



The League of Women Voters of New York State  
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**THE LEAGUE  
 OF WOMEN VOTERS**  
*of New York State*

***State Board Updates: July 2017***

**If you are no longer President or on your local League board, please forward this to the appropriate board member – and be sure that your League has submitted the changes in your board to the state office.**

**Local League To Do’s (email: [lwvny@lwvny.org](mailto:lwvny@lwvny.org) or call 518-465-4162)**

- Mark your calendar for **Saturday, Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, to be in Albany!** We are hosting an opening reception at the NYS Museum to kick-off their special exhibit on women’s suffrage history. Be sure to join us – it’ll be a great celebration! More details shortly.
- **Complete and return your Local League Officer and Board list to the state office ASAP.** Thanks to those who have already sent it to us!
- Order the Voter Guide Part II by **September 1** – (order form attached)
- Sign up to receive the weekly LWVUS League Update from LWVUS President Chris Carson by emailing [database@lwv.org](mailto:database@lwv.org). It provides a wealth of info each week about LWVUS – do it now!

**100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dates**

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| November 6, 2017  | 100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Woman Suffrage in New York State  |
| November 19, 2019 | 100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the League of Women Voters of New York State  |
| February 14, 2020 | 100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of National League of Women Voters   |
| August 26, 2020   | 100 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the official certification of the ratification of the 19 <sup>th</sup> amendment by the US Secretary of State |

A new packet of resources for local Leagues to organize programs and events on women’s suffrage history has been mailed to every local League – and a new page has been created on the state website with links to all the info, as well as a calendar to see what events are scheduled, and a blog on significant events and locations in women’s history in NYS. Check it out at: <http://www.lwvny.org/programs-studies/womens-suffrage/index.html>.

**President’s Report: Dare Thompson, [darethompson@gmail.com](mailto:darethompson@gmail.com)**

When I wrote last month, Judie Gorenstein and I were at the **LWVUS Council** meeting in the DC area and I promised you a report. Judie kindly wrote the report for us and you can see it below in her report.

The report stresses the need for all of us to make our state and local Leagues more effective by being more comfortable with new, nimble ways of doing things, while still being firmly committed to being nonpartisan. I

am eager for change (hard though it is) but I find myself struggling with our **nonpartisan policy** when so many issues the League cares deeply about (health care, climate change, immigration, etc.!) - as well as the very structures of our democracy are under attack.

Yes, there is much we can say and do, and LWVUS has issued statements of outrage that we can use in our own Letters to the Editor in local media outlets, but sometimes I get frustrated with the limits as I watch party members propose candidates, gather signatures, and get about the business of trying to put people in office who agree with them. I even find myself tempted to run for office myself.

But countering those frustrations are my experiences with new advocates who are grateful to be with a group like ours that is listening hard to all sides and knows the ins and outs of advocacy at all levels in a deep and very useful way. **It feels so good to introduce so many new people to the restrictive NYS election laws, see their outrage, and help direct their anger into informed and effective action.** I hope you too are training activists, and keeping a close eye on your own governing bodies. Even my own county's legislature is reduced to a level of squabbling that I don't think I've ever seen before. We must **insist on better government everywhere.**

Meanwhile, on the state League board we send greetings and thanks to former board members **Ann Burton, Georgia DiGregorio, Judy Middelkoop, Terri Parks, and Sue Wilson** and welcome new members **Sheila Miller Bernson, Betty Ann King, Lori Robinson and Suzanne Stassevitch.** The new board recently had a 2-hour conference call board meeting. Among other topics, we addressed the Directions to the Board concerning our support for the Constitutional Convention and the wording of the position itself. A statement about this is reported below by VP Sally Robinson. Don't hesitate to reach out to me or anyone else in the state League about this if you have questions or concerns.



We also continue to celebrate NY women getting the vote in 1917. We've already participated in an April women's conference at Hyde Park and SUNY New Paltz which included LWVUS CEO, Wylecia Wiggs Harris, and many of us enjoyed a pre-convention tour of **Seneca Falls** last month. I was in Seneca Falls again for **Convention Days**, got into some buildings that had been closed in June, and met many League members from around the country (including new-ish Syracuse member, **Erin-Leigh Darnley**, who was with some young students connected with the Matilda Joslyn Gage Center). "Elizabeth Cady Stanton" read the Declaration of Sentiments at the opening ceremony (see photo left).

And now we ready ourselves for the fall election season and for the multi-faceted centennial

**suffrage celebration in Albany on Saturday, November 4.** Is your calendar marked? See you then if not before!

### **Issues and Advocacy Report: Sally Robinson, [robintwins@gmail.com](mailto:robintwins@gmail.com)**

#### **Direction to the Board re: League Support for 2017 Constitutional Convention Ballot Question**

At the March 2017 board meeting, the state League board voted to support the November ballot to call for a Constitutional Convention to be convened in 2019 to consider changes to the New York State Constitution. The state Constitution requires that this question be asked of the voters every 20 years, Any proposed changes recommended by the Convention would be subject to voter approval.

