



The LOCAL VOTER
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
SYRACUSE METROPOLITAN AREA

FEBRUARY 2011

Syracuse Metro LWV
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 Web Sites:
 Local: www.lwvsyr.org
 State: www.lwvny.org
 National: www.lwv.org

UPCOMING EVENTS
Friday, March 4th, 8:15 –9:30 AM
 Annual Legislative Breakfast
Sunday, March 27th, 4:00 PM
 Gerrymandering (Movie)
Tuesday, April 5th, 12:30 PM
 Redistricting Forum
Wednesday, April 27th, 7:30 PM
 Redistricting Forum
Saturday, April 30th, 1:00 PM
 Gage House Tour

To receive your *Local Voter* by email, please contact us at league@lwvsyr.org. You will help the environment as well as save us printing and postage costs.
 Thank You!

Inside This Issue:

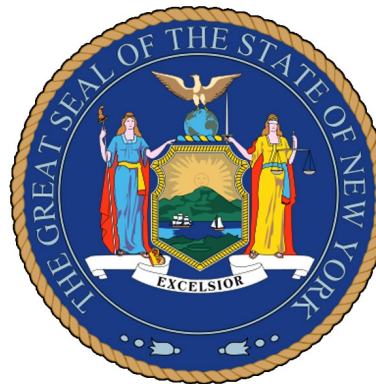
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STAYING INFORMED ON THE ISSUES AND EVENTS
 Local: www.lwvsyr.org
 State: www.lwvny.org
 National: www.lwv.org



MEET YOUR STATE LEGISLATORS

FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 2011—7:45-9:30 AM
NYSUT CONFERENCE CENTER
4983 BRITTONFIELD PARKWAY—EAST SYRACUSE 13057



Please join us for a continental breakfast and to listen, learn and ask questions about the budget, redistricting, campaign finance reform, ethics reform, election reform and other issues of interest to central New Yorkers. All local legislators have been invited.

To make your reservation:
Phone: 448-7199
Email: league@lwvsyr.org
Mail: PO Box 11866, Syracuse NY 13218

Reservations by Friday, February 25th
Continental Breakfast: \$5.00
Coffee, Tea, Juices, Fresh Fruit, Bagels and Pastries

THE LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
ALL ARE WELCOME

Sponsored by the League of Women Voters of the Syracuse Metro Area
 Continental Breakfast provided by Carnegie Catering

BOARD NOTES

We recently received the following note from Rosalie Bandyopadhyay, a former member, who now is living in Gainesville Florida:

Dear Fellow League Members,

There may not be too many in the Syracuse League who remember the 1970's but as a young League member then I learned so much about politics, public service, public speaking, leadership and self-empowerment by being an active League member and being mentored by such incredible women as Helen Zych, Suzanne LaLonde, Marion Sherman, and Mary Jo Fairbanks.

I have continued membership all these decades and now am in my 4th (and final!) year as President of the Alachua County/Gainesville League in Florida.

Continue the work "up north" and we will work "down south."

Rosalie

Rosalie continues to support our League through her many donations.

IN MEMORIUM

It is with sadness that we note the passing of former league member Doris Kelly.

2011 Naturalization Ceremonies

Thurs., Feb 17 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, Mar 10 11AM - Federal Bldg, Ceremonial Court 1
 Thurs, Mar 17 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, April 7 11AM - Federal Bldg, Ceremonial Court
 Thurs, April 21 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, May 19 11AM - Federal Bldg, Court Rm 5, 12th Fl
 Thurs, May 19 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, June 16 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, June 23 11AM - Federal Bldg, Ceremonial Court 1
 Thurs, Aug 18 11AM - Federal Bldg, Ceremonial Court 1
 Thurs, Aug 18 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, Sept 15 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, Sept 22 11AM - Federal Bldg, Ceremonial Court 1
 Thurs, Oct 20 11AM - Federal Bldg, Court Rm 5 12th Fl
 Thurs, Oct 20 2PM - County Court House
 Thurs, Nov 17 11AM - Federal Bldg, Ceremonial Court 1
 Thurs, Dec 15 2PM - County Court House

Volunteers are needed to fulfill our obligation to assist new citizens in registering to vote. Please contact Voter Service Director Joan Durant at 424-0040 or email at jdurantywca@cnyemail.com for more information and to volunteer.



