

Rochester/Metro League of Women Voters

Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Voter education is one of the League's most important functions, and the League encourages all citizens to register and to cast an informed vote.

The League does not support political parties or candidates, but does take stands on important issues after careful study and research.

Membership in the League is open to all citizens of voting age.

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**February League Day:
A viewing and discussion of THIRST,
a movie about the global fresh,
clean water crisis.**

Join Us

Thursday, February 7, 2008

10:00 am to 11:30 am

WXXI Studios, 280 State Street*

Since its premier in 2004, THIRST has been shown in dozens of film festivals and won numerous prizes. In addition, THIRST was screened in Congress and at the World Social Forum. The water conflicts portrayed in THIRST have continued and intensified since the filming.

Plan to attend this thought provoking documentary. Learn about the issues: should water be treated as a natural resource available to all or treated as a commodity?

An optional tour of the WXXI studios will be offered after the meeting.

** WXXI is on the right side of State St headed north from Main St., just past the railroad underpass and opposite Frontier Field/Kodak parking lot. Parking is available at the parking garage adjacent to the WXXI building and can also be entered from the east side (in case you miss it and have to go around the block). Please consider carpooling with another League member or friend.*

From Your President

by Dorothy Borgus



To all—Happy New Year! I wish each of you a healthy and happy 2008.

Back in December I encouraged you to contact your elected representatives, home for their “break”, to press for much delayed action on some very critical issues. On the state level,

campaign finance and election reform, astronomical taxes, a capital budget for upstate projects and a deficit-plagued budget come to mind quickly. These serious issues languish while a reluctant Albany squabbles over Troopergate and partisan politics, bringing state government to a virtual standstill. The worst part is the spending. The final NY budget, while almost on time, exceeded \$121. billion, a 9% increase over the previous one. That's triple the inflation rate. Albany's overriding problem continues to be spending and borrowing. Is this reform?

At the national level, our representatives and senators have deliberated endlessly over the Iraq conflict and, except for the last few days of their session,

accomplished minimal results. While energy costs continue to escalate, taxes cripple the economy, the trade deficit swells, and the immigration problem seems just too big to handle, our representatives bicker and finger-point. Lots of bills were introduced....few laws of consequence were passed. In short, both the New York State Legislature and U.S. Congress accomplished little in 2007, choosing instead to play the blame game for most of the year.

League members are known for taking action, a point I made back in December. If you haven't made that call or written that e-mail to your elected representatives yet, I urge you to do so now. They are back in Albany and Washington, supposedly rested and ready to do the work of the people. If this litany of serious problems has discouraged you from taking action before, just choose one or two issues that really get your dander up and pursue those. Reform and change will only come about when voices get raised.

The League has a solid reputation for thoughtful action based on study and consensus. Our name is one of the most recognized brands in the country and carries influence well beyond our membership. Let's capitalize on this reputation and respect and make things happen. Abigail Adams said, “We have too many sounding words and too few actions that correspond to them.” Silence is not golden! Speak up! One by one we can make a difference. Let's do it.

Dorothy

SAVE THE DATE!

March League Day

Thursday, March 6

10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

1600 East Avenue

Health Care Reform – Is a Single Payer Program the answer?

The Social Policy Committee will sponsor a presentation by Dr. Emily Queenan of the Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP).

Dr. Queenan, Chief Resident, Department of Family Medicine, University of Rochester Medical Center, will discuss the PNHP's recommendations for a national single payer system for health care.

The New York State League's position on health care reform supports a single-payer system as an acceptable way to contain costs and provide equitable access.

This is the first of two League Days planned on Universal Health Care Issues in March and April.

Annual Fund Drive

There is still time to make a contribution to the annual fund drive. Many have responded and many have not. If you have not done so there is still time. All contributions are tax deductible and should be sent to the League of Woman Voters Education Fund. These contributions make it possible for us to maintain our League's programs both in content and quality. Our program has grown as has our visibility and participation in the larger community. Please take time out to make a contribution. No matter how large or small, your contribution will make a dramatic impact on our League.

Thank you to those who have contributed, and thank you to the rest of our membership for your consideration.

Nancy Kleintop, *VP Development*

Local Development Corporations, continued

Kent Gardner, President of the Center for Governmental Research, discussed the CGR report “Local Development Corporations: Risks and Benefits” at our Holiday Party in December. The League commissioned the report because of our concerns about the potential for abuse by these organizations. Those who were at the event may recall that Kent said that the report covered 16 LDCs in the Rochester area, but since there is no registry for them (as Kent said, “they’re not listed in the Yellow Pages”), there are most likely more out there. He also said that although LDCs are usually formed by government bodies, it is possible for a group of individuals to also incorporate an LDC.

