortunate to have a beautiful place in which to live and rear our children, and with any privilege comes an equal responsibility to safeguard insofar as possible what we have so that we may pass it along to future generations. This thought is shared by many, witness the informative and well-presented Response to the DEC’s 2011 Draft SGEIS, from the LWV of Tompkins County.

Our own study of Hydrofracking will soon be getting organized. Betty Ann King—stalwart Leaguer and contributor of many articles to this newsletter, for which THANKS!—will welcome you into the group. You may contact her at 518-310-1164.

Another of the issues that I find truly compelling is the recent ruling of the Roberts Supreme Court in Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, which overturned provisions of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law that had kept corporations (and lobbyists) from spending unlimited amounts of cash on campaign advertising within 60 days of a general election for federal office.

This ruling, in the opinion of many including Florida’s former Rep. Alan Grayson, “not only allowed corporations to buy those elections but made it a constitutional right.”

My favorite comment is from former Justice Stevens, whose understatement never ceases to delight me: “At bottom, the Court’s opinion is thus a rejection of the common sense of the American people, who have recognized a need to prevent corporations from undermining self government since the founding, and who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt. It is a strange time to repudiate that common sense. While American democracy is imperfect, few outside the majority of this Court would have thought its flaws included a dearth of corporate money in politics.”

If you are at all interested in learning more or in joining a group that is working to amend this ruling, you may look for Move to Amend on the internet at <http://movetoamend.org/amendment>.

Other organizations active in this are the Vermont Public Interet Research Group (VPIRG) and Clean Yield Asset Management, also in VT.

These are but two issues to claim our time, thought, and active participation. We have no reason to complain that there’s nothing of interest for us to do!!

Let’s GO!!



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Visit Plattsburgh LWV Web Site at www.plattsburgh.ny/lwvnet.org

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