



# ***LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY***

**OCTOBER 2007**

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## **CANDIDATES' FORUM**

### **ALL CANDIDATES FOR ITHACA CITY AND TOWN OFFICES**

**Tuesday, October 23 at 7:00 PM  
Ithaca Town Hall, 215 N. Tioga**

study group, contact Mary Berkelman at 257-6450. I hope you will participate. If you're not able to attend meetings, but have some ideas to share, please let Mary know. We will hold a Consensus Meeting in January.

I have not heard from you about what issues you want the LWVNY to focus on in 2008. The areas of interest were provided in last month's Newsletter. Please review them and call me at 272-4748 to make your views known. I send in our League's priorities on November 1st.

Finally, we are still planning the Ida Trager Regional Training Workshop that will take place at TC3 on October 20th. Only a few of you have registered. It's not too late (see the LWVTC website for information and ignore the October 5 deadline for registration). It is from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. If you need transportation, call me: I'm sure we can arrange a car-pool.

Enjoy this beautiful time of the year. See you at the October 23rd Candidates' Forum.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Happy Fall everyone! As always, at this time of the year, we are busy with candidates' forums. September 11th we sponsored the Ithaca Town Supervisor's forum and on September 25th we moderated a forum for the Town of Dryden. Both forums were well-attended. Our service to communities in this capacity was well-received. Following in the vein of public service, we were registering voters at the Farmer's Market and the Apple Harvest Festival the past two weekends. Thank you to those of you who volunteered.

The LWVTC is invited to speak at the Downtown Businesswomen's luncheon on October 4th. Maria Eisner, Kathy Burlitch and Mary Berkelman will provide an overview of our local government and activities the League has provided to promote our community's understanding of it. I'm tagging along to make a pitch for joining our League.

A number of members have just begun to form a study group on the issue of immigration. Last month's newsletter had a preview of the items to be discussed. If you'd like to take part in this

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## **A GOAL OF UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR NEW YORK STATE**

The New York State Departments of Health and Insurance are conducting public hearings to solicit input as they develop proposals for achieving health care reform and increase access to health insurance coverage for all New Yorkers. They plan to draw on the experience of other states but develop a plan which is suited specifically to New York's needs and health care challenges. The goal of the committee is to study alternatives and come up with a plan by next May that the governor can endorse.

New York has nearly three million uninsured many of whom work full time but cannot afford health insurance. New York State spends more per capita on health care than any other state in the nation but we aren't getting top results. Despite the fact that we have increased programs to provide insurance for children and the working poor with Child and Family Health Plus we have not been able to decrease the number of uninsured. This is due largely because employers, due to the high cost of health insurance premiums, have cut back on coverage. The whole process has become a vicious cycle.

At the hearings I was one of thirty-three who testified. There were representatives from a broad range of organizations including Excellus and NY Health Plan Association, the CEO of the local hospital, business and labor groups, activist groups, nurses and doctors, small business owners, unions and the LWV. Over one-third of the groups spoke in support of a single payer financing system with a publicly financed, privately delivered plan which would allow patients free choice of doctors and would provide comprehensive coverage for all New Yorkers.

I pointed out that a similar commission had been conducted in Colorado and 31 proposals

were submitted with 4 plans ultimately chosen for further cost analysis and study. Three of the four plans were variations on our current system with individual or employer mandates or both, and expanded government (tax payer) financed public programs. Plan 1 would cost \$595 million and cover 41% of the uninsured, Plan 2 would cost \$271 million and cover 83% of the uninsured, Plan 3 would cost \$1.3 billion and cover 87% of the uninsured. The fourth plan was a single-payer program governed and administered like a public trust, funded through income tax and payroll deductions. It offered a complete benefit package and would cover everyone while **saving** \$1.4 billion.

This issue has gained heightened awareness with the showing of SICKO across the country. A number of league members helped staff tables at showings of the movies and I was able to submit petitions with 2200 signatures to the Governor's Health Care Taskforce panel showing our support for a single-payer health care plan. We would like to follow up this action by forming a LWVTC health care committee and have someone from our local league take part in the hearing in Syracuse on Thursday Nov. 13th from 10:00- 4:00 at Onondaga Community College. We also plan to have a rally and press conference before this hearing.