Confirmation of both these possibilities came in articles in the Democrat and Chronicle on January 1 and 3, 2008. One of the corporations that bid to purchase property tax liens on September 28, 2007 was the Monroe Tax Certificate Corporation, an LDC created by Michael Townsend, an attorney with Harris Beach. There are three other directors of the corporation: Andrew Bartlett, a top official in the County Finance Department; Assistant County Attorney James Fumia; and Richard Bell, treasurer of the Monroe County Republican Committee. Monroe Tax Certificate Corporation was not the successful bidder, but there are several disturbing parts to this story:

- Townsend declined to discuss the corporation with the D&C reporter. “I don’t feel like talking about my private business in the press.”
- Bartlett “ran numbers for both [bidders], but that’s purely objective in his role as a member of the Monroe County staff,” according to Stephen Gleason, the county Finance Director.
- Bartlett said he agreed to be listed as a director to allow the corporation to function.
- Gleason said that he negotiated directly with the investors who would purchase the liens, but would not name them.
- Gleason said it was “challenging” to remain objective in dealing with the bidders when one of them was represented by someone in his office.

County Attorney Daniel DeLaus didn’t have a problem with Fumia on the board because he knows that local development corporations must be connected to a municipality in order to sell tax-exempt bonds. However, he would have insisted that Fumia resign from the tax board if it had won the bid, since it would be unethical for an employee to do business with the county. (*Note: The D&C article said ‘tax board’. I’m assuming that should have been Monroe Tax Certificate Corporation.*)

What’s so disturbing about all this?

Monroe Tax Certificate Corporation wants to be considered a private business when asked questions, but yet it also wants the advantage of being related to the government. We wonder:

- Just what does Bartlett mean when he says he agreed to be listed as director to allow the corporation to function?
- Was Bartlett’s running of the numbers truly objective?
- With two county employees as directors of the corporation, shouldn’t the public have a right to know who the investors are?
- Could the Finance Department be objective with a member of its staff acting as a director of one of the bidders?
- Why did DeLaus consider it OK for the Assistant County Attorney to be a director when the LDC was bidding for the contract?
- LDCs don’t issue tax-exempt bonds; even if they could, should a corporation set up by individuals, not a government body, be able to issue them merely by having a county employee as a director?

Curiouser and curiouser.

We will continue to look into this matter and keep you informed.

Judy Weinstein, *Local Government Chair*

Welcome to New Member:

Judy Dresnack
P.O. Box 144
Brockport, NY 14420
585-637-4753

The Anatomy of Successful Lobbying for a Domestic Violence Issue

For those of you who wonder what one person can accomplish in the struggle for legislation needed for victims of domestic violence, this is Carly's story.

A local Democratic Monroe County Legislator, whose term limits were about to expire in December, wanted one last thing to be remembered by. She introduced a bill outlawing discrimination in housing for victims of domestic violence in Monroe County. Normally the Republican majority would have buried the bill. And that is where Carly W. comes in.

Carly W. began her campaign. First she prepared a letter for all supporters to sign. Then she contacted Republican and Democratic legislators on the state level. These people had been contacted for several years on issues of domestic violence so they knew Carly and her expertise on the subject. She was able to get the State legislators to write letters of support for this bill to be sent to the local legislators. She then spoke at every open meeting from September to December and explained the necessity for the bill from a variety of viewpoints. She met every argument with one of her own.

In addition, everyone she met - or her boyfriend met in his office - were given a copy of the letter and were asked to sign it and give it back to Carly. She brought these letters to the legislative meetings.

Our local league is a member of the Domestic Violence Coalition here in Monroe County. She contacted me, and we submitted a letter of support. She told me that every time she met with the legislators, she would mention the League to show the broad support this bill had.

On December 11, 2007, in the wee hours of the morning, after all the budget votes were passed, the Monroe County Legislature passed this anti-discrimination bill. Hooray for the power of one passionate woman and all her friends who helped.

For more information on what you can do to push for the Expanded Access bill, contact Georgia at georgiatd@frontiernet.net or 585-787-9692.

