

HEALTH CARE PROPOSAL

I would like to propose the formation of a health care committee to educate ourselves and others on the issues and the plans being put forward by states, governors, presidential candidates and other politicians and organizations. The goal would be to assess the validity of the plans using the state and national league positions on healthcare. Using these criteria we could advocate for and support legislation which would move us toward the league goals for cost-effective and accessible health care for all. If you have questions or suggestions call Rebecca at 272-0621.

Rebecca Elgie

HEALTH CARE UPDATE

Things are very busy on the health care front with plans being offered at the national, state and local levels by state and national legislators, governors and presidential candidates. Even union leaders and top executives of large companies such as WalMart, Safeway and General Motors are joining the discussion. A study in 2006 by Kaiser Foundation found that health insurance premiums had risen 87% since 2000. There is wide agreement that there are big problems but there is little agreement on how to fix the problem.

However, four of the democratic candidates have actually discussed single payer financing which would be a not for profit, publicly financed and privately delivered system.

Dennis Kucinich co-sponsors The National Health Care Act HR676 which would be a non-profit enhanced and improved Medicare for All. This plan makes it possible to afford excellent universal healthcare for all by using all of our healthcare money for healthcare rather than for maintaining the profits of hundreds of insurance companies and would actually save \$56 billion the first year. The responsibility would be shared by individuals, employers and

government but at a lower rate than they currently pay with no premiums, deductibles or co-pays and no denials of payment.

John Edwards has a very detailed plan which is ambitious and expensive, adding from \$90-\$120 billion a year to the nation's health care bill, money he proposes would come from increased taxes on well-to-do families. He would provide tax credits to low-income families and expand Medicare and SCHIP. He would setup regional Health Markets or purchasing pools to ensure that everyone has a way to purchase an affordable health plan. Most of these pools would be private but one would be public. His theory is that if the public pool is cheaper more people would gravitate toward it and it would be the basis for a single-payer system that would eventually do away with private health insurance. This could only happen if the risk is spread evenly among the Health Markets so that the public pool doesn't get the sicker, older people.

Hillary Clinton does not have a well defined plan as yet but in New Hampshire she said that there are two ways to solve the insurance crisis:

1. build on the employer-based system with a provision for a government sponsored program that would act as a safety net for those who could not get insurance through their employers. However, it would be important to have safeguards so that the sickest and most "expensive" people did not end up in the safety net?
2. develop a single-payer approach funded publicly, but delivered privately.

In this same speech she congratulated the New Hampshire House for passing a resolution in support of HR676.

Barak Obama is working on a health care proposal and wants to build the political support needed to move a plan forward. He said he was not wedded to any one plan but would support universal coverage that would squeeze

inefficiencies out of the health care system and would stress preventive programs. He said that if he were starting from zero, he would likely support a single-payer system, similar to the government-run program in Canada but he is leery of doing that since US already has a complex and established system of employer-based health coverage. He plans to hold a series of meetings to gauge public sentiment and will offer a health care proposal in a couple of months.

There is less discussion of the issue in the Republican party, most of whom support variations on Bush's plan for tax credit, HSAs and Consumer Driven healthcare which have individuals pay much of their health care expenses from their saving rather than from insurance. Mitt Romney has been fairly quiet

about his health plan in Massachusetts which is a combination of individual and employer mandates and Arnold Schwarzenegger has promoted a similar plan in California having employers, individuals, doctors, hospitals, insurers and government all do their share.

With any plan it is crucial to ask whether it is:
 -truly universal and will cover everyone consistently
 -automatic & portable
 -comprehensive & accessible
 -cost effective

Rebecca Elgie

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."
 Martin Luther King Jr.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY: BOARD 2006-07

LWV NYS website

LWV US website

LWV-Tompkins County

leave message at 273-8350

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ANNUAL REPORTS

Membership

Our membership stands at 155, the official number that the LWVUS adopted from our membership list on January 31, 2007.

Throughout the year we lost 16 members, but gained enough to increase our number from 149 to 155. In the meantime, since January, we lost one member, but signed up 3 new ones. We hope we can remain on the upward trend.

Maria Eisner

Finance

Last year, Maria Eisner and Alene Wyatt initiated with the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, a fund to which charitable contributions (tax deductible) can be made to support League educational activities.

I was asked to begin the process of establishing a tax-exempt component of the League, to make accessing funds from our account with the Community Foundation somewhat easier. The Community Foundation is legally permitted to disburse contributions only to organizations that qualify under federal Internal Revenue standards as charitable. These are known as "501(c)(3) organizations" after the applicable section of law that defines them.

The League has now established a not-for-profit corporation, the LWVTC Education Fund, Inc. Our Certificate of Incorporation has been filed with the NYS Secretary of State on August 16, 2006 with the prior consent of the NYS Department of Education. Our Bylaws were adopted on April 10, 2007. The next step is to apply for federal 501(c)(3) status.