There will be a Health Care Organizing Meeting on Wed. Oct. 24th 5:00 p.m. at 409 Linn St. At that time we will discuss upcoming actions and times to meet. We hope you will join us in this effort. To participate and for more information contact Rebecca Elgie at 607-272-0621. If you cannot attend this meeting but are interested please contact me and we can discuss good meeting times and your interests.

Rebecca Elgie

**CANDIDATES' FORUM**

Thanks to the quick action of Debbie Levin and Barbara Thorp we were able to present a candidates' forum on the evening of Tuesday, September 11th in the Ithaca Town Hall, for the two candidates running in the Primary Elections,

Libby deProsse and Sunny Gooding were



Cathy Valentino and Herb Engman. There were about 30 people in the audience. Kay Sharp opened the meeting and made a closing remark. Marnie Johnson was the moderator,

timers, and Mary Berkelman served as a greeter. The meeting followed our established procedure of initial statements from the two candidates, followed by questions from the audience, and brief final statements from the candidates

Both candidates spoke about their ideas and goals for the future, where they agreed and where they did not. Valentino emphasized that she will not run as a Republican (as implicated in an article in the Ithaca Journal previously). The questions covered topics on the City water supply (Bolton point), planning committee vs. planning board, the budget, a citizens' budget committee, environmental concerns and more.

The event was taped by Rebecca Elgie and was later aired three times on Channel 13. Refreshments were served.

Maria Eisner



**LWVTC CALENDAR—2007-2008**

*(tentative items in italics)*

5:00	Thurs., Oct. 4	Immigration Study Group	380 The Parkway
11:00	Sat., Oct. 20	IDA TRAGER TRAINING WORKSHOP	TC3 (see President's Message)
<b>7:00</b>	<b>Tues. Oct. 23</b>	<b>CANDIDATES' FORUM: LOCAL ELECTIONS</b>	<b>Ithaca Town Hall</b>
5:00	Wed., Oct 24	Health Care Organization Meeting	409 Linn St.
	<b>Tues., Nov. 6</b>	<b>LOCAL ELECTIONS</b>	
7:00	Mon., Nov. 12	Board Meeting	(Debbie Levin)
<b>7:00</b>	<b>Mon., Nov. 26</b>	<b>GENERAL MEETING: <i>Affordable Housing</i></b>	<b>TBA</b>
9:30	Sat., Dec. 1	Board Meeting	(Maria Eisner)
<b>7:00</b>	<b>Tues., Jan. 29</b>	<b>GENERAL MEETING: Consensus Meeting on Immigration</b>	
	<b>Tues., Feb. 5</b>	<b>PRIMARIES FOR STATE &amp; NATIONAL ELECTIONS</b>	
Noon	Sat., <i>Feb. 16</i>	<b>GENERAL LUNCHEON MEETING: <i>Albany Reform</i></b>	
<b>7:00</b>	<i>Mar. ?</i>	<b>GENERAL MEETING: <i>Agribusiness and Nutrition</i></b>	

## OUR FIRST MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF 207-2008

On Monday, September 17th 2007, we had our first membership meeting this fall at 7 p.m. in the Women's Community Building. Our guest speaker was Mary Jo Dudley from Cornell. Almost 30 people assembled to enjoy the home-made desserts the board had provided—thank you all!—and then settled down for a stirring presentation of “An Endangered Workforce.”

Mary Jo Dudley heads the Cornell Farm-worker Program which serves to address the needs of farm-workers, their employers and the communities in which they live. It conducts research and provides outreach and education programs that improve the living and working conditions of migrant, seasonal, and year-round farm-workers and their families in NY State.

