

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BRONXVILLE

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

JANUARY 2011

BULLETIN

ISSUE FIVE

We invite members and friends

to our

January Monthly Coffee Meeting

An informal discussion about WIKILEAKS

Activism or malicious mischief?

A whistleblower or a thief?

About privacy or deception?



Tuesday, January 18, 2011

9:30 AM

*Bronxville Women's Club
135 Midland Avenue*

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

As someone once said, "We live in interesting times" to which I'll add a heartfelt "And may they be good!" And so they may be, for our League, as we begin 2011.

The first news is that all papers pertaining to a change of our League's name and footprint are up at State, in time for this month's Board meeting. From there the request goes to National and hopefully becomes a done deal there. We will then be the League of Women Voters of Bronxville, Eastchester and Tuckahoe, encompassing the entire town including both villages and the unincorporated area of Eastchester. Our population increases thereby from 6000 to nearly 35,000 in one swoop.

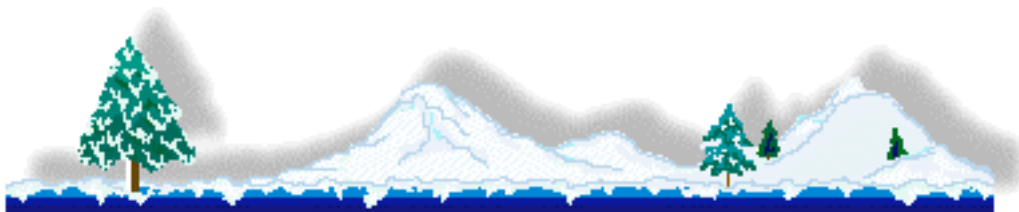
Recognizing another reality, we regretfully accept the resignation of Pat Harriss as Co-President. Given her ongoing personal responsibilities, she's decided to focus her Board activities more sharply and will become our point person on redistricting instead. That's been a long time interest of hers so our loss in one area is a great gain in another.

Here's a note of congratulations to ourselves. This last Fire Commissioners' election drew a record number of voters to the polls - in part, I'm sure, because of our "Coffee" in November and the publicity it received. Our thanks to Jean Delfiner for getting it started.

Warmest wishes to all. Edith Szold, President

******* DECEMBER HOLIDAY CELEBRATION *******

The Holiday "Coffee" we had this year was a warm, low-key and very pleasant event. The day was cold, the coffee hot, and, as always, there were delicious goodies to munch on. Unlike the formal gathering of prior years, this one had no speaker and no program. We, the Leaguers, were the center of one another's attention. Bronxville's Mayor Mary Marvin dropped in, as did Eastchester Town Supervisor Tony Colavita and we were delighted that they did. Although some of us missed the holiday tradition, I think, in the end, we were just as happy with what we had. The "Coffee" was a rare chance to simply visit, and talk - a real "time-out" from the holiday rush and pressure outside. Yes, we are activists, but the League as "haven" is also quite appealing!



HEALTH ISSUES



Updating last month's column, the challenges to the Health Care Reform law proceed apace in the Federal District Courts. On Dec.13th, Judge Henry Hudson of Richmond, VA ruled that the mandated purchase of health insurance was unconstitutional. Judge Roger Vinson of Pensacola, FL, in the suit brought by multiple attorneys general and governors, will probably do likewise. (Both were appointed by Republican presidents; the two who ruled otherwise were appointed by Bill Clinton.) At issue is the reach of Congressional authority under the commerce clause of the Constitution - actually the subject of many hot debates, both political and legal, for decades. Also at issue, in the present instance, is the difference between "activity" ("doing something") which has often been regulated, and "inactivity" ("doing nothing") which has not.

Of note is the number of conservative and libertarian interest groups lined up against the law, many created expressly to make such challenges, as was the American Civil Liberties Union on the left. The mandate would not take effect until 1014 by which time a Supreme Court decision is expected. (Kevin Sacks, NY Times, 12/16/10)

Now, the good news! On Nov.30,2010 the Senate, in a vote of 78-25, passed a sweeping overhaul of the nation's food safety system. (Gardiner Harris & William Neuman, NY Times, 12/1/10) Spurred by wide-spread episodes of tainted food, products major producers joined consumer advocates in demanding stronger government oversight. The House passed its own bill earlier in the year.

Both versions would grant the FDA new powers to recall tainted food, demand accountability and oversee farming. And both would give the agency more control over food imports, including more inspections of foreign processing plants and the ability to set standards for produce grown abroad. At this point, nearly 1/5th of our food supply, including 3/4ths of our seafood is imported but the FDA has been able to inspect less than one lb in a million.

In recent years the public awareness of the FDA has been fixed on its work with drugs. We've largely forgotten that the safety of 80% of our food supply is also its responsibility. (Michael Pollen & Eric Schlosser, NY Times, 11/29/10) The industrialization of agriculture has greatly increased that challenge. Hugely expanded farms and facilities, along with the popularity of processed foods, ensure that any problem, anywhere along the line, will impact thousands of people, country wide. The real beauty of this legislation is that the FDA would finally have the authority and resources to prevent food safety problems instead of responding only after folks were ill.

