

COUNTY VOTER

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTCHESTER
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March/April 2007

Legislative Committees in Action

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

10:30 AM

**Eighth Floor Conference Room
Michaelian Office Building
White Plains**

League members and guests will meet with the Chairs of the County Legislative Committees for a discussion of initiatives and priorities for the coming year

Student Legislative Day

Monday, March 26, 2007

8:30 AM to 2:00 PM

**Michaelian Office Building
White Plains**

Students from around the county will attend a regular meeting of the legislature, lobby their legislators on a League issue and participate in a mock session where the students become the legislators and vote on issues chosen for debate. This annual event is sponsored by the LWVW and the Board of Legislators.

From the President's Desk

And here comes March!

February flew by in a New York minute, and capricious March stretches ahead with unpredictable days to come. Named for the Roman god of war, the planet Mars revolves about the sun for 687 days -- aren't you glad you aren't a Martian? But never fear, the League will keep you busy for 31 of those 687 days. Plan to attend the following important events.

Wednesday, March 14, 10:30am to 12 Noon, Legislative Committees in Action. League members and guests will meet with our County Legislators to hear about their initiatives and priorities for the coming year. Chairman William J. Ryan will preside over a discussion with the chairs of the County's legislative committees. Expected are Mike Kaplowitz of B&A; Tom Abinanti of E&E; Judy Myers of F,H& HS; Bernice Spreckman of G,C& ED; Lois Bronz of H,P& GO; and Vito Pinto of Legislation. Don't understand this alphabet soup? Come and find out what each of these tongue-twisting committees does. Questions from the audience are encouraged.

The Tappan Zee Bridge issue was front and center in the Journal News this week. This huge project will have far-reaching effects on Westchester, Rockland and surrounding areas. The lead agencies are the NYSDOT, MTA/Metro-North RR and NYS Thruway Authority. The League's TZB Committee has been gathering information on the Six Alternatives being studied by these agencies.

Want to know where we are with voting machines in NYS right now? See the reprint of the LWV of Saratoga's update elsewhere in this County Voter. And, you might want to attend the LWV of New Castle Coffee on Wednesday, March 21, featuring Marion Sinek and Laura Porter, who will speak on "New Voting Systems - Counting Every Vote and Making Every Vote Count."

Student Legislative Day, Monday, March 26, 8:30am-2:30pm. Denise Berthier has been working hard to put together this very popular event in cooperation with the Westchester County Board of Legislators. Students will observe a formal meeting of the Board of Legislators, lobby legislators over lunch, and participate in a mock legislative session of their own. For information, call Denise at 779-6748

Spring begins on March 20, the same day as Village Elections.

Rosemary

Looking ahead to April:

Thursday, April 19, 10am to 12 Noon, Training Session for the LWV NYS Annual Convention, at the White Plains Library, 2nd floor. Volunteers and Presidents of Local Leagues are strongly urged to attend. Edna Vincenti, Coordinator of Volunteers, and other members of the LWV NYS will provide training. The March SBR has information about the Convention, to be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in White Plains, May 18, 19, 20, 2007. There will be speakers, entertainers, a special breakfast for presidents, a banquet for all. And, there will be a Silent Auction and a Big-League Raffle. More details to come.

The Reform New York Coalition, which consists of about 35 good government groups, will hold its 3rd annual Lobby Day in Albany on April 23. Participants will advocate for three important issues: Campaign Finance Reform, Redistricting Reform, and more Rules changes. Speakers have been invited from the highest levels of NYS government. This will be an enjoyable and worthwhile opportunity to make our priorities known to those who represent us in Albany. A bus will leave from Westchester.

