

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BRONXVILLE

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

SEPTEMBER 2009

BULLETIN

ISSUE ONE



BRONXVILLE LWV MONTHLY COFFEE



*Tuesday, September 15
9:30 AM
Bronxville Women's Club
135 Midland Avenue*



Our first coffee meeting of the fall season will bring us "up close and personal" with the leaders of our three municipalities: **Mayor Mary Marvin of Bronxville, Mayor John Fitzpatrick of Tuckahoe and Supervisor Anthony Colavita of Eastchester.** They'll talk about problems shared and cooperative solutions found, as well as issues that each of them faces separately, and they'll try to answer your questions. Here's your chance to find out what all the construction's about and express your concerns about safety issues, noise pollution or anything else that worries you.

Please join us!

PRESIDENTS' LETTER

Welcome back! We hope you all had an enjoyable summer and are looking forward to League activities this year.

It has been a busy summer for the League. County and state leagues held conventions and National had its first ever "virtual" Council. (Councils are the off-year equivalent of conventions.)

A common problem at all levels is the financial crunch and loss of income, especially interest income and investment portfolio value at National and State. As a consequence, normally frugal budgets have been slashed. Because of the high costs of printing and mailing, all levels have eliminated the printed version of their Voter publications and moved toward electronic communication -- e-mails and more reliance on their websites.

Our local League faces the same financial pressures. However, as evidenced in your hands, we have decided to continue publishing and mailing the Bulletin this year. We made this decision for a number of reasons. First and foremost, every member is not on the internet and we felt it of paramount importance to communicate with *all* members. We also recognized (through our own experience) that e-mailed documents the size of the Bulletin are often not read or printed out. And what is the point of putting together a communication document if it does not communicate?

We are not eschewing internet communication. Meeting reminders, some action alerts, and other short messages will be e-mailed to members for whom we have e-mail addresses. And we are exploring the possibility of establishing a website. But that still leaves the problem of how to maintain contact with members who are not on the internet.

So the Bulletin will continue in its present format. **However, this will be the last Bulletin for members who have not paid 2009-2010 dues!** If you are in doubt about your current status, contact our membership chair, **Birgitta Sherman - birgittaelsa@yahoo.com**.

Pat Harriss and Edith Szold

Copy of letter printed in the Journal News in July

It is heartening to see our Senate and House of Representatives seriously grapple with reforming our health-care system. Its failures with respect to our health and our economy are frighteningly obvious: 47 million uninsured and climbing; soaring costs of coverage and treatment that are unsustainable. Most of us agree that we need affordable, accessible, quality health care for all Americans. The question is how best to achieve it, and what changes in our health-care system will be necessary.

First, cost control is absolutely essential. This does not mean reflexively cutting benefits and payments to providers (which might actually drive them out of the system). It does mean changing the way care is delivered and recorded, choosing care that has been proven to work (evidence-based medicine) and revising financial incentives that reward high-tech procedures at the expense of preventive services and palliative care. Other costs, less apparent and harder to trace, are hidden in shifts of responsibilities among programs, municipalities and institutions.

Finally, cost control means constraints on the insurance industry to avoid misrepresentation and undue denials of coverage.

Only Congress can effect such changes. The premiums and benefits of the 1,200-plus health insurance plans currently extant must be made public so people know what they are buying. There must be a strong, government-supported health plan, with which they will compete and be compared to. This is the real key to effective reform. We look to Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand and Rep. Nita Lowey to support it.

Edith Szold and Patricia Harriss

HEALTH ISSUES

To continue I'm writing amidst a swirl of rage, ignorance and accusations about the proposed health care reforms that makes considered discourse all but impossible. Fortunately, this column can duck out and focus instead on the paradox of a "uniquely American" health care system. This has been referenced to reassure opponents of "socialism" and the like but remains conveniently undefined.

So what is it? Consider first our inalienable right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". In practice this often speaks to the entrepreneurial spirit of the American frontier with its exuberant pursuit of profit, now enshrined in a shadowy Bill of Rights. Find a need, fill a need, or better yet, create one! it's in that context that our uniquely American concept of health has grown - not as a joyful celebration of well-being but as the lack of anything so far discernable as wrong.

H. Gilbert Welch, DM said it best in an op-ed column of the NY Times (7/28/09). The definition of health has been "deferred to those with a financial interest in the answer - health professionals entwined with pharmaceutical companies, biotechnology firms, manufacturers of medical devices and diagnostic technologies, free-standing diagnostic centers, surgical centers, hospitals and academic medical centers - a group aptly labeledas the 'medical-industrial complex'.. (and they have said that).... health is the absence of abnormality". Whereas people once sought care when they were sick, the complex now seeks patients to be screened, evaluated and checked beforehand, as steady customers, so to speak.

