

Volume 5  
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# The Voter



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## LWVNY 2010 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

This year the State League is focused squarely on government reform, given the sorry state of affairs in Albany. The agenda has been dubbed **“Fix Albany Now!”** and includes four “Steps to a New and Better State Government”.

1. Redistricting -- Create an independent redistricting commission to draft the NYS legislative and Congressional political boundaries for the 2012 elections
2. Campaign Finance Reform – Support lower contribution limits and increased disclosure. In particular, support stronger and effective campaign finance enforcement with increased civil and criminal penalties for violations.
3. Ethics Reform – Put in place a new independent ethics oversight agency and tougher enforcement. Make the legislature more open and accountable through continued rules reform.
4. Election Reform – Improve election processes that extend and encourage voting, including no-excuse absentee balloting and Election Day registration.

You will find items pertaining to the above throughout this newsletter.

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## TIMELY TOPIC PLANNED FOR MARCH MEMBERSHIP MEETING

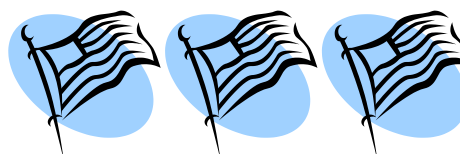
The Rensselaer League will hold a meeting on **Government Consolidation/Shared Services on Thursday, March 25, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM at the Arts Center of the Capital Region.**

An impressive panel has been assembled, including **John Clarkson, former Executive Director of the so-called Lundine Commission** (the NYS Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness). Mr. Clarkson oversaw preparation of the commission's report, “21st Century Local Government”, released in April 2008. Other panelists include: **Jeff Anderson, Criminal Justice Coordinator, Rensselaer County** and **Daniel Garab, Fire Commissioner, N. Greenbush Fire District**. An assistant superintendent of BOCES/Questar III is also expected to participate.

The panelists are expected to explain the value of consolidating and sharing services among government entities, especially in this time of fiscal crisis. Many people are unaware that local governments in our area are already sharing some services. Panelists will present examples. Finally they will address problems that inhibit cooperation among local governments and how these might be overcome.

The meeting is **FREE** and **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**.  
**PLEASE COME AND INVITE YOUR FRIENDS!**

The Arts Center is located at 265 River Street in Troy. For more information, contact Margaret Story at [MrgStry@aol.com](mailto:MrgStry@aol.com) or 2721566



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 N. Greenbush, Rensselaer)

**The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization. For full NP statement, go to "About Us" on our website ( [www.lwvrc.org](http://www.lwvrc.org) ).**



### LETTER FROM THE CO -PRESIDENTS

What a great time was had at our Post-Holiday Get Together. Thanks to **Donna Packard-Mahoney** for organizing the program, **Judy Rancourt** for putting the event together and the bakers of those tasty desserts. Blair Horner, our speaker, heightened our awareness of how important elections are when it is time to draw redistricting lines.

**Diane Bell, Gail DeMarco** and Barbara Thomas from the Saratoga League lobbied Senator Roy McDonald January 19<sup>th</sup> on S. 6457, the Ethics and Campaign Finance Reform Bill. Following the meeting, he addressed the Senate in favor of and voted for the Bill.

In recognition of the League's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, **Diane Bell** made a presentation to the Rensselaer County Legislature at their February 3<sup>rd</sup> Public Forum. At the public meeting of the Legislature on March 9<sup>th</sup>, there will be a resolution celebrating the League's anniversary.

**Diane Bell, Irene Wynnyczuk** and **Margaret Story** attended the State League's Public Forum on the Issue of Reapportionment and Its Effect on Competitive Elections. Speakers included legislators, educators and good government advocates.

**Margaret Story** is planning our spring program on government consolidation. Look for more details on the back page of the newsletter. We are sponsoring one student for the **"Students Inside Albany"** program. Please say "yes" when the Nominating Committee calls you. You'll be working with a great group of people.

