



Suffolk County Voter

www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org

December 2007

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Wed. Dec. 12
Wed. Jan. 16

LWVSC Board Meeting—Riverhead Library 10:00am-Noon
LWVSC Board Meeting—Riverhead Library 9:30am-Noon

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VETERANS NEED OUR HELP!

At the Suffolk County League of Women Voters Post Election Brunch on Sunday, November 11th, Joe Sledge, Public Affairs Officer for the VA Medical Center in Northport, was a special guest speaker for Veterans' Day. He urged all of us to encourage any veteran we know to register online or in person at Northport for the many services now available to our vets.

Two very disturbing points were made that we can act upon. First, many veterans are going hungry, and second, almost 25% of returning veterans are unable to get the jobs back that they left when activated (this is against federal law).

To provide food for hungry veterans, we can send a check made out to "Hero Hunger Help Project" and mail it to Mary O'Sullivan, Northport Veterans' Hospital, 79 Middleville Road, Northport, NY 11768. Monies collected will be used to provide supermarket food vouchers to needy vets.

To urge our representatives to uphold the Federal Law requiring employers to hold the jobs of servicemen and women, we can contact our elected officials in Washington: Congressman Bishop, Senator Clinton and Senator Schumer (refer to 2007 Directory of Public Officials for contact information).

Our servicemen and women are sacrificing their lives for us in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world. We need to support them when they finally come home.

Barbara Jordan

2007 LWVSC POST ELECTION BRUNCH

55 LWVSC members and guests Gail Vizzini, Director, Suffolk County Budget Review Office (who received an honorary LWVSC membership) and SC Legislator John Kennedy, heard *Newsday's* Rick Brand's views of the stories behind the 2007 local elections.

Hampton LWV's Sue Wilson was honored for her contributions to LWVSC with the 2007 LWVSC Liberty Award, and Joyce Edward (Brookhaven), Mireille Lister (Hamptons), Judie Gorenstein (Huntington), Cathy Kenny (Shelter Island) and Lisa Scott (Smithtown) received Voter Service recognition at the brunch.

Lisa Scott



Joe Sledge, Public Affairs Officer for the VA Medical Center in Northport, with Adam Gaus, LWVSC 1st VP, veteran, and our liaison to the VA.

WRITING AN OP-ED**- the story behind the story**

Our Op-Ed in Newsday on October 26th was written on an issue that has been of great concern to the LWVSC—the lack of supportive housing for people suffering from mental illness. It was through our position in support of Alternatives to Incarceration programs that we learned of the significant number of mentally ill people who get caught up in the criminal justice system because of their illnesses. Their need for supportive housing is a critical need in our county.

We expected the process of writing an Op-Ed piece to be a simple one, i.e., you write and submit it, and it's published or not. It is more involved than that. We heard back rather quickly from Alleen Barber, the Opinion Editor, indicating her interest in it.

Alleen suggested including case studies to give a human face to the issue. It was not easy to get them because of concern about confidentiality among the agencies who provide services. After some calls, though, we did receive them.

Once they were incorporated, the article was re-submitted to Ms. Barber. She reordered the paragraphs in it, significantly improving its flow. When she sent back the revision, she had questions that pushed for verification of what we stated: were all the case studies from Suffolk? Is Single Point of Access a program administrated by the NYS Office of Mental Health? Is it in each county? What is the timing of the county budget issues we raised? Several calls provided the needed validation.

Learning that the next step the Op-Ed would take was to the copy editor, I had concerns that with additional editing our message might be diluted. I was reassured that that wouldn't happen, and it didn't. Ms. Barber's request then was for us to send her our photos to run with the article. Her response to mine was, "You just made my day! I did get the photo, and I opened it with no problem--but it's of three sea otters floating on their backs. So I think you have the technology down, just not the right photo!" My second attempt resulted in, "I got it! And it's you!"

Our Op-Ed appeared on October 26, 2007.

We saw that the headlines, "Mentally ill deserve better housing", and "Support from the Suffolk County executive could help secure funding to care for most vulnerable", highlighted the points we addressed. The cartoon captured the essence of it, and was riveting. We are hopeful that there will be an increase in the numbers of supportive housing facilities so critically needed in Suffolk.

EVERY VOTE COUNTS**- and should be counted correctly**

Election Day, November 6, 2007, is over and the votes cast that day have been counted. As anticipated in an off-year election, voter turn out was low. Many of the elections were very close. These tight races clearly show that every vote counts and that every vote needs to be counted correctly.

How upsetting it was therefore to learn that the day before Election Day the Department of Justice (DOJ) had made a proposal calling for the federal courts to consider taking control from the state and to select the new voting system for New York. They have filed a motion with the US District Court, asking the judge to compel New York to comply with HAVA by the September/November Federal Elections in 2008. The case will be heard on December 20th.

While it is true that New York has had many delays in replacing our lever machines, it is also true now that we have developed the highest standards to make certain that integrity remains in our voting process. These standards SHOULD NOT and CAN NOT be compromised. It is also true that nine months is an extremely short amount of time to select, order, distribute, and prepare an all new voting system.

We know that voter turnout is highest in presidential elections, and change causes confusion. Therefore, the LWV, along with several other civic groups, is advocating that ballot-marking devices which satisfy the accessibility requirement, already in use in New York, be placed in each polling site by September 2008, and that paper ballot optical scan systems replace all lever machines by 2009.

If the court will not allow for the delay until 2009, there is even more of a reason to advocate strongly for the PBO system which is secure, accurate, recountable, accessible, least expensive and the simplest to use. Let's continue to work hard to make certain that the voters of Suffolk county, as well as all voters in New York, can have confidence that their vote counts and will be counted correctly in 2008 and thereafter.

Judie Gorenstein

Katherine Hoak