

COUNTY VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTCHESTER
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January/February 2007

BREAKFAST WITH THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

ANDREW SPANO

Wednesday, February 21, 2007

9:30 AM

White Plains Library
Martine Avenue

***Mr. Spano will discuss important issues facing Westchester
County and will answer questions from the audience***

***Coffee and bagels will be served
at no charge***

SAVE THE DATE!!

New York State League Convention

May 18-20, 2007

Crowne Plaza Hotel
White Plains

From the President's Desk

Welcome to the New Year 2007!

T.S. Eliot said that April is the cruelest month, but I think January is. Although it is my birth month, I find it to be dull, dark, dreary and **cold**. Not this year, you say? Just wait. Janus, the two-faced god, has been looking to the west, but he may soon cast his baleful eyes on the east and frigid weather may be the result. Keep those woolens handy.

Looking back over the past several months, the Voters Service group, coordinated by Noreen Fisher, has done an outstanding job. The Tappan Zee Bridge study group, chaired by Kristina McCarthy, has been moving along expeditiously. In a very narrow time frame, Barbara Strauss and Mary Beth Gose, co-chairs of the County Budget Committee, prepared a statement of the League's views on the proposed 2007 County Budget. They also honored retiring County Budget Director, Kathleen Carrano. She has been replaced by Ann Reasoner, formerly of the MTA, Barbara's least favorite Authority.

Karen Schatzel has kept us current on the complexity of Housing issues in the County. The NY Times published Roberta Wiernik's article entitled, "A Drinking Problem," which explained the relationship between clean water and septic systems. The Fair Campaign Practices Committee held hearings on several complaints during the recent election campaign season.

And now, like Janus, we look ahead to the year 2007. We are hoping to receive funding once again from Con Edison for the very popular 2007 Directory of Officials. Olga has started work on updating it, and we hope to have it ready by mid-April. The County Government Committee continues to monitor the county's Legislation Committee, which is now preparing the 2007 Joint State Legislative Program; and we continue to monitor what is happening, or not happening, in Albany on new voting machines.

On February 21 we will have our annual Breakfast with the County Executive; and on March 26 we will sponsor Student Legislative Day. Please mark your calendars for the NYS League's Convention to be held this year at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in White Plains, May 18, 19, 20. This is a wonderful opportunity to see your NYS League in action, right in our own backyard. Finally, our own LWV of Westchester Convention will be held on June 7, details to come.

I am looking forward to an exciting and productive year for the LWV of Westchester. If you would like to be involved in any of the above activities, please contact us at our new e-mail address: **LWWwestchester@verizon.net**. Your message will be forwarded to the person who is managing that topic.

Rosemary

LWW LIST OF OFFICERS – 2006

President	Rosemary MacLaughlin
First VP	Adelaide DiGiorgi
2 nd VP	Noreen Fisher
3 rd VP	Kitt Rosenthal
Treasurer	Sydelle Herzberg
Secretary	Felice Kaufman
Directors:	Ina Aronow
	Renee Baylor
	Laura Fratt
	Mary Beth Gose
	Janet Jaidi
	Claire Prohl
	Karen Schatzel
	Barbara Strauss
	Selma Thackeray

MESSAGE FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Dear League Members,

The Nominating Committee of your County League is reaching out to League members with an invitation to consider joining the County League Board by assuming important leadership positions, **and/or** joining a range of committees which offer the experience so critical to the development of future leaders. We need help with key program items such as, lobbying for electoral process reform; a study of Tappan Zee Bridge reconstruction alternatives; and lobbying for a County-wide septic management plan. We also need help in other areas, for example, fundraising and membership, which are so essential to sustaining our work and hopefully reaching out to a wider audience.