Since 25% of NY State is farmland and New York is almost the top producer of apples, grapes and dairy products in the US, there are many hired farm-workers (80,000) with 6-8,000 in the Finger Lakes region. 70% of them are believed to be undocumented immigrants, 56% from Mexico alone. 82% speak very little English. The distribution of migrant and seasonal workers has changed in recent years to 2/3 seasonal workers, who stay in the area, but work in the harvests in summer and fall, and in the dairy industry or grape growing during the rest of the year. Migrant workers are the ones who move back and forth from the South, whose numbers have diminished. The pay for these jobs is at least minimum wage, but does not attract local workers. The growers are dependent on these immigrants, and often protective of them. The workers have many problems, not just the one of becoming legal residents. There is little health care available to them, schooling for children may be difficult without transportation (only 20% complete high school), poor knowledge of the language and local customs and therefore poor relationship with the local community, no availability of banking services, no mobility without a driver's license.

The existence of the Guest Worker Program in the US is of doubtful relief for growers. It requires a high recruitment fee for each worker one year ahead of time, guaranteed housing, payment of transportation from and to Mexico (or other home country), guaranteed pay for a predetermined time with exact dates of beginning and end of employment.

AgJOBS, the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act, is a proposed immigration law that would greatly improve the situation for farm-workers and growers alike. Unfortunately, this law did not pass and has no chance to become law in the near future. Instead, with renewed and reinforced security regulations, undocumented immigrants are being sought out, often taken to detention centers or jail and deported.

The facts, according to Ms. Dudley, are that these farm-workers are needed; the growers cannot do without them. They support the local economy like citizens do, because they pay taxes and Social Security fees, but their insecure legal status keeps them under constant mental pressure and the fear of being deported. These humane and social factors have to be acknowledged now and be a part of future considerations. Ms. Dudley and her students are working toward that end.

Maria Eisner



## IMMIGRATION STUDY COMMITTEE

Following the presentation, Mary Berkelman announced the organizational meeting of the Immigration Study Committee. The meeting was held September 21, at which the group reviewed the information from the LWVUS and the consensus questions. The only thing that was clear was that this is an extremely complicated subject affecting the lives of immigrants and citizens in very basic ways. Economic impacts affect individuals and businesses as well as the national and global economies. Human impacts on immigrant families, survival of farms, continued availability of reasonably priced food, the rights of workers to safe working conditions and a livable wage are among the considerations. How do we regulate and enforce the solution, should we find one? How do homeland security and crime prevention and enforcement figure in?

There are assumptions underlying some of the questions that will influence the outcome of our study. Should we not be questioning the assumptions: 1—that we must import and underpay workers in some labor categories; 2—that Americans would not do these jobs even if the pay were adequate and the employees not demeaned and abused, and if there were training programs? How do current policies of the Department of Agriculture and allocation of farm subsidies affect these issues?

The National Voter has been running informational articles that the committee will be studying. These are also available online. The goal is to reach consensus in January. MEMBERS ARE NEEDED for this important study.

Next meeting is Thursday, October 4 at 5 PM at the Berkelman's, 380 The Parkway. For more information call Maria Eisner at 277-4404.

Beverly Livesay

## IMMIGRATION: IMPACT ON U.S. ECONOMY

Historically, immigrants have come to this country for a variety of reasons, but economic opportunity has always been a major draw. And, the U.S. economy has not disappointed. It has accommodated an expanding labor supply that today includes 1.5 million immigrants per year whose spending on housing and consumer goods helps stimulate the economy and increase the demand for still more labor.

### Workforce Shortfall

At a time when a “baby boomer” decrease is anticipated in the workforce, economists expect demand to create millions of new jobs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 56 million new jobs will be created in this country between 2002 and 2012. During this same period, more than 75 million Americans will retire, and declining native-born fertility rates will be approaching replacement level. Various interests consider new immigrants a necessary labor source to meet this shortfall.

