



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY

MAY 2011

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lwvtompkins.org/

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ITHACA CITY SCHOOL BOARD

CANDIDATES FORUM

WEDNESDAY, MAY 11 AT 6:30 PM

LEHMAN ALTERNATIVE
COMMUNITY SCHOOL (LACS)
111 CHESTNUT ST., ITHACA

Sponsored jointly by LWV, AAUW, PTA
and the Ithaca Journal

That is something to be proud about. I hope that my involvement with the State Board will increase my knowledge about issues at the state level and, thus, be a more informed president for you.

Background information on the "Role of Federal Government in Public Education" for the study group is just beginning to be sent via the State website. I hope to hear more about the issue and study questions this month. I will keep you informed as more material comes in.

Kay Sharp

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thank you for your votes for me as President. I look forward to serving our League in this capacity. As I mentioned last month, I hope to engage more of you in the ongoing activities of our League.

The public portion of the annual meeting program was excellent! It was well-attended, over 100 people, and the audience appreciated our League's contribution to keeping the community informed of this important issue. Kudos to Catherine Wagner and the Natural Resources Committee.

The State Convention is going to be exciting for me. I have been nominated as Secretary to the Board. I'm also going to serve as a Regional Director, keeping local Leagues apprised of the State League business. I've been asked to sit on a panel at the Convention that considers the League's approach to building its membership. Our League is one of only five in the entire state that has experienced growth in the past year.

MEMBERSHIP

We would like to welcome three new members to our League:

Jennifer Engel	927 Taughannock Blvd., Ithaca 14850	272-8401
Sarah Jane Blake	20 Middaugh Rd, Brooktondale 14817	277-1312
Lucia A. Sciore	124 Pine Tree Rd., Ithaca 14850	351-0221

Deborah Levin

TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Message	1
Membership Report	1
Soup and Bread Luncheon	2
Annual Meeting: Business	3
Annual Meeting: Program (Fracking)	4
Board of Directors	4
Students in Albany	5
Representatives in Congress	6

SOUP AND BREAD LUNCHEON

On Saturday, April 16, about 25 members of the Tompkins County League had the opportunity for extended discussion with our guests, NY Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton and NY Senator Thomas F. O'Mara, who shared their positions about the issues which concern us all: the State Budget deficit, cuts in Medicaid, social programs and schools, property tax cap, mandate relief, redistricting reform, gas drilling in the Marcellus shale, ethics reform, consolidation and sharing of services between local governments. Both Barbara Lifton and Tom O'Mara responded with interest to the challenging questions and comments made by League members and many lingered for personal conversations at the end of the formal program. The attendees thank the Board members who provided the lunch of home made soups, breads, dessert and beverages.

Flo Smith

LWVTC ANNUAL MEETING

On Monday, May 2, forty members of the League gathered from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m at the Tompkins County Public Library for the Annual Meeting. Before the business portion of the meeting, all enjoyed refreshments and social conversation.

President Kay Sharp facilitated the business meeting which followed. The group voted to approve the list of nominees for officers and directors for 2011-2013, as presented by Pat Long, chair of the Nominating Committee: Kay Sharp, President; Florence Smith, Vice President and Program Chair; Julie Ann Dickens, Secretary; Sally Grubb as Director and Service Co-chair; and Kathleen Yen and Susan Henninger as Directors and Youth Program Co-chairs.

The budget for 2011-2012, presented by Susanne Lipari, was also approved as were, after amendment, revisions to the bylaws presented by Bob Silsbee.

The final business item was a very brief presentation of the program of our local League for next year. Kathleen Yen presented the plans for the Healthcare Committee proposing efforts to prevent legislative erosion in Washington of the new federal healthcare plan; to develop possible alternatives of the state level; and to monitor the progress in Vermont in developing a single-payer plan. Catherine Wagner spoke of the proposed work of the Natural Resources Committee for next year. Focus will continue on the gas-drilling issues but with more emphasis on economic, sociological and health effects, particularly long term consequences, i.e., answers to the question "What will be left behind?" Marnie Johnson, with Beverly Livesay, is interested in starting an advocacy/action group focused on local government issues with possible targets: formation of an observer corps; outreach to other community groups interested in improving local government; and action on specific issues such as redistricting, consequences of budget cutting and opportunities for the Tompkins Council of Governments. Finally, Kay Sharp announced plans to start a new study group using background material from LWV-US: Role of Federal Government in Public Education. See the April bulletin for more information.

Patrick Labuff and his mother attended as our guests. Patrick, a High School Senior from Trumansburg was sponsored by LWVTC, as our Student Inside Albany. Patrick honored us at the end of the meeting by speaking about his experiences. He thanked the League for giving him the opportunity to spend three days in Albany with other students from across the State. He enthusiastically described his time with Barbara Lifton and Senator Thomas O'Mara observing legislative sessions and learning how bills become law. When Patrick returned home, he reported on what he had learned to students and teachers at his High School, and encouraged others to participate in the Student Inside Albany Program next year.