Although board positions entail a serious commitment of time and energy, they also provide excellent preparation for a variety of public policy careers. Locally, Assemblywomen Amy Paulin and Suzy Oppenheimer, County Legislator Kay Carsky, Supervisor Marion Sinek, among others, all gained valuable experience through intense involvement in the League. Jo Brill, past president of your County League, is presently working for the Citizen's Budget Commission, and I have been helping develop environmental policy for Eliot Spitzer's gubernatorial campaign. I can personally testify to the incredibly supportive and helpful atmosphere within which I, in my past role as 2nd VP. and co-chair of the Environment Committee for your County League, was encouraged to stretch and grow in confidence, as well as competence, in so many ways.

Our candidate(s) should be generally familiar with League practice and policy (e.g., strict nonpartisanship), though not necessarily someone who has been an officer on the local level. We are seeking, above all, committed and conscientious persons. All board members are required to attend meetings at the League's headquarters in White Plains on the first Thursday of the month at the Community Unitarian Church in White Plains. The board adjourns, however, for the summer months (July and August).

We are grateful for your involvement and look forward to hearing from you! For more details about the responsibilities of Board positions, and to let us know your interest, please contact any of the following committee members.

Sincerely,

Heather Baker-Sullivan

For your 2006 Nominating Committee, LWV of Westchester:
Heather Baker-Sullivan, Chair riverliffey4@aol.com
Mary Beth Gose megose@att.net
Claire Prohl CDPohl@aol.com
Robina Ramsey rkram@optonline.net

LOCAL LEAGUE ACTIVITIES**BRONXVILLE LWV**

“Staying Healthy in a Fowl Situation:
Epidemic of Chicken-related Diseases vs Consumer”
Speaker: Dr. Urvashi Rangan, Consumers Union
Senior Scientist and Policy Analyst

Tuesday, February 13, 2007
7:00 PM
Bronxville Library

*Ninth Annual Women's History Month Conference Sarah Lawrence College
Friday/Saturday, March 2-3, 2007*

*WOMEN AT WAR: Soldiers, Sisters, Survivors
Keynote Speaker: Janis L. Karpinski*

Former commander at Abu Ghraib and author of the book:

ONE WOMAN'S ARMY: The Commanding General of Abu Ghraib Tells Her Story

LWV Bronxville is a co-sponsor. (For information, go to Sarah Lawrence Website: www.slc.edu and click on graduate studies, women's history, Conference 2007)

Voter Service – 2006-2007 – Noreen Fisher

Voters Guides

This year we produced the same number of Voters Guides as in years past (181,000 English and 20,000 Spanish). The number of English copies we mailed continues to decline as local Leagues find it too costly to mail and we have compensated by increasing the number of Guides we deliver to local libraries, post offices and municipal offices. The Spanish Guide is not mailed but is distributed to libraries and municipal offices and to specific Hispanic outreach centers. This year we targeted retirement communities in our English distribution as that population is less likely to use the internet to access information.

Internet/Smart Voter

This year we continued to post our two Guides on our local website (lwwestchester.org) and on the National LWV website (lww.org). In addition, we entered into a LWVNY pilot program with Smart Voter (smartvoter.org) in cooperation with the Westchester County Board of Elections and uploaded specific candidate information onto the Westchester Smart Voter site. The BOE added the Smart Voter site to its website under (“Candidate information”).

Smart Voter allows voters to confirm their polling place, compiles an address specific candidate list and candidate information and also includes other standard information like dates and procedures for registering etc. The site does allow candidates to access their page and change their information as the campaign progresses but as this was a pilot for us we did not enable that feature in the fall. Under Smart Voter guidelines we would have to “check” all candidate- updates for appropriateness and we did not feel we had the manpower to do that this fall. We hope to try out the candidate updating feature with the spring village and school board elections. The beauty of this site is that it can be used as a resource for all elections, fall and spring without the need to produce printed pages.

Newspaper in Education/Journal News

This year we were asked to supply the candidate information to the Journal News for them to insert into their Middle School/High School Newspaper in Education edition on Voting. We did do that using information on statewide candidates we received from the LWVNY. In return they inserted a piece we wrote about the League to educate these future voters. We understand teachers were very happy with the edition and used it in their classrooms.

