



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

The Leaguer

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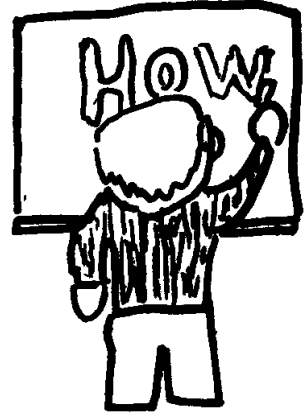
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY

www.lwvchautauqua.org 413-9595 or 672-4275

"The Dynamics of Public School Finance: Where Does the Money Go in NYS?"

Dr. James M. Merrins, speaker

School finance reform has emerged as a critical component for the transformation of public schools. A growing number of districts have turned to an approach known by different names – student-based budgeting, weighted student funding, and fair student funding, among others – in which budgets are allocated to schools in dollars, based on a school’s particular mix of students, rather than in staff positions.



JANUARY 25 - NOON

The Brick Room

NOTE CHANGE OF VENUE

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LWV Chautauqua County
PO Box 224
Dunkirk, NY, 14048

James M. Merrins, Ed.D., SDA, SBA

Dr. Jim Merrins is currently Executive Program Administrator of the Educational Leadership Institute, SUNY Oswego, School of Education, and Executive Director of the School District Internal Auditing Alliance (SDIAA). He administers and teaches the statewide *Transition to Superintendency Program* and numerous fiscal workshops for superintendents and experienced school administrators. His workshops and programs include *Fiscal Navigation for Superintendents*, *Everything is Negotiable*, *At the Table Negotiating Skills*, *Claims Auditor Training*, and the *School Business Officials Training and Support Program*. Jim has 38 years experience in school administration, including 16 years as a Superintendent of Schools in Fredonia and Honeoye, New York. For fourteen years he was the Executive Program Administrator for the Greater Southern Tier BOCES (NY). Dr. Merrins is New York State certified as a School Business Administrator. Dr. Merrins taught school finance and school law as an adjunct professor at SUNY colleges (Brockport, Fredonia, and Oswego) for several years. Dr. Merrins has a doctorate in Public School Administration with minors in Instructional Systems Technology and Public Administration (*Indiana University*, Bloomington, '79).



Just a gentle reminder. If you have not already done so, now is the time to renew your membership in the League of Women Voters of Chautauqua County. Individual membership is \$60. Household is \$90. Student is \$25. Send your check payable to LWV Chautauqua County to 68 Lambert Avenue, Fredonia, NY 14063.



Thanking You in Advance, the Membership Committee

January 25th at Noon Luncheon

The Brick Room, 49 West Main Street, Fredonia

"The Dynamics of Public School Finance: Where Does the Money Go in NYS?" with Dr. James Merrins

- Chicken club with Hickory smoked bacon and avocado mayonnaise
- Grilled salmon cake sandwich with honey mustard
- Pulled pork sandwich with vegetable slaw

All served with pasta salad side, coffee/tea, tax and tip—\$12.00

NAME _____ PHONE _____
 ADDRESS _____ EMAIL _____

Send Reservations to:

Marti Burdick, 5206 West Lake Rd, Dunkirk 14063, 672-5546, martiburdick@netsync.net

From Your Board...

Dear League Member,
It has been quite an exciting year! Thank you for all of your support and hard work.

This year, the League celebrated our 90th anniversary and we held an event in our community to honor our past and celebrate our present and future! We also held forums on the importance of the census, our county's assets, update on Chautauqua Lake, education in NYS, advocated for issues surrounding social services in the county, and a number of other topics that are of interest to the future of our community. And as always, we have been very busy registering voters and coordinating and moderating debates. **Thank you!**

The work you have dedicated yourself to in the past year makes us proud - but perhaps what makes us even prouder is the grace and civility each of you has shown during a particularly nasty election cycle. While it seemed as though the tone of the November 2010 election hit a new low, our League members maintained their decorum and continued their nonpartisan work educating in our community.

Thank you for continuing to encourage thoughtful, civil, and fact-based discussion of the issues. Each of you should be extremely proud of your work. We cannot thank you enough for your dedication to the League, our communities, our state, and our nation as you maintain yourselves as nonpartisan and trusted sources of information.

With gratitude,
Your Leadership Team

*Minda Rae Amiran Claudia Ansell Perce Bernatz Gloria Garretson Reggie Komar
Gen Ludemann Marcia Merrins Shirley Palawski Judy Reynolds Tillie Solomonson*



The Laura Paul Award for Service to Democracy

Laura Paul was a member of the League of Women Voters all her adult life, serving three terms as president of the Chautauqua County chapter, conducting countless Meet the Candidates forums, leading voter registration campaigns, and advocating for students' right to vote in their college communities. She also served on the Great Lakes Commission, an international body charged with cleaning and conserving water in the lakes.

