



The League of Women Voters of The Rivertowns

Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Hastings-on-Hudson and Irvington
www.watpa.org/lwv/rivertowns

BULLETIN – FEBRUARY 2010

Dear Fellow Members and Friends of the League,

We are planning another Coffee & Conversation meeting with our New York State Assemblyman, Richard Brodsky, to hear about current issues of interest in our state legislature. Please mark your calendar and join us at the Embassy Community Center in Dobbs Ferry on April 23, 2010 at 12:30 (see details inside) for what is sure to be a very enjoyable event.

On the national front, we continue to support the effort to enact healthcare legislation that will provide universal coverage and rein in the skyrocketing expenses of the current system which covers far too few people and costs way too much. As Mary G. Wilson, President of LWV-US put it: "Congress has a workable bill before it and for the sake of the American public they need to move it forward now."

Please add your voices to this urgent message and write, telephone or email our U.S. Senators (Sen. Schumer and Sen. Gillibrand) and Representatives (Rep. Lowey or Rep. Engel) to support passage of this necessary healthcare legislation. It may not include all the provisions we initially hoped for, but it is a first step in the right direction.

Lindsay Nicely Feinberg

Board Briefs

December: We had reports and discussions on Health Care, the Waterfront, League Coffees, and Fundraising. We did get the schedule for Naturalization Court, and our turn will be 6/9 and 12/8.

January/February: We heard reports from the Health and Waterfront groups. We discussed a new issue of concern, hydrofracturing to extract natural gas from below the Marcellus Shale, a process that has the potential to adversely affect water quality in New York and elsewhere. We want to increase participation among our newer members and are planning a get together in mid April to welcome them. We have also scheduled our next Conversation. Assemblyman Richard Brodsky will be our guest (see below).

The Rivertowns League invites you for

COFFEE AND CONVERSATION!

Friday, April 23, 2010, 12:30 PM at the Embassy Community Center

60 Palisade Street, Dobbs Ferry

Meet other members and discuss issues in an informal setting.

Assemblyman Richard Brodsky

will discuss current issues in our State Legislature . . .

Following his presentation there will be time for your questions and input.

ALL ARE WELCOME !!!

Bring a Friend

The Coffee and Conversation immediately follows the senior lunch at the Community Center. If you would like to join the seniors for lunch, call the Embassy Center (693-0024) in advance for a reservation.

Any questions? Email Chris Verber (selwinverber@gmail.com) or call her at (693-9054)

AUTHORITY REFORM - update

Public Authority Reform Legislation, sponsored by Assemblyman Brodsky, was signed by Governor Paterson, and will

- Clarify **fiduciary responsibility of Authorities.**
- Create an independent **Authority Budget Office (ABO)** to review compliance of all public authorities and their subsidiaries; it will issue recommendations to the Legislature, Governor and Attorney General.
- Grant the **Controller oversight** of no-bid and state funded contracts.
- Require **legislative approval of subsidiary formation.**
- Ensure that authority property can be sold only at **fair market value.**
- Protect **whistleblowers.**
- Require compliance with the **Minority and Women owned Business Enterprise Program.**

MARCELLUS SHALE/HYDROFRACTURING - FRONT AND CENTER

Powerful NY forces are aligned pro and con re proposals to produce natural gas by hydrofracturing Marcellus Shale of the Southern Tier, Catskills and central New York, extension of a geologic formation which also runs through northern and western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, western Maryland and West Virginia. Natural gas was trapped 400 million years ago in horizontal pockets one to two miles below the surface. More than 13,500 comments, filed with the NYS DEC prior to a 12-31-09 deadline, define this controversy, and prompted extension of the comment period for 90 additional days.

Methane gas would be extracted by hydraulic fracturing (“hydrofracturing”, “fracking”); water mixed with powerful chemicals is forced under high pressure down a well to expand fractures and release gas which is then forced up another well.

This process is a threat to water supply at three crucial points: (1) depletion of aquifers (huge amounts of water are required), (2) danger of leakage during the fracking process, (3) contaminated runoff into the Delaware and Hudson watersheds; over 250 toxic chemicals are reported to be used. Another threat: radioactive material is released from beneath the surface. Shale deposit drilling has “devastated water, air, roads and forests in Colorado, Wyoming, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Texas and Pennsylvania”.

Proponents cite economic benefits: immense profit, creation of jobs, lucrative lease payments to landowners, a 3% tax on natural gas producers which could benefit New York’s budget crisis. Gas burns cleaner than oil or coal, would lessen dependence on foreign oil. **However**, as expressed at a rally, “Once our groundwater is polluted, we can’t unpollute it.” (The NYS League has filed a written statement with the DEC.)

(Sources: Croton Clean Water Coalition, Federated Conservationists of Westchester, The Journal News, Rivertowns Enterprise letter - Vitagliano/Delmerico.)

What can you do? Become informed, and contact elected officials!

NYS - LWV ETHICS RECOMMENDATIONS

LWVNYS urges **your support** of comprehensive ethics legislation, to include:

- An appointment process that fosters independent oversight
- Safeguards barring lobbyists, former officials and other interested parties from serving on ethics oversight bodies
- Transparency - disclosure of financial interests
- Investigatory and enforcement powers, strong campaign finance enforcement power, reasonable audit procedures.