There are two ways to do this. One is to develop diagnostic techniques that find smaller and smaller abnormalities (i.e. damaged cartilage, bulging discs, "worrisome" shadows on an X-ray) all increasingly common as we age. All of them can lead to more diagnostic and/or surgical interventions. The other way is to narrow the definition of what is normal. The newly normal blood pressure, for instance, is 120/80 or below, which targets over half the adult population in the USA for medical help. Without question, many people are helped, their lives even saved, by this process of exams and treatment. However, for a distressingly large percentage of patients, the value of any particular intervention is simply unknown, including whether it could be harmful (as estrogen, that "fountain of youth" turned out to be). For all that we do so much, and spend so much, we don't live longer than our European brethren nor are we any healthier or happier by any measure.

Our culture supports this approach to health care, with a faith in technology beyond all reason, an entitlement to make money, and an inability to accept death kindly. How do we reconcile these beliefs with the concept of social responsibility and a universal right to decent, compassionate health care for us all? It's where we get stuck. It's where fear and incipient violence come from. This is the conflict we need to confront with reason.

Edith Szold, Health Issues Chair

HEALTH CARE REFORM: URGENT ISSUES, CRITICAL INFORMATION (about legislation, passed or still proposed, to date)

October 19th, 2009

5:30 - 7:30 PM

**At the NY Presbyterian Hospital, Main Bldg.
21 Bloomingdale Road, White Plains
(Directions re parking, etc. will be posted)**

Speakers will be Mark Hannay, Director of Metro NY Health Care for All, on legislation on the national and the state level and Mary Beth Morrissey, Esq., MPH of the Fordham Ravassin Center on Aging and health care costs - who benefits, who pays, and how.

This meeting was arranged by NASW (National Assoc. of Social Workers) and co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Westchester.

UPDATE PAGE

1. The Bronxville League lent a hand to the Yonkers Federation of Teachers on May 27th. At the request of Eugene A. Zilempe, Exec. VP of the YFT, Janet Jaidi and Edith Szold observed the counting of ballots and, as disinterested parties, interpreted marks that were ambiguous. Sometime later, the chairperson of a private condo board asked if we'd do the same for its board. According to one LWVW Board member it would have been perfectly OK, but it felt a bit too commercial to us.

2. For those of you who missed our Coffee of May 25th --- it featured a great presentation on the UN and the LWV's connection with it. The speaker was our own **Martha Chatterjee**, resident expert on the subject and a League delegate with official observer status.

The League was one of the UN's midwives. During World War II, when it was just an abstract idea, the League studied the possibility of a world organization for peace. In 1944 it supported US membership in such an organization and campaigned for its formation, training over 5000 speakers and distributing over a million brochures. We were then invited by President Truman to be one of 42 NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to the US delegation at the UN Charter Conference in San Francisco in 1945.. The League has had three official UN observers ever since. In 2009, the UN celebrates the 60th anniversary of League member Eleanor Roosevelt's Declaration of Human Rights, a foundation for the humanitarian work of the UN.

Martha Chatterjee began as a teacher at the UN International school, developing curriculum and going on to numerous NGO Committees over the years, with many different responsibilities. She is presently teaching about the UN and, through UNICEF, working on the educational needs of children in transit - migrating out of their country, or displaced within it. Another of Martha's interests is in international law and how it developed in relation to the UN - an interest we hope she'll share at another Coffee.

If inspired to volunteer at the UN, the person to contact is Doris R.Schapira, one of the League's three nationally elected representatives. (Martha knows how to reach her.)

3. Our Voter Service Chair, Irma Moore, and members of her committee registered students at Concordia College on August 26th and will be registering students at Sarah Lawrence College on September 2nd. The League does this every fall to encourage new young voters.

The More the Merrier

Do any of you remember the Girl Scout song "Make new friends, but keep the old / One is silver, the other is gold" ? I was more than pleasantly surprised to learn that our League snagged the award for the largest increase in memberships in our category. Adelaide brought home a "virtual commemorative plate", very appropriate as she is tirelessly energizing members of old standing as well as bringing in welcome additions to our merry group. Then it struck me - we have to keep up the good work so we can shine next year as well. So, if you have not got around to re-joining, please, please do so. I know how time flies and how hard it is to remember when you last sent in the check. The new year for our League always starts on April 1 - no joke!

To entice your friends to join, I have a little raffle. The "sponsors" of new members will have a chance to win a bottle of N.Y. wine - or N.Y. cheese, if you don't care for wine - to share with your friends. It will not be a "virtual bottle" but a real one. The drawing will be at our holiday program, right in time for a New Year celebration. If you need membership envelopes, please give me a call, 961-4024, or (718)755-3503, and the envelopes will be in the mail pronto.

Birgitta Sherman, Membership Chair

GOOD NEWS: **Mairin Din**, daughter of former LWVW President, **Erin Malloy**, is on her way to full recovery after a terrible accident last fall that left her seriously injured. After many months of physical therapy, she will be returning to Swarthmore College soon and will be rejoining its cross country running team. She is also planning to run in the New York Marathon in November. Congratulations, Mairin, and heartfelt best wishes to Erin and her family. It's been a long ordeal.

