



League of Women Voters of NYS **STATE VOTER**

January 2015



From the President

On January 21, Governor Cuomo presented an unprecedented joint State of the State and 2015 Budget Program (2015 Opportunity Agenda). The League was well represented at the event and is currently analyzing the budget proposals in several different subject areas. The League will be presenting testimony at a number of the Joint Budget hearings. Watch the state website to read these testimonies.

Also last week, Assembly Speaker Silver was arrested by the FBI on corruption charges in connection with an investigation into his outside income. The League continues to monitor the impact of this arrest on the Assembly leadership and League priorities for the legislative session. The League will also continue to work with the other good government groups to advance long-needed necessary ethics reforms. A [statement](#) was released shortly after the arrest and is posted on the state website.

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ADVOCACY TRAINING DAY IN NYC

NEW DATE: FEBRUARY 5th

The state League will be holding its annual Advocacy Training session on **February 5 (from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm)** in New York City. The State Advocacy team, including our Issue Specialists, will be presenting information on the League's expected action during the upcoming legislative session. We hope that holding it in NYC this year will encourage more downstate members to come learn about our advocacy agenda. Plans are being developed to organize a lobby day later in the spring in Albany for members to directly lobby their legislators in Albany. **To attend the Feb. 5th Advocacy Training Day, please call or email Katrina at the state office (518-465-4162 or katrina@lwvny.org).**

IN THIS ISSUE

- [Advocacy Training](#)
- [Con Con Position Update](#)
- [2015 State Convention](#)
- [Join the LWVNYS Leadership Team in 2015](#)
- [Membership](#)
- [Grassroots Lobby](#)
- [Election Law Reform](#)
- [Judicial Issues](#)
- [Women's Issues](#)
- [Voter Services Survey Results](#)
- [Development](#)
- [Local League News](#)

SAVE THE DATE

The 2015 State League Convention will be held on **June 6-7, 2015**, at the Desmond Hotel in Albany. Mark your calendars now to join us!

Travel with the League



Click [here](#) for the latest newsletter from Travel Concepts.

Constitutional Convention Position Update

At the state League convention two years ago, the delegates voted to update our current position on Constitutional Convention with an emphasis on the method of delegate selection. The materials for the update are [here](#) and will also be sent to all local League Presidents separately. A chapter from the book, *Decision 1997*, published by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute, is also available [here](#). This book is considered the most comprehensive source of information on the constitutional convention process. The excerpt includes the Delegate portion section of the Commission report and provides details on both sides of several issues related to the delegate selection process.

This is an update with a limited scope and we are not changing any of the substantive aspects of the current position. Therefore we are asking local Leagues to approve the updated position instead of responding to questions and then the state Board developing the updated position.

The memo giving the background and explaining the updated position is only a couple pages long and should be very easy to understand. If you have any questions, you can call the state office, email Laura, or email me at robintwins@gmail.com. While we recommend that you discuss the update in a general membership meeting attached to a board meeting, your board can use other methods to get input from your local League members on the update, including soliciting their input by email. **Return the completed form to the state office by May 30, 2015.**

2015 State League Convention A Voice for Citizens, A Force for Change



The State League Convention will be held on June 6-7, 2015, at the Desmond Hotel in Albany. The theme is "A Voice for Citizens, A Force for Change." All members are invited to join us for workshops, business meeting, dinner and a speaker, caucuses and more! It's a great time to learn more about League and to network with other Leagues and League members from across the state. Each local League is entitled to a specific number of delegates, but there are always extras, or you can still attend as

a visitor. More info on registration will be available by Late February.

In the meantime, your local League has many activities to do to help plan the next two years for the state League. The Nominating Committee is looking for candidates to join the LWVNYS Board - see the article just below for more information if you know someone who would be great for a job - or if you'd like to nominate yourself!

The state League bylaws are available [here](#). Take a look at them and email the state League (Laura@lwwny.org) if you would like to suggest any revisions. Suggested amendments are due to the state office by March 1, 2015.

Program planning is another activity in which we seek local League input. Ask your local League board when they are planning to review the state's program. In this discussion, our members recommend whether we should keep each state League position, revised it, or delete it. You can see all of the state positions on the state website in [Impact on Issues](#). Members can also recommend new areas for study to evaluate whether we want a new position. This is your opportunity to influence our program - **new items CANNOT be introduced at Convention**; the ideas and suggestions must first be included in the local League's responses on Program Planning forms. So, become part of the process - ask when your local meeting is happening and join the discussion!

