The Mission of the League of Women Voters:
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.

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**Co-President’s Report**

The 2017 Nominating Committee, chaired by Ramona Gallagher, presented a slate of officers at the April board meeting. Many thanks to Ramona, Kathleen McCarthy, Lynne Vallone, Janet Goodsell, Lori Robinson, Pat Costanzo and Nicole Matteson for your work to present a slate of able leaders for LWVBN. As you’ll read in this Voter, we have important vacancies for president and a vice president. If no one steps forward, the board will organize around a leadership team to carry out the president’s duties. I have volunteered to be one member of that team and continue many of the tasks I have done as president.

Many thanks also to the Budget Committee for its fine work to craft a budget that proposes judicious use of League funds for League program events this coming year without proposing any increase in dues. This year’s budget provided a challenge. Al Dozoretz and the Election Service volunteers continue to conduct housing unit elections for the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority under the terms of our most recent contract, which officially expired at the end of 2016 at the request of BMHA. The authority has yet to issue an request for new contract proposals (RFP). This is not unusual for them. While we may have income for the entire year ahead from BMHA, we elected not to budget for it to be on the safe side. Thank you, Amy Witryol, our most able Budget Committee chair, Margaret Brunson and Lori Robinson.

Once again, our League will have a full delegation to the state League Convention in June. Lori Robinson, Nora Mikes, Ramona Gallagher, Marian Deutschman, Shirley Joy and Terri Parks will represent us. We should be able to cover the workshops and the plenary well with these fine representatives.

At its April meeting, the board voted to support the Buffalo March for Science on April 22. The board approved an updated communications policy. It will be posted on our website and has been sent to committee chairs. The board also approved a donation of $100 to the Western New York Survivors of Torture. Those who attended the program on April 4 were extremely impressed at the work to help refugees and immigrants who are torture survivors to deal with the issues they need to confront, so that they can live successful lives in our community.

As we look to a new League year, we thank the board members who will not return to the board next year: Sue Stievater, Nicole Matteson, Dorothy Tao, Joan LoCurto and Judy Metzger. We will give special recognition to them at the annual meeting as well. There are no words to describe the many contributions that Judy Metzger has made to the League for many years. While she will no longer grace the board, she will continue to be a mentor, guide and presence in our League as her health allows.

I look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting on June 3, 2017, at Hyatt Place. Make your reservation now!

Terri Parks, Co-President

**Great Decisions**

**The Future of Trade**

Ann Malachowski is on deck to steer our second Great Decisions discussion topic for 2017, "Trade, Jobs and Politics," from 10:00 a.m. to noon on Thursday, May 4, at the League office. "The U.S. political mood toward trade has gone sour. One needs look no further than the 2016 presidential contest for the popular narrative; trade means that China wins, at America's expense. But do the numbers support that conclusion? The metrics used to gauge economic strength — gross domestic product and balance of trade — have not kept up with the realities of modern manufacturing. Obtaining an accurate picture of U.S. economic stature requires a critique of those numbers. Only then can the U.S. develop appropriate policy solutions for the challenges at hand." As you can see, the Foreign Policy Association picked a very timely topic. I look forward to hearing views from all who can attend.

Bernice Baeumler, Great Decisions Chair
Voter Service Committee
News and Notes

We have one request for a moderator for a School Board Candidates Night in Williamsville. I expect to get a few more of these in the next few days. Anyone who missed the League program last fall on Belva Lockwood, the first woman to run for president of the United States, might be interested to know that the same speaker will be giving the program for the Western New York Federation of Women's Clubs on Saturday, May 20. Contact me for details.

Warm congratulations to former League member Karen Wielinski. The publication of her book, "One on the Ground," the story of the crash of Flight 3407 in Clarence Center on February 12, 2010, was celebrated by the Aurora Women's Club in February.

Margaret Brunson, Voter Service Chair

Volunteer Coordinator’s Update
Many Opportunities to Take Part

The month’s calendar for naturalization ceremonies was filled by Ellen Moomaw and Richard Hemann on March 16, Liz Zausmer and Jayne Murray on March 23 and Kathleen McCarthy and Mike Egan on March 30. We had two volunteers fulfill a commitment to the Enterprise Charter School to observe their lottery drawing on April 3. They were Judy Capodicasa and Carolyn Koelmel. Judy Casassa and Joyce Bol represented the LWVBN at a naturalization ceremony on April 6, 2017.

Our volunteers have succeeded in having 30 percent of the registration forms we hand out turned in to the Erie County Board of Elections. That is almost twice as many as the number returned last year! Keep it up everyone: you are doing a terrific job.

All of our volunteers are making extra efforts to register new citizens before the midterm elections. Their efforts are very much appreciated!