Gail and Diane

## 90<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY PRESENTATION

[Editor's Note: The following remarks were presented to the Rensselaer County Legislature on Feb. 3, 2010]

Good evening. I'm Diane Bell, Co-President of the League of Women Voters of Rensselaer County. I'm here tonight with Gail DeMarco, our other Co-President and several members of the Rensselaer League. We appreciate the opportunity to address you tonight.

This is the **90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the League of Woman Voters**. Growing out of the women's suffrage movement, the League was founded in 1920 just six months before passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the U.S. Constitution which granted women the right to vote.

The League's first purpose was to help newly-enfranchised women exercise their responsibilities as voters. In the beginning, only women could join the league; but in 1973 the charter was modified to include men. Today there are local leagues in all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.

The Rensselaer County League was created in 1939. The first president was Beulah Bailey Thull who was one of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt's speechwriters at the time. She also helped establish the Civil Service Employees Association, acting as its first president. Here in Rensselaer County she served as county historian. The second president was Catherine Benson, a trained nurse who became Director of Nurses at Leonard Hospital in Troy.

From the beginning the League has been a **non-partisan** organization devoted to sustaining and improving our democratic form of government. It does not endorse or oppose political candidates or parties at any level of government. However, after careful study, it does **advocate for certain public policy positions** at the local, state and national levels. We often collaborate with other organizations which have similar positions.

In developing policy positions, the League has always taken a **grassroots approach**. First, local leagues are encouraged to undertake in-depth research on a given issue -- immigration reform, for instance -- and then to develop a consensus

among their members on a position to support. These positions fall under several broad headings, including representative government, natural resources, and social issues, and form the basis of our lobbying efforts.

The League has a second core mission -- to **educate our citizens** about basic democratic practices and principles and to **encourage them to participate actively** in their government by making their voices heard in and out of the voting booth.

Year after year, here in Rensselaer County, the League devotes its energies to **voter services**. We go out into the community to register voters. We conduct candidates' forums and produce voters' guides listing candidates, propositions, and so forth. On election night, we collect vote tallies so the media can report on preliminary results. We also publish an annual guide to local, state and national elected officials for our area. This year we hope to sponsor at least one student to participate in the League's "Students Inside Albany" program.

On the substantive side, we hold several informative meetings each year for the general public on issues -- such as redistricting, solid waste management and health care -- that have long been of concern to our members and the community at large. Finally, our website ([www.lwvrc.org](http://www.lwvrc.org)) contains a wealth of practical and substantive information with links to many governmental sites. (continued on page 4)



Rensselaer County Legislators greet League members

(continued from page 3)

Currently, we have two big items on our plate.

First, the new **voting machines.....** In December, as you know, a milestone was achieved in New York's implementation of the Help America Vote Act when the NYS Board of Elections approved two optical scan-type voting systems for use in the state. Now we stand ready to help educate voters about using the machines and to monitor the first large-scale use of these machines in upcoming elections. Our aim will be to provide feedback to election administrators and policymakers on how to make the voting experience more user-friendly, as well as secure and accurate.

Second, in keeping with the League's grassroots approach to determining policy positions and along with other local leagues across New York State, we have just begun a study of issues surrounding the subject of **local government consolidation**. This study item was approved at the most recent State League convention.

We will continue, as we have for 90 years, to work for good government in Rensselaer County. We look forward to cooperating with the Rensselaer County Legislature on matters of shared interest. Thank you for your time and attention on this the occasion of our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

## LWV RENSSELAER COUNTY IN THE NEWS

[Editor's note: the following two articles appeared recently in The Record.]

### (1) League Supports Effort

*(Printed in The Record, February 1, 2010)*

We were pleased to learn recently that Mayor Tutunjian is considering a **new effort to revise and update Troy's City Charter**. The League of Women Voters of Rensselaer County has long maintained an interest in the operation of local government. Over the years, we have participated in a number of endeavors to revise Troy's charter and have worked to inform and advise the electorate about the pros and cons of proposed revisions.

