

INSIDE the New York City League

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

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Fall 2010

"Election 2010 - Ready, Set, Vote"

TUESDAY, October 19th 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

4 West 43rd Street

For all members - Annual Pre-Election Meeting

Who's Running ... for which office?

What's on the Ballot? ... *proposed amendments to the City Charter*

Where can voters get information on the candidates

LWV-sponsored Debates

NEW in New York City ... **Vote 411.org** and **Smartvoter.org**

LWV Voters Guides

Why are we using a new voting system?

What happened in the Primary Election?

What can we anticipate for the General Election?

Guests welcome.

Fall Calendar

Sunday, October 10 - Candidates Debate - Attorney General
WABC-TV, Channel 7, 11:00 a.m.

Sunday, October 17 - Candidates Debate - U.S. Senator (2-year term)
WABC-TV, Channel 7, 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, October 19 - 3:00 p.m. - Legislative Action Committee*

Tuesday, October 26 - Last day to apply by mail for absentee ballot

Tuesday, November 2 - Election Day - polls open 6 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Tuesday, November 9 - League Day at the U.N. (*see page 5*)

Thursday, November 11 - 10:30 a.m. - City Affairs Committee*

Tuesday, November 16 - 11:00 a.m. - Board of Directors*

Thursday, December 2 - 6:30 p.m. - Juvenile Justice Forum (*see page 8*)

*meetings in the League office, 4 West 43rd St, Suite 615

See page 8 for Events in 2011

From the President

Dear Members,

It is truly an honor to be elected to serve as president of the New York City League of Women Voters and I look forward to a rewarding year.

This 2010 Election season has been exciting and challenging for all of us, with the introduction of electronic voting, new voter registration forms, new absentee ballot applications, and a full ballot with candidates for statewide office, all of our state legislators and Congresspersons, and, unusually, both of our U.S. Senators, as well as two questions dealing with our City Charter.

Voter Service is the League's *raison d'être*, educating and engaging citizens in the democratic process, and the demand for our help and information has been tremendous. The new chair of our Voters Service committee, Hope Freeman, has handled a huge number of requests for registration drives and speakers on election issues. Our Telephone Information Service volunteers have been busy providing voters with information on every aspect of the election.

This has also been an especially active year for candidates debates. Before the Primary, we co-sponsored the first televised debate featuring candidates for the Democratic nomination for Attorney General on WABC-TV, our long-time partner in bringing candidates to the attention of the voters. Our members moderated several debates among candidates in local primary contests which were aired on Manhattan Neighborhood Network. In the weeks leading up to the election, we were co-sponsors of debates for the offices of Attorney General and United States Senator on WABC-TV. A debate by candidates for Governor is pending.

After a long struggle by the League and other civic organizations, New York State and New York City finally adopted a new voting system which meets the League's criteria of "secure, accurate, recountable, and accessible." At our August meeting, representatives of the Board of Elections demonstrated the new optical scanners for our members and the public, who were able to try out the new paper ballots and the ballot marking device for voters who need assistance.



LWVNYC President Miriam Adelman

We have also been closely involved in the effort to revise the New York City Charter. LWV vice president Adrienne Kivelson presented important testimony at hearings of the Charter Revision Commission and prepared a statement about the two ballot questions for inclusion in the Voters Guide issued by the NYC Campaign Finance Board. (See page 4 for analysis of those questions.)

In addition to our work in city affairs, we have been engaged in education and advocacy at the state and national levels. We worked with the State League to present a program on redistricting and expect to hold a public meeting on the need for an independent redistricting commission in January. At our September meeting Robin Bahr alerted us to the need to write to members of the U.S. Senate in support of legislation to require transparency in campaign financing; the measure failed by one vote but the League will continue to work for this important disclosure legislation.

You can keep up with the League's work by visiting our website, www.lwvnyc.org, which provides election information, video replays of our demonstration of the new voting system and the MNN debates, and links to other levels of the League and to other important sites.

Come to our October 19 meeting to learn more about election issues, and mark your calendar for December 2 when we will be a co-sponsor of a forum on Juvenile Justice. Bring your friends. Become involved in League activities – we can all make a difference. I look forward to seeing you at meetings and other events throughout the year.