Judith Clarke, Volunteer Coordinator

Election Services Committee
Upcoming BMHA Elections

March was a very quiet month for the Election Services Committee. We had no elections scheduled; however, there were communications between BMHA housing aides and me to help facilitate three meetings for May. Two of the sites have no functioning Resident Councils, and I have offered our assistance in attempting to get them active again. The housing aide is working to get residents involved. Numerous sites are due for elections during this summer and autumn, so our committee will spring back to life very soon.

There were two elections in February, and I would like to thank Judy Capodicasa and Scott Gehl for their able assistance.

Alan Dozoretz, Election Services Chair

Nominating Committee
The LWVBN Wants You

Interesting and interested people doing interesting work and having interesting dialogue. Does this sound like a group that might interest you? An experience to remember: demanding, rewarding, challenging, and satisfying. Join the LWVB/N board of directors to be part of a dynamic leadership group.

The 2017 Nominating Committee invites you to apply for the office of president or first vice president to serve a two-year term from June 2017 to June 2019. Contact the chair of the committee, Ramona Gallagher, by phone or via email no later than April 30, 2017, for details.

Ramona Gallagher, Chair,
2016-2017 Nominating Committee

Belva Lockwood

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April Program
Survivors of Torture

The April 4 program at Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County was our unique opportunity to hear the stories of those refugees who fled from their homeland for safety and security. The basis for their persecution could be religion, race, gender, or simply what they are doing. Many have spent two to 10 years in a refugee camp. It may take a refugee 40 days to go to Canada as compared to two to four years to be accepted into the United States. The refugees have to repay the cost of their trip to this country. They have traveled long distances and they may suffer from separation, isolation, and stress. Many suffer physical and psychological pain. Thirty-five percent are torture survivors. We were told 400 women are raped each day in the Congo. Many Burmese refugees were prisoners who experienced body torture. In addition to language difficulties, cultural differences such as eye contact, touch, physical space, and parenting need to be addressed before building a trusting relationship that includes safety, choice, collaboration and empowerment in this country. Many with professional credentials need to start their education all over again. In 2014, 4,085 refugees settled in New York State. They have a case manager for the first three months helping them with housing, food and community orientation.

The primary refugee population in the Buffalo area is from Burma, Bhutan, Iraq, and Somalia but they also come from many other countries. They are fully documented and heavily vetted before they are approved for admission. After reviewing their work history, employers, and extensive records, the U.S. takes the cream of the crop. Jewish Family Service is one of four resettlement agencies in the Buffalo area. This non-denominational agency is more than 150 years old. The other resettlement agencies are Catholic Charities, Journey’s End, and the International Institute. They all have religious roots but different funding sources. Jewish Family Service receives federal funding. One of the speakers was Marlene Schillinger, president and CEO, who has been with the agency for 22 years. Another speaker was Blaine Schwartz, chair of their board, who explained the distinct differences between an immigrant and a refugee. They are proud to house the WNY Center for Survivors of Torture. Their work with Holocaust survivors qualifies them to work with victims of torture. They gave credit to the League of Women Voters for the help we provide to refugees as they become citizens with the right to vote, since they are anxious to exercise their interest in the democratic process.

Amela Soteli, a refugee from Bosnia, is care coordinator at the agency and Leonce Byimana, an asylum seeker from Rwanda, is program director. In Rwanda, Leonce was a clinical psychologist who worked with HIV-positive children and children who were genocide survivors. Amela was asked about her success rate with her clients given the need for a multitude of adjustments. She replied that she can’t have failures. Her enthusiasm convinced us that she is dedicated to assuring their assimilation. We ended with a quote from Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel that is their mantra: “All are entitled to live with dignity and respect. All are entitled to live without fear or pain.”

Marian Deutschman

Save the Date
Don’t Miss our Annual Picnic!

Join us at the League’s Annual Picnic Pot Luck Luncheon at noon on Tuesday, July 18, 2017, at the Chelsea Clubhouse at Canterbury Woods, Downing Lane (off Renaissance Drive), Williamsville, NY 14221. Bring a dish to pass. The camaraderie and cuisine are guaranteed to please everyone!
Photos from the April Program

The presenters of the April 4 program, Survivors of Torture, and some of the League members who attended.

This photo of Barbara Brooks, Janet Massaro, and Judy and Jim Metzger shows the rapt attention the audience paid to the speakers.

Photo Credits:
Marlene Schillinger, president and CEO of the Jewish Family Service.
It’s always a good time to give!

Make your LWVBN donation today

Last November, only half of New York’s eligible voters cast a ballot. That means our League’s work on voter registration and voter education is more important than ever.

In March, you received a letter describing our many accomplishments during the past year, and asking for your support. If you haven’t yet sent your gift, please do so today.

You can make donations directly to LWVBN by check in the return envelope that came with the letter. You can make tax-deductible donations to LWVBN through the LWVNYS-EF by check as noted on the envelope. You can also make your donation on the League’s website: www.lwvbn.org. Click on the Make a Donation prompt in the menu on the left side of the home page.