Officers

President... Susan Bush
 Vice-President... Mary Clare Hatch-Pennello
 Secretary... Karen Smith
 Treasurer.... Donald MacLaughlin

Directors

Advocacy... Mary Clare Hatch-Pennello
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 Membership... Mary Lou Green
 Program.... Rae Rohfeld
 Publications/PR... Joan Johnson
 Voter Service... Joan Durant

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 Nominating Committee..... Minna Buck
 Barbara Olum
 Mary Lou Green
 Joan Johnson
 Gwen Grant
 Election Law Specialist.... Lenore Rapalski
 Technical Support... Roberta Millert

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. For more information please call the League office at (315) 448-7199 or e-mail to league@lwvsyr.org

Diversity Statement

The Syracuse Metropolitan League of Women Voters is committed to diversity and pluralism, which means there shall be no barriers to participation in any League activity on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, or national origin.

Please let us know your email address.

- It is the most efficient way to communicate
- You will be notified of upcoming local events
- LWV National & State Action Alerts

Your e-mail address will not be shared or sold. Please respond to league@lwvsyr.org

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Now that our new and re-elected state legislators are back in Albany it is time to turn up the heat on redistricting reform. The Census numbers are in and New York State will lose two congressional seats which means both our congressional districts and our state senate and assembly districts will be redesigned. The League of Women Voters believes the most important step to end dysfunction in Albany is to create a non-partisan commission to draw the lines. We have devoted much of this newsletter to the issue .

In addition we will be sponsoring meetings on Redistricting this spring. Included will be a screening of the movie, Gerrymandering at the Palace Theatre on Sunday, March 27th and a program with the Sierra Club on Thursday, April 28th with LWVNY Executive Director, Laura Ladd Bierman and Legislative Director, Barbara Bartoletti. You will find more information on these events in the March "Local Voter." Remember to check our website at www.lwvsyr.org for updated information.

Check out the calendar below for all upcoming events including our Legislative Breakfast on March 4th and a tour of the Matilda Joslyn Gage House on Saturday, April 30th.

Thanks to all who participated and planned for the activities held so far this year. I also invite anyone interested in the planning of these next programs to contact us. If you have suggestions for other programming we welcome participation at all levels. Participating in the planning of programs and attending events provides the opportunity to get the most of your membership. All our programs are open to the public.

Susan Bush, President

CALENDAR

February 14, 2011

Happy 91st Birthday, LWV

Friday, March 4, 2011

Annual Legislative Breakfast

NYS United Teachers Headquarters (NYSUT)
4983 Brittonfield Parkway, East Syracuse

Sunday, March 27, 2011, 4:00 PM

Gerrymandering Movie

Palace Theatre
2348 James St, Syracuse 13206

Tuesday, April 5, 2011, 12:30 PM

Redistricting Forum

Onondaga Senior Center, 4834 Velasko Rd.
Syracuse 13215

Wednesday, April 27, 2011, 7:30 PM

Redistricting Forum with the Sierra Club

University United Methodist Church
1085 E. Genesee St. Syracuse 13210

Saturday, April 30, 2011 1:00 PM

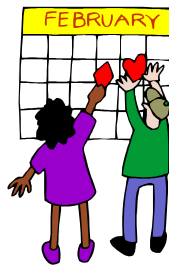
Tour of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Home

210 East Genesee St, Fayetteville

May 20 –22, 2011

LWVNYS Convention

Desmond Inn—Albany



FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

THE CASE FOR REDISTRICTING REFORM IN NEW YORK STATE

The League of Women Voters of New York State has gone on record stating that redistricting reform is the crucial reform effort on the horizon in New York State. In the next several months local leagues across the state will provide community forums and programs to educate citizens on the importance of fair and non-partisan redistricting and reapportionment. The League believes in a non-partisan redistricting system for drawing lines and that the lines should be drawn by a non-partisan commission. It needs to be a transparent process allowing public involvement.

The 2012 state legislative and congressional elections will be held with new district boundaries set during the 2011-2012 legislative session. Those new boundaries will be in place for the next decade. Thus the decisions made by the new governor, and the state legislators elected this November will play a critical role in the fairness and competitiveness of elections for years to come.

BACKGROUND:

Every 10 years since 1790, the United States has held a census to determine the nation's population and the population shifts among the states. Reapportionment is the redistribution of congressional representatives among the states based on each decennial census, while redistricting is the redrawing of the states' congressional and legislative district maps to reflect population changes. In simple terms, reapportionment refers to the shifting of Congressional representatives between states based on population (New York is expected to lose at least one congressional representative based on the loss of population). Redistricting at the New York State level determines which voters are represented by which legislative seat on the federal and state levels.

