



The Broome-Tioga Voter

Bulletin of the *League of Women Voters of Broome & Tioga Counties*

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“Clean Air”

Presentation by

Dick Rehberg & John Patterson



Tuesday, January 26, 2010

7:00 pm Coffee

7:15 pm Program

Vestal Public Library

Vestal Parkway E., Vestal, NY

Public Welcome

(The Library is accessible to people with disabilities.)

President's Message

The following is a continuation of a report which I began in October's President's Column. It was called "Seven Falsehoods About Health Care", the first three were covered in that issue. The last four follow.

False: The House Bill Requires Suicide Counseling

The falsehood began with this statement made by former Lt. Governor McCaughey (R-NY), July 16. The Congress would make it mandatory.... That every five years people in Medicare have a required counseling session that will tell them how to end their life sooner, how to decline nutrition, decline being hydrated, how to go into hospice care... all to do in society's best interest... and cut your life short.

This claim is nonsense and a misrepresentation. What the bill actually provides for is voluntary Medicare funded end-of-life counseling. Medicare will pay for seniors to sit down with their doctor to discuss the type of care and treatments they wish to receive at the end of their life, and to discuss what types of life-saving treatments they wish to refuse. That choice has been federally guaranteed for almost 20 years. Doctor assisted suicide, on the other hand, is legal in only three states, making it even unlikely to be a part of the federal health plan.

False: Families Will Save \$2,500

When candidate Obama said that legislation plus some voluntary measures by the private sector "could save families \$2,500" in the coming years, he wasn't promising to reduce health care spending below current spending levels, only to cut the rate of growth in spending.

The Congressional Budget Office says that experts generally agree that changes in government policy have the potential to significantly reduce health care spending for the nation as a whole and for the federal government in particular- without harming people's health. However, achieving large reductions in projected spending would require fundamental changes in the financing and delivery of health care. It suggested moving away from the current system of paying doctors and

hospitals for performing medical procedures and paying them a fixed fee per patient or some other payment based on "value." So far we don't see these ideas in the bills being considered.

False: Medicare Benefits Will Be Slashed

The claim that Obama and Congress are cutting seniors' Medicare benefits to pay for the health care overhaul is outright false, though that doesn't keep it from being repeated ad infinitum. The truth is that the pending House bill extracts \$500 billion from projected Medicare spending over 10 years, as scored by the Congressional Budget Office, doing such things as trimming projected increases in the program's payments for medical services, not including physicians. But none of the predicted savings (or cuts) come from reducing current or future benefits for seniors.

Obama hasn't always thought that Medicare "savings" could be accomplished without actual cuts in benefits. Last fall, his campaign ran two television ads accusing Sen. John McCain of wanting "a 22 percent cut in Medicare benefits." The basis for the ads was a newspaper article in which a McCain aide said the Arizona Republican would cut Medicare costs. But the aide said nothing about cutting benefits, in fact quite the contrary. We call the claim "false" when Obama made it against McCain, and it's still false when Obama's critics are making the same accusation against him.

False: Illegal Immigrants Will be Covered

One Republican congressman issued a press release claiming that "5,600,000 Illegal Aliens May Be Covered under Obamacare" and we've been peppered with queries about similar claims. In fact, the House bill (the only bill to be formally introduced in its entirety when this article was written) says: H.R. 3200: Sec 246 – NO FEDERAL PAYMENT FOR UNDOCUMENTED ALIENS Nothing in this subtitle shall allow Federal payments for affordability credits on behalf of individuals who are not lawfully present in the United States.

Also, under the current law, those in the country illegally don't qualify for federal health programs. Of interest: About half of illegal immigrants have health insurance now, according to nonpartisan PEW Hispanic Center, which says those who lack insurance do so principally because their employers don't offer it.

January Program: Clean Air



On January 26 at 7 P.M. the Broome and Tioga Counties League of Women Voters are offering a talk at the Vestal Library meeting room on "Clean Air". Speakers will be Dr. Dick Rehberg, a retired professor at Binghamton University and John Patterson, an energy auditor and speaker on environmental issues. Dr. Rehberg currently serves on a number of committees and lectures on climate change and comparative health policy. Trained as a sociologist, he has been a recipient of grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the U.S. Office of Education. John Patterson has been a manager of residential buildings. He will give practical ideas about using less energy.