We believe the revision process should be characterized by the following:

- 1.) A commission that is **non-partisan** in nature (Members should be charged with promoting the best interests of all Troy's citizens and should play no formal role in city government, either as employees or elected officials.);
- 2.) A commission whose members come from **diverse but relevant** backgrounds in terms of education, experience, expertise (e.g., law, economics, social welfare) and interest in municipal governance;
- 3.) A process that provides **ample opportunity for citizen input** (This would require timely notice of upcoming meetings in the media and on the City's website. It would also require periodic publication of easily understood summaries of proposed charter revisions.); and
- 4.) Provision of **adequate support** for the commission, including access to legal libraries, research and drafting assistance, photocopying, telephone, and e-mail.

The League supports the idea of a new, cooperative effort and stands ready to work with the City's leaders and other interested parties in developing a revised Troy City Charter that truly serves the public interest.

Diane Bell and Gail DeMarco  
LWV Co-Presidents  
Rensselaer County League of Women Voters

("LWVRC in the News" continued on page 5)

("LWVRC in the News" continued from page 4)

## (2) We Oppose Term Limits

(Printed in *The Record*, February 6, 2010)

In the "Sound Off" column of Monday, January 25, there was a comment entitled "A contradiction here?". There is, in fact, no contradiction. The comment states that "the New York State League of Women Voters is supporting Gov. Paterson's call for term limits on state elected officials". This is *erroneous*.

The State League, in fact, opposes term limits. In 1996 the League adopted a formal position opposing term limits for members of the New York State Legislature and for New York State statewide elected officials. This position statement can be found on the State LWV website ([www.lwvny.org/](http://www.lwvny.org/)) under League Positions – Election Law.

The comment goes on to say how "strange" it is "that in Troy, the local [Rensselaer County] League of Women Voters opposed term limits in the city charter." The comment is *correct* in that the local League opposes term limits and made this position known in our comments during the last round of efforts to revise the City of Troy's charter. It is customary for all levels of the League from national to state to local to be in sync on positions of this nature. We are mystified as to where the speaker obtained his/her incorrect information.

Diane Bell and Gail DeMarco  
LWV Co-Presidents  
Rensselaer County League of Women Voters

### ELECTIONIC "VOTER" ???

As you are probably aware, the State and US Leagues, along with many other non-profit organizations, are shifting to electronic newsletters to reduce costs. The Rensselaer League is also considering this change. It would save us printing and postage costs, not to mention the labor involved in processing mailings. For those who do not use a computer, we would, of course, continue to mail a paper copy. Please let us know what you think about this move. You can send your thoughts via e-mail to Diane Bell at [dianebell@nycap.rr.com](mailto:dianebell@nycap.rr.com) or call her at 273-5172.

## 2010 CENSUS: League Working to Eliminate 'Undercount'

As the 2010 Census approaches, US LWV President Mary Wilson has said that: "Our goal is to work with others to eliminate the 'undercount' that occurs, particularly within low income and minority populations. ....We have been fighting to protect the rights of under-represented communities in many arenas, including voting, immigration and health care reforms."

Census data is used for many important purposes. It provides the basis for apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and for allocating federal funding to states and communities. It also is used in redistricting all election districts; in New York State this encompasses city council districts, state senatorial districts, and everything in between. The Rensselaer League has long been concerned about the issue of redistricting.

As the U.S. Census Bureau prepares for the census, the NYS League is urging local leagues to help educate the public about the census process and to be vigilant for any shortcomings that may arise.

**Beware!** If a "census bureau representative" knocks on your door and asks for personal information like your Social Security number or your e-mail address, they are not who they say they are. **Legitimate census takers will be equipped with a badge, a census canvas bag, a hand-held electronic unit and a confidentiality notice. During their initial visitation period, census takers are strictly trying to determine how many individuals live in the residence. They will not ask for names, ages or Social Security numbers. Neither will the Census Bureau contact people by e-mail.** Anyone who receives an e-mail supposedly sent by the Census Bureau is advised not to open the messages or attachments.