SAD NEWS: We have learned that a long time League member, friend and mentor, **Marion Sinek**, passed away August 17th after a long battle with cancer. She was known for her commitment to good government and human rights. She worked tirelessly for the League and held many offices, including NY State League President. She served for eight years on the New Castle Town Board before becoming its supervisor from 2000 to 2004. There will be a memorial service for her in September. In lieu of flowers, donations in her memory may be made to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.



State News

The League of Women Voters of New York State

August 2009

President's Message

It has been a busy three months since the excitement of the convention, and we all have been multi-tasking nonstop, both to ameliorate the League's financial problems and to implement a full and diverse program for the upcoming year. As an incoming President I would like to share my goals, which include bridging the divide between state and local Leagues, putting us all on a better financial footing, and bringing a new level of dynamism to League operations. For more concrete information, see pp. 2-6 of the August SBR. I welcome and need your input. Feel free to call me at 518-426-3711 or e-mail me at betsey@lwvny.org.

Election Season 2009

Election season 2009 is around the corner with Primary Day on September 15th and Election Day on November 3rd. Voter's Guide Part I is now available and provides general info on voting requirements and info on the new voting machines; Part II will include info on the proposed constitutional amendment and judicial elections and will be available in September. To order Voter's Guides, Part I, Part II, and the *Your Right To Vote* series (with voting info for special populations such as college students, homeless individuals and others), contact the office.

Youth Leadership Initiative

The League is planning to develop its own youth leadership initiative to replace the LeaderSpark program in NYS. It will contain modules on civic education, financial education, and leadership skills. The modular approach will provide greater flexibility, allowing local Leagues to tailor the program to the needs of all the state's diverse students and also enabling more Leagues to participate.

Free State Board Reports

The State Board Report is published six times a year and provides vital information on all activities and actions of the State Board. To sign up for your free electronic version of the SBR, contact Stephanie at Stephanie@lwvny.org.

Government Consolidation/ Shared Services Study

We are pleased to announce Noreen Fisher, former Mayor of the Village of Scarsdale and member of the Scarsdale League as chair of the government consolidation / shared services committee. More information will follow shortly.

Financial Update

The generous donations of local Leagues and individual League members enabled us to reduce the 2008-2009 deficit to approximately \$3,000. Our heart-felt thanks to all for their incredible generosity.

In looking at League budgets longitudinally, it becomes apparent that the largest decrease in income over the past decade has been in the area of corporate support and foundation grants. To avoid future shortfalls, we are now actively engaged in seeking outside sources of income. The NYS Bar Association has published the *Your Right To Vote* series of specialized Voters Guides, and CSEA will print the revised *Welcome to the League* shortly. We have applied for a mock election grant from the Election Assistance Commission, which, if funded, would provide approximately \$75,000 over a 2 year period to develop a series of lesson plans for use in Participation in Government classes. We are also in the process of soliciting corporate / foundation sponsorship for governmental consolidation/shared services forums and the new youth development leadership initiative.

Vote 18: A Civic Engagement Program for Students

Vote 18 is a fun, fast-paced interactive game taught at high schools during one class period. It teaches students the history of voting, makes it relevant in their lives, and engages them in the world of politics. For information on how your local league can sponsor a Vote 18 program, or to receive training in the Vote 18 program, contact the League office.

Check Out Our New Website

Our website has undergone exciting new changes - and everything mentioned in State News is also available on the website. Send us your local league photos and announcements and we'll include them. More changes to follow.

Capitol Beat – The Saga Continues

The stalemate that paralyzed the New York Senate ended on July 9th when Senator Espada who had defected to the Republicans returned to the Democrat caucus giving them the majority they needed to control the chamber. The new leadership arrangement appears to be Espada as majority leader, John Sampson as leader of the democratic caucus and Malcolm Smith as Senate president pro tem.

In a surprise move, on July 8th Governor Paterson appointed Richard Ravitch as lieutenant governor. His legal authority to make this appointment was immediately challenged and is the subject of an ongoing court battle that is expected to end up in New York's highest court.

Before leaving on July 17th the Senate passed a number of bills that were time sensitive and adopted senate rules changes that the League views as a step forward in making the Senate more open and accountable. However, these rules also codify an inequitable distribution of both resources and member items between the majority and minority parties. For more details see the rules reform press release put out by the League and its reform coalition partners on July 16th.

The Senate returned for one day on August 6th to deal with New York City school issues and pass Mayoral control.

The state legislature is expected to return sometime during this summer or fall to deal with the burgeoning state deficit.

In the meantime please use the Stick with Reform press release sent on July 16th to continue to press for action on our Albany reform priorities. The press release is located the League's website as http://lwvny.org/press/statement_SenateRulesChanges071609.pdf. If you have any questions, you can call the office or e-mail Sally Robinson at robtwins@gmail.com.



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IMPORTANT DATES

Sept

8	9:30 AM	Bronxville LWV Board Meeting	Bvl Women's Club
15	9:30 AM	Bronxville LWV Monthly Coffee	Bvl Women's Club