



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY

FEBRUARY 2010

PRESIDENT: MARNIE JOHNSON 257-2948
lwvtompkins.org/

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ANNUAL LUNCHEON MEETING: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 12 NOON

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION

Guest Speaker and Panel Discussion

**Unitarian Church, Buffalo and Aurora
(Use Parlor Entrance on Buffalo Street)**

(more information on page 2)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

February 2nd and regardless of what the groundhog saw or didn't see today the League is not about to crawl into a hole until spring. Our Nominating Committee has been busy and has almost completed its work. The Natural Resources Committee is a beehive of activity (see their article). The Local Government Cooperation/Consolidation Committee has NY State LWV consensus questions and will be gearing up toward consensus in April. There is a most interesting program planned for our luncheon on Feb. 22nd, and in March the League celebrates its 90th anniversary with two Saturday special events.

This is also the time to be thinking about League program and emphasis and planning for next year. We really need member input. What are the things YOU would like to see the League working on and studying? Are there things you would like to be involved in? New ideas, support for what we are already doing, whatever.... Let us hear from you.

Marnie Johnson

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CONSOLIDATING LOCAL GOVERNMENT — BACKGROUND

The most recent commission to address government efficiency, the Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness, was formed by Gov. Spitzer and issued its report in April, 2008 (the “Lundine Report”). Along with recommendations regarding cost containment, school reforms, election reforms, and state aid, are recommendations to consider and, in some cases, require the consolidation of certain local government entities.

The Attorney General responded with a piece of legislation, the “New York Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act” (the “2009 Reorganization Act”) which was passed by the legislature and signed into law in June, 2009, and will become effective March, 2010. This piece of legislation facilitates the consolidation of towns, villages or districts (but not school districts, city districts or county created special purpose districts), the dissolutions of villages and certain districts, and grants counties additional powers to initiate dissolutions as well.

What is the need for such legislation? New York has a complex layering of 1,607 general-purpose local governments made up of 57 counties, 932 towns, 62 cities, 556 villages, all of which have taxing power, can issue debt and are covered by home rule protections under the state constitution. There must be a more efficient way!

The NYS League is undertaking a study to develop positions which will allow local (and the state) Leagues to weigh in on decisions related to consolidation, dissolution, and/or shared services among the many municipalities of the state.

(Adapted from portions of http://lwvny.org/consolidation/Fisher_FullReport1109.pdf)

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON MEETING

Our next event, designed to acquaint members with the critical issues in this consolidation study, will be our Annual Soup and Bread Luncheon meeting starting at noon on Saturday, February 20. It will be held in the parlor of the Unitarian Church on the corner of Aurora and Buffalo from 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM. **Please use the parlor entrance on Buffalo Street.** We will have delicious home made soups, breads and desserts provided by members of the Board. The buffet lunch will start at noon; suggested contribution of \$5.00.

The program will include a presentation and discussion of the *New York Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act of 2009*. There will be invited guests to lead our discussion and help us answer important questions:

- 1 What’s happening in Tompkins County?
- 2 What can we do to influence our local governments to become more efficient and cost effective?
- 3 Come prepared with your own question!

Please call Flo Smith at 273-6147 to reserve a place and to help us in planning.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL UNITS & SHARED SERVICES COMMITTEE

Alene Wyatt, who leads the CLGUSSC (we didn’t suggest that title) of the Tompkins County League, would welcome help from any and all interested members. There’s a lot of work to be done before the April consensus meeting and what a great opportunity to learn more about the relationships among the 17 towns, villages, and city in Tompkins County. Call Alene at 257-1894 or e-mail to alene@lightlink.com.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COOPERATION: A HEALTH-CARE EXAMPLE

The program for our January 24 general meeting gave us a taste of the potential savings from the sharing of services. Don Barber, Supervisor for the Town of Caroline, Chair of the Tompkins County Council of Governments, and of the Board of Directors of the Greater Tompkins County Municipal Health Insurance Consortium, was the guest speaker at the LWV-TC meeting, held at the Women's Community Building.

Mr. Barber provided an overview of the Tompkins County Council of Governments (TCCOG), whose mission is to "provide a forum for discussion and negotiation leading to agreements for more efficient and fiscally responsible delivery of government services" and described the creation of the Tompkins County Health Insurance Consortium, the first to form under authorization of the New York State Insurance Law, Article 47.

A \$266,000 Department of State Shared Municipal Service Incentive grant provided the seed money for the county to address health insurance needs and issues such as wild swings in premiums, inferior coverage at a higher cost for "community rated" rural municipalities (less than 50 employees), high cost (\$23million – total health insurance premiums paid County wide) and municipal fringe rates of 30-40%.

