



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SARATOGA COUNTY, NEW YORK

BULLETIN

September 2011

OUR MISSION

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.

Diversity Policy

The League of Women Voters of Saratoga County, in both its values and practices, is committed to inclusion and diversity.

This means:

There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the League on the basis of economic position, gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin or disability.

We recognize that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision-making.

We believe inclusiveness enhances the organization's ability to respond more effectively to changing conditions and needs.

We affirm our commitment to reflecting the diversity of Saratoga County.

What is the Role of Government in Education?

Reaching consensus after studying an issue is at the heart of the League. This fall, along with local leagues across the country we will be participating in a consensus process focusing on the role of the Federal Government in Education. This is a topic that is constantly in the news: every day you will find an article in the newspaper or a magazine discussing this complex issue.

We have been posting background material on our website, www.lwvsaratoga.org, all summer long. You can go to the website, click on Education Study in the lefthand column, and get up to speed on what we will be discussing. We will continue to post relevant documents all fall. We also have a blog where you can share your thoughts. There is a link to the blog on the education study page. Just click, and comment.

Since this is such a broad topic, we have divided the consensus into two sections. Our first meeting will be **Tuesday, September 27th, from 7 – 9 pm, at the Saratoga Library.** At that meeting we will discuss the role of the federal government in education, questions about equity in education, education of the disadvantaged, and early childhood education. Our second meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 27th.** See the October issue for more.

Please plan to attend these meetings and share your opinions as we join together with our fellow leaguers to develop the LWV position on education.

See page 3 for background material

WE HAVE A NEW PRESIDENT! *See pages 2&5*

CANDIDATE FORUM FOR THE SARATOGA SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL ELECTION

Date: Wednesday, October 19, 2011

Place: Saratoga Springs High School Auditorium

Time: 7 pm



Included are candidates in contested races: Mayor and Commissioners of Public Safety and Finance. Candidates in uncontested races will be given an opportunity to make a brief statement.

Keep watching the LWVSC website (lwvsaratoga.org) to see what other candidate events may be planned in the next few weeks.

See page 7 for more. Go to our website: www.lwvsaratoga.org



**League of Women Voters
of Saratoga County (NY-639)**

Official address: LWV of Saratoga County
PO Box 1029, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
www.lwvsaratoga.org Phone: 728-0237

Board of Directors

All phone numbers in 518 area code, unless noted

President/Program Chair

Patricia Nugent, 20 Secretariat Lane, Saratoga Springs, NY
12866 584-4255

1st Vice President/Voter Services

Ann Kril, 60 Hillcrest Drive, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
584-1436

2nd Vice President/Youth Service Liaison

Darnell Rohrbaugh, 6 Almaria Drive, Clifton Park, NY 12065
371-2588

Treasurer

Diane Whitburn, 11 North Hill Dr., Ballston Lake, NY 12019
877-5310

Secretary/Observer Corp Liaison

Donna Dardaris, 64 Middle St., Ballston Spa, NY 12020
884-9070

Director/Good Government Liaison

Barbara Murphy, 2 Granada Drive, Clifton Park, 12065
371-6534

Director/Membership Chair

Pattie Garrett, 537 Union Ave., Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
584-4271

Director/Bulletin

Margot Ammon, 238 Nelson Ave., Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
587-4204

Director/Advocacy & Issues Chair

Patricia Reed, 12 Clubhouse Dr., Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
583-1376

Director

Mary Lou Classen, 4 Blue Spruce Lane, Ballston Lake, NY
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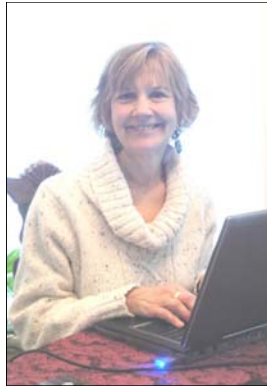
Meg Stevens, 13 Whippletree Rd., Ballston Spa, NY 12020
885-3650

**League of Women Voters of New York State or
League of Women Voters of New York State
Education Foundation**

62 Grand Street, Albany, NY 12207
465-4162 www.lwvny.org

Executive Director: **Laura Bierman**, laura@lwvny.org
President: **Betsey Swan**, betsey@lwvny.org

League of Women Voters of the United States
1730 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-4508
202-429-1965 www.lwv.org
President: **Elizabeth MacNamara**



From the President -

I am honored to be the new president of the Saratoga County League of Women Voters. And...I am very aware of the BIG shoes I have to fill. But I'm going on record right now that it's not up to me – it's up to US to carry on Barb Thomas's legacy, which is this wonderfully strong and healthy organization. We cannot squander what Barb has bequeathed. To quote Sojourner Truth, we must "keep the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait 'til it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again."