Miriam

VOTERS SERVICE - ALWAYS A PRIORITY

This has been a remarkably busy season for the League's Voters Service program, with registration sessions at corporate offices and community centers, demonstrations of the new optical scan voting machines, and candidates meetings for local and statewide offices. We also distributed printed information about candidates and the two ballot questions on the City Charter and helped to make candidate information available on the web.

In July, when many people were barely beginning to pay attention to the coming election, we helped to register approximately 100 voters in a two-day event at the headquarters of J.P. Morgan Chase. In addition to securing their own place on the election rolls, bank employees wanted information about registration and voting for college students.

Election Night Reporting

The Associated Press has again asked the League of Women Voters of New York City to assist in the collection of voting results from selected sites after the close of polls on Election Day.

This year the AP is using a "Quik Tab" procedure: 175 election districts across the five boroughs have been chosen for their demographic makeup. The results from just this sample are expected to present a picture of the statewide contests across all districts in the City.

On Primary night, 39 League members and volunteers were assigned to poll sites other than their own election district. They were able to report results with only a few delays in poll closings and will be asked to repeat the process on the evening of November 2. More reporters will be needed, however.

Those who would like to participate in this process (they do not have to be League members) should call the League office at 212-725-3541 or write to ashton@lwvny.org. The League will receive a small stipend for each election district covered, and it is fun to do.

Kathy Jacobson & Nancy Schwartz

On August 2, as part of Harlem Week, we registered voters and provided information about the election and voting rights at the First Corinthian Baptist Church. Daniel Charlton of Project Vote came from DC to support this effort.

The New School held its annual Block Party on September 2nd and the League was on hand to register young voters, many of whom were uncertain of their rights as students away from home.

Two major corporate drives were held at the end of September. ConEd, which also underwrites the publication of *They Represent You*, our directory of elected officials, invited us to register voters at their offices. (Managing this effort was Mary Lou Urban - on her birthday!) At American Express, a number of employees registered to vote and practiced voting on an optical scan machine provided by the Board of Elections. There will be additional citizen education activities at American Express throughout the year.

In preparation for the September primary, we provided moderators (Jane Colvin, Barbara Friesner and Ann Northrop) for three nights of taping of candidate debates for Congressional, State Senate and State Assembly races. Each debate was aired several times on Manhattan Neighborhood Network and all are accessible on YouTube. (Links can be found on the League's website, LWVNYC.org, and Facebook pages.) The debates also received wide coverage in the press.

For statewide races, we worked once again with WABC-TV, Univision 41, and the *Buffalo News* to present debates that were aired on Channel 7 at 11:00 a.m. on October 10 (Attorney General) and October 17 (U.S. Senate - two-year term). Arrangements for a debate featuring candidates for Governor are pending. For the first time this year, we have been working with two nonpartisan websites, [Vote 411.org](http://Vote411.org) and SmartVoter.org, to provide information about candidates at all levels. (See *Executive Director's report*, page 7.)

Hope Freeman

Charter Revision Commission Presents Two Ballot Questions

On August 23rd the New York City Charter Revision Commission voted to put two questions on the November ballot – one asking the voters if they want to restore a limit of two terms for elected officials and another proposing a compendium of charter changes affecting elections and government administration.

When the Commission was appointed by Mayor Bloomberg in March, Chairman Matthew Goldstein, Chancellor of the City University, promised that they were going to look at the entire Charter and invited New Yorkers to bring their concerns and proposals to one of the many public hearings that would be held throughout the city. All of the hearings were webcast and can still be seen on its website, www.nyc.gov/charter, as can the Commission's reports.

We testified at two hearings and submitted additional information on our proposal to include governance of the Department of Education in the Charter now that it is a Mayoral agency and consumes 20% of the City budget. The Commission dismissed our proposal as outside of its authority and decided that many other changes proposed by civic organizations and individuals, including nonpartisan elections and instant runoff voting, required more in-depth study by future Charter Commissions.

This Commission was determined to go out of business this year after barely five months of hearings and reporting, clearly not enough time to delve into the complicated policy and program initiatives that arose during their deliberations. By law, they could stay in business until November 2011 if they did not put anything on the 2010 ballot and the League and others asked them not to rush, to spend more time considering these issues.