How can you support ethics reform? Contact state legislators.

GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION/SHARED SERVICES STUDY

The NYSLWV seeks a comprehensive position to judge legislative measures for consolidating government districts within the state.

New York provides multi-layered home rule protection to 1607 local governments (most established before 1920) - 57 counties, 932 towns, 62 cities, 556 villages; each can tax and assume debt. Only New York City and the 14 Native American reservations have a single layer of government; five towns/villages are co-terminus. Only villages can incorporate and dissolve through local action, 125 created since 1925 and 37 dissolved (as of 2007).

In addition, 1811 special purpose districts (school, fire, water, and commissioner run districts - parks, water, sewer and solid waste) also tax and issue debt; many cross political boundaries.

Yet another 1302 entities (authorities), with independent boards, control BOCES, community colleges, health districts, activity districts, local and industrial development corporations, housing. They also impose costs and assume debt.

Finally, thousands of other boards and councils, most under local control, cannot tax: soil and water conservation, regional planning, storm water management, fire protection, health and vital records.

Westchester County has 425 governing bodies, including 301 special districts for such things as sewer and water. Complicated laws govern these overlapping districts; coupled with inertia, change is slow, despite profound societal shifts.

The League's "Government Modernization" study points out that New York has among the highest local property taxes in the nation, and has set a June 1, 2010, consensus deadline. LWV has no current comprehensive position, and seeks a platform to evaluate:

state legislative or constitutional proposals regarding dissolution/consolidation of government units or shared services
local proposals for consolidation of governmental entities or shared service.

Consensus questions concern: standards to be used in evaluating proposals, steps to improve governmental efficiency, funding/use of incentives (grants?, loans?), transparency, citizen input, operational standards, cost savings, positive or negative effects, impact on state aid, possible higher costs to some government entities, quality and efficiency of service, disparities in service and employee contracts, social/economic justice.

Does this study resonate with you? Contact President Lindsay Feinberg or any board member to express your interest or opinion.

VOTING RATE DIPPED SLIGHTLY IN 2008

131.1 million (63.6%) U. S. citizens 18 and older voted in 2008, an increase of 5 million voters - mostly minorities; turnout was down from 63.8% in 2004.

Figures document a decline (from 2004) of older white voters (notably in Ohio and Pennsylvania); turnout among 45 and older whites fell 1.5% to 7.2%; overall white vote was down 1% (to 66%). Increased minority voting was key to election results; black vote increased 5% to 65%; Hispanics improved by 3% and Asians by 3.5% to almost 50%. This election was the most diverse on record; nearly a quarter of votes were minority.

49% of 18 to 24 year olds voted, compared to 47% in 2004; 55% of young blacks voted, an 8% jump. Among that age group turnout was 49% for whites, 41% for Asians, and 39% for Hispanics.

LWVNYS SURVEY - NEW VOTING MACHINES

Results of a survey among users of new voting machines (2009) showed that:

- 76% considered instructions adequate. However, some overlooked ballot's reverse side.
- Many found ballot print, squares and circles too small (circles easier to fill in); more adequate supply of pens/pencils needed; lighting inadequate for some voters.
- Concern was expressed about privacy and disposal of spoiled ballots.
- The scanning operation was mostly satisfactory.
- Most respondents were unaware of the Ballot Marking Device, or were discouraged from using it.

Recommendations: more intensive voter and election official education, better signage and lighting, increased attention to privacy, revision of the paper ballot, larger pool of trained inspectors with higher compensation for training, approval of split inspector shifts.

WATERFRONT happenings

Big news (X 2)! Demolition is proceeding at the Hastings waterfront toxic waste site. Dobbs Ferry was awarded \$2 million toward reconstruction of its eroding shoreline at Waterfront Park by the state's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program; an additional \$28,000 was awarded to begin a trolley service. The village must provide matching funds (\$1 million already pledged by local benefactor). Other grant applications are pending.

We're adjusting our name to fit recent focus and are now the Environment and Waterfront Group. **Next meeting (DO come!): Monday, March 15, 1:30 PM**, at the home of Mary Wall; 150 Draper Lane, Apt. 1GN (reached by the brick walk). We focus on the Hudson River and watershed issues.

HEALTH INSURANCE REFORM

Despite apparent stalemate in Washington, this issue remains priority. As forty-five million uninsured Americans are joined by the recently unemployed, the situation becomes more urgent. Some estimate place excess annual mortality due to lack of health insurance or under-insurance as high as 45,000 annually; medical bills are a leading trigger for personal bankruptcies; overhead consumes an exorbitant share of health care dollars. Premiums are again skyrocketing, and persons with pre-existing conditions remain at risk.

The League of Women Voters supports establishing a system which would provide quality, affordable health care for all U.S. citizens. This system should include choice of provider, disease prevention, health promotion and education, primary care, long-term and mental health care, along with fiscal responsibility.

What can you do? Write, e-mail, or telephone elected officials.