The meeting is free and open to the public

~ Carol Carpenter & Raney Colvill

Looking for Sunshine: Protecting Your Right to Know

The League of Women Voters Education Fund has created this Resource Guide to assist Leagues in dealing with this era of increasingly difficult public access to government information. This guide provides an overview of the most significant federal and state laws—those that protect and those that restrict public access to government information. It also suggests various ways that Leagues can become more active in this area, and identifies other national and state organizations involved in these issues.

A copy of this guide can be downloaded from the LWVUS webpage.

http://www.lwv.org/Content/ContentGroups/Projects/OpennessinGovernment/40404_LWV_LoRes.pdf

~ LWVNY Webpage

Election Night Reporting

Thank you to all the volunteers that helped with Election Night Reporting on the September 15th Primary and the General Election on November 3rd. It takes many volunteers to put this event together and your time and effort are greatly appreciated. A special thank you to members Sondra Pruden, Clare Simeone and Mary Johnson for helping to find phone clerk volunteers among their friends.

The Primary was smaller this year than usual, with only 9 clerks and 1 supervisor needed. At the General Election we had 32 clerks, 5 supervisors and JCHS teacher Jim Testani supplied 6 runners. The Broome County AP reporting was handled by Sue Garing.

Thanks again for helping to make Election Night Reporting a success.

~ Joanne Gee

The Natural Resources Committee

The Natural Resources Committee has not met in several years but is ready to start up again. When the former chair Ruth Levin left, a replacement was not found. With all that is happening in and to our environment it seemed a good time to get the committee organized. A meeting has been set for January 19 at 2:00 in the Vestal Library conference room. We will set some priorities, choose a leader and plan future meetings. Anyone interested in the topic is welcome to attend. You may contact Mary Johnson, mjohnson23@stny.rr.com, 607.427.4748 with any questions.

~ Mary Johnson

Identification Statement

The Broome-Tioga Voter is published 9 times a year (January, February, March, April, May, July/August, September, October, and November/December) by the League of Women Voters of Broome & Tioga Counties, 3 Willow Way, Conklin, NY 13748.

Send Voter newsletter articles and feedback to Sue Garing, Editor, sgaring@verizon.net.

The DVD Project -- Environmental Risks in Drilling for Natural Gas

Members who were able to attend our October program meeting on natural gas drilling were impressed with the presentation by Susan Multer, a League member from Steuben County. Ms. Multer had carefully researched the topic and was able to answer questions on a wide range of related issues. She also showed an excellent video entitled "Rural Impact." While this video emphasized the environmental hazards of gas drilling experienced by residents in rural areas of Colorado, it had been edited to apply to rural areas of New York State as well.

After the program, our president Clare Simeone suggested that we distribute copies of the DVD to elected officials in Broome and Tioga Counties. Our Board of Directors approved the project at their November meeting, agreeing that it was appropriate to use funds budgeted for program activities to cover the expense of this educational project.

The Board also decided that we should mail or deliver the videos to county legislators, town supervisors, our State Senator and our Assembly representatives, and to Broome County Executive Barbara Fiala and the City of Binghamton Mayor Matthew Ryan. When all these officials were included, we had a mailing list of sixty persons.

Each packet included a copy of the DVD, a memo explaining our purpose in sending it, and a handout entitled "What Local Governments Can Do to Minimize the Negative Impacts of Gas Drilling." These items are available now for any member who would like a copy of the memo and handout or who would like to borrow a copy of the DVD.

We delivered more than half of the packets in person, thereby saving on the expense of postage. Many thanks to the members who volunteered to make deliveries -- Alice Brooks, Raney Colvill, Mary Johnson, Jane Park, Charlene Shorten, Clare Simeone, Isi Trapper, and Sara Wokan. Nearly half of the expense for this project was covered by special contributions from members so the total expense taken from our treasury was under \$140.00. Your Board members believe this was a worthwhile use of resources to educate decision makers on this issue and to highlight the work of the League of Women Voters in promoting a safe environment.