In addition to my experience as a public school administrator, my best qualification for this role is that I embrace the ambitious and progressive agenda of this seemingly well-behaved organization. I am passionate about League positions on gun control, campaign finance, reproductive choice, civil liberties, environmental protection, health care, immigration, and early intervention. And I know you are too. The League is a non-partisan *political* organization. And be political we must, during these financially and socially troubled times. Our program planning meeting last June resulted in a lively discussion about becoming more visible and vocal for the causes the League supports on the national and state levels. We can't let our democratic freedoms slip away. *Because if the League doesn't speak up, who will?*

I've read the studies – I know people prefer to send money and not show up. That's what I did for years. I now know the League and our democracy cannot afford bystanders - not now. We are looking to involve all of our members in the important work that lies before us. Inside, you'll read about our new recruitment strategy and the action we have been and will be doing. We're counting on you all to find your niche and lend a hand.

I welcome our new board members Meg Stevens and Darnell Rohrbaugh, and I thank our returning board members. There is so much talent and passion among them. Change can be hard on an organization after a long-tenured leader. Together, we will strive to do what is best for this vital organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as we work together on these important issues. Please feel free to contact me with any suggestions or guidance you may have.

Pat

Welcome New Members
DEIRDRE LADD
PETER & LINDA NEENAN

THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION— EQUITY AND FUNDING

Public school funding comes from many sources – federal, state and local taxes as well as grants provided by both governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The federal government adds less than 10 percent to local education budgets, yet it contributes significantly to the rules for how the funding is used. Additionally, the United States invests 5 percent of the GDP in public education. Nearly half of the K-12 education funding in the United States is intended to come from the states, drawn from a combination of income taxes, fees and other taxes. However, some states resemble Illinois, where the state’s share is only 27 percent. The remainder usually comes from local property taxes.

Equity

States that rely heavily on property taxes to fund education tend to have large inequities in school funding, which mirror the inequity of wealth in society-at-large. Inequities in wealth stem from the fact that wealthy people earn much of their income from investments and/or inherited funds, while the poor earn all of their income from jobs and they spend it on food, shelter, transportation, etc. In the United States, the wealthiest 20 percent own 84 percent of the total wealth.

Inequities in school funding reflect housing patterns. During the past 50 years since *Brown vs. Board of Education*, schools have become re-segregated. Currently, three-fourths of the Black and Latino/a students attend schools that are predominately non-white.

Adequacy

Since, 1990, rather than looking at equity, most lawsuits have focused on adequacy—whether a state is providing local districts with just enough funding and resources to give all students a basic education. A model was developed calculating the cost of an adequate education. It defined an adequate education as one that includes factors such as a full-day kindergarten, core class sizes of 15 for grades K-3, 25 for grades 4-6 and specialist teachers. The cost of an adequate education varies. For instance, more money is needed to educate students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

Funding Priorities

When schools are not funded adequately, this has a long-lasting impact. For instance, dropouts cost the country at least \$200 billion a year in lost wages and taxes, costs for social services and crime. Since the 1980s, national investments have spent three times more on the prison system than on education. Data show that the national average for educating a child is \$9500, while it costs \$43,000 per year to keep a person incarcerated. With 5 percent of the world’s population in the United States, we house 25 percent of the world criminals.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act, “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), which was intended to close achievement gaps, particularly for minority children. However, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveal that scores were higher in math and reading for minority students before NCLB. One provision of NCLB permitted parents to remove a student from a low-performing school and transfer to another, better performing school. They would receive a voucher which would pay some of the cost of attending another school – public or private. Additionally, courts and education agencies stepped in to “remediate.” The sanctions imposed by NCLB had the effect of punishing or threatening punishment to low-performing schools and teachers, sending them the message that they were incompetent and that they should not have the right to make decisions about how to educate students. Studies (Reeve, 2009) showed that threatening public schools and teachers with punishment had harmful effects on students who remained in the public schools.