Last year, the Chautauqua County LWV established an award in her name. The award goes to a person in the community who is not a member of the League or an elected or appointed official but who has made a major contribution by informing the electorate on important issues or by acting to preserve democratic institutions. Last year the award went to John D'Agostino, the editor/publisher of the Observer, which has consistently interviewed pairs of opposing candidates and presented their ideas at length and has given space to conflicting views on problems facing the community. In addition, Mr. D'Agostino has led a number of public forums on government consolidation and has presided over United Way fundraising campaigns.

Do you know of somebody who deserves the Laura Paul award this year? The award will be presented during the May 3 annual meeting, a festive dinner at the Shorewood Country Club. Please send us a brief nominating message stating why the person should receive the award. Address it to Gloria Garretson, gloriag543@roadrunner.com or Judy Reynolds, jtrpurple@yahoo.com.

Redistricting Reform

During the last election, we heard most candidates for state office repeat that “the New York State legislature is the most dysfunctional in the nation.” Why has this dubious honor been bestowed on New York? Like many reputations, this one was well-earned. A poll conducted last summer showed that 83 percent of those questioned agreed with the description of the state government as “dysfunctional,” up from 76 percent in December of 2009 and 71 percent in April 2009. That poll further showed that 76 percent of voters disapproved of the Legislature, 51 percent of respondents said that their state senator should be voted out of office in November, while only 36 percent said their senator deserved re-election. The poll said half of respondents also want to oust their Assembly member, compared with 34 percent who favor re-election.

So what happened at the election?

Well, despite the fact that the disapproval rating of the legislature was off the charts, and the national fervor against incumbents was at a fever pitch, most incumbents in the New York State legislature were re-elected. This repeats the pattern of past years, in which incumbent state legislative candidates were re-elected at a staggering rate. According to NYPIRG, over the past 22 years, only 30 incumbents

have been beaten in the general elections. How does this happen? One of the reasons is the way in which our state draws the lines determining the electoral districts.

The League of Women Voters of New York State is working extremely hard to convince our legislators that the process we use to determine the electoral lines as a result of the recent census should be determined by a process which meets the following criteria:

- Creates a new, independent citizens redistricting commission that is fairly chosen to draw congressional and legislative district lines. These lines must not favor any incumbent or political party and must employ even-handed and sensible redistricting guidelines that provide for fair and effective representation of racial and language minority groups.
- Ensures adequate disclosure and opportunities for public input of redistricting proceedings and data.
- Preserves and creates an effective mechanism for legislative approval of the independent redistricting commission’s plan. recommendations are found in “The Case For Redistricting Reform: A Briefing Paper Examining New York State’s Redistricting.”

Here is the executive summary of this report. The information can also be found at the New York State League of Women Voters website (www.lwvny.org)

Politically motivated mapmakers exploit weaknesses in state law to further their efforts to “rig” district lines in favor of the majority parties in each house and the re-election prospects of incumbents. As lawmakers begin to consider how to reform the state’s previous redistricting approach, it is important to examine the effects of the most highly partisan redistricting techniques, which taken together, reduce competition and ultimately, diminish government accountability.”

Six Findings of the Case For Redistricting Reform



1. Only 29 of 212 state legislative districts (14 percent) have been drawn within one percent of the “ideal size.” The ideal size is the size of a district if each legislator represented the same amount of people as other legislators in their house. In a representative democracy, ensuring districts of similar size ensures fair representation.
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.
3. Mapmaking practices have allowed for the creation of district shapes that ignore the state’s constitutional requirement that districts be compact.
4. Mapmaking practices have been used to remove significant electoral threats that challengers posed to incumbent legislators.
5. From 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.
6. As seen above, New York’s redistricting practices make it incredibly difficult for challengers to succeed. 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 two to one or greater. Nearly 75 percent of Assembly winners won by that margin or greater. Roughly five percent of races were close.

The Report’s Recommendation

The authors concluded that an independent redistricting commission is needed to create fair legislative districts in New York State and to ensure that the state’s districts adhere to the principle of one person, one vote and that the primary goal of mapmakers is to reflect the interests of the general public, not the political parties and legislative incumbents.



2010 Election Survey:

Machines Perform But Privacy Suffers

The League of Women Voters of New York State 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.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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 New York State League website: www.lwvny.org.



Join Us for Another Hot Topic!

February 25 at Noon

At the Clarion

In LWV Chautauqua’s efforts to be informed energy consumers, here is an article from the Union of Concerned Scientists.