Each state has its own standards for creating congressional and legislative district maps to reflect population changes. In addition to equalizing the population of districts and complying with Federal requirements (such as the Voting Rights Act), criteria includes attempting to create compact, contiguous districts; trying to keep political units (like a county, for example) and communities within a single district.

Presently New York State's redistricting process rigs elections to benefit legislative incumbents and political parties by undermining the democratic principal of "one person, one vote," allowing legislative districts with huge population disparities, and minimizes the number of "competitive" legislative districts with close party enrollments to protect incumbents, according to a report by a coalition of civic groups.* The groups argue that New York State allows "gerrymandered" districts with vast differences in population size that, while technically legal, undermine democratic principles. The report, *New York State's Redistricting Process: The Case for Reform*, examined the state's redistricting practices and found:

Finding #1: Only 29 of 212 legislative districts (14 percent) have been drawn within one percent of the "ideal size." In a representative democracy, ensuring district of similar size ensures fair representation.

Finding #2: only 25 of the 212 state legislative districts (12 percent) were drawn to have a similar number of major party enrollments. The enrollments in the rest favor one party or another by a wide margin. This small number drastically limits the number of "competitive" elections in New York. This lack of competition helps insulate lawmakers from the wishes of their constituents.

Finding #3: Mapmaking practices have allowed for the creation of district shapes that ignore the state's constitutional requirement that districts be "compact."

Finding #4: Mapmaking practices have been used to remove significant electoral threats that challengers posed to incumbent legislators.

Finding #5: During the period 1980 through 2008, nearly 3,000 state legislative general elections were held, yet in only a tiny fraction of those races (39) were challengers successful in knocking out incumbents. This staggeringly high reelection rate is a direct consequence of New York's system of legislative redistricting.

Finding #6: As a result of mapmakers' efforts to limit electoral competition, incumbents win – and win big. From the general elections in 2002 through 2008, over 65 percent of Senate winners won by more than 2 to 1 or greater. Nearly 75 percent of Assembly winners won by that margin or greater. Roughly 5 percent of races were close.

WHAT IS GERRYMANDERING? Gerrymandering is a term that describes the deliberate rearrangement of the boundaries of congressional and state legislative districts to influence the outcome of elections.

WHERE DID GERRYMANDERING COME FROM?

The term to redraw electoral boundaries to favor a particular party dates from 1812 when Massachusetts governor, Elbridge Gerry crafted a district in Essex County Massachusetts for political purposes. A political cartoon satirized the bizarre shape of the district as a dragon. Newspaper editors and others at the time likened the district shape to a salamander and the word gerrymander was a blend of that word and Governor Gerry's last name. The term is mispronounced. Gerry pronounced his name with a hard g as in goat rather than the soft g as in giraffe.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GERRYMANDERING? The purpose of gerrymandering is to either concentrate opposition votes into a few districts to gain more seats for the majority in surrounding districts (called packing), or to diffuse minority strength across many districts (called cracking).

ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE— The principal that all citizens, regardless of where they reside, are entitled to equal legislative representation— US Supreme Court in Reynolds v. Sims (1964). The Court ruled that a state's apportionment plan for seats in both houses of a bicameral legislature must allocate seats on a population basis so that the voting power of each voter be as equal as possible to that of any other voter.

NEW YORK TO LOSE TWO CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

In late December Census figures were released that showed New York State will lose two Congressional seats due to population decreases. What this means is that New York will lose clout and federal funds. Pictured is a map of what our Congressional Districts looked like as a result of the 2000 Federal Census.



REDISTRICTING THE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

In November 2010 Onondaga County voters approved reducing the size of the county legislature from 19 to 17 members. The redistricting process begins with the publication of the census. Under the County Charter, the legislature must appoint a "Commission" within 6 months of the census publication to evaluate districts for "equality of representation." The commission will consist of the two election commissioner, one by the majority of the legislature, one by the minority party or parties in the legislature, and one person appointed by the county executive. The Commission gives undue weight to the "executive" branch, to the extent that the partisan make-up is otherwise equally divided.