Georgia DeGregorio, *Chairperson, Social Policy Committee and Off-Board Specialist on Domestic Violence, LWVNY.*

Our Stream Team

"Oooooo -- it's crawling out of the dish! Shove it back in!"

The large (well, 2 inches long, larger than any of the other creatures we were counting) crane fly larvae, shaped like a caterpillar, is one of the more fascinating stream insects we had encountered in our monitoring session.

The League of Women Voters Water Watch Team, or Stream Team as we call ourselves, enjoys monitoring Irondequoit Creek in Powder Mills Park on a regular basis. We take notes on conditions, measure water flow by climbing into the stream with waders on, then scrape the bottom for the creatures that dwell there. We put the creatures into a bucket and climb onto the shore to explore bucket contents. That's the fun part! New discoveries are made regularly. It's surprising how many critters seem to live down there, even when we've broken the ice surface to get them.

Monroe County sponsors the monitoring activity in order to track water quality of streams in the County. Chemical testing of water samples gives researchers an idea of the water quality at the instant the sample is taken - but streams, of course, are constantly moving and events causing pollution can happen upstream at any time. Counting creatures that live in the stream, as we do, gives us an idea of the stream water quality throughout the life of the creature. Some are more sensitive to pollution than others. Discovery of mayflies is cause for celebration - once again, the stream is clean enough for these very sensitive organisms. Recently we learned that not only have we been monitoring longer than almost any other team in the County (since 1999), we have been more regular in reporting.

Team members are League members Ann Jones, Joyce Pearson, Barbara Wagner, Chris Fredette, and friend of the League, Carol MacInnes. We'll go out again next month, crack the ice to collect, then retreat to Joyce's home for hot chocolate, lots of kibitzing, and our count. It's fun!

Chris Fredette, *Leader of the LWV Stream Team*

Update on Lead Poisoning

The Social Policy Committee continues its work to combat childhood lead poisoning.

The City of Rochester's two-year old lead abatement ordinance which the League supported has, according to a recent report by the Center for Governmental Research, had much success in reducing the number of children being reported with elevated blood lead levels and shown that the costs of complying with the law are not as great as landlords anticipated. The thrust of this legislation is primary prevention as opposed to secondary prevention. This means that lead hazards are removed from homes before the lead gets into the children. Too many cities rely on secondary prevention that remediates the lead in homes only after a child is found to have elevated blood lead levels.

ACTION

We must expand the concept of primary prevention to the rest of New York State by enacting State legislation to increase funding for lead hazard control work. Assemblyman David Gantt, D-Rochester, sponsored such a bill which was passed in the Assembly; Senator Joseph Robach, R-Greece introduced the same bill into the Senate (S6350) in June. It is called the Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act and is now in the Rules Committee. This act authorizes tax credits for lead hazard reduction activities.

If you are in Senator Joseph Robach's district (56th), please call him (585-225-3650) and thank him for introducing this legislation and urge him to find co-sponsors. If you are in districts of the other Senators from this area- James Alesi from the 55th District (585-223-1800), Senator Michael Nozzolio, 54th District (315-568-9816) and Senator George Maziarz, 62nd District (585-637-5800)-please contact them and ask them to co-sponsor the bill and do what they can to push the legislation through.

If you have questions, contact Joan at 244-6255 or joanmarv@rochester.rr.com.

Joan Rosenthal, Social Policy Committee, Off-Board Specialist on Lead Poisoning LWVNYS

NYSLWV Agenda for 2008

LWVNYS has set its 2008 Legislative Agenda. The issues are:

- A. Good Government
 - Redistricting
 - Campaign Finance Reform
 - Voting Technology
 - Court Restructuring
- B. Cost Effective and Accessible Health Care
- C. Natural Resources, Energy and Environment
 - Greenhouse Gas Emissions
 - Energy Efficiency
 - Water Quality
 - Smart Growth

These topics were selected from various League programs studied and adopted in previous years.

Our local League has already had several League Days on these issues. This year we will continue our League Day programs on them. After you have attended one of the programs, call or write your local state officials. You'll have lots of facts that can influence them to support the League's positions.