Hispanic Outreach

This year we increased our outreach to the Hispanic population with a series of articles in El Aquila about citizenship issues and voting. In addition we used some foundation funding to print up material in Spanish and held a registration and voter information drive at the Hispanic Day festival at the Kensico Dam over the summer.

We also conducted a citizenship class in Yonkers for over 200 immigrants in ESL classes reviewing the basics of the steps to citizenship, providing written material on civics classes available in Westchester and information on the written and oral tests and providing the classes with a list of who represents them at each level of government and of how one becomes able to vote. We provided written materials in both English and Spanish including our two Voters Guides.

Candidate Forums/Voter Registration

Local Leagues continued to organize candidate forums in their areas. These forums are reported on in papers and shown on cable. This year our New Rochelle league partnered with RNN to run two in studio debates for the 17th and 18th Congressional District races as well. These in studio debates were a first for us.

We held registration drives whenever requested. We find most of our requests come from active/assisted living centers and homeless shelters where changes of address are the primary issue. The County League is constrained by a lack of manpower in more extensive registration efforts.

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE PROJECT - Kristina McCarthy

A Study Committee of the Westchester County LWV has been meeting to collect information on this project as it will have a significant impact on all of us in the region. The bridge is about 50 years old and needs improvements; \$150-\$200 million is being spent yearly to keep it safe. The NY State Department of Transportation, the Thruway Authority and Metro-North Railroad have formed an Inter-Metropolitan Planning Organization (IMPO) and are completing the first phase of the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287 Environmental Review. An Alternatives Analysis details six alternatives that are now being carried forward into the second phase of study, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The alternatives were reviewed by the Westchester Rockland Tappan Zee Futures Task Force in two rounds of public meetings and narrowed down. The six alternatives that remained at the end of that screening compose the short list of the most viable alternatives. They are detailed in the Alternatives Analysis at www.tzbsite.com. At this point, engineering studies have been commissioned to determine the viability of the alternatives. They will particularly impact the practicality of adding commuter rail transit, bus rapid transit or light rail transit.

The league has delved into extensive research of the remaining 6 options, and will continue to examine each new study published. We have formed a Tappan Zee Study group comprised of members from the Westchester County League, as well as the New Castle, Rivertowns, Somers, and former BOCC leagues. We have had 2 influential speakers at our meetings to who discussed in-depth their knowledge of areas pertaining to the studies of the bridge. Maureen Morgan spoke with the our group about the importance of rail commuting for future generations, as gasoline becomes scarcer and baby-boomers continue to work well into their late 60s. We garnered knowledge about the existing railroad lines, and how a connection of these rails could link over 4 states, with a single easy ride. The availability of new labor pools into developing cities would be fantastic, and great for the economy.

Our second speaker was Michael Anderson, Lead Engineer of the Tappan Zee Bridge re-construction project. Mr. Anderson graciously walked us through the process which had taken place in order to narrow down the possibilities to the current 6 alternatives. He then explained in depth the differences between each alternative, highlighting the specific benefits of each one. It was a great experience for all league members as we engaged in a question and answer session with Mr. Anderson patiently answering our technical and not so technical questions of where the future studies would lead us. At the end of the presentation we had a better sense of where we had come from and exactly how much work was left to be done.

We are hoping to welcome another speaker to the group, this time with a different twist. We are considering inviting someone who was involved in the original design of the Tappan Zee Bridge, to gather insight into why it was designed the way it was. Then we are hoping to focus during the next 2 or 3 months on additional information which might provide insight into the final cost to Westchester residents. We are mindful of the additional traffic this new bridge may bring to the area, not only in numbers of vehicles, but also in numbers of individuals. Will Westchester County be ready to undertake the industrial development that will be necessary to employ these new people?

HEALTH CARE – Edith Szold

In December, 2006 the state's Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st Century released its final report on the health care industry of NY State. It recommended sweeping changes in how that care is financed along with reducing the number of hospitals and changing the functions of many others. Under the law that created the Commission, its recommendations were to become law in their entirety unless rejected by the the legislature or the then Governor Pataki. All recommendations were to be carried out by the end of 2007. At the urgent request of the affected hospitals, however, it is under a 30-day injunction, after which the court will issue a ruling.