## **CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR 2010-11 BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE LWV RENSSELAER COUNTY**

The Nominating Committee is now at work seeking nominees for the positions listed below. If you would like to nominate someone to fill a position (including yourself), please contact Marcia Hopple, Chairperson (mhopple@nycap.rr.com, 283-5353)

Office to be Filled (Two Year Terms):

Co-President  
Vice President  
Treasurer  
Director  
Director  
Director

## **GOVERNOR VETOES ETHICS AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE LEGISLATION AND SENATE FAILS TO OVERRIDE**

In January, both houses of the NYS Legislature overwhelmingly passed ethics and campaign finance reform bills (A.9544/S.6457), but Governor Paterson has vetoed the legislation calling it "reform light". The Senate did not have enough votes to override the veto.

Passage of this legislation would have been a first step in reform and would have made important changes to state law in executive branch ethics, lobbying oversight, legislative branch ethics, campaign finance enforcement and disclosure requirements.

The League of Women Voters and its good government colleagues, particularly Citizens Union and NYPIRG, were involved in negotiations on these bills. The resulting legislation did not include all of the reforms that the League has long advocated for, but it would have made significant improvements to existing law. Their Memorandum of Support for this bill can be found at:

[http://www.lwvny.org/advocacy/legAction/Memorandum\\_SenateCodes011010.pdf](http://www.lwvny.org/advocacy/legAction/Memorandum_SenateCodes011010.pdf)

LWV Rensselaer Co-Presidents Diane Bell and Gail DeMarco, along with Barbara Thomas, President of the LWV Saratoga, met with Senator Roy McDonald's staff on January 19<sup>th</sup> to

advocate for S. 6457 and to ask the Senator to be a co-sponsor. Indeed, the Senator did address the Senate on behalf of the bill and voted in favor of it. He also voted to override the Governor's veto. Letters were sent thanking him for his efforts on behalf of the citizens of Rensselaer County.

Assemblyman Ron Canestrari was a sponsor of A.9544. In a letter to him, we also expressed our appreciation for his support of this important legislation.

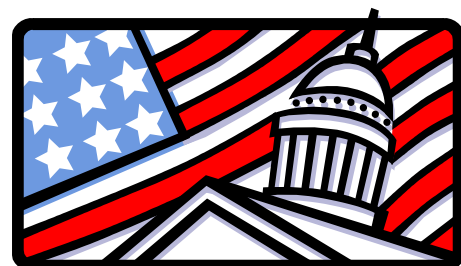
Governor Paterson has claimed that his efforts to participate in negotiations with the Legislature on reform legislation were met with resistance. He vetoed the Legislature's bill saying that it "did not go far enough to address the underlying issues that have caused the public to lose faith in their government".

On February 3, the Governor released his own "compromise Albany Reform Legislation". This proposed legislation contains provisions designed to achieve compromise with members of both houses of the Legislature in increasing oversight and enhancing transparency.

The proposed legislation would create two independent ethics commissions – one for the executive branch and another for the Legislature. An independent body would select the members of both commissions. Both commissions would enforce "pay to play" laws. The structure of the Board of Elections would also be altered to enhance enforcement of campaign finance violations.

The Governor claims his proposed reforms would reduce the influence of money in politics by cutting all allowable contributions by 50 percent.

Stay tuned. What happens next is uncertain.



## REDISTRICTING AFTER THE 2010 CENSUS: Can We Do Away with Gerrymandering?

*[Editor's Note: Redistricting has long been an issue of concern to the LWV Rensselaer County's, as expressed in our Local Program. It is of particular interest now as the time approaches to redraw legislative districts based on the new census.]*

What is that blob – a lobster claw, Lincoln in his top hat, a penguin? No, it's a New York election district said Blair Horner, Legislative Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) and speaker at the Rensselaer League's post-holiday party. This was his attempt at adding a little levity to the serious subject of redistricting. It worked, too; he had his audience hooked and ready to hear about how to eliminate the partisan maneuvering that undermines the very foundation of our democracy.