In the case of term limits, we had opposed the 2008 action of the Mayor and the Council in extending limits to three terms because the two-term limit was instituted through a voter referendum and any change should have gone through the Charter Revision process. We therefore urged the Commission to put a

question on the ballot offering voters a clear choice, yes or no, on term limits.

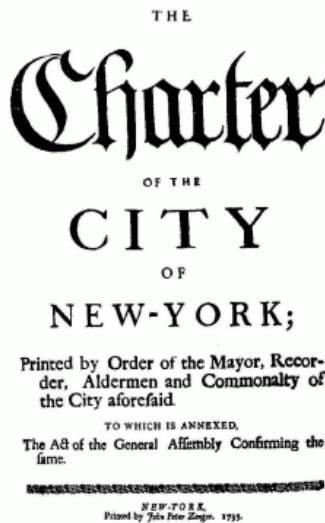
The Commission rejected our recommendation and the question on the ballot asks if the voter wants to reinstitute the two-term limit; if the question is voted down, the current three-term limit remains in effect. We believe that the best term limit is the choice available to voters on Election Day and there is no evidence that we have better public officials because of statutory limits but we consider three terms better than two. Consequently, we oppose a two-term limit and urge a NO vote on Question #1.

The second question on the ballot is a different matter. Almost everyone who testified urged the

Commission to ask separate questions for the several issues under consideration but the Commission insisted that the Board of Elections had indicated that the space for the questions on the ballot was very limited. In the end, seven unrelated proposals have been combined into a single question. The Board of Directors of the LWVNYC reviewed the components of the question and decided that the majority of the provisions would significantly improve accountability and transparency in city government and may not easily be secured through the legislative process. We therefore recommend a YES vote on Question #2.

What became apparent to us through this Charter Revision process is that significant charter change cannot be achieved in four or five months, the average duration for all of the Charter Revision Commissions appointed since 1989. We also came away from this experience with concerns about whether a Commission appointed entirely by a Mayor will ever be willing to consider proposals which reduce the power of the Mayor, such as independent budgets for other elected officials or decentralization of planning and development. We will be pursuing our proposal regarding the Department of Education with the City Council and the State Legislature and we will be reviewing legislation which would change the Charter Revision Commission appointment provision in the Municipal Home Law.

Adrienne Kivelson



News from LWWUS

“Disclose Act” Rejected – Despite a major effort by the League and other “good government” groups, legislation designed to restore transparency to U.S. elections by requiring disclosure of corporate and union spending fell one-vote short of the needed 60 votes in the U.S. Senate in September. The League will continue to monitor proposals and work for change in campaign financing.

Hydraulic Fracturing - Following up on their success at the national convention in June, supporters of stronger regulation of oil and gas drilling are urging that this issue become part of the LWWUS priorities for 2011-12. One goal is to close the “Halliburton loophole,” which exempted the oil and gas industry from restrictions in the Safe Drinking Water Act. To support the League’s efforts in this area at state or national levels, or to obtain more information, write to Sullivanmaryanne@yahoo.com.

News from LWWNYS

League Day at the U.N. – Join League members and friends from around the state for the League’s annual United Nations briefing. This year’s topic is “Microfinance: From Struggle for Survival to Planning for the Future.” The program will be held on Tuesday, November 9, from 2:00 to 4:30, at the Church Center of the United Nations, 777 U.N. Plaza (on the west side of 1st Avenue). The cost for the briefing will be \$55. For details and registration form, see the State League website, LWWNY.org, or call 518-465-4162.

State Legislative Agenda for 2011 – Still “Fixing Albany” – The League’s priorities for 2010 focused on making the State Legislature cleaner and more competitive. Our emphasis was on campaign finance, ethics, and other good government and election reforms. Some changes were enacted, including simplifying the application for absentee ballots. Much remains to be done, however, and the State Board recommends that we continue to focus on those areas while also acting on issues covered by existing positions as opportunities arise.