The project was divided into three phases:
Phase I: Create an Agreement Framework (Fall 2007 - Fall 2008) (All 17 municipalities passed resolutions of concurrence)
Phase II: Develop the benefit program design (Fall 2008 – Summer 2009)
Phase III: Implement the program (Fall 2009)

The NYS Insurance Law, Article 47, provided the framework for the creation of the Health Insurance Consortium and required pooling of risks, a meaningful role for unions, and a minimum of 2000 employees/retirees to be covered at the beginning. The Tompkins County Council of Governments worked closely with

the New York Department of State (DOS), the New York State Insurance Department (NYSID), approximately 30 collective bargaining units (13 unions), health care providers (Cayuga Medical Center and local physicians) to develop "a comprehensive health insurance program to cover active and retired employees from municipalities as big as 1,200 contracts to as small as one contract" that had lower premiums and did not decrease benefits.

Locey and Cahill were selected as consultants and the TCCOG appointed a Health Benefits Steering Committee, made up of municipal representatives and community members (e.g. health care providers, County Health Council, TST BOCES Consortium comptroller), to examine the county's 17 municipalities' benefits programs and explore a shared approach for pooling health benefits programs. A legal consultant experienced in New York State Insurance law was also hired.

Summary: Premium savings of \$994,000 for 2010 resulted from reducing administrative expenses and sharing risks. Further information at www.tompkins-co.org "Shared Services" or by contacting Don Barber.

An application with a draft Consortium agreement, and benefit plans were filed with the NYSID, third party administrators for health care and prescriptions were secured, 2010 premiums were established and an anticipated March 1, 2010 start date was set pending final details with the NYSID.

Kathleen Yen

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Your committee has been meeting nearly weekly in efforts to develop effective responses to the threats to the environment implied by plans for gas drilling in the Marcellus shale formations. Having submitted, last fall, both oral and written comments to the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), critical of the inadequacy of the proposed regulations for gas drilling, we seek

additional ways to influence decisions related to the regulation of the drilling.

The National League has asked local leagues for areas on which to focus their lobbying efforts in Washington. We, along with other local leagues in NYS, have supported a statement submitted by the League of Steuben County concerned with the gas-drilling issue. We were assured that this would be presented to the National Board for consideration and hope for favorable action.

In order to get a better grasp of issues related to the regulation of the gas industry by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Marnie Johnson, Don Holcomb and Kay Wagner met with Don Lamb, legislative assistant to Maurice Hinchey, on January 29. It was a very informative meeting and Dan was pleased to learn that the League is working on this issue. A major concern with the use of hydrofracturing, necessary for exploitation of the Marcellus shale, is the disposal of the noxious wastewater. Thanks to a section of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, oil and gas drilling operations are exempted from provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act; hence the EPA cannot develop regulations based on that act. Hinchey in the House and Schumer in the Senate have introduced bills, referred to as the FRAC Act (Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act), to remove these exemptions and allow regulation by the EPA. The EPA is further restricted in its ability to regulate by similar exemptions, again for the oil and gas industries, in other congressional acts empowering EPA to regulate for clean air, safe disposal of hazardous wastes and conservation, and assuring the rights of citizens to gain information about drilling and mining processes. Unfortunately the FRAC Act, even if it passes, is relevant only to the clean water issue and still leaves the EPA with no authority in the other critical areas. We clearly must also direct our efforts towards action on the state level.

Finally we are working on the development of a concurrence resolution, which we hope will be adopted by the National League at its biennial

convention in June. The intent is to establish a national position which would support lobbying action at both the national and state levels specifically for strong regulation of any/all industries involved in the exploitation of natural resources, e.g., gas and oil drilling, coal mining, and hard rock mineral mining. In contacting the state leagues in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, New Jersey, Texas, Wyoming and Colorado and other New York local leagues we have found many with concerns parallel to our own. In particular, the Pennsylvania State League performed an excellent year-long study. It covers many aspects of drilling, including water quality, air quality, and economic issues (the downside as well as the upside). It is available on their website (www.palwv.org); just follow the link for the Marcellus Shale.

There will be much work to be done preparing for the June convention: if you can help, call Kay Wagner at 539-3322 or e-mail to her at cmw18@cornell.edu.

Bob Silsbee

VOTER SERVICES REPORT

Recently I received a report from the State League reporting on "Highlights from the Voter Service Survey." "Leagues reported having some difficulty recruiting moderators and many Leagues reported using moderators who were not League members." Fortunately, we have so far been able to find people from our membership to act as moderators for all of the candidate meetings that we have sponsored. We would, however, love to have some new people to act as moderators for the candidate meetings.