According to Stephen Berger, the Commission Chair, the plan calls for 48 "reconfigurations" through mergers, downsizing and differently defined missions. Under-used general hospitals, for example, may turn into free-standing clinics or dedicated centers for specialty use. The anticipated effect would be to make hospitals more efficient, increase their profits, and better serve the poor. Thousands of current jobs would be lost but others, presumably, would be created by the reorganization.

There has been no opportunity for public discussion but heated, unsolicited reactions have come from patients, doctors and politicians. The report does not deal with HMO's, drug or insurance companies, or other components of the health care system.

The full report can be read on Commission on Health Care Facilities in the 21st century at nytimes.com/nyregion.

**STATEMENT OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTCHESTER AT THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY
BOARD OF LEGISLATORS' PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED 2007 COUNTY BUDGET, DECEMBER 6, 2006,
7:00 P.M., MICHAELIAN OFFICE BUILDING**

The League of Women Voters of Westchester thanks the Board of Legislators for this opportunity to present its view on the proposed budget. We believe that the County budget must reflect the priorities of the citizens and taxpayers for services provided by the county government. In this context, we offer the following comments and suggestions.

Board of Legislators Budget: The League is concerned about the fact that, unlike other departments, the Board of Legislators does not list its personnel and salaries in the operating budget. This oversight must be corrected in future budgets.

Budget Process: The Board of Legislators must vigorously petition the County Executive to release the budget at an earlier date. His current schedule allows no time for analysis and study of this very complex and complicated document. As we have said for more than twenty years, this is a disservice to the public as well as to the Board of Legislators itself.

HAVA ("Help America Vote Act"): Based on extensive research by the LWVNY and LWVW, the League's position is that precinct-based optical scan machines with a verifiable paper trail are the most reliable and cost-effective voting machines available at this time. We expect there will be major increases in expenses required by HAVA legislation. The Board of Elections has already appropriated \$3 million for 2006, and is projected to spend another \$5.1 million in 2007. It is therefore essential that the Board of Legislators keep monitoring this item closely. In addition, we expect voter training to be a major issue, and the League, with its long record of service to voters, looks forward to assisting in this area.

MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority): The County gives the MTA approximately \$130 million from the operating budget from such areas as a portion of the sales and mortgage taxes, with no accountability to the County. The Administration and the Board of Legislators must insist on periodic, audited reports detailing where the money is being spent.

Medical Center: The League believes that the continuing mission of the Medical Center is to serve as the regional tertiary care and trauma center. The League believes that all County support of the Medical Center should be consolidated in one place in both the operating and capital budgets. Since the Medical Center serves six neighboring counties, there should be continuing lobbying at the state level for assistance from these counties.

Taxes: The League is very concerned about the continual peaks and valleys in property tax levies. For example, in 2001 the change in the property tax levy was set at -5.2%. In 2002, the property tax levy was increased by 3.8%. In 2003, the property tax rate increased by 14.9% and was followed by a rise of 18.8% in 2004. In 2005, the tax levy was set at 0%. For 2006, the tax levy increase was 3.9%. In 2007, the proposed tax levy increase is projected to be 3.98%. The League believes that such fluctuations are not fiscally prudent and should be addressed by both the Board of Legislators and the Administration in future budgets.

Reassessment ("Reval"): While the proposed increase in the tax levy is 3.98%, there are municipalities that will sustain a hefty rise due to the lack of Reval. As we have stated in the past, Countywide property reassessment is essential, and the administration and Board of Legislators should immediately move forward to implement it. We are also concerned about the high cost of certioraris, or tax challenges. As shown in the budget, certioraris increased from \$5,461,768 in 2005 to a projected \$9,500,000 for 2006 to \$10,000,000 in 2007.

Contract Agencies: Because the League continues to support full funding of the contract agencies, we applaud the 5% increase for 2007 in this area, but we are concerned that the 2006 increase of 5% has not yet been released to these agencies.