According to the Bylaws, the LWVTC Education Fund, Inc. has a Board of Directors consisting of the president of the League (who also serves as chair or president of the Education Fund), the first, second and third vice presidents of the League, the League's treasurer and the chair of the League's Voters Service

committee. The 1st vice president and treasurer of the League also serve the Education Fund in these capacities. The Education Fund Board selects one of their number as secretary. If any of the above League positions is shared, both members serve on the Education Fund's board. Board members serve only during their terms as officers of the League

Sunny Gooding

(Maria's name here is Word's personal contribution—it won't let me erase it.) Maria Eisner

Voter Service

VOTER GUIDES

Voter Guides were distributed by the League members throughout the Ithaca area.

FIRST VOTE

First Vote brochures were purchased from the state League and included in the folders given to new citizens at naturalization ceremonies held in Ithaca.

CANDIDATE FORUMS

September 26, 2006 -- A Gubernatorial debate between Republican John Faso and Democrat Eliot Spitzer was held at Cornell University. The event was sponsored by Cornell University, the NYS League of Women Voters, and the Time Warner Cable news channels in NYS. The event was cablecast live in New York City, Albany, Syracuse, and Rochester and broadcast live on most public radio stations in the state.

October 26, 2006 -- Six candidates for the offices of NYS Assembly 125th District, Tompkins County Sheriff, and Tompkins County Clerk presented their respective platforms and answered questions from the audience. The event was sponsored by the TCLWV and aired on Channel 13 Public Access on November 1, 2, and 4.

May 8, 2007 -- Candidates for the school board of the Lansing School District will answer questions at an open forum to be held at the Lansing High School. The TCLWV will provide the moderator.

May 10, 2007 -- Candidates for the school board of the Ithaca City School District will answer questions at an open forum to be held at the Ithaca High School Cafeteria. The event is co-sponsored by the TCLWV, the PTA Council, and the AAUW.

Charlotte Coffman and Bette Winkler

Phone and Web Services

The League phone has responded to approximately 50 phone calls since April 2006. Requests for registration and voting information, candidate and bond proposal information, and polling location information top the list of inquiries. The number of questions relating to school board elections and votes has increased. Other requests relate to specific areas for which we have positions. There have been 1,375 'hits' on our website. That is an average of 115 'hits' per month. The website continues as the most used method for information distribution. Thirty inquiries have come in via e-mail from the website. This does not include the questions that are submitted for candidate meetings. Nineteen Action Alerts from LWVUS and LWVNYS were posted.

Linda and Michael Duttweiler

Programs: 2006-07

Sept. 18: Member meeting. Gwen Wilkinson addressed the issue of domestic violence, particularly as it affects children.

Sept. 26: Gubernatorial Debate at Cornell, Bailey Hall, co-hosted by LWVNYS, Time Warner Cable and Cornell.

Oct. 26: - Candidates forum at the Town Hall.

Nov. 20: Consensus meeting—Charter Schools

Jan. 23: Canceled due to bad weather

Feb. 24: Lunch member meeting. Lauren Signer, Women's Community Building

March 27: A representative from the NYS Comptroller's Office; talked about reading and understanding the budget.

April 24: Annual Meeting - Clean Money, Clean Elections. Jessica Wisneski Citizen Action of NY, 94 Central Ave., Albany, 12206,

Debbie Levin and Charlotte Greenspan

Study Committee on Condition of Children in Tompkins County

2006-07

The committee co-sponsored a gathering of human service providers, which explored the many factors affecting the welfare of the children of our community. Special concerns are child health insurance, affordable housing, rural transportation, social services, child care, and education as they relate to children living in poverty.

We lobby for passage of the Farm bill, which includes WIC (Women, Infant and Children Feeding Program), food stamps and community projects.

Proposed local Program for 2007-08

Condition of Children in Tompkins County

A study of the unmet needs of Tompkins County youth, including the contributing economic, social and legal factors.

Libby deProse



LWVTC CALENDAR—SPRING 2007

April 24	ANNUAL DINNER MEETING	Human Services Building	6:30
	JESSICA WISNESKI from Citizen Action of New York:		
	“CLEAN MONEY, CLEAN ELECTIONS”		
May 7	Board Meeting (Charlotte Coffman)		7:30
May 8	MEET THE CANDIDATES: LANSING SCHOOL DISTRICT		7:00
		Lansing High School	
May 10	MEET THE CANDIDATES: ITHACA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT		7:00
		Ithaca High School Cafeteria	
May 11	IMPACT OF NYS BUDGET ON HEALTH AND AGING SERVICES		noon
	BARBARA LIFTON, NYS Assembly member		
May 15	SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION		noon-9:00
June 4	Board Meeting (Tee-Ann Hunter)		7:30
August 9	NATURALIZATION DAY		

BRIEFING MATERIAL FROM THE LWVNYS ON REFORMING STATE GOVERNMENT

CAMPAIN FINANCE REFORM

Independent researchers and the public at large have long criticized New York State’s disgraceful system. Indefensibly high contribution “limits,” coupled with disgracefully inadequate disclosure requirements and nonexistent enforcement, create a system that cries out for change.