“In recent years, consumers have become increasingly concerned about the environmental impacts of the vehicles they drive. In response, today’s manufacturers often make claims of ecological stewardship, touting green automotive technologies and product lines. Yet upon closer scrutiny, many of their assertions lack substance.

The Union of Concerned Scientists’ Automaker Rankings 2010

assessment puts these claims to the test by using government data to measure the environmental performance of each of the eight best-selling automakers’ product offerings. Focusing on model year 2008—the latest for which final data are available—and assessing each manufacturer based on the smog-forming and global warming emissions of the entire fleet of vehicles it sells, we objectively measure the companies’ true environmental performance.

Automaker Fleet Average Environmental Scores, 2010 by manufacturer



Note: Scores proportional to average per-mile smog and global warming emissions based on model year 2008 vehicles. Lower scores indicate less pollution. Industry average=100. Source: "Automaker Rankings: 2010," Union of Concerned Scientists, October 2010

League’s Successes During Election 2010

VOTER PROTECTION EFFORTS All year long, Leagues in key states worked to protect voters’ rights by fighting efforts that would disenfranchise certain groups like minorities, the elderly, and students. The League mobilized to fight back against burdensome new rules and administrative practices and other outrageous scare tactics designed to frighten ordinary citizens or dissuade them from exercising America’s most precious right.

VOTE 4R11.ORG—Millions of citizens turned to the League for answers to their questions and they found them on VOTE411.org. While viewing nearly 10 million pages of information, voters were able to find the answers to their most commonly asked questions: am I registered and, if not, how do I register, who’s on my ballot and where is my polling place? In fact, over 4,000 websites promoted VOTE411 as a tool for their users!

VOTER REGISTRATION—Through our [High School Voter Registration Project](#), we set out on a multi-state effort to encourage young people — especially young minorities — to register to vote. This groundbreaking project was also a first-of-its-kind research experiment measuring the effectiveness of various voter registration strategies in high schools.

While initial Election Day reports indicate young people turned out to vote in numbers comparable to past midterm elections, we know much more needs to be done to empower young people, especially underrepresented youth. Just days before Election Day, the League hosted a [forum](#) to discuss the trends and future plans to impact youth civic participation.

FIGHT FOR DISCLOSURE The Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision gave big corporations and unions the green light to raise and spend unlimited amounts from anonymous donors. As a result, moneyed interests dumped unprecedented millions of secret money into the 2010 campaign.

The [League will continue in its efforts](#) to call on Congress to pass the DISCLOSE Act, which would restore transparency to U.S. elections by requiring disclosure of corporate and union spending in candidate elections. We also call on Congress to [preserve and extend ethics enforcement](#). With the election system awash in special interest money, this is no time to cut back on the enforcement of ethics standards in Washington.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

January 11	BOARD MEETING — 1:30 P.M. Marcia Merrins, 42 Rosalyn Court, Fredonia, 672-4275
January 25	NOON LUNCHEON at the Brick Room " The Dynamics of Public School Finance: Where Does the Money Go in NYS? " with Jim Merrins Reservations—Marti Burdick, 5206 West Lake Road Dunkirk, 14048, 672-5546, martiburdick@netsync.net
February 23	NOON LUNCHEON — at the Clarion " Privatization of Government Services: What Does it Mean for You? " Jim Hurtgen, SUNY Fredonia, speaker
March 22	NOON LUNCHEON — at the White Horse Inn " The Future of SUNY at Fredonia , Virginia Horvath,
May 3	ANNUAL MEETING at Shorewood Country Club, Jonathan Lawrence, CEO Brooks Hospital

THANK YOU TO OUR ADVERTISERS

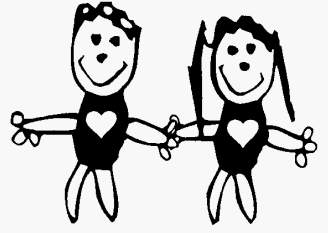
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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®

The League of Women Voters of Chautauqua County is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement.

Invite a Friend to Join or Give the Gift Of League Membership!!

Make Your Voice Heard Join Us Today!

League of Women Voters of Chautauqua County

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Gen Ludemann

Marcia Merrins

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2010 Membership

Mail to: Perce Bernatz,

68 Lambert Ave, Fredonia, NY 14063

Membership Dues: through December 31, 2010

Individual: \$60; Family: \$90; Student: \$25

(Check payable to LWV Chautauqua County)

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

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I would like to get involved with:

Local Issues Voter Service State/National Issues Local Newsletter Assisting with minor tasks occasionally Other: _____