Supporters of NCLB appreciate the increase in accountability for schools and teachers as well as the focus on low scoring sub-groups. Critics of NCLB decry the lack of federal funding for many of the Act’s mandates, the emphasis on penalties, the reliance on standardized tests, and the lack of attention to gifted students as well as to subjects such as science, social studies and the arts. One goal of

Continued next page

NCLB has been to offer choice to parents whose children attend poorly performing schools.

However, large-scale studies of voucher school students have revealed little difference in their performance compared to public school students with similar backgrounds, and having vouchers has not raised the performance of the most needy students. Furthermore, many argue that the NCLB goal of 95 percent of students meeting state standards in reading and math by 2014 is unrealistic.

Race to the Top (RttT)

Race to the Top was signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2009. This program shifted the basis of awarding funds to emphasize competition. Competitive grants reward reform planned in the winning states. Funding is flexible as long as states demonstrate grant dollars are aligned with the agenda outlined in their winning applications. Only twelve states received funding through RttT.

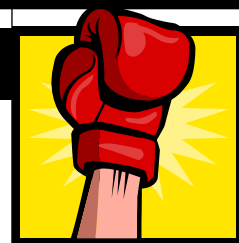
Two of the requirements met by states that received RttT funding were (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance and (2) lifting the cap on the number of charter schools that could be created.

While both these funding requirements can be effective, neither is foolproof, and each addresses only one part of the problems schools face. For instance, research studies show that promising increased pay based on teacher effectiveness is not an effective incentive. Furthermore, research showed there is a problem when teacher performance evaluation is based only on student scores in standardized tests (Springer et. al. 2010).

Although there is no question that some charter schools are effective, they have not been the panacea many expected. They were originally proposed as an opportunity for educators to test research-supported methods for reaching hard-to-educate children, and some have done quite well. However, a large-scale research study funded by pro-charter advocates revealed that only 17 percent of the 2403 charter schools had significantly more growth in test scores compared to traditional public schools, and, in fact, 37 percent showed significantly less growth. Furthermore, many charter schools do not admit and/or retain students who need increased support, e.g., students from impoverished communities and students with special needs.

References for this article can be found at:
www.lwvsaratoga.org/educationstudies

MEMBERSHIP



Activist Recruitment Drive to Kick Off in October

The health of any organization depends upon the number and involvement of its members. With leadership from our new Membership Chair, Pattie Garrett, our League will be taking an active stance in recruiting “activists” who are tired of the partisan politics yet agree with the League’s positions on good government, civil liberties, and quality of life. Our theme, *We’re Putting Our Gloves Back On to Fight for Your Freedoms* will be featured on our new membership brochure. (We modified the concept from the LWVNYS.)

We will be having an Activist Recruitment Drive on Thursday, October 6 from 6-8pm at the Malta Community Center. Invite a friend to learn more about the organization you support. We could double our numbers (and our influence) if each current member recruited at least one other person to join (give a gift certificate if you have to!)

If you’re interested in joining the Membership Committee, please contact Pattie Garrett.

A GIFT OF EMPOWERMENT

LWV Saratoga County is now offering gift certificates for a one year membership in our League. It’s the perfect birthday, graduation or holiday gift for the person who shares your passion for the issues but hasn’t gotten around to joining yet.

There aren’t many gifts you can get for \$50 that would have such a significant impact – on the recipient and on the issues. There is a sense of pride that accompanies League membership and... this gift will multiply our voices about the issues we all care about.



The recipient will get a certificate like the above, and information about the League. S/he must be a resident of Saratoga County to qualify. To give the *Gift of Empowerment*, please complete the form on page 8. It’s worth every penny.

LWV VICTORY Marriage Equality in NYS

In 2010, our Saratoga County League, led by Lori Dawson, proposed a marriage equality position to LWVUS. At the 2010 national convention, delegates almost unanimously supported the addition of marriage equality to the League's equality of opportunity position.

Thanks to a large number of telephone calls, emails, and office visits by members of the Saratoga County League of Women Voters and others, Senator McDonald reconsidered his position and was a very important player in the passage, this summer, of New York's law legalizing same sex marriages.

In keeping with our position, the next step will be to lobby for the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

2011 ANNUAL MEETING



YOUR NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Front, left to right: Mary Lou Classen, Diane Whitburn (treasurer), Patricia Nugent (President), Meg Stevens, Donna Dardaris (secretary), Back row: Darnell Rohrbaugh (2nd vice-president), Pattie Garrett, Patricia Reed, Barbara Murphy, Margot Ammon. Not shown: Ann Kril (1st Vice-president).