The State Assembly has regularly passed legislation that the League supports. This legislation would address the numerous shortcomings of New York’s campaign finance system as well as creating a voluntary system of public financing that would reduce the influences of the rich and powerful, while strengthening the possibility that challengers have resources to take on incumbents. It is the model that we support.

Governor Spitzer may shortly propose legislation which addresses many of the issues below. He also has proposed in his first State of the State speech, the ultimate goal of full public financing of campaigns.

Biggest problems with New York’s campaign finance law

– **Soft money.** Unlike at the national level, New York State allows donations of unlimited size to “housekeeping” accounts.

– **Sky-high campaign contribution limits.** Political parties are allowed to receive annual contributions of \$84,400; statewide candidates can receive contributions of nearly \$50,000 (including up to \$14,700 for a primary) for an election cycle; state senate candidates can receive \$8,500 for the general election (an additional \$5,400 for a primary); and assembly candidates can receive \$3,400 for the general (an additional \$3,400 for a primary).

– **Transfers from one political committee to another.** On top of the skyhigh contribution “limits,” political parties (state parties, county parties, senate republicans and democrats, and assembly democrats and republicans create these committees) are allowed to transfer donations of unlimited size from their accounts to the candidates of their choice.

– **Campaign fundraising during the legislative session.** Unlike 27 states, New York imposes no additional limits on campaign fundraising during the legislative session, nor does it impose any unique limitations on lobbyists’ involvement in campaign activities.

Limited disclosure. Unlike federal law, contributors do not have to disclose the names of their employers or even the names of those who actually delivered the contributions (a.k.a. “bundlers”). Moreover, New York State does not computerize campaign finance data at the local government level and thus cannot enforce corporate contribution limits properly.

Poor enforcement. New York State’s Board of Elections is under-funded and limited by law in its ability to punish election law scofflaws.

Use campaign contributions for “personal” uses. Incumbents often use these donations for junkets, country club memberships, flowers, leased cars, and other purchases.

Heavy reliance on special interests for elections funds and the extreme difficulties for challengers to raise money. New York’s combination of huge contribution limits and the commonplace practice of incumbents holding fundraisers near the Capitol during session, promotes a heavy reliance on those with the financial resources to fund elections – typically special interests with business before government.

Recommendation:

Enact comprehensive campaign finance reform

Solution #1: Create a voluntary system of public financing modeled on New York City.

Solution #2: Overhaul existing campaign finance law.

There appears to be a consensus that New York’s campaign finance law needs to be reformed. Assembly Speaker, Sheldon Silver, has proposed legislation that overhauls campaign finance law.

Solutions #3: Limit the use of campaign contributions to those activities directly involved in campaigning.

New York State law not only allows the use of campaign contributions for purposes relating to a candidacy, but also to spending relating to an official’s role as a public or party official.

REDISTRICTING

Support the creation of an independent redistricting commission based on the state of Iowa’s successful model.

At the heart of the public’s discontent is a feeling that state lawmakers rig the system for their own political gain. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way legislative district lines are drawn.

Currently, the State Senate Republicans and the State Assembly Democrats are allowed to draw the lines for their respective houses. The only check on this system is whether the Governor chooses to allow this practice to continue or use his veto powers to force changes.

We believe that creation of an independent redistricting commission must be a top priority for those interested in reform. Lawmakers should support a Constitutional Amendment to create a nonpartisan Redistricting Commission.

New York State Lacks Competitive Elections

New York State elections are incredibly one-sided. Incumbent state legislative candidates are re-elected at a staggering rate. Over the past 22 years, only 30 incumbents have been beaten in the general elections.

Redistricting Decisions Limit Competitiveness.

How district lines are drawn has a dramatic effect on the lack of competitive elections. Only 25 of the 212 legislative districts (11 percent) have close enough enrollments that could allow frequent competitive elections.

Redistricting decisions play a critical role in having maintained Albany’s legislative status quo for decades.

In the last 20 years, America has changed. Twenty years ago, the Internet and “hip-hop” music were nowhere to be found. Yet, when it comes to majority party dominance, not much has changed. Since the Democrats took control of the Assembly in the 1970s – and redrew the maps in 1980 – the majority party margins have been incredibly consistent over time.

YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS

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