Kathy Smith, *VP Action*



League members participating in Consensus on Immigration



FEBRUARY 2008

FEBRUARY 2008						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4 VOTER Deadline	5 NYS Primary	6	7 League Day 10:00 am WXXI	8	9
10	11	12 Social Policy Committee 5:30 pm	13	14 Executive Committee Naturalization Ceremony	15	16
17	18	19	20 Natural Resources Committee 9:30am	21 Local Government Committee	22	23
24	25	26	27	28 Board Meeting 1:45 PM	29	

MARCH 2008

MARCH 2008						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
						1
2	3 VOTER Deadline	4	5	6 League Day 10:00 am	7	8
9	10	11 5:30 Social Policy Committee*	12	13 Executive Committee Naturalization Ceremony	14	15
16	17	18	19 Natural Resources Committee 9:30	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27 Board Meeting 1:45 PM	28	29
30	31					

*Board meets in the Bagel Bin Conference Room, 2600 Elmwood Avenue, at 1:45 PM on the fourth Thursday of each month.
Executive Committee meets at the Town & Country Restaurant, 3205 Chili Avenue, at 9:00 AM on the 2nd Thursday of each month.*

*League Days are normally held at 1600 East Avenue at 10:00 AM on the first Thursday of the month.
Parking is at the rear of the building.*

*Natural Resources meets at the home of Ann Jones, 244-9337; Social Policy and Immigration Committees,
call Georgia DeGregorio at 585-787-9692, Local Government Committee call Judy Weinstein at 442-9815 and
Social Policy Committee meets at the home of Joan Rosenthal 244-6255*

AM Naturalization Ceremonies are held at Monroe County Office Building, 39 W. Main St;
PM Naturalization Ceremonies are held at Federal Court House at 100 State Street.

League Days are open to the public. Calendar information subject to change.

For more complete information consult our website at www.lwv-rma.org, call the office at 262-3730 or e-mail us at lwvrma@frontiernet.net

Water For Sale!

A few years ago a foreign country wanted to buy water from the Great Lakes. Suddenly, we became very aware of the possibility that one of our water sources, Lake Ontario, could be considered a commodity to be sold. Below is a very brief summary of the current situation and privatization.

Many countries buy and/or sell water. Two international companies, Veolia Environment (formerly Vivendi SA) and Suez Lyonnaise supply water to over 200 million people in 120 countries around the world. In the USA subsidiaries of Suez Lyonnaise supply/distribute water to cities in 17 states.

Water can be sold through several different venues that vary from a fully public system where water is treated and distributed by a municipal agency or department to a fully private facility where supply, distribution, and management are provided by the private sector. In between are public/corporate utilities where ownership is split among private and public shareholders; and mixed management where ownership is public, but operated and managed by a private entity under contract.

Advocates of public water supplies state that water is essential to life and that clean, safe and inexpensive water should be available to all; this can be assured only by public ownership. Advocates of privatization cite benefits of financing where the system must be built or is in need of major reno-

vation, better technical expertise and efficiency – although the last one is questionable in some countries where government is not knowledgeable about water systems. In our country the private water supply corporations are often allied with other corporations that supply materials for water treatment and water related equipment.

For more information about the pros and cons of selling water and countries that use privatized sources, google THIRST, American Water Corp., United Water NJ, and water privatization and then go see THIRST.

Jane Schmitt, *Natural Resources Committee*

Listen In

Dorothy Borgus, League President, and Dr. Kent Gardner of the Center for Governmental Research will be guests on WXXI's Bob Smith Show at 1:00pm on Friday, January 25th when the topic will be LDC's (Local Development Corporations). Tune in.

Thank You

A special thank you is due Beverly Longbine, CPA who generously completes our League's Federal and NYS annual tax returns for non-profit organizations. Her contribution-in-kind is most appreciated and reserves precious dollars to be spent on our educational activities instead. On behalf of our entire membership, thanks Beverly.

Dorothy Borgus

Join the League Today!



Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Check Amount: _____

Level of Membership: _____

Yes! I would like to get The VOTER in my E-Mail!

Please send this form and your check payable to League of Women Voters/RMA to:
LWV/RMA, Times Square Building,
45 Exchange Street, Suite 508,
Rochester, New York 14614

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS:

Individual/Associate	\$70
Household	\$100
Susan B. Anthony/Frederick Douglass	\$150
Carrie Chapman Catt	\$200
Student (full-time/under 25)	\$25
Low income, call office	Sliding Scale



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League of Women Voters**

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**March VOTER Deadline is
February 4th!**

Goals of the League of Women Voters:

- To encourage informed citizen's participation in government and politics
- To influence public policy through education and advocacy

In nature there are nether rewards nor
punishments - there are consequences.

Robert G. Ingersol,
from "Some Reasons Why"