

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BRONXVILLE

(Serving Bronxville, Eastchester, Tuckahoe, Mt. Vernon and Yonkers)

FEBRUARY 2008

BULLETIN

ISSUE FOUR

Annual Breakfast with the County Executive

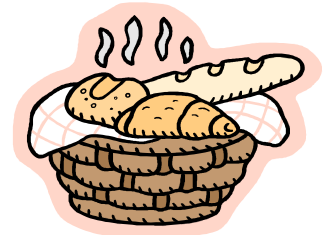


The Honorable Andrew Spano

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

9:30 AM

**White Plains Public Library
Auditorium, Second Floor**



Come discuss important issues facing Westchester County

Monthly Coffee Meeting

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

9:30 AM

**Bronxville Women's Club
135 Midland Avenue**



**Guest speaker: Paul Thomas, Jr.
Asst. Dir. Intergovernmental Affairs
Office of Attorney General Andrew Cuomo**

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

January has flown by, and at this writing, the New York State primaries have been completed. So now, on to the conventions and the 2008 elections!

Our January third Tuesday informational coffee featured the film "18 in '08" - a documentary by a young college student (and Westchester resident) that highlights the fact that 29 million voters between the ages of 18 and 24 are eligible to vote in the coming election. Will they? It's a non-partisan 35 minute documentary composed of interviews of leaders in politics, media, entertainment, and youth activism. The County League has now made copies available for distribution and viewing throughout the County. One of our members, a professor at Iona College, is showing it to her classes, and we can certainly arrange for showings at other schools in the area. To view information on the film, log onto www.18in08.com.

Our February coffee on 2/19 features Paul Thomas Jr., Assistant Director, Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of the Attorney General Andrew M. Cuomo. The Attorney General has launched a website for more transparency in New York State. Project Sunlight, www.sunlightny.com, is an exciting beginning to more transparency in NYS government. State residents may submit any questions or comments to the Attorney General's office by clicking on the "Contact Us" button at the top right hand corner of the page. The Attorney General is especially interested in League input, as we are a prime target audience for this website.

The annual "Breakfast with the County Executive" featuring County Exec. Andrew Spano will take place the week before - on Wednesday, February 13th at the White Plains Library Auditorium beginning at 9:30 AM. The meeting is open to the public, and I encourage all League members and friends to attend.

To make every vote count, the League has supported the use of optical scan voting machines with verifiable paper trails for use in the 2009 elections. Currently, the makers of "Automark", devices not certified by NYS for use by the disabled as ballot markers in the 2008 election, are suing New York State on various grounds. The struggle to keep the DRE's (Direct Recording Electronic devices) out of our state continues. In a letter to the editor from our County League President, Mary Beth Gose, and County Government Committee Chair, Laura Porter, published in the February 4th *Journal News*, the Westchester League commends the NYS Board of Elections' decision to select only paper based, optical-scan voting systems, with auto markers to serve the disabled community in the 2008 elections. This will protect both the disabled and all New York voters.

The LWVNYS Board has been directed by its membership to pursue the **National Popular Vote study**. Therefore, the Board agreed to direct Lori Dawson and Carol Mellor to lobby across the country to recommend the adoption at the National convention in 2008 of a National Study entitled "The Advisability of Using the National Popular Vote Compact among the States as a Method for Electing the President". Lori Dawson, the State Study Committee Chair for the original LWVNYS study and committee member, Carol Mellor, will continue, under the guidance of LWVNYS Board Citizen Action Director JoAnn Ross, to post objective reference material to the LWVNYS website (www.lwvny.org) and serve as coordinators of this effort to gain support for the adoption of this study throughout the country.

Adelaide

IN MEMORIAM

Bronxville League member (and mother-in-law of our president) Louise DiGiorgi (nee Pingue) died on Friday, 1/25/2008 in Lawrence Hospital at the age of 84. Louise was a longtime resident of New Rochelle and Bronxville and wife of the late Dr. Francis DiGiorgi, D.D.S. She retired as Treasurer of Fordham Prep, was President of the Fordham Prep Mothers' Club, and worked as an independent tax preparer and consultant. She is survived by 5 sons, their spouses, many grandchildren and great grandchildren, her sister and a large extended family and circle of friends. She will be missed by all who knew her. □

HEALTH ISSUES, JANUARY 2008

As the new year begins, we'll be increasingly bombarded with ideas for new health insurance plans, by states as well as by presidential hopefuls. Gov. Spitzer and the NY Assembly's Comm. On Health made a good start by proposing "NY Health Plus", a publicly sponsored health coverage like Medicare, that would be available for all who want it. The summary I've read, while very general, sounds good. It basically involves expanding Family Health Plus and Child Health plans by gradually raising the income eligibility until it can cover everyone while all existing plans would be untouched. Even now, New Yorkers are protected from some of the worst effects of market driven insurance. A 1993 state law forbids the denial of coverage because of prior treatment for such things as hay fever or acid reflux, for instance, along with more serious health conditions. Such denials regularly occur across the country (Consumer Reports, Jan 2008)