JOIN THE LWVNYS LEADERSHIP TEAM IN 2015

As the Nominating Committee for the June 2015 LWVNYS Convention we take our responsibilities seriously and passionately. We're genuinely excited about the terrific team of LWVNYS leaders that we are already assembling for 2015-2017 and invite you (or a League colleague of yours) to consider applying for one of our small number of open positions including directors for youth programs, membership, and citizen education.

The coming years will be both challenging and inspiring for League in New York State. Many local Leagues are in transition, and looking for ways to attract and retain new members in compelling ways. The state League stands ready to assist in these efforts, strengthening our skills, imparting information and tools, and sharing best practices across the state.

If you (or a friend) are passionate about League, willing to work with a team from all parts of the state to further League goals and engage with our talented and inspiring local League members and boards, please consider joining our LWVNYS board and working in an area you find compelling. It will be a way for you to share your strengths, learn from others, and help lead LWVNYS in the important years ahead.

For more information please contact Lisa Scott, Chair of the Nominating Committee (tel. 631-523-1653) or email lisawscott@gmail.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Dare Thompson, darethompson@gmail.com

How delightful it was that thirty LWV men and women from the Southern Tier and beyond turned out on a chilly but sunny day in Elmira on January 10th for an information and solution-swapping regional meeting. The Chemung league was a terrific host (thanks, Barb Luther and your MANY helpers!) and seven other leagues were represented: Broome/Tioga, Cortland, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins - and in the "beyond" category, Cazenovia and Utica-Rome.



Laura Ladd Bierman and Victoria Melillo-Jordan joined me to share information from the state League and to demonstrate how much information is on the state website (including a lot of information from LWVUS). We really hope more of you will take advantage of the wealth of information and training materials you can find there. We also continue to pass on this tip on how best to find what you want on the LWVUS site: Google it! E.g. if you want material on developing your membership, just Google "LWVUS + membership development." Some material may not be available if you haven't bothered to create a LOGIN password, so do that first if you want to be treated like a League member!

But of course the most valuable part of the day was what local league members learned from one another. We hope the excitement of these exchanges will continue on the regional calls that we always encourage all presidents to participate in.

We know there may be some sharing of study committees or speakers or co-presentation of programs going on in the Southern Tier, and we will watch you all with interest via your newsletters. What great energy and talents you bring to the League!

GRASSROOTS LOBBY DIRECTOR

Carol Mellor, Camellor@aol.com

Nearly 40 members participated in the last Update on Issues conference call which explored the way the League makes decisions and reviewed the process by which particular decisions to support, or not support, proposals and legislation were made.



To recap the process, when an issue upon which action is contemplated arises, it is referred for consideration to the State Issues Committee, which consists of the Issues and Advocacy Vice President, Legislative Director, Grassroots Advocacy Director, and any relevant Single Issue Specialist. Approval is NOT necessary for items which the League has supported/opposed in the past so long as action is consistent with a current position.

It is most important to remember that any local League board or member can bring a potential action item to the State Issues Committee. A meeting is convened by sending notice and relevant materials

to members of the committee. The preferred method of communication is e-mails, using the "REPLY ALL" button, with telephone conversations or conference calls as may be necessary. The procedures followed by the committee will be determined by the time framework for approval.

All decisions of the State Issues Committee are reported to the board after the decision was made. The board has the ultimate authority and retains the right to overrule any decision of the State Issues Committee on a going-forward basis.

We on the State Board and in the State Office understand that it is of utmost importance to keep our members informed about the actions taken by the League. We resolve to strive to keep information flowing to the members and to be responsive to the questions and concerns expressed to us by the members. We ask, in return, that the members take advantage of the resources available to them to keep themselves informed-which include the monthly Voter, Action Alerts, the Update on Issues conference calls, and the constantly updated web site.

ELECTION LAW REFORM

Aimee Allaud, 85aimes@nycap.rr.com



January 2015 brought new opportunities for visibility and advocacy on the League's Legislative Agenda on Election Law Reform. The League and our good government partners adopted a joint policy statement "Voter Participation: How to Turn Up the Volume" that debuted at the NYS Election Commissioners Association (ECA) conference in Albany. [Click here](#). At this annual two-day conference of local boards of elections commissioners we talked with the commissioners about how together we could increase voter participation through the policy and legislative changes identified on the policy statement. Obtaining the pragmatic point of view from the local boards of elections staff at their conference was a first for our organizations and will be important as we move forward to expand voter registration modernization

using existing technology methods. We heard their points of view on early in-person voting for their counties and no-excuse absentee voting. Improving ballot design to make the voter-marked ballot more "voter-friendly" has received bi-partisan support from the ECA and LWVNYS will be working on achieving changes to the NYS Election Law in the 2015 legislative session. Advancing the goals of the policy statement have some fiscal implications for local boards of elections, and meeting commissioners informally at our table was mutually profitable.

