



# Suffolk County Voter

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February 2010

Wed. Feb. 17

LWVSC Board Meeting, Riverhead Library

11:00 am - 1:00 pm

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## A Step to a Newer and Better State Government

In the new electronic LWV NYS newsletter, reform of state government was listed as one of the focus points for this year. Very recently, the NYS Senate passed S.6457, which, although not perfect, will improve both ethics and campaign finance enforcement and create greater transparency. It represents a good-faith effort on the part of legislative leadership to overhaul ethics oversight. We are waiting to see whether Governor Patterson will sign it since he has said he thinks it is too weak.

Redistricting, however, which was not included, is of special importance because the new demographic data from the 2010 Census will require redrawing the lines for legislative districts. The New York State League recommends that the state create an independent redistricting commission to draft the New York State legislative and Congressional political boundaries for the 2012 elections. This would be the most propitious time to address this issue, which will not surface again until the next Census.

The Suffolk County Legislature adopted just such a plan last year to redraw our district lines. The Suffolk County League studied the issue and followed the progress of the redistricting plan through the County Legislature and the County Executive's office, and offered many suggestions that League members thought would improve the plan. We grappled with the question of nonpartisanship vs. bipartisanship. We referred to the LWV US consensus on apportionment and redistricting, which says that we believe that congressional districts and governmental legislative bodies should be apportioned substantially on population.

## REDISTRICTING REFORM: VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE IN NYS

### PUBLIC FORUM ON THE ISSUE OF REDISTRICTING

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

The Nelson A. Rockefeller  
Institute of Government  
411 State Street, Albany

#### INVITED SPEAKERS:

Governor David A. Paterson  
 NYS Legislative Leaders  
 Gerald Benjamin, Associate VP for Regional  
 Engagement, SUNY New Paltz  
 Blair Horner, Legislative Director, NYPIRG

#### MODERATED BY:

Susan Arbetter, Capitol Correspondent  
 WCNY News & Public Affairs Director

#### CO-SPONSORED BY:

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LIGHT RECEPTION FOLLOWING THE PANEL  
 TO CELEBRATE THE LEAGUE'S  
 90TH ANNIVERSARY

The term “substantially,” as used in Supreme Court decisions, allows adequate leeway for districting to provide for any necessary local diversities, and to protect minority representation under the League’s Voting Rights position. An expert from a League in California was helpful in guiding us in our work with local government, and the result was important – Suffolk County will now have its lines drawn by a commission that is “non-political.”

In support of the efforts of the New York State League, we encourage the local Leagues to get involved in the action on redistricting the New York State legislature. We offer the following facts as a starting point:

•**FACT:** At present, each Legislative house’s majority leader draws the district lines for his/her house—which, of course, delivers an incredible power over individual legislators.

•**FACT:** Only 29 of the 212 Legislative districts are within one percent of an “ideal size.” NY districts can be dramatically different in size so that some districts with greater population are effectively denied the same level of representation as those with many fewer residents.

•**FACT:** NY’s incumbent return rate is one of the highest in the country—close to 95%. Does this provide a real choice for voters?

•**FACT:** Over the last 30 years, New York has seen dramatic changes (particularly in population), but our legislature has not changed much..

•**FACT:** The NY Legislature has been identified by the Brennan Commission as one of the poorest run governments in the nation. (#49 out of 50).

•**FACT:** With a more responsible and objective method of drawing the election district lines, legislators elected would need to be more responsible to the electorate rather than to the majority leader.

If we, the public, want legislators who are truly responsive to their constituents and don’t necessarily have a “safe seat,” what are some ways we can achieve such change?

Now is the time of the 2010 Census. The population count will differ from the last census data and will require the adjustment of district lines.

Therefore, NOW is the time to pressure our sitting legislators about the need for an independent commission to set the new lines.

**WE BELIEVE THAT AT THIS TIME WE HAVE A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE CHANGE IN NEW YORK STATE...**

#### **QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED:**

- (1) What standards should be applied for the selection of the commissioners who will sit on this re-districting commission?
- (2) What can we as League members do to effectuate the changes we believe are needed?
  - publicity related to the problems
  - contact legislators by phone, e-mail, letters
  - create a model letter from which to write others
  - arrange for speakers to get around to other public groups, e.g., PTA, Senior Citizens, college classes, High School seniors, other Leagues, libraries

**OTHER SUGGESTIONS WELCOME!**