Medical care, as well as insurance, varies nationwide (a topic studied by the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care, a research project of Dartmouth's medical school). For example: with increased physician specialization, as exists in sophisticated urban areas, costs go up while quality of care often declines. This is partly due to our payment system, which rewards providers of both care and equipment for staying busy; i.e., more tests, by more doctors, and more days in hospital, exposed to medication errors and hospital infections. Treatment also varies. In South Dakota, two out of 1000 female Medicare enrollees with breast cancer have a mastectomy; in Vermont, it's only 0.3. In Nebraska, ten in 1000 people have knee replacements; in Rhode Island, it's only 5.

What do we make of this? How does a single payer insurer (which would be the collective tax paying "us"), decide how much of what to cover, and at what price? Those decisions have to be made, especially at the current pace of innovation in the medical field. Can "health" be realistically translated into dollars and cents? Some economists say "yes" and have come up with a single measure of cost-effectiveness that, theoretically, could be applied to every treatment and kind of care - curative (like surgery), sustaining (as with drugs) and preventive (cancer screening). It is the QALY, or "quality adjusted life year". Within that framework, "1" is a year in perfect health. An otherwise healthy blind person, for example, might judge his quality of life to be 0.75. Treatment to restore his sight would raise it to 1, and would therefore be worth 0.25. With a future life expectancy of 30 years, treatment in his case would have a total worth of 7.5 QALYs (30 x 0.25). The same calculations would apply to cancer meds costing tens of thousands of dollars per case, which give very sick patients a few more weeks. And, at the other end of the spectrum, are cholesterol lowering drugs, at 1/100th the cost, that give people decades of active years. Most Americans dislike this kind of thinking but it's something we may have to accept. If so, we'd have to strenuously guard against its application as a formula instead of a guide.

Edith Szold, Health Issues Chair

LWV of Westchester Statement on Proposed BOL Stipends – Presented during Public Comment at the BOL Meeting on December 10, 2007

Chairman Ryan and Honorable Members of the Board of Legislators:

My comments will address the Rules Committee Resolution on BOL Personnel.

The League of Women Voters of Westchester respectfully requests that you consider again our earlier recommendations during your deliberations on the proposed increases in stipends for the Board of Legislators. The League's position that all legislators' remuneration should be detailed within the budget and subject to public review has remained consistent since 2005, when the League communicated with the Board of Legislators, expressing our opposition to stipend increases.

I will now read a portion of that letter, dated December 23, 2005, because it is as applicable today as it was then:

Although we have the highest regard for our elected officials and the good work that they do, the League of Women Voters of Westchester was dismayed to learn of the substantial raises in pay and stipends proposed for the members of the Board of Legislators. This proposal was made public at the eleventh hour, providing little time for public notification and review. Further, because the number of positions, legislators' salaries (separated out from staff salaries), stipends and fringe benefits are not listed in the Board of Legislators' section of the county operating budget, the citizens of Westchester County cannot make an informed decision as to whether the increases are warranted. We ask for more details in the budget and an explanation of the board's needs.

The League opposes stipends for everyone other than the chair of the Board of Legislators. However, we want to emphasize that we consider the proposed \$40,000 stipend for the chair to be excessive. \$40,000 was the amount that was proposed and passed in 2005. We understand that the current proposed stipend for the Chair is \$75,000, and the League views both amounts as excessive. The League believes that legislators should be viewed as professionals fulfilling their responsibilities to the county and the electorate. There is no need for financial incentives beyond a base salary. Stipends are not always based on comparable responsibilities or merit.

We appreciate the many hours legislators work on the county's business, but we do not accept the argument that their jobs are full time. When elected, legislators knew that their positions were considered to be part time. If there is to be a change in this designation, it needs careful consideration and the approval of the citizens of Westchester County. We recommend the appointment of a non-partisan committee, with citizen participation, to study this issue.

Thank you for your time.

****NY STATE BOE SELECTS OPTICAL SCAN VOTING MACHINES****

Letter sent to the Editor of the Journal News from the LWWW

The League of Women Voters® of Westchester commends the New York State Board of Elections' decision to select only paper-based optical scan voting systems with auto markers to serve the disabled community in the 2008 elections. The Board's decision to exclude the touch-screen DRE machines is consistent with protecting the rights of disabled voters and the rights of all New Yorkers. The DRE machines submitted to the Board for approval did not allow many voters with disabilities an opportunity to independently verify the votes cast without help from outsiders.