Redistricting – The creation of an independent commission to draw new district lines for Congress and the State Legislature has been a League priority for decades and is a

lively issue once again, following the decennial federal census. Our goal is to raise public awareness of the problems with the current process so that legislators will hear from their constituents about the need for change. Watch for information about a forum on this subject in January.

LWWNYC Joins Coalition to Support Islamic Center

A coalition of civic, cultural, and religious organizations in New York City came together in August to counteract the opposition to a proposed Islamic Center near Ground Zero which was coming from groups and political leaders across the nation. New York Neighbors for American Values includes more than three dozen local organizations, including the NYC League of Women Voters. Following is the statement issued by the group.

“America is strongest when her people stand united by the freedoms on which our nation was founded. New York Neighbors for American Values embraces our core American values of religious freedom, diversity and equality. As community groups and organizations representing hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, we welcome the planned Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan – as we would welcome any center planned by neighbors of good will.

“New York is one of the world’s greatest cities thanks to the richness, vibrancy and diversity of those who call New York home. The shared hopes and dreams of countless New Yorkers have united our city for centuries. We will not allow anyone to sow fear and division or condemn the warm embrace we have always offered to all people from all lands. We call on our country’s politicians, pundits and leaders to live up to the freedoms enshrined in our Constitution, the very values Americans have fought for and held dear for centuries. And we call on our neighbors in New York and across the nation to stand up and stand united: Our Constitution’s founding freedoms extend to every person and every house of worship, regardless of creed or color. America’s founding values must be welcome on every street and town square across the nation.”

The coalition also joined with those opposing the efforts to stop construction of a mosque in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn.

The New Voting Machines -- Reviewing Primary Day Operations

For 90 years voter education and election administration have been priorities for the LWVNYC. In recent years we strongly supported replacement of our lever voting machines with paper ballots, optical scanners, and ballot marking devices and we paid close attention to the operations on Primary Day when NYC voters used them for the first time. We also circulated a survey among members and friends to learn about their experience and the conditions at the polls. In recent weeks, LWV City Affairs Chair Kate Doran testified before the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Elections and the City Council Committee on Government Operations on our observations, the results of our survey, and recommendations for resolving problems that arose.

Among the highlights* of Kate's testimony were the following:

For most New York City voters, using the new system was quick and easy. The Board of Elections Voter Education Program was well-designed and publicized and voters felt prepared for the experience. Machine-related problems were isolated and promptly resolved. The largest number of problems resulted from inadequate training and management of poll workers.

Privacy was a major concern. In many polling places, privacy booths were turned the wrong way so passers-by could see how voters were marking their ballots; privacy panels were not installed on many scanners; over-zealous inspectors often took marked ballots from voters to check to see if they were filled out accurately or to feed them through the scanner. A common problem was the lack of privacy sleeves.

The disabilities community had done an excellent job of alerting its constituencies to the availability of the AutoMark ballot marking devices but poll workers were often unable or reluctant to assist voters in the use of the device.

The biggest complaint, based on our survey, is that the print was TOO SMALL. The size of type and the layout of the ballot are directly tied to the State Election Law which requires that the names of all candidates must fit in the frame of the ballot – the “full-face” ballot. The law includes specific requirements on relative type size and placement of candidates' names and parties. We believe it is time to revisit these requirements. Now that we have a voting system that permits multiple-page ballots, we urge the Legislature and the State Board of Elections to explore best practices for the design of election materials and to pursue efforts to produce more voter friendly ballots.

A new amendment to the State Election Law authorizes boards of elections to employ election inspectors to work half-day shifts. We believe that the 16-hour day has been a disincentive to civic-minded individuals who might otherwise appreciate the opportunity for public service. We also believe that poll workers should have strong communication and problem solving skills. We encourage the NYC Board to embrace the eight-hour work shift and to develop an open, public, skills-based recruitment plan. We are confident that these two initiatives combined will address most of the problems identified by voters on September 14th and permit the recruiting and retaining of competent, professionally minded workers. We recommend a pilot project be designed for the November 2nd general election.

**The complete text of these statements can be found on our website, lwnyc.org*

The League on the Web

www.lwnyc.org

Visit our website for up-to-date details of LWVNYC membership and committee meetings and special programs. In addition, on the **Elections** page, you can find a link to the State's voter registration data base where you can verify your own registration.