The moderator is a very important player at a candidate meeting. She or he welcomes the audience, introduces the candidates and explains the format of the meeting. The moderator's duties then are to be sure that the rules are followed by both candidates and questioners.

The busy times for candidate meetings are in the early Fall and in May before the school board elections. If you are interested in becoming a

moderator (we will provide training) please call or e-mail Debbie Levin, 273-7746, dlevin01@twcny.rr.com, or Sally Grubb, 257-6017, sally.grubb@gmail.com.

STUDENTS INSIDE ALBANY (SIA)

The 2010 *Students Inside Albany* conference, sponsored by the League of Women Voters of New York State Education Foundation, Inc. will be held April 11-14, 2010, in Albany, NY. Students from across the state will learn about New York State government and the process by which citizens participate in the policy making arena and will have the opportunity to attend workshops, tour the Capitol, and shadow their legislators. All costs (room, board, car/bus travel) are covered by the LWV.

The LWV-TC will be selecting a high school student (11th or 12th grade) to attend and represent Tompkins County at the conference. The application deadline is March 1, 2010. The selection committee will review the applications and make a recommendation to the board. Application and nomination/recommendation forms and a program flyer are available on the local LWV-TC website, www.lwvtompkins.org. Please encourage students to apply.

For more information, please contact Kathleen Yen, 607-257-8199, kyen@twcny.rr.com or Susan Henninger, 607-387-7544, shenninger@fltg.net.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY: BOARD 2009-10

LWV NYS website
LWV US website
LWV-Tompkins County

leave message at 273-1436

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Natural Resources—Chair	Kay Wagner	539-3322	cmw18@cornell.edu
NYS Consolidation/Shared Services —Chair	Alene Wyatt	257-1894	alene@lightlink.com

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH**WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT
IN UPSTATE NEW YORK**

KAREN PASTORELLO
Professor of History at TC3

Saturday, March 6, 1:00 to 3:00 PM
History Center, 401 E. State (MLK) Street

SAVE THE DATE

City Federation of Women's
Organizations (CFWO)
Centennial Celebration
Tuesday, March 30, 2010
5:00 p.m.
Women's Community Building
100 West Seneca Street
Ithaca, NY
607-272-1247

In recognition of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the League of Women Voters, the Program Committee has partnered with the History Center to present TWO PROGRAMS TO CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH. We've collaborated with Paul Miller, Educational Director and Donna Eschenbrenner, Archivist of the History Center, and used the primary sources available at the History Center to document the connection between the Women's Suffrage Movement and the work of politically active women in Tompkins County. The second program will be on March 27. More information will be in the March bulletin but NOW is the time to mark your calendar for both events.

The City Federation of Women's Organizations (CFWO) has been making history since its founding in 1910. Along with the Ithaca Woman's Club, the Political Study Club (now the League of Women Voters of Tompkins County) was one of the original founders of the organization. Working together, women and the federated organizations sought to fulfill the mission of helping women and children, and better the community in so many different ways.

The event is free and open to all. Please come and celebrate our shared achievements and the vision for the next century.

LWV-TC CALENDAR—2009-2010
tentative dates and/or programs in italics

Noon	Sat	Feb 20	DISCUSSION, WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS, OF RESOURCE SHARING	Unitarian Church
7:00	Mon	Mar 1	Board Meeting	Old Jail
1:00	Sat	Mar 6	WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN UPSTATE NEW YORK: KAREN PASTORELLO	History Center
1:00	Sat	Mar 27	<i>WOMEN IN POLITICS IN EARLY TOMPKINS COUNTY</i>	History Center
5:00	Tues	Mar 30	CITY FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS	Women's Comm. Bldg.
7:00	Mon	Apr 5	Board Meeting	Bob Silsbee
7:00	Mon	<i>Apr 26</i>	<i>Consensus meeting on Consolidation & Shared Services</i>	
7:00	Mon	May 3	Board Meeting	
	Mon	<i>May 10</i>	<i>Annual Meeting — Natural Resources</i>	
7:00	Mon	June 7	Board Meeting	Kathy Burlitch

LEAGUE of WOMEN VOTERS of TOMPKINS COUNTY
2010/2011 Membership List (For League Purposes only)

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	Brittain (h)	Douglas		
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N = National mbr., h = household mbr., H = honorary mbr., *** = star mbr. (inactive/supporting mbr.).

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