The League has studied and followed the developments in voter technology for seven years. The experience of states like Maryland, Ohio, and Florida (which abandoned recently purchased DRE systems for optical scan machines) supports the League's long held conclusion that optical scan voting systems are the safest way to ensure that New York voters are protected. When inevitable problems and questions arise in elections, the state can rely on paper ballots marked by the voter to verify results.

In the next two weeks, Westchester election commissioners will have the opportunity to choose one of three approved ballot marking devices to accompany an optical scan machine for each election district. These purchases will require a major investment in dollars and technical training. The Westchester League is optimistic that once this initial investment is made, optical scan technology for all Westchester voters will be implemented, given that it is the safest and most cost-effective. The League, with its long record of volunteer service to voters (including voter training), is available to provide assistance to Westchester's election commissioners during the upcoming voting machine transition.

Mary Beth Gose
President

Laura Porter
Chair, County Government Committee

Let's thank the person who stood up for all New Yorkers and protected our votes!

The New York State Board of Elections recently voted to approve only optical scan voting systems for county election commissioners to purchase in the upcoming 2008 election. Although the decision for these machines only applies to accommodating disabled voters this year, it will directly influence the choice of systems purchased for all New Yorkers in 2009.

Money and training investments will be made for the optical scan this year so it is unlikely any election district will waste these investments next year by choosing an entirely new system.

For two long and frustrating days, members of the Board refused to hold the vote for approval of machines because the Liberty DRE was not on the list of acceptable machines. State Board of Elections Commissioner Doug Kellner refused to give into the amazing amount of pressure to include the DRE on the list. Doug refused to give in because Liberty's DRE did not allow many disabled voters to independently verify their vote, once it was cast as required by state law.

Doug was pressured by lobbyists and powerful political interests and held his ground. We need to thank him for protecting the citizens of New York. It is only because of his resolve and ability to resist the pressure that New Yorkers will now have a voting system that can be verified by paper ballots marked by the voter. This is the only safe way the authenticity of all elections can be upheld.

PLEASE EMAIL OR WRITE MR. KELLNER AND THANK HIM FOR RESPECTING THE STRICT REQUIREMENTS OF NEW YORK STATE LAW AND RESISTING INDUSTRY PRESSURE

You can contact him at info@elections.state.ny.us or: Commissioner Doug Kellner, NYS Board of Elections, 40 Steuben Street, Albany, NY 12207-2108

LEAF BLOWER BAN MADE PERMANENT FOR SUMMERS IN YONKERS

At our December coffee meeting, new League member Molly Roffman spoke to us about her efforts to ban the use of leaf blowers during the summer months to protect air quality and prevent respiratory illnesses due to the flying particulates and other toxic pollutants emitted by the gas fueled blowers. Molly joined a Green Policy Task Force of residents from different areas of the city. Their mandate is to develop and lobby for passage of environmental and health legislative policy on behalf of all the residents of Yonkers.

At the January 22nd Yonkers City Council meeting, members voted unanimously to approve a ban on using gas-powered leaf blowers -- for a second time. Though the Council unanimously approved the June 1 to Sept. 30 ban, the Mayor vetoed the bill in December, after many in the Yonkers lawn-care industry said it had passed without their knowledge. The newly formed Environmental Policy and Protection Committee then held another meeting to hear from everyone before the Council made its decision.

The ban, which was tested last summer, reduces the noise and pollution from leaf blowers, only allowing their use during the "high" seasons when they are needed most. City departments that use leaf blowers such as Parks, Education, and Public Works are being asked to voluntarily comply with the ban.

Yonkers joins a growing number of Westchester municipalities to enact leaf blower bans including Bronxville, Rye, Greenburgh, Scarsdale, Dobbs Ferry, and Mamaroneck. The county has also created stricter standards that require landscapers to use newer, cleaner machines.

Optical-scan voting is the best choice

Letter to Editor of *The Journal News*, appearing in the February 4, 2008 issue

The League of Women Voters of Westchester commends the New York state Board of Elections' decision to select only paper-based optical-scan voting systems with auto markers to serve the disabled community in the 2008 elections. The board's decision to exclude the touch-screen DRE machines is consistent with protecting the rights of disabled voters and the rights of all New Yorkers. The DRE machines submitted to the board for approval did not allow many voters with disabilities an opportunity to independently verify the votes cast without help from outsiders.