She Will Be Missed

Barbara Batten, 93, died June 9, 2011. She was a life member of the League of Women Voters and a member of LWV Saratoga for the last ten years of her life. Our sympathy to her family and especially her daughter, Kathryn Oppedisano, also a member of this League.

GOT SCISSORS?

We are looking for a "clipper" for each of the daily and weekly papers that cover Saratoga County, to clip articles specifically about our League. Marian Potter has agreed to be our League archivist if she is provided with the clippings. You simply need to cut the article out, date it, and send it to Marian at 173 Saratoga Blvd, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.

We need one person per publication so please email: (mpotter002@nycap.rr.com) or call (583-1315) Marian to let her know you'll do it.



Presidents abound!

Newly elected President, Patricia Nugent joins past-President, Barbara Thomas and LWWNY President, Betsy Swan



Ron Seyb, Associate Professor of Government at Skidmore College addressed us at our annual meeting on June 5th. Go to our website to view a summary of his talk, prepared by Ron, "**Who Speaks for Me? Free Speech, the Constitution and Corporations.**" *Even if you were present*, we suggest that you print it out and read it at www.lwvsaratoga.org because the subject is complicated – and important for us to understand.

“HELLO, LADIES”

By Patricia Nugent

It should have been a big deal. The County Board of Supervisors was holding a public hearing on whether to increase (for the third time) the number of residents that a county supervisor can represent. The magic number used to be 12,000; it was subsequently increased to 15,000 in 1981 and 20,000 in 1991. And now they were proposing to increase it to 25,000.

Why? If the Board didn't raise the number, the Town of Halfmoon would have to have a second supervisor representing its interests on the board. (But there are only 23 chairs in the meeting room, the same number as there were in 1968 prior to the population explosion on our county!)

Barbara Thomas, as League president, sent a letter to each supervisor last May recommending against raising the number and suggesting they instead consider a more systemic solution to ensure fair representation for the larger towns such as Malta, Wilton and Milton. No response was received.

On August 12, four League members (Francine Rodger, Helen Crawshaw, Margie VanMeter and I) showed up for the public hearing to reiterate the message in our original correspondence: *The League supports equitable representation coupled with informed and active participation in government.* Four League members (and Barb Thomas wrote a letter) ...and no one else. It apparently *wasn't* a big deal to most. As supervisors filed past us for the hearing, we heard “Hello, ladies,” as if they were expecting the League to show up. It reminded me of how President Woodrow Wilson must have felt when he looked out the White House window and saw those pesky suffragists hanging out with banners, demanding the franchise.

It was clear that no one other than the League seemed to care about the issue. On August 16th, the supervisors voted 17-2 to raise the number, thereby effectively diminishing the political voice of Halfmoon residents as well as the future voices of other large towns. (Even the current supervisor in Halfmoon, Mindy Wormuth, voted to increase the number.)

The two dissenting votes were cast by Joanne Yepsen (City of Saratoga; jyepsen@nycap.rr.com)

Join our Book Club

It's kind of like a book club, but we are just reading one book. The book is “Impact on Issues”, which is the book which explains all of the positions adopted over the years by the League of Women Voters of the US.

Did you know there are over 40 positions? The plan is we will meet on the 1st Tuesday of each month, and take turns reviewing the positions and explaining them to the assembled group.

Our second meeting will be at Francine Rodger's house, 34 Hemlock Drive, Clifton Park, at 1 PM on October 4th. At that meeting we will continue our review of the Social Policy Issues, looking at Equality of Opportunity, Health Care and Immigration. Again could we be more current? Join us to look at our policies, developed over the past 30 years, and see how they apply today. Call Francine at 371-8032 or email her at aerodger@aol.com to let her know you will be there.

We will continue to look at all of the Social Policy Issues in the Fall, then move onto Representative Government and International Relations in the winter, and Natural Resources in the Spring. Members will select the Issues they would like to research and we will develop a calendar for the year.

and John Collyer (Providence; providencesupervisor@nycap.rr.com). We encourage our League members to contact their offices to thank them for the vote they cast against further diminishing the voices of residents from larger towns.

Our League's Observer Corps makes it their duty to attend county committee meetings and board of supervisor meetings in order to monitor decisions that affect the residents of Saratoga County. This monitoring effort will become even more important as our county government strays further away from the concept of *one person, one vote*. If you'd like to aid in the effort, please contact Margie VanMeter, chair, at 587-1545. We must keep reminding our representatives that these “ladies” AND gentlemen from the League will continue to be visible and vocal in the interest of fully representative government – just like those annoying suffragists.