### Costs and Benefits

Immigrants have had a profound impact on company creation, economic innovation and market value in the U.S. A PRNewswire article (November 15, 2006) reported that over the past 15 years, immigrants founded one of every four U.S. public companies that received venture capital. Forty-seven percent of current venture-backed companies in the U.S. have immigrant founders. Nearly half of the immigrant entrepreneurs surveyed came to the U.S. as students and started their own businesses within 12 years of entering the country. According to a Migration Policy Institute publication, “Immigration and America’s Future: A New Chapter,” the number of Hispanic-owned businesses has grown at three times the national average, while the number of Asian-owned businesses has grown at twice the national average.

Furthermore, the negative effect of authorized and unauthorized immigrants on public-sector budgets is small. Immigrant workers pay into social insurance programs, lessening strains on social assistance for the elderly. Many unauthorized workers use false ID numbers and pay Social Security taxes but are ineligible to receive benefits. Less than three percent of immigrants receive food stamps. Unauthorized workers support local school districts through property taxes, indirectly as renters or directly as homeowners. Taxes paid to the federal government and increased macroeconomic productivity result in a net benefit to the country as a whole from immigrants. However, studies indicate that costs and benefits are not evenly allocated locally. Communities face demands for costly services from immigrants, particularly in education and health care, which are not offset by tax income. But this type of financial burden is applicable to all low-income, uninsured populations—unauthorized, authorized and native-born. As Tamar Jacoby notes (Foreign Affairs, Nov./Dec. 2006), “the additional state tax burden per native household is, on average, no more than a couple of hundred dollars a year.”

### **Perceived Problems**

Opponents of immigration often suggest that if employers paid American workers more, they could reduce the need for foreign labor. However, many industries cannot pay more, because they would be undercut by imports from abroad. Even in sectors such as construction and hospitality, where the work must be done in the U.S., companies must decide whether it is better to lure Americans to jobs that require lower skills than those that they possess by paying more for less-skilled work. Meanwhile, because they complement rather than compete with most native-born workers (this, in turn, attracts additional capital), immigrant workers are a factor in raising rather than lowering most American wages.

For the past decade, market forces have attracted 1.5-1.8 million skilled and unskilled immigrants to work in the U.S. each year. However, annual legal quotas admitted only about a million immigrants, resulting in a significant imbalance. A realistic immigration system would make the annual legal intake more or less equal to the flow generated by supply and demand. The U.S. currently issues 5,000 visas per year to year-round unskilled workers, while 400,000-500,000 additional such workers are needed to keep the economy growing.

### **Disaster or Inconvenience**

A legitimate way to assess the role and value of immigrants' contribution to America is to consider what would happen if the influx stopped or if those already here left the country. Proponents of comprehensive reform (“bring in more workers”) believe this would be disastrous. In some regions, they contend, whole sectors of the economy could collapse. Opponents maintain that a cut-off would mean, at most, a temporary inconvenience for a few employers, who would soon wean themselves away from their dependence on foreign workers. Whichever path is chosen, there is one certainty: the consequences will affect everyone.

This brief is based on two LWVUS Immigration Study Committee background papers, “Immigration and the Economy” by Chris Carson and “Economic Aspects of Authorized and Unauthorized Immigration” by Dorrit Marks. These papers, including full citations of sources, are available at [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).  
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»Immigration Study Brief #2

Mary Berkeleman

## VOTER SERVICES REPORT

The LWVTC had two Voter Registration tables on Saturday, September 29, one at the Farmers' Market and one on the Commons at the Apple Festival. Nineteen people filled out the registration forms on the spot; we will deliver these to the Board of Elections. We handed out about another twenty-five forms that people will (we hope) fill out and mail to the Board. Those who staffed the tables felt that it was a worthwhile effort. In addition to the newly registered voters, we talked to a lot of people about the importance of voting. We also talked to people about joining the League and gave

out our brochure with membership information. We hope to gain some new members from this effort.

There will be a Candidates Forum on Tuesday, October 23 at the Ithaca Town Hall from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. All candidates for Ithaca City and Town offices have been invited to attend.

On Tuesday evening September 25 Kay Sharp moderated a Candidates Forum at the Dryden Firehouse.

Deborah Levin  
Co-Chair, Voter Service

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

LWV NYS website

[www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org)

LWV US website

[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

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