The Commission is supposed to recommend districts to the legislature, which must then hold a public hearing, and then vote on a "local law setting forth revised district boundaries subject to a permissive referendum at the next general election." It appears that the legislature is free to disregard any recommendations made by the Commission and that the County Executive has veto power over the districts approved by the legislature. Regardless, whatever is enacted as a local law by the legislature is "subject to" voter approval in the 2011 election. The local law reducing the districts takes affect only after the new districts are approved by the voters. In 2011 there will still be 19 legislators running in the same districts as presently constituted. If the voters approve the new districts in the referendum presented on the 2011 ballot, then the new districts will take affect beginning in the 2013 election. If the voters disapprove of the recommended districts, then the commission reconvenes and goes through the same process in 2012.

Thank you to Legislator Tom Buckel for this information

NYS TO CORRECT MISCOUNT OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE

NYS has passed legislation ensuring incarcerated persons will be counted as resident of their home communities when state and local legislative districts are redrawn next year.

The state legislature and some counties and municipalities have previously counted incarcerated people as residents of the prison location, inflating the local population counts used for legislative districts. Padding legislative districts with prison population artificially enhances the weight of a vote cast in those districts at the expense of all districts that do not contain a prison.

The new law required the use of data from the department of corrections to identify the home addresses of incarcerated persons and to include them in the population counts for those areas prior to redistricting. Because the bill does not change the core Census data, no federal funding based on Census data would be affected. The bill will affect state senate, state assembly, county and municipal districting that will begin in 2011.

The law will put all state and local redistricting in New York in line with the practice of 13 rural New York counties with large prisons that conduct their own adjustments to census data to avoid prison-based gerrymandering.

The new law will help New York correct past distortions in representation.

ELECTION 2010: SECRET MONEY, INCIVILITY LEAVE LASTING IMPACT

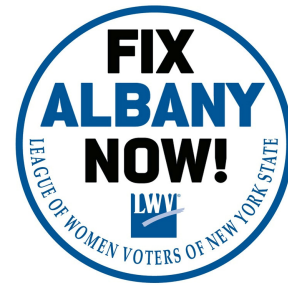
The League of Women Voters calls on Congress to fix secret cash in American elections. "The impact of election 2010 goes far deeper than which party controls the House and the Senate." Said Elisabeth MacNamara, national League president. "The tens of millions of dollars in secret money spent in this election are a recipe for scandal. Voters were overwhelmed by millions of dollars in negative ads but didn't know who paid for many of them. Pay-to-play politics won't change until we know who the special interests are who are pouring money into our elections," she said.

"This election demonstrated the critical need to improve our government structures," said MacNamara. "Because of the failure of Congress to act, there are no disclosure requirements governing the huge amounts of money that the Supreme Court recently turned loose in American politics (Citizen United v. FEC). Voters will be hard pressed to know if their elected officials are in Washington to serve the public interest or the special interests."

"The incivility and tone of the 2010 campaign reached a disturbingly new low in American politics. Not only was this evident in the advertising, but we also saw it in candidates debates and forums and in the public discourse," added MacNamara .

"The league calls on Congress to pass the DISCLOSE Act which would restore transparency to U.S. elections by requiring disclosure of corporate and union spending in candidate elections. We also call on Congress to preserve and extend ethics enforcement. With elections awash in special interest money, it is no time to cut back on the enforcement of ethics standards in Washington." "The money poured into recent elections has been unprecedented. The League believes that voters, not money, should be at the center of our democracy" concluded MacNamara. "We will continue our decades of work in helping citizens debate the issues in a civil and effective way and fighting for transparency, accountability and disclosure in American elections."

Elisabeth MacNamara, President
League of Women Voters of the United States
November 3, 2010



2011 Legislative Agenda

Redistricting - Create an independent redistricting commission to draft the New York State legislative and Congressional political boundaries for the 2012 elections.

Campaign Finance Reform – Support lower contributions limits and increased disclosure. In particular, support stronger and effective campaign finance enforcement with increased civil and criminal penalties for violations.

Ethics Reform – put in place a new independent ethics oversight agency and tougher enforcement. Make the legislature more open and accountable through continued rules reform.

Election Reform – Improve election processes to extend, encourage and protect voting, including Election Day registration, better ballot design, improved polling place management/poll worker training, and measures to ensure the integrity of all ballots.

Other League Positions

The League also has positions on Health Care, the Judiciary, Natural Resources, State finances, and Social Policy including Women's Issues under which we can and do take action.

