

Protect Your Right to Vote – January 19th

By Patricia Nugent

How precious is our right to vote in a democracy! Our organization is founded on the fact that female citizens were once denied the right to vote. Our brave soldiers have fought and died to ensure the right to vote in other countries. Yet as many as five million US citizens have recently lost their right to vote as a result of legislation being passed in more than 20 states, with several more on the verge of passing similar restrictions. In particular, the elderly, minorities, and youth are being disenfranchised. This is the greatest threat to voting rights in our lifetime. And it is a concerted effort to sway election results.

What's the big deal, you might ask. So, someone just has to have a photo ID. Well, it IS a big deal. Many of the recently disenfranchised don't have drivers' licenses due to age or poverty. And, yes, some states issue ID's for free. But...first you have to get to Motor Vehicles, and then you have to show a birth certificate to get the ID. Many can't locate their birth certificate or, if born at home, never had one. If your married or adopted name is different than your birth name, you have to show an ID with your original name to request a new birth certificate. (How many of us still have those? You can see how women are particularly impacted.) And on it goes. Plus, there's a fee for applying for a replacement birth certificate, which is a re-introduction of the poll tax, which was outlawed for its discriminatory nature.

This legislation is also very expensive to enact and enforce, at a time when so many municipalities are struggling financially. Yet, statistically, we have a greater chance of being struck by lightning than of being impersonated at the polls.

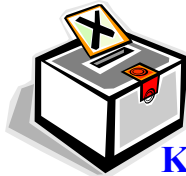
This has the cumulative effect of suppressing the votes of the elderly, minority, and youth populations. If you've seen the elderly women crying on TV because they could not vote this past November – women who have not missed an election in over 60 years – you have a sense of the personal pain involved. Yet, the damage goes much deeper, striking at the very heart of our democracy.

We know you care about this issue – you told us at meetings and through your contributions. On January 19th at 7pm at Gannett Auditorium at Skidmore College, we are privileged to be hosting Tim

O'Brien from LWVUS, a specialist on Voter Protection, speaking to us about what is happening and why, and what we can do about it. There will also be panelists from the Albany-based Law and Justice Center, who just returned from the march in DC, and the NYCLU. Under our League's leadership, neighboring Leagues and other organizations will also be joining us as co-sponsors.

We need all hands on deck for this one – NOTHING this organization does is more important than defending every citizen's right to vote. Please show up on January 19th and bring your neighbors – don't let democracy slip through our fingers.

Check our website www.lwvsaratoga.org for additional information.



Keynote Speaker: TIM O'BRIEN

Tim O'Brien is the Project Manager for the Public Advocacy for Voter Protection (PAVP) project at the League of Women Voters of the U.S. based in Washington DC. He has worked for the League since 2007 – during that time he has expanded the PAVP project's work from 6 to 22 states.

The PAVP project focuses on six major areas identified as essential elements in protecting the votes of all citizens and improving election administration overall:

1. Opposing photo ID and documentary proof-of-citizenship in the voting and registration;
2. Guarding against undue restrictions on voter registration;
3. Improving administration of statewide voter registration database systems and guarding against wrongful or incorrect purging;
4. Improving polling place management;
5. Improving poll worker training and recruitment; and,
6. Fighting against last minute barriers to voting.

Prior to working for the League, Mr. O'Brien was the State Affairs Director for the Human Rights Campaign. He spent five years working in the Wisconsin State Legislature as a policy analyst and owned and operated a small business in Madison, Wisconsin.