MASS TRANSIT

The Journal News reports the year 2000 census (for **suburbs**) show 14% of Westchester workers commute by Metro North train - #1 in the U. S.; Nassau is #2 (L. I. Rail Road). Westchester includes Larchmont (35% - 3,593 people daily), Rye (29% - 2,258), and Mamaroneck (19% - 2,245). 59% of Westchester workers drive alone to work.

These numbers are dwarfed by NYC users; in Manhattan and Brooklyn 60% of workers commute by mass transit.

When all forms of public transportation are included, 12 counties surpass Westchester (including the five NYC boroughs, San Francisco and Philadelphia).

DID YOU KNOW? (from the Westchester Public/Private Partnership for Aging Services)

“Westchester County is 40th of the nation’s sixty-four first suburbs, according to the Brookings Institute’s First Suburb Study. First Suburbs are “inner-ring” suburbs developed before the wave of growth during the past 50 years. Between 1950 and 2000, First Suburbs grew twice as fast as the rest of the nation. ...”

Westchester’s richly diverse cultural, ethnic, racial and linguistic composition is changing:

- African-Americans represent 14.2% of the county population.
- Asian population grew by 27% and now represents to 3.7%.
- Hispanics/Latinos are the fastest growing segment - 15.6% of county residents.

30% of the minority population live at or below poverty level.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY - THE LEAGUE IS 90 YEARS OLD!

A look at history leading to the 19th amendment:

1848 - July 10 The first woman's rights conference (in the US) is called by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. It is held at Wesleyan Chapel at Seneca Falls, NY, then reconvened in Rochester chaired by Amelia Bush who becomes the first woman to preside over a meeting attended by both men and women. New York State Legislators pass a law giving women the right to retain property they owned prior to marriage.

1851 - Amanda Bloomer describes her bloomers in the Seneca Falls newspaper.

1851 - Sojourner Truth delivers "Ain't I A Woman?" speech - Akron convention

1855 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton makes unprecedented appearance at NYS Legislature to urge expansion of Married Woman's Property Law.

1859 - Carrie Chapman Catt is born.

(from Syracuse area League bulletin)

After its 1920 founding, the first LWVUS president was Maud Wood Park.

The Plattsburg's look-back at League's 1930 issues reminds us that LWV successfully advocated for: Social Security, Food and Drug acts, and TVA. "... the League launched a nationwide campaign in support of the merit system for selecting government personnel. ... legislation passed in 1938 and 1940 removed hundreds of jobs from the spoils system and placed them under Civil Service."

IN THE RIVERTOWNS

We extend a warm welcome to **Mary Ellen Fischer** and **Marion Zinman** new members, of the Rivertowns LWV and apologies to **Daphne Romeo**, whose name was misspelled in our December Bulletin.

Our Sincere thanks to the **Kalyan Sundaram Fund** for a most generous gift to our LWV Education Fund.

We want our membership data base to be current. Even if you are a long time member, please be sure to include your **phone number** and **email address** on your membership renewal form.

An Invitation – Time for Renewal

To meet our newest members, celebrate spring and renew our spirits, a gathering at the home of our president, Lindsay Feinberg, Sunday April 18, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. Please join us. Recent members will receive a special invitation.

Looking ahead - IMPORTANT DATES!

Monday, Mar 15: Waterfront Group - Home of Mary Wall, 150 Draper Lane, 1 GN (follow the brick walk) - 1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Mar 16: Village Elections –**Hastings and Irvington** – 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Tuesday, Mar 16: Rivertowns LWV Board Meeting - Hastings Community Center – 7:00 p.m. (If main door is locked enter via outside stair to lower level meeting rooms.)

Friday, Mar 26: LWVW Health Care Committee - home of Chris Verber, 49 Eastern Drive, Ardsley - 1:00 p.m.

Sunday, Apr 18: Membership Tea – Home of Lindsay Feinberg, 80 Hollywood Drive, Hastings, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.. **All are Welcome**

Friday, Apr 23: Coffee and Conversation with State Assemblyman Richard Brodsky – Embassy Community Center, 60 Palisade Street, Dobbs Ferry – 12:30 p.m.

Note: All Board meetings are “open” and we welcome your participation. Future dates:
Apr 13, and May 11;
Saturday, June 5: Annual Meeting and Luncheon

DUES ARE DUE

NOTE: ALL MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE APRIL 1. UNLESS YOU *JOINED* SINCE OCTOBER 1, 2009, PLEASE SEND YOUR RENEWAL *NOW*

LWV The Rivertowns – MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Name: _____ E-mail: _____
Address: _____ Telephone _____

Check one: Basic Member Single \$50 Household \$75
 Friend of LWV Single \$75 Household \$100

Tax Deductible Contribution to the Fund for Citizen Education \$_____

My interests are: Voter Service__ Water Front__ Observer Corps__ Youth Outreach__
Fund Raising__ Membership__ Bulletin/Public Relations__ Health Care__
Global Warming __ Other_____

Please make checks payable to: LWV the Rivertowns
Mail to: LWV The Rivertowns, P.O. Box 142, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706

***LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE RIVERTOWNS
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