LWVNYS also partnered with statewide disability organizations at the ECA conference to bring attention to our opposition to continued use of lever voting machines for some local elections as permitted under annual extensions to the NYS Election Law. The newly developed policy statement of the collaborating organizations is available by [clicking here](#). League joined with the organizations and individuals at a press conference who described their disenfranchisement when trying to vote at school board and other local elections (click [here](#) for press release).

I will be attending the upcoming League Advocacy Training Workshop in NYC on February 5 and look forward to updating you on the latest developments on the election law reform agenda.

JUDICIAL ISSUES

Helga Schroeter, helgasasquith@verizon.net



Following last year's success in gaining more Family Court Judges state-wide, the Coalition for more Family Court Judges has decided to rename itself to reflect their current advocacy issues. The new "Coalition for Family Court Justice" plans to advocate for the needs of adequate resources and for adjustments in light of impending legislation to raise the age of criminal culpability for juveniles. The new coalition hopes to retain support from its previous members, including the LWVNYS.

The Governor's Commission On Youth, Public Safety And Justice (co-chaired by Soffiyah Elijah of the Correctional Association and Jeremy Creelan) had been charged with evaluating the current Juvenile Justice System and making recommendations for change. They just released a comprehensive report. The governor has pledged his full support and plans to turn the recommendations into legislative action. Proposed changes would incrementally raise Family Court jurisdiction from 16 to 17 years of age in 2017 and to 18 in 2018. The current age of 7 for Family Court jurisdiction would be raised to 12, although murder cases would remain at 10 and would not be sealed for future criminal proceedings. Instead of being sent to adult criminal prisons, juveniles would be kept in less restrictive, more rehabilitative settings up to the age of 21. More youth courts would be created. Under the League's positions, alternatives to incarceration should allow us to be supportive of most of these changes.

Other issues covered in the Judicial arena are better and more consistent funding of indigent's defense services and potential changes to the current grand jury system. All of these long-standing issues are likely to be addressed in the current legislative session. The League should be prepared to advocate for changes where appropriate under our positions.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

**Barb Thomas, barb.lwv@nycap.rr.com and
Lois Haignere, haigner@nycap.rr.com**

Since 2013, the state League has actively supported the passage of the Women's Equality Act comprised of 10 point agenda. Much of this legislation has been addressed in one house or the other, but never jointly passed to become law. The Senate passed 8 of the agenda items last week but has refused to pass legislation dealing with reproductive justice. In previous years, the Assembly has preferred to pass the Governor's 10 point agenda as a package.

The 2015 legislation session will allow the Women's Equality Coalition to move forward in a slightly more comprehensive way. In conjunction with the Women's Equality Coalition, LWVNYS will be supporting measures that advance economic and reproductive justice for all women in New York State. The Women's Equality Coalition has added the issues of child care and paid family leave to its agenda. LWVNYS, along with the WEC, will pursue a political strategy that includes:

- Working closely with the women in the legislature, as well as other lawmakers who support legislation which will move New York's women toward economic and reproductive justice; and
- Supporting the passage of bills, individually and/or collectively.

VOTER SERVICES SURVEY RESULTS

Similar to last year, less than half of our local Leagues responded to the state survey on voter service activities, so while the results are impressive, there is a lot more activity occurring by our local Leagues that isn't reported here. Thanks to all of your hard work during the election season and congratulations on the great results!

Responses from 25 local Leagues Debates and Forums

- 19 held Debates or Candidate Forums
- 10 had to cancel Candidate Forums (candidate cancelled or refused to participate, bad weather, no mutual date)
- 13 Co-sponsored event with other organizations
- Attendance ranged from 15-564
- 17 leagues took questions from the audience, 13 screened the questions, 3 allowed questions from the floor at a microphone

- 4 Leagues had problems during Q&A (outbursts, disagreements between candidates)
- 12 Leagues videotaped the debates and 15 had the debates aired
- 3 had problems with people taping from audience (and using twitter)
- 16 debates were covered by the media
- 7 Leagues provided services such as moderating or timekeeping for an event sponsored by another organization
- 15 Leagues had debate policies

Voter Guides and Registration Drives

- 8 Leagues published local voter guides printing between 100 and 24,000 copies
- Total of 135 voter registrations drives were held by these 25 local Leagues
- Local leagues registered over 1,005 voters
- 18 Leagues distributed absentee ballot applications (between 2-100 distributed)

Get Out the Vote Efforts

- 6 leagues were on TV or radio programs
- 13 leagues sent Letters to the Editors
- 4 Leagues developed and distributed PSAs
- 8 Leagues attend naturalization ceremonies or organize activities for new citizens

DEVELOPMENT

Kate Jankowski, kate@lwvny.org

Thank you to everyone who made a gift to the Education Foundation during our year-end fundraising season. We had a successful year-end online giving match, raising almost \$5,000 during the last few weeks of December. That amount will be matched by a Board member. All of these gifts allow us to continue to offer great programs like Students Inside Albany and Vote411.org.