Housing: The League urges continuing County support of the New Home Land Acquisition Fund, the Housing Implementation Fund, and housing assistance organizations, such as the Westchester Residential Opportunities and the Housing Action Council.

Pesticide Control: To ensure full implementation of and compliance with the Pesticide Reduction Law, the League strongly supports funding for a professional Pest Management Coordinator in the Department of Health.

The League of Women Voters of Westchester thanks Budget Director Kathleen Carrano and her staff for their availability and the information they have provided to us. We also thank the Board of Legislators for their consideration of our concerns and suggestions.

The New York Times, Sunday, December 10, 2006

OP-ED

A Drinking Problem

Nine million people drink water from the New York City reservoirs, including the Croton Reservoir; approximately 800,000 of these are Westchester County residents. Twenty thousand homes in Northern Westchester get their water from wells.

While these water supplies have been considered safe, they are threatened by malfunctioning septic systems, which are placed on the property of individual houses, housing developments and businesses; these systems treat the wastewater on the premises instead of sending it to a central treatment plant. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, failing septic systems are the second largest cause of water pollution - and this includes drinking water. The agency estimates that 168,000 viral illnesses and 34,000 bacterial illnesses result every year from contaminated drinking water.

Of primary concern are the waterborne pathogens from feces seeping from malfunctioning septic systems. These pathogens are a threat to public health, a threat that became a reality in Westchester in 1996 when there was an outbreak of hepatitis caused by a septic system that contaminated the drinking water of a community well in New Castle.

Ten years later, Westchester County has done little to attack the causes of this dangerous situation. What the county needs is tighter regulations for septic systems.

In 1997 the towns in the New York City watershed and Westchester County signed an agreement with the city to put aside money designated to safeguard the threatened water supply. In particular, some of this money was to be used to clean up and replace failing septic systems with sewers connected to county-owned treatment plants, thus diverting wastewater from the watershed.

Unfortunately, the allocation of money for the diversion plan never made it to a vote at the board of Legislators because constituents living near the plants asserted that these treatment facilities could not deal with increased sewage.

Septic systems can be a cost-effective and efficient means of treating wastewater if they are properly designed, sited, constructed and maintained. The Westchester County Department of Health regulates the first three criteria, but no agency oversees maintenance once the system is installed. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, it is the lack of maintenance that leads to system failure; therefore, the agency has issued guidelines to encourage communities to adopt effective maintenance programs.

Westchester County has about 45,000 septic systems. Most of them are more than 30 years old, and were built with what is now outdated technology and under regulations that were weak or non-existent. Many of these systems are failing and could potentially pollute our water. The county needs to establish a program to ensure that owners of septic systems know how to care for them and that they are being regularly maintained by qualified persons.

Counties and states across the country have set up septic management plans to provide oversight, education, and inspections. In fact, the Westchester County Department of Planning drafted such a plan in 2000; for unexplained reasons, the plan was shelved and so far nothing has replaced it.

At a minimum, the county plan should include an education program on maintenance for owners of septic systems, and a requirement for regular pumping and inspections by certified persons with copies of these records sent to the Department of Health for inclusion in a database for tracking compliance.

It would be a shame if we waited until a larger public health emergency, like the hepatitis incident, frightened us into finally taking this action to protect our drinking water.

Rosemary MacLaughlin, President

Roberta Wiernik, Chair, Environment Committee

COUNTY VOTER

League of Women Voters of Westchester
White Plains Mall, 200 Hamilton Ave., White Plains, NY 10601

Non-Profit org.
U.S. Postage
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White Plains, NY
Permit No. 615

IMPORTANT DATES

Feb 1	9:30 AM	LWVW Executive Board Meeting	Com.Unitarian Ch. 468 Rosedale Ave White Plains
Feb 21	9:30 AM	Breakfast with County Executive Andrew Spano	White Plains Library Martine
Avenue			

SAVE THE DATE!!!

May 18-20		LWVNYS Convention	Crowne Plaza Hotel White Plains
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