LWW LIST OF OFFICERS – 2006

President	Rosemary MacLaughlin
First VP	Adelaide DiGiorgi
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	Karen Schatzel
	Barbara Strauss
	Selma Thackeray

THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS

and

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTCHESTER

invite members and guests to attend

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES IN ACTION

Wednesday, March 14, 2007

10:30 AM to 12 Noon

Michaelian Office Building, 8th Floor

William J. Ryan, BOL Chair, will preside

Speakers:

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS – Michael Kaplowitz

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY – Thomas Abinanti

FAMILY, HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES – Judith Myers

GENERATIONAL, CULTURAL & ETHNIC DIVERSITY – Bernice Spreckman

HOUSING, PLANNING & GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS – Lois Bronz

LEGISLATION – Vito Pinto

**Legislators will discuss their initiatives and priorities and answer questions
From the audience.**

For information, call: LWVWestchester 949-0507 or A. DiGiorgi 779-1288

LOCAL LEAGUE ACTIVITIES

BEDFORD/LEWISBORO/NORTH SALEM LWV

“Will Water Issues Drown Affordable Housing Plans?” – Wednesday, March 14, 2007 at 7:30 PM at the Katonah Library, 28 Bedford Road, Katonah. The public is invited to participate in a discussion with a distinguished panel of experts including Bedford Town Supervisor Lee Roberts, Joan Arnold of A-HOME, Bedford town Engineer Jim Hahn, Jim Killoran from Habitat for Humanity and Norma Drummond of Westchester County’s Department of Planning. Refreshments will be provided.

BRONXVILLE LWV

“It Can Happen to Anyone--Wrongful Convictions and the Death Penalty” – Jeffrey Deskovic will be the speaker at the monthly coffee meeting on **Tuesday, March 20, 2007 at 9:30 AM** at the Bronxville Women’s Club, corner of Midland and Tanglewylde. For more info: Adigiorgi@optonline.net.

Jeffrey Deskovic was 17 when a jury found him guilty of murder in the Nov. 15, 1989, death of Angela Correa. The jury knew then that DNA evidence did not match Deskovic, but jury members convicted him based on testimony from a Peekskill detective that Deskovic had confessed to the crime. Deskovic was given coffee during the interrogation session, but no food, and held in a tiny room, without a lawyer or parent. He allegedly confessed after 6 hours, and 3 lie detector tests. Deskovic had been told that if DNA evidence did not point to him, he would not be charged with the crime. This did not happen. The District Attorney decided to pursue the case against Deskovic, relying on the confession. For years after the conviction, local prosecutors rebuffed Deskovic’s requests for DNA tests using more sophisticated methodology. Finally, in September, 2006, the new Westchester District Attorney, Janet DiFiore, agreed. DNA test results proved that Deskovic was innocent of the crime and pointed to the actual killer. Mr. Deskovic’s indictment was thrown out and on September 20, he was released.

Jay Gallagher will be the speaker at the Bronxville League’s Annual Luncheon on **Thursday, April 26, 2007, 12 noon**, at the Lake Isle Country Club, 660 White Plains Road, Eastchester. The subject will be: **“An Irresistible Force Meets an Immovable Object: The Physics of New York Politics”**. For reservations, send check (LWV Bronxville) for \$30 per person to: Dee Sorensen, 10 Vine Street, Bronxville, NY 10708. For more info: Adigiorgi@optonline.net.

LARCHMONT/MAMARONECK LWV (Co –sponsored with RYE and NEW ROCHELLE LEAGUES)

“The Road to Reform: Fixing Government One Step at a Time” – Tom Suozzi, will be the keynote speaker at the L/M LWV Luncheon on **Friday, March 23, 2007 from 12 noon to 2 PM** at the Davenport Club, 400 Davenport Avenue, New Rochelle. ((After his inauguration in January, 2002, Mr. Suozzi led Nassau County, the “worst run” county in the nation, “from the brink of bankruptcy to fiscal health in a matter of three years”. – *The Daily News*) Luncheon Fee: \$45. Send check to LWV of L/M, PO Box 811, Larchmont 10538. For more info: lww10538@aol.com.

NEW CASTLE LWV

“New Voting Systems – Counting Every Vote and Making Every Vote Count”. Speakers will be: Marion Sinek and Laura Porter. The coffee meeting will be held on **Wednesday, March 21, 2007** from 10 AM to Noon at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Chappaqua.