~ Alice Brooks

HELP WANTED:

Aspiring Technology Expert

Carol Oestrich, our Board Chair on Education Finance, has also taken on the position of coordinating the audio-visual equipment at all program meetings that require a computer, projector and or microphone(s). We believe that this is a large responsibility for one person to handle throughout the year. If you have any experience working with any or all of the above pieces of equipment, we are looking for someone to serve as a substitute for Carol in the event that she has other commitments. Carol is working on a written step by step procedure to help whoever volunteers for this position, and she is willing to help with learning the process. Please contact me, Clare Simeone (csimeone@stny.rr.com) or Carol Oestrich (coestrich@aol.com) if you are interested.

~ Clare Simeone, President



LWVNYS VOTER

On November 20, Laura Bierman, Executive Director of the LWVNYS, sent out the first electronic State Voter. Some of our members do not have access to a computer and the State League wants to offer them a paper copy for a small fee. The fee is \$5.00 per issue or \$20.00 for the year; the issues will be available in November, January, March and May for this fiscal year. If you would like to receive a paper copy, you can call Stephanie at 518-465-4162 or send your request to:

Stephanie Lopez, Program Coordinator
League of Women Voters of New York State
62 Grand St.
Albany, New York 12207

~ Clare Simeone, President

LWVNYS POLLING PLACE SURVEY

Remember those e-mails you had inviting you to report on your experience with the new voting machines? Here are the results of that survey, with 121 responders from 20 counties including Broome.*

Adequacy of Instructions

76% indicated satisfaction with the adequacy of instructions given on how to fill out ballots and use the scanner. However, a number expressed concern that they overlooked the reverse side of the ballot.

Marking the Paper Ballot

Many respondents felt the ballot print was too small, as were the squares and circles to be filled in. Some noted that a square takes longer to fill in accurately. The correct type of pens/pencils and a sufficient supply of these tools was also a concern. Some noted that privacy booth lighting was inadequate.

Privacy Issues

The single most frequently expressed comment concerned privacy issues surrounding the location of privacy booths, privacy screens, scanner and BMD so that privacy is provided in marking and casting the ballot. Several voters who spoiled ballots wondered about the procedures for disposing of spoiled ballots.

Ballot Scanning

Survey respondents reported very few problems with the scanning operation itself.

Ballot Marking Device (BMD)

Generally, the respondents were unaware of the location of the BMD and did not observe anyone using it. Several said they requested information on how to use it but were discouraged from using it by the election inspectors who were uncomfortable with the procedures for using the BMD.

Recommendations

1. Assure more extensive and intensive voter education.
2. Use better signage at polling place entrances and pro-

vide better training of inspectors regarding use of BMDs.

3. Revise the paper ballot and set minimum standards for lighting and usability in the privacy booth.
4. Increase attention to local and state boards of elections to privacy issues. Mandate use of the privacy sleeve.
5. Enlarge the pool of trained election inspectors.
6. The Senate should immediately pass two bills, S1836/Klein and S5172/Dilan which have already passed the Assembly. The Klein bill would permit split shifts; the Dilan bill would permit 16- and 17- year-olds to serve as inspectors.
7. Consider offering inspectors \$100 per day and/or further incentives to encourage attendance at training and working on election days.

(Summarized from testimony given by Aimee Allaud, LWVNYS Election Specialist to the NYS Senate Elections Committee, November 30, 2009).

*Tioga County opted to test the new machines in only 4 precincts. This meant that some of us got to pull those levers one last time and thus had nothing to contribute to the survey.

~ Jane Park

SAVE THIS DATE: Legislative Breakfast

The Legislative Breakfast will be at the Binghamton Regency on Saturday, February 20, 2010.

~ Mary Johnson

A Note of Appreciation

I was very pleased to be honored this year as a Woman of Achievement at the annual dinner of the Status of Women Council. Thank you to all members of the League of Women Voters of Broome and Tioga Counties who nominated me. I appreciate the honor, as I continue to appreciate the work of the League and my colleagues in the League. Thank you also to all League members who attended the dinner at the Treadway in Owego. It was a fine occasion, one which I enjoyed very much.

~ Alice Brooks

The Broome-Tioga Voter

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