Attention Halfmoon Residents:
Your voice is MUCH smaller at the county level
than it should be.
SPEAK UP!

And the Winner is... LWV OF SARATOGA COUNTY



Our Voter Service Activity Gets State Award!

Congratulations to Ann Kril and the Voter Service team! Because of their efforts, our League was the recipient of a competitive state-wide award granted by the League of Women Voters of New York State at its 2011 biennial convention. The award was specifically for leading a collaborative group of Capital District Leagues in developing an online Voters' Guide and also for conducting joint candidate forums with neighboring Leagues when candidates' districts crossed county lines. Collaboration with area Chambers of Commerce and local newspapers was also cited in the announcement of the award.

The award was accepted by Christine Alexander, on behalf of the League's Voter Service Committee (Ann Kril, chair, Chris Alexander – online guide, Francine Rodger – online guide, Terry Lowenthal, Mary Lou Classen, Janice Burns, Millie Green, Debbie Peck-Kelleher). Chris was instrumental in pioneering Vote411 and SmartVoter on a state-wide level, two electronic tools that provide nonpartisan election-related information to the public.

In response, the *Post Star* wrote an editorial commending our Voter Service efforts. And this year, our team is still going strong heading into the 2011 elections. If you wish to be part of this winning effort – registering voters, helping at Candidate Forums, or reporting results on election night – please contact Ann Kril, our Voter Service chair.

CANDIDATE GUIDE

Online Guide Developed for Fall Elections

The Voter Service Committee has prepared questions for the Online Voter Guide, and the following candidates have been contacted for their responses:

1. All Saratoga County candidates for town/county supervisor (contested and uncontested races)
2. City Councils (Saratoga Springs and Mechanicville)

For the Supreme Court justice 4th judicial district and surrogate court judge, we will provide a link from our website to the NYS Unified Court System. VOTE 411 will be available October 8th through Election Day. Local newspapers will be providing a link to our Online Voter Guide, where residents will be able to see the candidates' bios and responses to questions from several websites. And we continue to work on more links from libraries and Chambers of Commerce. In addition, the *Spotlight News* will be printing an edition.

Be sure to check our website or go to VOTE411 after the first week in October for information on your candidates. Be an informed voter!

For the latest League action on
hydrofracking and redistricting
go to www.lwvny.org.

Thanks To Our Contributors

To LWVSC

Donna Dardaris

Betty Gallagher

Edward & Barbara Murphy

Claire Olds

Robert & Josephine Pasciullo

John & A.C. Riley

Meg Stevens

Barbara Thomas

To LWVNYSEF

Eleanor & Richard Lahey

Barbara Stamas

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 13, Tuesday, Primary Election, noon to 9pm

Sept 25, Sunday Peace Fair, noon - 4pm, Presbyterian New England Congregational Church, 24 Circular St, SS

September 27, Tuesday, Education Study and Consensus, Part I SSPL, 7pm

October 4, Tuesday, Impact on Issues Book Club, 34 Hemlock Drive, Clifton Park, 1pm

Oct 6, Thursday, Activist (Member) Recruitment Drive 6-8pm Malta Community Center. Bring a friend and sign him/her up to join the League!

October 19, Wednesday, SS City Council Candidate Forum, Saratoga Springs High School Auditorium, 7pm

October 27, Thursday, Education Study and Consensus, Part II, SSPL, 7pm



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SARATOGA COUNTY
P.O. BOX 1029 SARATOGA SPRINGS, NY 12866

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

September 2011

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Permit No. 16

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IF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS DOESN'T SPEAK UP, WHO WILL?

GET INVOLVED! GIVE 2 HOURS A MONTH TO THE OBSERVER CORP
Contact Margie VanMeter, 587-1545

JOIN US & MAKE A DIFFERENCE

THE BULLETIN IS FREE WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP

- YES!** I Would like to join the League. 2011 –2012 dues enclosed.
- \$50. Individual \$75 Family \$20 Student
- Please send more information Non-members may subscribe to the BULLETIN for \$15., enclosed
- In addition, I would like to contribute \$ _____ **Send a gift membership to:**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____ PHONE (home) _____ (work) _____

E-MAIL _____

Mail to: Membership, League of Women Voters P.O. Box 1029, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866