Where we are with voting machines in NYS right now

- The State Board of Elections has had to stop the testing of the voting machines because the company who had been hired and had begun testing, **CIBER**, was decertified by the U.S. government's Election Assistance Commission (EAC).
- This makes it impossible for the state to have voting machines ordered and in place in time for the 2007 elections, as the U.S. court has ordered.
- The League of Women Voters, New Yorkers for Verified Voting, and the Election Commissioners Association are all urging the legislature to pass a new law calling for one machine to be used state-wide (with the obvious advantage in terms of voter education), but still requiring a paper trail and audits to compare machine results to the paper. (An Action Alert Fax Blast to Governor Spitzer has been activated to local league presidents)
- The League of Women Voters, New Yorkers for Verified Voting, and the Election Commissioners Association are all urging that the new machines not be used until 2009, in order to avoid the chaos that might result from using new machines for the first time in a presidential election. Whether the court will allow that remains to be seen.

(thanks to the LWV Saratoga for permission to reprint this brief description of the current status of certification)

THE BIGGER BETTER BOTTLE BILL

Hi to all of my environmental friends and co-workers,

The state LWV is (has been for years) working to pass the Bigger Better Bottle Bill which will capture most beverage containers (an additional 2 BILLION per year) for recycling rather than being discarded. The best part is that the unclaimed deposits will go to the state Environmental Protection Fund to assist local communities.

Hope you will take one minute to support this important legislation. With Gov. Spitzer's support (it's in his budget), the bill actually has a chance of passing the Senate this time. It really only takes one minute, so please go to the www.lwvny.org website (Action Alert) and support the BBBB with your vote. Or contact your state senator directly to urge the passage of this bill.

Roberta Wiernik
LWVNY, Natural Resources Specialist

WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER – Barbara Strauss

The medical center has been served with subpoenas from the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the Office of Health and Human Services for 37 different requests going back to 1997. The requests are mainly for doctors' contracts concerning Medicaid and Medicare. The medical center does not really know what the OIG wants and is meeting with them to clarify these issues. Bill Ryan, Westchester BOL Chairman, called a meeting to discuss this matter with Mr. Israel, head of the center and inquired as to why the BOL learned about this from the *Journal News* rather than from the center directly. Mr. Israel apologized and gave assurances that it would not happen again. A special counsel has been hired. Mr. Ryan said that a special committee of the BOL will be set up to study this problem and to find out who will pay for it.

Early Child Care – Selma Thackaray

Following are excerpts from an Op-Ed dated December 24th, in the Albany Times Union, by Karen Schimke, co-convenor of Winning Beginning, the offshoot of the Child Care that Works (CCtW) lobbying group with which the State LWV has been affiliated. It is encouraging that Governor Spitzer recognized the issue of early childhood education and care in his campaign speeches and quoted from Karen's article in his inaugural address. For anyone interested in obtaining more information, the web address is: winningbeginningny.org

"we urge our state's leaders to make the quality and availability of early care and education a public concern, shifting it from what is today a largely private burden. This not only aligns state policy to the economic reality of life in New York, it helps change this economic reality for the better. As a key first step, we ask state leaders to create an Early Learning Commission charged with developing a smart, coherent investment strategy for high quality early care and education services for New York state..... The child-by-child cost of high quality early care and education lies beyond the buying power of low-income families. Even many middle-income families find the cost a stretch. Meanwhile, under the current "private responsibility" arrangement, the public pays the indirect cost of having generations of children growing up without quality early care and education. The long-term cost of such frugality spans the fiscal impact of poverty, everything from welfare payments, to health care and criminal justice as several academic studies have enumerated. The old ad slogan, "pay me now or pay me later," applies to quality care for kids from birth to age 5, and we also know that paying later means paying more, usually to less effect.....(i.e.) public dollars invested into child care and pre-kindergarten have a lifelong impact on the ability of our state's children to be productive and happy.... these investments cultivate New York state's human potential, our most important resource. Over the long run, public early care and education investments pay for themselves and then some..... the debate about New York's early care and education policy doesn't take place in a vacuum. The United States lags the rest of the world's industrialized nations in rates of public spending on early care and education..... let's not wait for 2008 to make a change.... Creation of an Early Care and Education Commission to oversee the effort is a smart start. It will save missteps later and provide heightened accountability and transparency to the state's early care and education investments."