At caucuses during Convention and during the Directions to the Board time, a number of members raised concerns about the underlying rationale for the decision and the board interpretation of the League's Constitutional Convention position. Several asked that the 2017-2019 newly elected board reconsider the decision to support and also update the League's Constitutional Convention position adopted in 1993 and updated in 2015.

All materials that had been distributed to the previous board, including all input from local Leagues, were sent to new Board members for their review before the July board meeting.

After discussion and review of the process under which the state board applies League positions to specific action and advocacy, and the precedent of how the League board applied the Constitutional Convention position to the 1997 ballot question, the new board agreed that it was the appropriate responsibility of the board to decide whether to support, oppose or stay neutral on the ballot question. Under the position, the League does not have a standing position on whether or not a Constitutional Convention should be held. Instead, the determination is made by the state board every 20 years given current policy circumstances. As part of the March 2017 decision-making process, the state League sought input from local Leagues who were informed that this input would be used as part of the decision-making process.

The new board also affirmed the state League decision to support the ballot measure as a means of giving New York voters to opportunity to consider critical reforms that state government has refused to undertake, such as voting reforms, anti-corruption measures, completely independent redistricting, modernizing the court system, and further guaranteeing personal freedom and meeting basic human needs.

The new board will consider an update to the Constitutional Convention position if submitted by any local League as part of the state program planning process. If recommended by the board, an update requires a majority of delegate support. A non-recommended item requires two-thirds support.

### **LWVUS Council Report: Judie Gorenstein, [judieL728@aol.com](mailto:judieL728@aol.com)**

LWVUS Council of 2017 focused on this being the time for transformation. The LWV is at a crossroads. We are moving from the way things have always been done, through a planning and transition change to what the LWV will be in the century to come. We do not have a choice. We need to change to be relevant. We can and should be THE leading voice for fair elections and good government.

We may never have an opportunity as good as the one we have right now. Since the 2016 Presidential Election, politics is more polarized than ever and citizens are looking to be civically engaged. Memberships in many Leagues have already significantly risen. In Ann Arbor, MI, membership went from 70 in 2016 to 450 members in 2017. Many people look to the League with our nonpartisan policy as a voice of reason and as the experts in voting and elections. The LWV has won court cases re voting rights in several states. We are both a voter service and an advocacy organization. We CAN and DO do both! Our strength comes from both. In those states where there have been court victories such as Florida, their visibility - along with their membership - increased dramatically. Success begets success.

What does the LWVUS as well as state and local Leagues need to do to continue to be successful in reaching our transformation and goals? It is important that we increase and retain our membership as well as our outreach and impact. We need to make it easier for people to be involved. This can be done by offering different paths to affiliation with the LWV. In order to help local Leagues do more, national and state Leagues may need to lessen administrative burdens now on local Leagues. One way may be by restructuring PMP and have dues submitted to national and flow downward. It is also possible to have different levels of membership. Some Leagues already give scholarships. A Florida League has been giving trial membership for \$21.00. 90%

of trial members stayed on for the rest of the year. It is also important to make it easier for Leagues to form. This can be done by decreasing the requirements.

It is crucial that we increase external perception of us. First, we have to have clear understanding of who we are. If we are not clear ourselves, we give out conflicting messages which creates confusion. If we are more aligned and unified, if we get things done, it gives us a much bigger impact. We need to speak with one voice. People need to perceive that we matter, we are knowledgeable and are a force to be reckoned with.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE STUMBLING BLOCKS WE FACE?** A major hurdle may be our own beliefs and feelings.

- Do we have a fear of failure that keeps us from trying something new?
- Are we uncomfortable with change and want to keep old patterns?
- Do we think the “League way” is the only way?
- Do new ideas make us feel defensive and/or tired, not inspired?
- Are we fearful of losing control?

These and other attitudes can keep us stagnant. They need to be examined. We need to feel positive about change and be able to take risk. The founders took risks and welcomed change. As we look ahead at the next 100 years, we need to channel our inner Carrie Chapman Catt. We need to be flexible and strategic. While making certain that we remain and continue to be perceived as nonpartisan, we need to set measurable goals and evaluate if we are attaining them. More than ever, our democracy needs a strong League of Women Voters.

### **Voter Service Report, Judie Gorenstein, [judieL728@aol.com](mailto:judieL728@aol.com)**

This is the time when local Leagues are planning their voter registration drives and candidate nights. LWVNYS is in process of making revisions Road to The Voting Booth Part two and some of our voter services policies.