As we enter a new decade, it is time to count the population and draw district boundaries for the 2012 elections. In years past, lax standards have allowed partisan mapmakers to protect incumbents and legislative majorities by drawing bizarre-shaped districts, hence the lobster claw for proposed NYS Assembly District 13. Mr. Horner lamented that this practice which, combined with a disgraceful system of campaign financing, has undermined the principle of "one person, one vote" and left New Yorkers without meaningful elections.

By way of history, back in the 1960's the Supreme Court ruled that for both houses of state legislatures the **population must be apportioned equally among voting districts**. This ruling aimed to afford all citizens their Constitutional right to equal representation. For years the League has supported this standard. Unfortunately, there are ways to get around it. In New York, with both houses of the Legislature in charge of drawing their own districts, they have consistently finessed the apportionment requirement by drawing those strange, but familiar, Rohrshak-blot districts that favor incumbents.

This is why the League and like-minded organizations have also advocated that **districts be contiguous and compact**, in other words

made up of land parcels that are adjacent to one another and have the smallest perimeter possible. Further, districts should **follow existing political subdivisions** as much as possible, because these are reasonably permanent boundaries that are less likely to be tampered with for political advantage. The populations in these political subdivisions are also more likely to share common interests.

Mr. Horner concluded his presentation by spelling out key reform measures that will put a stop to unfair redistricting practices. These are:

- Create an independent redistricting commission
- Keep district populations within 1 % of the "ideal" size district,
- Maximize "competitive" legislative districts, and
- Ignore partisan and incumbency issues when drafting lines.

He sent us on our way with a simple strategy for advancing the reform agenda from now through the 2011-12 redistricting period -- push for immediate legislative action and keep the issue in the forefront during the 2010 race for governor. As a sign of their commitment to reform, all gubernatorial candidates will be urged to pledge, if elected, to veto districts drawn in a partisan manner.

It's way past time to restore the true meaning of "one person, one vote"! Let's draw districts fair and square!



NYPIRG'S Blair Horner shows unusual-shaped voting district

**SAVE THESE SPECIAL DATES**

- **Proclamation honoring the League's 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**, at public meeting of the Rensselaer County Legislature, **Tuesday, March 9**, 6 PM, Government Center, 1600 Seventh Ave., Troy
- **LWVRC Spring Membership Meeting:** "Government Consolidation/Shared Services", **Thursday, March 25**, 7-9 PM, at the Arts Center of the Capital Region, 265 River St., Troy.
- **LWVRC Consensus Meeting** on "Local Government Consolidation", **Thursday, April 22**, 7-9 PM, at the Krause Center, 2212 Burdett Ave. (across from Samaritan Hospital), Troy.
- **LWVRC Annual Meeting:** We are excited to announce that Susan Scrimshaw, the recently installed President of Thel Sage Colleges, has agreed to be the featured speaker at our meeting on **Thursday, May 27**, 5:45-9 PM. This year, we will be holding the event at the Rensselaer County Historical Society, 57 Second St., Troy.

**FEBRUARY/MARCH CALENDAR**

**FEBRUARY 2010**

18 - LWVRC, Monthly Board Meeting

**MARCH 2010**

8 - International Women's Day  
18 - **LWVRC Monthly Board Meeting**  
25 - **LWVRC Spring Membership Meeting**



**HELP THE LEAGUE & LEARN A NEW SKILL**

The Rensselaer League is looking for someone interested in writing and desktop publishing to produce our newsletter. You would be helping us with one of our primary modes of communication while adding another skill to your resume. If interested, contact Diane Bell – 273-5172, [dianebell@nycap.rr.com](mailto:dianebell@nycap.rr.com).



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