Flo Smith

THE LONG TERM ECONOMICS OF HYDROFRACKING

Our program, following the Annual Meeting and open to the public, attracted a crowd of 100 members of the Ithaca community. For those of you who were not able to attend, a video recording of the program can be viewed by going to the links provided on our website, <http://lwvtompkins.org/>. The links are in the first Calendar item. We have already received requests from other New York Leagues for access to this video and, at the State Convention and elsewhere, will publicize its availability.

Kay Sharp began the program with a welcome and a description of the work of the League. A handout about the LWV with a membership form was distributed to all participants.

Kay Wagner introduced the presentations by noting that the gas drilling question was more complicated than the simple conflict: "It's good for the economy but bad for the environment." The focus of the program was on the complex question of just how good or bad the gas-drilling might be for the economy of upstate communities. Will the gas industry give the boost to the local economies that is so widely advertised? Kay then introduced the three panelists: Susan Christopherson, Dept. of City and Regional Planning at Cornell University; John Schwartz, retired member of the Department of Physics at Ithaca College; and Don Barber, Town Supervisor for Caroline and Chair of the Tompkins County Council of Governments.

A key point of Christopherson's talk was the "boom and bust" character of the gas industry. In any given local area the industry creates expanded economic activity during the drilling phase of the extraction cycle but what about afterwards, typically ten years, when the activity has moved onto another area. The first issue concerns the impact, both positive and negative, during the drilling phase: new jobs (though primarily low-paying since the skilled workers are typically from out-of-state), increased

wages, higher activity in food and housing industries, demand for health care, social services and emergency responders, road degradation, and competition with existing economic base for labor to mention a few: a mixture of good and bad.

Christopherson's second point concerns "what's left behind." Once the local gas installation has moved into the production phase the number of industry related jobs is minimal. The local community is left with excess capacity in housing and services, formerly productive enterprises that were crowded out by the high paying competition from the drilling may recover only slowly if at all, and permanent damage to the environment implies permanent loss of a once successful part of the economic base of the community. Though some members of the community certainly stand to benefit economically, for the community as a whole it seems problematic. One go-away message: if it's going to happen, the slower the growth in the boom phase and the slower the decline in the bust stage, the less will be the permanent damage to the community as a whole.

John Schwartz addressed two specific issues. The first compares the return to local communities of various industries including tourism, viniculture, farming, dairy, and recreation with the return to the local area through royalties on extracted natural gas. Focusing only on counties which override the Marcellus shale formations, he concluded that the return from gas, over a 20 year period, would be about three per cent of the return from that portion of the current economic base that could be seriously damaged by the development of the gas industry. A small loss of income from our current base could mask the royalty returns from the gas extraction. These results give a quantitative basis for some of Christopherson's qualitative concerns.

In a second part of his presentation Schwartz focused on the issues of the large amounts of water used in the hydro-fracturing (fracking) process: there are concerns both with the

amount of water withdrawn from the local supplies and the problem of the disposal of the water once the fracking is completed. Comparisons with amounts of water required for other local uses help to illustrate the large magnitudes that are involved.

Don Barber presented results from a number of studies, many based on experience in Pennsylvania. Issues addressed included: the large fraction of the economic benefit of both the gas revenue itself and ancillary industries (chemical, equipment manufacture, pipe, etc.) which goes out-of-state; boom-bust issues as discussed by Christopherson; competition with existing economic base for limited social and labor resources; traffic and road maintenance problems; and so on. Barber closed his remarks

with a quote from a Bradford County (center of much of Marcellus drilling in Pennsylvania) official to the Pennsylvania governor: "I have heard politicians in complete favor of the gas industry use the phrase, 'We don't want to kill the golden goose.' I would like to state, for the record, that the Golden Goose does not exist. It is no more part of reality than the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus, or the Easter Bunny."

The subsequent question and answer period continued until our time reservation in the Library expired; a good sign of an effective presentation of a controversial subject.

Bob Silsbee

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY: BOARD 2010-11

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STUDENTS IN ALBANY

At our Annual Meeting we heard a report from Ithacan Patrick Labuff about his experience in the Students in Albany program. The following is a report on the same program from Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director of the LWV-NY in Albany.

“We concluded a very successful Students Inside Albany Conference on Wed. Thirty five students from across New York State spent three days in Albany learning about their state government and how they can be influential in the policy decision making process. A full summary of the speakers and photos will be posted on the League’s website, under Youth Programs, very soon.

“The students heard from a variety of speakers, including lobbyists, media experts, public officials and more; they did some role playing as lobbyists with Assemblymembers Teresa Sayward and Catherine Nolan. The highlight, as always, was their experience shadowing their Assemblymember and Senator for an afternoon each. The students were all introduced on the floor of the Assembly and watched a bill on pay equity be introduced, debated and voted. All but two students were on the floor of the Senate when a bill concerning school suspensions was debated and voted on. In the evening during their “down” time, groups of students were still debating issues such as gay rights, abortion and death penalty among themselves. The students were well educated, informed, courteous and fun – thanks for sending such great kids!”



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