We also announced our special fundraising effort, the **League Matters Campaign**. During this three-year Campaign, we have set a goal to raise \$400,000 above and beyond our regular annual fund to safeguard the future of the League in New York State and help us increase the materials and support the state League can offer to our local Leagues. Thanks to our Campaign Committee and many generous donors around the state, we have already raised over \$325,000. And, the LWV of Albany County has been generous in offering to give us \$10,000 for the Campaign if we can raise \$25,000 between December 1, 2014 and the New York State League's birthday on February 14, 2015. We have raised a portion of this but will be sending out emails to help us get to the \$25,000 goal by February 14th. If you would like to support this Campaign, please click [here](#).

Online and Credit Card Giving to Local Leagues

The state League office recently announced a new way for local Leagues to receive tax deductible gifts. Members and friends wishing to make tax deductible donations to their local League through the grants management system can now use credit cards and do it online. Click here: [Local League EF Donations](#). When you donate using this link, you will be required to select to which local League you want your donation sent. The tax deductible donation will be deposited into your local League's grants management account here at the state League.

LOCAL LEAGUE NEWS

The **LWV of Tompkins County** is holding their annual Soup and Bread lunch at which they will recognize the achievements of our foremothers who led the struggle for Women's Suffrage, and enjoy the delightful 5 part harmony of the The Accords, a choral group featuring Jim Blake.

The new bay keeper for the Peconic Baykeeper organization, Brady Wilkins, will speak to the **LWV of Brookhaven** about his plans to bring the message about clean water to school children.

By Presidential Proclamation, the month of January has been designated as Human Trafficking Awareness month. The **LWV of Huntington** will be presenting their third annual program dealing with this very serious issue. At the Cinema Arts Centre in Huntington, the movie "NOT FOR SALE" will be shown followed by a very informative group of experts who will share their knowledge. Judge Ukeiley, who was the presiding judge for the Human Trafficking Court of Suffolk and Matthew Okerblom, who has been involved in the Federal end of legislation dealing with human trafficking will be present on the panel and other local agencies working with victims and survivors have been invited.

The **LWV of Buffalo/Niagara** hosted a program called, "Citizen Science, Environmental Health and Social Justice in Buffalo's West Side." William L. Scheider, PhD, a retired professor with a focus on nutritional ecology, environmental and health effects of the food system, risk communication of foodborne hazards, food security, and nutrition education was the guest speaker.

The **LWV of Scarsdale** is starting a book club for members of the League and community members; the first book is "The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace: A Brilliant Young Man Who Left Newark for the Ivy League" by Jeff Hobbs.



LWV of Schenectady has a Health Committee which shares information on the New York Health Bill, health issues in Schenectady, and issues of interest related to aging in place in the community.

LWV of Rensselaer is trying to avoid the winter blues with a potluck dinner and entertainment. Troy attorney, author and musician Jack Casey is preparing a special historical presentation and Diane Bell's English country dance band, Heartsease, will regale the members during the social time with their lively and graceful tunes.



At their Annual Winter Party, the **LWV of White Plains** will be honoring long time League member, Libby Hollahan, Executive Director of the Library Foundation.

In a cozy cabin with a warm fire, **LWV of Rochester Metro Area** invited all members (and anyone curious about how the League works) to join them for a discussion of the state and local positions on various issues that have been agreed upon over many years. Another great effort to avoid the winter blues and have fun with League members.

The annual Holiday Party of the **LWV of the Hamptons** was held at the lovely Dodds & Eder Outdoor Home store in Sag Harbor, where members were able to view art and sit at beautiful sets of outdoor furniture while sipping wine and nibbling hors d'oeuvres. They also raised over \$1,300 for the three local food pantries.

LWV of Broome-Tioga has organized a meeting to discuss, Enabling Community Solar Power; they will look at solar incentives including tax credits, grants, production credits and net metering.

As a part of its Voter Service activities, the **Syracuse LWV** has been helping new citizens register to vote for many years; League members attend two naturalization ceremonies each month.

LWV of Chautauqua County is rolling out its 2015 program schedule starting a program about research within the grape industry, including a tour of the research center. In February there is an important meeting about GMOs (genetically modified organisms) that we ingest with our foods almost every day. Find out about the good, the bad, and the ugly during this meeting.

In the next few months, **LWV of Southwest Nassau** will be registering students in several high school to help increase voter participation in our next election.