Edith Szold, Health Issues Chair

Please Save the Date

Friday, March 25, 2011

for a special League of Women Voters luncheon with former

**New York State Court of Appeals Chief Judge
Judith S. Kaye**

The Davenport Club,
New Rochelle, New York
12 Noon

Honored Guest of
The League of Women Voters of Larchmont-Mamaroneck
Joined by
The Leagues of Women Voters of New Rochelle, Rye, Rye Brook and Port Chester
The Leagues of Women Voters of Westchester County and New York State
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THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release:

Thursday, December 16, 2010

2010 Election Survey: Machines Perform But Privacy Suffers

The League of Women Voters of New York State (League) today released the results of an online survey of voters' experiences using the new paper ballot optical scanning system that was implemented statewide for the 2010 election cycle.

The online survey of 1,072 respondents, from 47 counties including all 5 counties of NYC, showed that the voting machines indeed did perform well; however, the respondents did make note of several inadequacies that the League feels must be addressed to ensure that voters are guaranteed a secure and private franchise. The League's recommendations for immediate action are listed below; the state Board of Elections should move to implement these recommendations before the next election cycle.

- **Increased Voter Education on the Voting Process**
The State Board of Elections must provide standard template materials which county boards of elections can tailor for their specific needs. Remaining HAVA funds should be used for this purpose.
- **Increased Training for All Elections Personnel**
The survey showed an immediate need for better trained election personnel. Legislation has passed permitting split shifts for election inspectors and recruitment of younger poll workers. These new laws need to be implemented.
- **Revision of the Paper Ballot for Maximum Usability by Voters**
There is an immediate need for improving the design of the ballot. Legislation to address the full-face ballot should be a legislative priority and should be introduced early in the 2011 Legislative Session.
- **Privacy Issues**
Over 20 percent said they did not have sufficient privacy in marking the ballot, scanning the ballot, or were not given a privacy sleeve or instructed how to use it. Poll workers need to be trained that any viewing of the markings on a completed ballot is a violation of the voter's privacy.

As noted by League Elections Specialist, Aimee Allaud, "Improving ballot design, providing better trained poll workers and ensuring privacy in voting are fundamental to our voter electoral system. We must take immediate steps to resolve these problems."

"The League's Voter Survey shows that we need to do much, much more if we're to take full advantage of the State's new voting systems. In particular, the design of New York's ballot must be completely overhauled in order to be fully usable by voters." said Bo Lipari, the League's Technology Director.

The full report is available on the League website: www.lwvny.org.

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CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
COMMON CAUSE/NY
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N.Y. PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP

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NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release:
Monday, October 4, 2010

NEW REPORT: NEW YORK'S REDISTRICTING PRACTICES UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY REPORT UNDERPINS STATEWIDE-GRASSROOTS EFFORT TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR REFORMS GROUPS URGE CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT REDISTRICTING COMMISSION

New York State's redistricting process rigs elections to benefit legislative incumbents and political parties by undermining the democratic principle of "one person, one vote," allowing legislative districts with huge population disparities, and minimizes the number of "competitive" legislative districts with close party enrollments to protect incumbents, according to a report released today by a coalition of civic groups. The groups argued that New York State allows "gerrymandered" districts with vast differences in population size and that, while technically legal, undermine democratic principles. The report, *New York State's Redistricting Process: The Case for Reform*, examined the state's redistricting practices and found:

- **Finding #1:** Only 29 of 212 state legislative districts (14 percent) have been drawn within one percent of the "ideal size." In a representative democracy, ensuring districts of similar size ensures fair representation.
- **Finding #2:** Only 25 of the 212 state legislative districts (12 percent) were drawn to have a similar number of major party enrollments. The enrollments in the rest favor one party or another by a wide margin. This small number drastically limits the number of "competitive" elections in New York. This lack of competition helps insulate lawmakers from the wishes of their constituents.
- **Finding #3:** Mapmaking practices have allowed for the creation of district shapes that ignore the state's constitutional requirement that districts be "compact."
- **Finding #4:** Mapmaking practices have been used to remove significant electoral threats that challengers posed to incumbent legislators.
- **Finding #5:** During the period 1980 through 2008, nearly 3,000 state legislative general elections were held, yet in only a tiny fraction of those races (39) were challengers successful in knocking out incumbents. This staggeringly high re-election rate is a direct consequence of New York's system of legislative redistricting.
- **Finding #6:** As a result of mapmakers' efforts to limit electoral competition, incumbents win – and win big. From the general elections in 2002 through 2008, over 65 percent of Senate winners won by more than 2 to 1 or greater. Nearly 75 percent of Assembly winners won by that margin or greater. Roughly 5 percent of races were close.

The groups found that "[a]s a result, New York State's legislative politics are dominated by the political status quo." The groups also unveiled their effort to educate New Yorkers about the need to support reforms. The groups are planning speaking presentations across the state to lay out the case for reform.

The groups argued that lawmakers should support legislation creating an independent redistricting commission to create fair legislative districts in New York State and to ensure that districts are drawn to benefit the public's best interests.



BULLETIN

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Current Resident or

Date Sensitive

IMPORTANT DATES

JAN

11	9:30 AM	Bronxville LWV Board Meeting	Chez Julia Pomeroy 2 Hillside Road
18	9:30 AM	Bronxville LWV Coffee Meeting	Bronxville Women's Club 135 Midland Avenue

HAPPY NEW YEAR!