.....

(A poem from an anonymous member of the LWV, Massachusetts)

Why Don't I Just Quit?

It seems to me that every year
I'm busier than before
I'm tempted to resign from League
Instead, I take on more!
Now why is that? I ask myself
(For surely there's a reason).
I'll have more time, I tell myself,
Right after the rush season.
Besides, League members are my good friends.
I couldn't let them down.
Those surface reasons I advance –
(The real one's farther down)

I think the answer lies somewhere
Deep within myself.
I want to see my talents used,
Not rusted on the shelf.
I want America to be
A better place to live.
Just talking won't improve it -
We also have to give.
I want to find myself among
The workers, not the floaters -
And that is why I am neck-deep
In the LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS!

SLOW THE REVOLVING DOOR

(Letter to Congress from LWVUS – 2/23/07)

The lobbying provisions of lobbying and ethics reform legislation – approved by the Senate by a vote of 96-to-2 on January 18 – are now under consideration by the House of Representatives.

Our organizations strongly urge you to address “revolving door” abuses by incorporating in House legislation restrictions similar to those contained in the Senate bill on former senior public officials taking jobs as lobbyists. These provisions:

- **Extend the “cooling off period”** from one year to two during which former senior officials must refrain from lobbying after leaving public service; and, *even more importantly*,
- **Include “lobbying activities”** – defined narrowly under the Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA) as paid activity intended to facilitate a lobbying contact – as part of lobbying prohibited during the cooling off period.

In the Ethics Reform Act of 1989, Congress recognized that public officials might be influenced by implicit or explicit promises of future employment, as well as the problems that arise when former public officials exploit their connections developed during public service to influence government action for their new private employers. That legislation barred former Members, senior congressional staff and senior executive branch officials from lobbying their former colleagues for one year after leaving office.

But the spirit of the law has not been met.

Today, the revolving door is spinning out of control. Between 1998 and 2004, almost half of Members of Congress who left office moved into lobbying careers on K Street. After the last administration, about a quarter of senior cabinet officials also moved into private employment as lobbyists.

The greatest loophole in the law is that former officials can be hired by lobbying firms immediately after leaving office to plan, strategize and oversee lobbying campaigns. They are only prevented from making “lobbying contacts” – direct contacts such as picking up the telephone and calling their former colleagues.

It is essential to include “lobbying activities” as defined by LDA – *work for compensation specifically intended at the time it is being done to facilitate a lobbying contact* – in the scope of “lobbying” that is prohibited during the cooling off period.

Former public officials can certainly join law firms or public relations firms, write books, give speeches, and pursue all other legitimate career opportunities. But it is important to the public interest that they refrain from working as paid lobbyists and engaging in lobbying activities during the cooling off period. Otherwise the revolving door, which raises so much public suspicion about conflicts of interest, will not slow.

We urge the House to join the Senate in doing what the 1989 ethics law intended: prevent very senior public officials from exploiting their public service by becoming lobbyists for an appropriate period of time after leaving office.

COUNTY VOTER

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

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IMPORTANT DATES

Mar 14	10:30 AM	Legislative Committees in Action	Michaelian Bldg White Plains
Mar 26	8:30 AM	Student Legislative Day	Michaelian Bldg White Plains
Apr 5	9:30 AM	LWVW Executive Board Meeting	Com.Unitarian Ch. 468 Rosedale Ave White Plains

SAVE THE DATES!!!

May 18-20		LWVNYS Convention	Crowne Plaza Hotel White Plains
JUN 7		LWVW Convention	NY Life Ins Bldg Sleepy Hollow