As always, we are so grateful for your generosity.

Judy Metzger and Terri Parks, Co-Presidents

New name tags coming in June

Should we call you Margaret, Marge, Peg, Peggy or Maggie?

Don’t forget — let us know by May 1

At the annual meeting on June 3, we will distribute beautiful metal name tags with our logo and easy-to-read names. A magnet that affixes to the back lets you wear your tag without damaging your clothing.

Your name will appear as it is listed in our membership roster. If you want your tag to read differently [for example, Terri Parks instead of Joan Parks], you MUST send an email stating your preferred name to lwvbn@lwvbn.org by MONDAY, MAY 1, 2017.

In the future, we’ll order name tags for new members once a year — in March, after dues and renewals are received. One free name tag will be provided for each member; replacements, if needed, will cost $10 each.

Nancy DeTine, Communications Chair

Happy Hour

Tired of Partisanship?

Get away from it all at the LWVBN's second "Fourth Thursdays" happy hour.
Get to know your fellow members at our informal, interesting, never-partisan monthly gathering.

Thursday, May 25, 5:30 p.m.
Providence Social, 490 Rhode Island St., Buffalo

“It isn’t about winning elections, it’s about building community.”
Constitutional Convention Update
From the State President

We know that many of you want to know what the state League board decided at its March 23-24 meeting about the position the League will take on the 2017 Constitutional Convention ballot question (oppose, support, or remain neutral). And we want you to know that the discussions many local Leagues held on this topic and shared with us were very much on our minds as we discussed it. We also want you to know that this wasn't an easy or lightly made decision.

The press release (click here) was distributed on Monday explaining that we will be supporting the Convention as a rare opportunity for citizens to take control of government and enact voting, ethics, and redistricting reforms. We have been urging these same reforms for many decades and getting almost nowhere. This past year the leaders of both houses were convicted on corruption charges and even then the legislature failed to adopt meaningful reform.

The option of a Constitutional Convention was put in the Constitution specifically for those times when the government was not responding to critical issues. It was intended to give citizens the power to act when the government will not. It is hard to argue that this is not such a time.

We know very well that there are real concerns in the public and within our League membership over the possible impact of an unlimited Convention even though any proposed changes would have to be approved by the public. The League shares some of these concerns. But we are the League of Women Voters and considering our inability to achieve critical reforms in the voting process and elsewhere, the state board could not see us passing up this opportunity to address the League's long-standing commitment to repair our broken state government.

Be assured that we will continue to educate the public on the ballot issue as we also educate on many of the prospective issues such as campaign finance and voting reforms on which we have clear advocacy goals. We will also be advocating for a delegate selection process that will help us all elect delegates who will put voters first, not their own political interests.

And that is what we are asking of ourselves. Whatever specific risks we are personally concerned about in opening up the whole Constitution, as League members we need to stress the potential for reforms that we feel we cannot achieve any other way. We do not expect you to keep quiet as individual citizens about other concerns and Leagues are always welcome to put on forums that discuss all sides in our usual impartial way. In fact we want local Leagues to continue to educate the public on how the Constitutional Convention will work and some of the important issues it may address.

But in discussing the Convention you need to be sure to state the League position. Members can always take action as individuals, but in order for the League to speak with one voice, local Leagues may not express opposition to that state board decision. Local Leagues, using the League name, must support this ballot proposal and cannot state that they are opposed or neutral on the proposal. A Constitutional Convention is an opportunity to achieve critical reforms that Albany has refused to make. We cannot allow this point to be drowned out by all the other noise that will surely surround this question.

Dare Thompson, President
League of Women Voters of New York State
May Meetings & Events

Visit lwvbn.org for the latest event details

Tues., 5/3, 4:00 p.m.
Issues Committee, Harlem Road Com. Cntr

Thurs., 5/4, 10:00 a.m. - noon
Great Decisions, League office

Mon., 5/8, 4:00 p.m.
Board meeting, League office

Wed., 5/10, 1:30 p.m.
Local Government Committee, League office

Thurs., 5/17, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
Ethics in Government: A lost cause?
TR Inaugural Site

Thurs., 5/25, 1:30 p.m.
Education Committee, League office

Thurs., 5/25, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
LWVBN Happy Hour, Providence Social,
490 Rhode Island St., Buffalo

Thurs., 6/1, 10:00 a.m. - noon
Great Decisions, League office

Please note that the annual meeting information
will be in a separate booklet that accompanies
this Voter.

Be sure to check your email and our website for other events as they are scheduled!

Reminder
The deadline for the June Voter is Monday, May 8, 2017. Please send copy, photos, meeting notices, and
other submissions to Nora Mikes, copy editor, at nora_mikes@yahoo.com (675-5025).