The league has studied and followed the developments in voter technology for seven years. The experience of states like Maryland, Ohio and Florida (which abandoned recently purchased DRE systems for optical scan machines) supports the league's long-held conclusion that optical-scan voting systems are the safest way to ensure that New York voters are protected. When inevitable problems and questions arise in elections, the state can rely on paper ballots marked by the voter to verify results.

Westchester election commissioners will soon have the opportunity to choose one of three approved ballot-marking devices to accompany an optical-scan machine for each election district. These purchases will require a major investment in dollars and technical training. The Westchester League is optimistic that once this initial investment is made, optical-scan technology for all Westchester voters will be implemented, given that it is the safest and most cost-effective. The league is available to provide assistance to Westchester's election commissioners during the upcoming voting machine transition.

Mary Beth Gose, LWVW President

Laura Porter, LWVW County Government Committee Chair

STATEMENT OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTCHESTER AT THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY
BOARD OF LEGISLATORS' PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED 2008 COUNTY BUDGET
DECEMBER 5, 2007, 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 ("BOL") Budget: The League is still concerned about the fact that, unlike other departments, the Board of Legislators does not list its personnel and salaries in the operating budget. By way of comparison, the budgeted amount for the BOL (\$4.6 million before fringe benefits) is \$1.0 million greater than the amount expended in 2006 (\$3.6 million). Although the BOL represents a tiny fraction of the budget, the lack of information provided in the BOL's section of the budget (e.g., no mission statement, number of personnel positions, salaries, etc.) raises questions about its willingness to be accountable to the tax-paying residents of Westchester. Although some members of the BOL have indicated that they plan to scrutinize the budgets of other county departments, which includes staffing, they have not indicated that they will apply the same level of analysis to their own departmental budget, despite the recent significant increases. This oversight must be corrected in the 2008 and future budgets.

HAVA ("Help America Vote Act"): Based on extensive research by the LWVNYS 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. The League's study concludes that these are the least expensive machines to buy, store and maintain. It is therefore essential that the Board of Legislators keep monitoring this item closely as it appears in both the capital and operating budgets over which the BOL has control. We expect there will be major increases in expenses in both the capital and operating budgets required by HAVA legislation. 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.

Duplication of Services: To contain costs, we urge the BOL and the administration to institute major in-depth studies of administration and departmental costs to determine actual needs and duplication of services.

MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority): The County gives the MTA approximately \$146 million from both the capital and operating budgets through such areas as a portion of the sales and mortgage taxes, with no accountability to the county. The Board of Legislators and the Administration 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. Since the Medical Center serves six neighboring counties, we urge that there should be continued lobbying at the state level for assistance from these counties, and the League would be willing to help in such lobbying efforts.

Taxes: The League is very concerned about the continual peaks and valleys in property tax levies. The League believes that such fluctuations are not fiscally prudent and a policy to address this issue should be developed by both the Board of Legislators and the Administration in future budgets.

Reassessment ("Reval"): While the proposed increase in the county tax levy is 4.74%, there are municipalities that will sustain a hefty rise due to the application of the equalization formula necessitated by the inconsistencies in current assessments. 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.

Department of Corrections: The League is very concerned about the significant proposed increase of \$9.7 million over last year's budgeted amount of \$110.4 million to \$120.1 million for this department. We suggest that this budget be re-examined for cost savings.

Day Care: The League supports the proposed increase of 298 slots in the number of low-income day care slots that are available, which raises the total to 2,039 slots. We also are in favor of lowering the day care co-payments from 15% to 10%.

Pesticide Control: To ensure full implementation of and compliance with the Pesticide Reduction Law, the League has been strongly urging inclusion of funding for a full-time professional Pest Management Coordinator. The League notes that \$40,000 has been added for this position; however, this amount is not sufficient to pay for a full time professional that is needed to fulfill the duties of this position. We strongly urge you to increase the amount from \$40,000 to \$65,000.

Budget Process: The Board of Legislators must vigorously petition the County Executive to release the budget at an earlier date. The 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.

The League of Women Voters of Westchester thanks Deputy Budget Director Arthur Vietro and First Deputy Budget Director John Delaney 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.

ORGANIZATION

NON-PROFIT

BULLETIN

U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BRONXVILLE, NY 10708

PERMIT NUMBER 7724
White Plains, NY

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Printing and Mailing by JAWONIO
(Vocational Opportunities for
People with Disabilities)

***** DATE SENSITIVE*****

IMPORTANT DATES

Feb

12	9:30 AM	Bronxville LWV Board Meeting	Bvl Women's Club
13	9:30 AM	LWWW Breakfast with County Executive Andrew Spano	White Plains Library Martine Avenue
19	9:30 AM	Bronxville LWV Monthly Coffee	Bvl Women's Club