Our major goal is that we not only adhere to nonpartisan policy but give perception that we are nonpartisan. It is also important that candidate night policies throughout the state and for all levels of government are consistent to avoid confusion and let the League speak with one voice. The revisions will not be completed until the end of August. However, one important change will be concerning candidate forums/debates for primaries. If you holding a forum/ debate for one parties' primary for a particular race and another party is having a primary for that same race, then you need to offer to hold a forum/debate for the other party.

Remember this is the time to review your League's policy on candidate nights. As you do your reviews, check to see there is consistency with the debates for different levels of government, make certain that your policy is clearly written and thorough and send it with your invitations to candidates. I am sorry that updated Road to the Voting Booth will not be completed until next month but if you have questions, contact me at [JudieL728@aol.com](mailto:JudieL728@aol.com).

### **State Office, Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, [Laura@lwvny.org](mailto:Laura@lwvny.org)**

#### **Local League Updates**

**A few local Leagues have still not completed and returned the annual local League Update Form. PLEASE DO SO NOW!** It is very important that you complete and return this form– this is the list we use to send out information, alerts, etc, to the local Leagues. Don't miss receiving our emails! Please also provide the name of the person in your local League who is researching your own local League history and helping to celebrate the centennial of women's suffrage and of the League of Women Voters in NYS.

#### **Voter Guide Part II – Ballot Proposals**

Part II of the League's Voter Guide will be available in September and will include information (pros and cons) on the three proposals that will be on the ballot in November. Please complete the attached order form to ensure

that your League receives this Guides. As in the past, local Leagues who are participating in the organ donor registration project can obtain 300 Guides for free – and reduced cost for additional Guides.

**Legislative Action, Jennifer Wilson, Director of Program and Policy,**  
**[jennifer@lwny.org](mailto:jennifer@lwny.org)**

**Vote411**

Campaign season is upon us! Many of our Local Leagues are beginning to plan candidate forums and send out invitations for local candidates to participate in Vote411. This year we have 30 local Leagues participating in the online voter guide. Contact Jennifer at [Jennifer@lwny.org](mailto:Jennifer@lwny.org) if you need any assistance in setting up your races, contacting candidates, or publicizing in your local media.

Publicize Vote 411 on your Facebook page, twitter, website and anywhere you can – Vote 411 is only strong if people are using it. We've attached **sample press release** templates that you can distribute to the media as soon as your Vote 411 site goes live – and **sample flyer** templates you can use to print off and have available at voter registration drives, candidate forums or League meetings. If your media doesn't cover it, write a letter to the editor telling people it's live and available.

There are many local races throughout the state and we hope all Local Leagues will consider co-sponsoring meet the candidate nights even if they aren't participating in the online voter guide.

**Legislative Action**

In July we received press requests related to campaign finance and the Governor's executive order on voting reforms. At the beginning of the month, there were several articles criticizing the Governor for benefiting from campaign donations from shell LLC corporations. The League has been adamant about closing the LLC loophole and we told reporters that we were dismayed to see the Governor benefiting from the LLC loophole when he has done little to address the problem. The Governor was not the only elected official to benefit from LLC donations, members of the Assembly and Senate also received large sums from these corporations. We will continue to monitor campaign spending as we get closer to the election.

At the end of this month the Governor passed an executive order mandating all state agencies have voter registration forms and help individuals complete the forms. The League issued a statement urging the Governor to do more. In New York State, registration is not the issue. In 2016, New York had a record high of registered voters. The issue in New York is barriers to voting such as long lines and strict party change deadlines. We hope that in 2018 the Governor will focus and more meaningful reforms such as early voting. Our full statement is below:

*While we appreciate Governor Cuomo's intentions, his proposed executive order will do little to address the issues New York State voters face on Election Day. Voter purges, strict registration and party change deadlines, and long lines at the polls cannot be fixed with enhanced voter registration. Studies show that voter registration is not a major issue in New York State. In 2016, voter registration in New York State reached a record high. Unfortunately, many of these newly enrolled voters faced barriers at the voting booths that deterred them from casting their ballot. While we agree that state agencies should take a more active role in voter registration, we would prefer to see an executive order that enacts early voting, alters registration deadlines, or allows for electronic poll books. The only way to truly empower voters and ensure ballot integrity is to make voting easier and more accessible.*

**LWVUS**

**Sign up for National Voter Registration Day 2017**

National Voter Registration Day is Tuesday, September 26! [Sign up your League as a partner in this incredible celebration of democracy.](#) All you need to do is agree to host a registration event in your



community on 9/26, or otherwise publicize the importance of voter registration. Join thousands of organizations, elected officials, celebrities, and other partners—including hundreds of participating state and local Leagues—by signing up today! *The League has been the single largest on-the-ground partner for NVRD since 2012. Let's keep up the trend!*

LWVUS has created a resource kit to help plan celebrations for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LWVUS in 2020. Feel free to download and utilize the kit in planning your activities. The Kit is available here: <http://forum.lwv.org/document/lwv-100th-anniversary-toolkit>

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