



# Suffolk County Voter

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March 2009

CHECK



THE DATE

Wed. March. 18

LWVSC Board Meeting, Riverhead Public Library 10:00am-12 noon

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## Supporting Democracy in Suffolk County

The bottom line for the League of Women Voters since its inception in 1920 has been to support the democratic principles on which our country was founded. LWVSC has been actively involved in that pursuit in varying ways, as we respond to local issues at hand.

We have reported previously on IR 1976-2008, A Charter Law to Reform and Reconstitute a Professional Independent Suffolk County **Ethics Commission**, written by Suffolk County Leg. Ricardo Montano, and co-sponsored by Legs. John Kennedy and Cameron Alden. The League's governmental specialist examined this legislation and found it to be on target, but with one concern: the importance of a secure budget to support the operation of the Commission so that it cannot be "starved into submission."

Mr. Bob Martinez, Mr. Montano's Chief Aide, reports that the bill's sponsors are aggressively taking into consideration statements to fine-tune this legislation put on record at the Public Hearings by the League and by individuals within the community. Once that is completed, it will be resubmitted to the Legislature. We trust that it will include a provision for the independent financing of the Commission.

In 1974 the League of Women Voters of the United States adopted a position on **Campaign Finance** which states that "the methods of financing political campaigns should ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process."

LWVNYS defined this position further in 1991 by stating: "In order to restore public confidence in the political process, appropriate limits should be placed on campaign contributions which can be made to each candidate from individuals, corporate funds, political party monies, donations by PACs and special interest groups."

LWVSC adopted **Campaign Finance Reform** as one of its primary positions of focus several years ago. We are pleased, therefore, to see that legislation has been put forth by Leg. Cameron Alden, IR 1895-2008, A Charter Law To Establish a Truth and Honesty Zone For Clean Campaign Practices in Suffolk County By Banning Improper Fundraising. Leg. Edward Romaine is a co-sponsor. LWVSC's Legislative Committee reviewed the legislation, received input from the LWVUS' government specialist, and conveyed its concerns to Mr. Alden, who then responded in detail to each item.

In order to supplement that report, I have been in contact with two specialists in Campaign Finance Reform at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU. They will review the legislation, and with their input, and with additional information requested by Mr. Alden, there is a realistic hope that the outcome will be legislation which the League can support.

*On Tuesday, Feb. 17, LWVSC board members visited JACO, manufacturer of the hardware for Suffolk County's proposed optical scanners and ballot marking devices for the disabled.*

*see photo on page 2*

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LWVSC board members Lisa Scott, Judie Gorenstein, Adam Gaus (who organized the meeting), Mary McLaughlin, and Katherine Hoak join JACO executives Leslie Jay Girsky, Robert Savacchio, and Jay H. Guthrie at the JACO manufacturing facility at Hauppauge. JACO is under contract to Sequoia Voting Systems which in turn is a licensee of the original voting machine designer, Dominion of Toronto.



### Supporting Democracy in Suffolk County *continued*

The **Cross Endorsement** of three incumbent candidates for office in the 2009 election was a concern of the editorial staff of *Newsday*; they were opposed to the practice, seeing it as one that inhibited citizen participation and choice. The four major parties, Republican, Democrat, Independent, and Conservative, had all endorsed these particular candidates. Rick Brand, the political reporter who was addressing the issue, contacted me to see what the League's position was regarding cross-endorsements. Before responding, I contacted Barbara Bartoletti, chief lobbyist for the LWVNYS in Albany, to get her feedback. Her immediate response was that such a set-up narrows the choices for voters and diminishes democracy, precisely the stand made by *Newsday's* editorial staff. In a later communication, Ms. Bartoletti stressed the League's ongoing commitment to promoting citizen participation in elections, and that when parties limit the ability to choose from different candidates with varying ideas and positions on issues, they restrict the citizens' right to choose and limit their participation in the democratic process.

Many individuals and organizations responded with outrage and great concern about the tolerance for bias crimes our county has been experiencing, especially since the tragic killing of Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant, a few months ago. The League was invited to participate in the **Dignity for All Students Committee**, along with representatives from NOW, Suffolk **Anti-Bias** Task Force, the National Association of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Social Workers, the L.I. Latino Teachers Association, the Suffolk NYCLU, and the Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth.

The focus of the Committee has been on specific legislation: the Dignity for All Students Act. For several years, it has routinely passed in the Assembly, but not in the Senate. There is some hope now that the bill will pass this year in both houses. Governor Paterson is in support of it.

This legislation authorizes the commissioner of education to establish policies and procedures affording all students in public schools an environment free of harassment and discrimination based on actual or perceived race, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or sex. It requires the reporting of harassment and discrimination to the commission.

All committee participant organizations were asked to contact their State representatives, asking for their support of the Dignity for All Students Act. LWVSC has sent letters to our Senators with this important request.

The League in Suffolk County will continue to pursue these important local issues.

*Katherine Hoak*