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

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Administrative Assistant Mary C. Palmer

Welcome to Mary Palmer



Mary C. Palmer joined the City League in January as Administrative Assistant. Previously Mary worked for the People Fund, a nonprofit in Austin, Texas. Her expertise

in computer programming has helped in the design and production of our print materials and in our ability to maintain an accurate record of our membership. In the spring we installed a new database for members, committees, other contacts, and friends, and Mary did all of the programming. She has also programmed links for PayPal (the online payment center) to the Membership page of our website to receive membership renewals, which will reduce the costs associated with paper mailings. Most recently, she has been working on a protocol that will permit us to make minor changes to our website internally, so that it can be kept up-to-date more easily. Always cheerful and willing to try new things, Mary is a wonderful addition to our staff.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

As you will see throughout this newsletter, we have been working at an accelerated pace this fall, doing all we can to provide information and resources that encourage informed and active participation in the coming election. Expanded marketing efforts have made it possible for us to share voter and election information with a wider audience. With the addition of our Facebook page, YouTube channel, and most recently our Twitter account, we are continuing to grow within the realm of social media. We advertised our need for Associated Press volunteers on Facebook, posted videos of the Primary Debates that we co-sponsored with Manhattan Neighborhood Network on YouTube, and issued our first "tweet" to announce our October 19th meeting.

Our website continues to improve as we streamline the many layers of resources and improve the site's navigation scheme. We have adjusted the location of certain items and will continue to do so. (Please visit the site often to see our progress.) Major additions have been made to the Elections page, including an option to request election information in Braille, thanks to our friends at the NY Center for Independence of the Disabled. We also offered an online survey to obtain feedback from voters on their experiences with the new voting system. Also on the Elections page is an excerpt of the video from our voting system demonstration, filmed and edited by Manhattan Neighborhood Network. The Board of Elections was so impressed by the video, they added it to their website!

Also featured on the Elections page of the website is VOTE411.org, an interactive online voting guide. We entered names and party endorsements of more than 200 candidates for statewide offices as well as those in legislative and congressional district races throughout the five boroughs. Candidates were invited to upload their photograph, biographical information, and answers to several questions composed by the League of Women Voters. There are many online guides available but it is my hope that the League will continue to use VOTE411.org and make it the most comprehensive online voter guide available. Give it a try and create your ballot before you go to the polls.

Looking ahead, our post-election voter survey will be posted on the Elections page of the website close to November 2. Please use it to tell us about your experience at the polls, and urge your friends to use it as well. The more feedback we receive the stronger our case will be to improve the voting system the next time we testify at the Board of Elections.

There are many opportunities for valuable volunteer service at the League. Whether you have a lot of time or a little, we would welcome your participation. For details, please call me at 212-725-3541.

ASHTON J. STEWART

New York's Broken Juvenile Justice System: Is It Being Fixed? December Membership Meeting

Moderator: Justice Sheryl L. Parker, Supreme Court, Kings County

Panel: Jeremy Travis, President, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Gladys Carrion, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children & Family Services

Laurence Busching, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Division of Youth and Family Justice

Vincent Schiraldi, Commissioner, NYC Department of Probation

Alfred Siegel, Deputy Director, Center for Court Innovation

Thursday, December 2nd, 6:30 – 8 p.m., NYC Bar Association, 42 West 44th Street

*Sponsored by the League of Women Voters of the City of New York,
NYC Bar Association Juvenile Justice Committee, Fund for Modern Courts*

Events in 2011

January – Redistricting Forum – why we need an independent commission to draw new district lines for Congress and the Legislature. At the Brennan Center, 161 Sixth Avenue. Date to be announced. Co-sponsors: Brennan Center & Women's City Club.

March – Women's History Month – Marking the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire – speaker and date to be announced

Thursday, May 5 – Annual Education Fund Luncheon – 12-2 p.m. – Hotel Roosevelt

We're Going Green! *In the interest of economy and the environment, the League is striving to reduce our dependence on postal mail. If you have an email address, we hope you will share it with us. Call 212-725-3541 or write to office@lwv.org to add your email address to our record. Thank you!*