Capitol Beat Returns

The League of Women Voters of NYS is pleased to announce the return of "Capitol Beat." This informative and entertaining column, written by the LWVNY Legislative Director Barbara Bartoletti, will contain legislative updates about League issues, as well as political gossip. We will also outline the budget and of course, will chronicle the always-lively end of session. We have created a blog page for "Capitol Beat" on our League website, www.lwvny.org and we welcome your comments posted on this blog page.

Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director



AND THE BEAT GOES ON.....

ELECTION 2010— SIZING UP OUR NEW VOTING SYSTEM

LWVNY 2010 Election Survey

The League of Women Voters of New York State has released the results of an online survey of voters' experiences using the new paper ballot optical scanning system that was implemented statewide for the 2010 election. The online survey of 1,072 respondents, from 47 counties including all 5 counties of NYC, showed that the voting machines indeed did perform well; however, the respondents did make note of several inadequacies that the League feels must be addressed to ensure that voters are guaranteed a secure and private franchise. The League's recommendations for immediate action are listed below:

Increased Voter Education on the Voting Process – The State Board of Elections must provide standard template materials which county boards of elections can tailor for their specific needs. Remaining HAVA funds should be used for this purpose.

Increased Training for All Election Personnel – The survey showed an immediate need for better trained election personnel. Legislation has passed permitting split shifts for election inspectors and recruitment of younger poll workers. These new laws need to be implemented.

Revision of the Paper Ballot for Maximum Usability by Voters – There is an immediate need for improving the design of the ballot. Legislation to address the full-faced ballot should be a legislative priority and should be introduced early in the 2011 Legislative Session.

Privacy Issues – Over 20 per cent said they did not have sufficient privacy in marking the ballot, scanning the ballot, or were not given a privacy sleeve or instructed how to use it. Poll workers need to be trained that any viewing of the markings on a completed ballot is a violation of the voter's privacy.

As noted by League Elections Specialist, Aimee Allaud, "Improving ballot design, providing better trained poll workers and ensuring privacy in voting are fundamental to our voter electoral system. We must take immediate steps to resolve these problems."

Coming March 27th—Gerrymandering, a documentary that looks at the practice of redistricting where politicians draw the lines to favor themselves and ultimately reelection for another 10 years. Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, Howard Dean, Grey Davis, Ed Rollins and other politicians. The League will sponsor a showing at the Palace Theatre.



We Have Paper Ballots, Now What?

In New York's first test case on using our new paper ballots, Nassau County's 7th Senate District race, the state courts have essentially ruled that even if New York's audit laws require further manual counting of paper ballots, accepting machine results and declaring a winner outweigh the public's right to know who really won the election.

The dispute demonstrates the typical dynamic in close political contests. Regardless of party affiliation, the candidate in the lead wants to stop further ballot counting, the candidate behind wants to continue, and the courts almost always get involved.

New York State now has one of the necessary conditions for verifiable election outcomes – paper ballots. Political parties will contest outcomes in court (nowadays that's the way we do elections in the United States). So New York's judiciary needs to embrace the value of counting the paper, and state law needs to be changed to clarify when the paper should be counted.

The law should stipulate when recounts are mandated to make them less subject to judicial fiat when races are close. Three changes would get us a lot closer to that standard:

Adopt statistical auditing methods that require checking more machines than current law when vote margins are close.

State law currently requires that both election commissioners agree to escalate an audit. But this will never happen, because one commissioner is appointed by Democrats and the other by Republicans, and these appointees are expected to represent their party's position in election disputes – particularly in important races. New York law must change to allow either commissioner to escalate the audit.

Adopt new standards that require hand counts of all votes in elections where the difference between candidate vote totals is ½ percent or less.

With changes like this, we will be a lot closer to realizing the full potential of our paper ballots than we are today.

Bo Lipari, LWVNY Technology Director and founder of New Yorkers for Verified Voting (NYVV)

The NYS Board of Elections is in the process of revising the voter registration form. We will keep you posted.





Syracuse Metropolitan
League of Women Voters
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Syracuse NY 13218

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February 2011

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**League of Women Voters
Membership Application**

*Democracy is not a spectator sport
It's efficient activism*

It is a way to make your voice count

It is a way to make politics a process for the people

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Work Phone _____ E-mail _____

___ **Individual Level....\$55**

___ **Household Level*....\$80**

___ **Student Level **....\$25**

**Please make check payable to:
Syracuse Metro Area League of Women Voters
P O Box 11866**

* Two members in the same household

** Full time student under 25

___ **I would like to support the League with a donation.**

For more information call us at (315) 448-7199 or visit us at www.lwvsyr.org