

SUMMER 2007 NEWSLETTER

Update on the National LWV study of Immigration

This study is broader and deeper than any one piece of proposed legislation. Therefore that Senate legislation is off the table, possibly until the 2008 election, does not change our study plan which is to be ready for consensus by the end of 2007.

Where are we now? Those of you who attended our spring general meeting heard a positive view of the role immigrants play in keeping New York a growing city rather than a shrinking city which is the fate of most large cities in America. Joseph Salvo, Dept. of City Planning, explained this and showed us the data to support that conclusion.

Whether you have learned from the newspapers and other media or have studied the League's "white papers" on the national website, I hope you have increased your knowledge and appreciation for the complexity of these issues. Many good people have sincere points of view with which you might not agree. Some are not driven by changing neighborhoods and overcrowded schools. Some have capitalized politically on people's fears. Others are sympathetic and appreciative of the workers whom we really seem to need - - but still, they are here illegally.

Our job is to study the history of immigration in America, sort through our values on this difficult subject, and try to develop principles for future immigration laws that would be just and effective over time. In the past we've had a succession of laws that failed, laws that led inexorably (e. g. in 1986) to legalization of those already here, a policy many are rejecting.

Major issues include: When and how would we actually close important borders? Would such action be less important if a new law brought effective documentation and forced employers to verify legal status of workers? Should the point system be tilted away from family reunification and toward those with high level skills needed by industry? Should there be a guest worker program? Would it lead to a permanent underclass and draw down the wages of legal workers? Is there a way to "legalize" those already here that would be acceptable to most people?

Do come and learn with us. The next committee meeting will be **August 1, 12:30 p. m.** at our 33rd street offices. And keep reading and thinking . Consensus issues have just been released. We hope to have more speakers, discussion, and consensus which is due in January 2008.

Have a happy, healthy summer - *Ellie Miller*

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Help America Vote Act (HAVA)

Mary Lou Urban

Thanks to all those who called and sent emails—3000 of them in two days—the effort to weaken the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) regulations were defeated.

We also gained a victory in the final moments of the State Senate/Assembly session when a bill was passed that the Citizen Election Modernization Advisory Committee now is legally enabled to obtain vital technical information about voting machines. Bo Lipari of the Schuyler county LWV and executive director of New Yorkers for Verified Voting has been the State League's representative of this committee for the past year. It is composed of 14 members from diverse areas, and is empowered to assist the New York State Board of Education in the examination of voting machines or systems submitted for certification in NYS, and to recommend which machines meet the requirements of HAVA.

City Affairs Committee Focuses on Affordable Housing and Campaign Finance

Adrienne Kivelson, Chair

The Grande Finale of our committee's efforts to become informed on the status of affordable housing in New York City were the inspiring presentations at our Annual Meeting by Margarita Lopez, Housing Authority Board Member and former City Council member, and Liz Krueger, State Senator and ranking member of the Senate Housing Committee. Our efforts on housing issues now will turn to advocacy for city and state legislation which preserves existing affordable housing and promotes development of new affordable housing. We will be working closely with the Lobby Corps, because most housing programs in the city are governed by state law and require enabling legislation from the State Legislature. For example, any changes in how Mitchell-Lama housing is financed and operated require state legislative approval.

Campaign Finance reform has been an ongoing priority of the League on the national, state and local levels. In fact, New York City has the best campaign finance laws of the three. On June 27th the City Council passed an even more far-reaching reform bill which, if implemented successfully, will eliminate "pay to play" -- when campaign contributions influence public policy. It limits contributions from "people doing business with the city" to \$400 for a city-wide candidate and to \$250 for a candidate for the City Council, and bars matching funds for these contributions. To encourage candidates to seek small contributions, the 4 to 1 match for contributions under \$250 is increased to 6 to 1 for contributions under \$175. The bill also simplifies and clarifies the procedures, rules and regulations for participating candidates and codifies due process protections.

We testified in support of the bill, but have some serious concerns about whether the prerequisite database of "people doing business with the city" can be developed, implemented and successfully maintained. The bill provides that if the database is not in place by November 2008, the campaign contribution limits will not be used in the 2009 city elections. If this happens, or if the changes result in more burdensome bureaucracy we believe the Council should consider full public financing, which is a long term goal of the League.

We will continue to monitor actions of the City Council and invite you to join us in this important effort. If you have any questions or want more information on the committee please call me at 718-762-4399 or email me--kivfam@aol.com.

Legislative Action Committee

Phyllis Wells, Robin Bahr Co-Directors

Just before the close of this year's legislative session in Albany, there was a "stealth" effort to alter the state's election law regarding voting machines. According to an alert from Barbara Bartoletti and Aimee Allaud, Microsoft tried to introduce legislation to ban the state's access into the codes which govern electronic voting machines. This would have nullified the state's ability to review the source code protections provided in the current law, if electronic machines are purchased for future elections.

3000 calls were made to Albany in protest. The effort was abandoned. This was a victory for grass roots lobbying and a demonstration to those of us directly involved in the effort to reform state government, that advocacy can succeed.

We need to keep that in mind because reform of Albany remains an uphill battle.

Even with Governor Spitzer leading the charge, there were few victories on our legislative agenda. An increase of \$1.7 Billion was awarded to NYC public education, and for the first time, the legislature used a foundation approach as the basis for allocation of funds. The League has long supported this approach which was a major change from the formulas which have served as the basis of funding in the past. But the lid on Charter Schools was raised to 200. And no action was taken on Campaign Finance, Redistricting or the other issues involved in electoral reform.

The Lobbying Corps, (renamed the Legislative Action Committee), will reassemble in September to recommend legislative priorities for 2007-2008. We will review advocacy strategies and tactics and adopt a plan of action for the next legislative session. We ask you to become part of this campaign. Numbers matter. As the committee grows, so does our voice and our reach. The success of the League's campaign to protect electoral law in New York gives hope and heart to our cause. Join us in this fight to restore the democratic process in Albany. As the League knows from its own history, democracy is a cause worth fight for.

[To find out when committees meet go to the EVENTS page.](#)