



Loretta Peszynski,
Co-President

Margaret Brunson,
Co-President

Judy Weidemann,
Membership Chair

Office:
1272 Delaware Ave
Buffalo, NY 14209
884-3550
Fax 882-3797
E-Mail:
lwwbn@lwwbn.org

Janet Massaro,
Administrator

Office Open:
Mon-Thurs
Office closed
Fridays

LWVB/N website
www.lwwbn.org

LWVNYS Home
Page
www.lwvny.org

LWVUS Home
Page
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Terri Parks,
Voter Editor
events@lwwbn.org

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A History of Change – A Future of Hope

On February 14, 2010, the League of Women Voters celebrates 90 years of work to safeguard democracy and advance civic improvement in the United States.

The League of Women Voters' Making Democracy Award honors such individuals. Nominations are open to any adult who has contributed to our community in a meaningful way.

The LWV celebrates community leaders; individuals who have envisioned a way to improve the community and who have mobilized others to work with them to effect change that has benefited the broader community. This award will honor such individuals who have, in the 90-year League tradition, helped to make our community strong, vibrant and fair.

If you would like to nominate someone from our community or to be considered yourself for the Making Democracy Work award, please contact Terri Parks at events@lwwbn.org to receive an application form. The award recipient(s) will be honored at the LWVBN celebration of the 90th anniversary in April.



League of Women Voters 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

CONTENTS

<i>President's Message</i>	2	<i>Lunch & Issues</i>	6
<i>Coming Events</i>	2	<i>Amherst Unit News</i>	6
<i>Great Decisions</i>	2	<i>How to receive electronic New York Voter</i>	6
<i>Consolidating Local Gov't</i>	3	<i>Membership News</i>	7
<i>LWV/BN History Article</i>	5	<i>In Memoriam: Miriam Becker</i>	7
<i>Natural Resources</i>	5	<i>January & February Calendar</i>	8

President's Message

The LWVB/N did not have a board meeting in December. We did have a Holiday Social at Rosary Hall at Daemen College. We enjoyed a lovely buffet supper followed by casual conversation and singing.

The program for the evening was a delightful PowerPoint presentation by League member, Alison Hyde. Alison, her husband Art, and a small group of volunteers have been supporting Crossroads Springs Institute, a school and care center for children orphaned by AIDS in Hamisi, Kenya. Their contribution has been fund-raising and actual hands-on labor at the school. To learn more about Crossroads Springs go to www.crossroadssprings.org. The evening was topped off by a Basket Raffle to support our local League. Here is a big "Thank You" to all those who worked to make the evening a great success, especially Judy Weidemann and Terri Parks.

December wasn't all fun and socializing. The LWVB/N signed on as a co-sponsor of the Candlelight Vigil on December 11, promoting awareness of the potential dangers of Climate Change to our Environment. Our thanks to Sandy Chelnov and Ellen Neumaier and the other members of the Natural Resources Committee.

At the LWVB/N board meeting on Monday, January 4, we started planning for the rest of the League year. We must submit program-planning ideas for national League program in March. We need your input as soon as possible (Jan. 20 at the latest.) You can view the current LWVUS Program in "Impact On Issues" which is available at www.lwvus.org.

One of the highlights of spring 2010 will be the League's 90th Birthday Celebration. We are planning a gala birthday event.

Margaret Brunson, Co-President LWVB/N

The following quote from Chris Carson, Co-President of LWV Glendale/Burbank gives us all something to think about when recommending program changes:

"At National Convention, the delegates will vote to adopt a new study, or no study, or an update to an existing study, or a concurrence to a pre-existing study. The convention doesn't set legislative priorities. Those priorities are set by the Board when the new session of Congress is ready to convene. There are a number of factors that go into a decision as what priorities the Board will adopt. Member interest is one. But the most important factor is whether there is any interest in Congress. The question is – given what Congress decides to work on, where can the League make the most difference, given our resources. If Congress has absolutely no interest in working on a particular issue then the League is literally wasting its time, talent and treasure if we persist in lobbying efforts. And we lose credibility as well."

Coming Events

The "Spring Fling" in New York City on May 15th replaces the United Nations Day this year because of renovations currently underway at the UN Building. The UN Briefings will resume sometime next year.

The LWVUS National Convention will be June 11 – 15m 2010 in Atlanta, Georgia at the Marriott Atlanta Marquis – Room Rate is \$179+tax (\$205.85 total) You may make your hotel reservation online at www.lwvus.org. More information on the convention program and activities will be posted on the LWVUS web site as it becomes available.

Great Decisions

The first topic for Great Decisions 2010 will be discussed on Thursday, February 4 from 10 AM - noon at 1272 Delaware. It is entitled *Special Envoys*. "Special envoys can help bring attention and diplomatic muscle to resolve conflicts and global challenges but they also bring with them their own 'special problems'. Will the Obama administration's reliance on special envoys increase the ability of the U. S. to deal with major international issues or complicate our diplomatic options?" Bernice Baeumler will be the facilitator. If you have any questions, please contact Bernice at events@lwvbn.org.

In the last issue of the Voter, we announced that LWWNYS is doing a study on the consolidation of local government entities and suggested some preliminary readings. When our local league receives the consensus questions for this study (probably in January), we will plan and hold consensus meetings to make our contribution to the development of a state position. The article that follows provides background information that will be helpful to us as we prepare for the consensus meetings. This was abridged from Noreen's full article. It is very important that you take the time to find and read it on the LWWNYS website at http://lwvny.org/consolidation/Fisher_FullReport1109.pdf.

Anne Huberman

Consolidating Local Government

Rationale for the Study

New York State continues to be faced with serious structural problems. Anemic economic growth, population losses and some of the highest taxes in the nation have been of serious concern for many years. Although the cost of New York State government threatens its effectiveness, the League has never studied, at a statewide level, whether it should encourage government consolidations/dissolutions or shared services in the interest of increasing efficiencies, and, if so, what criteria should be applied in evaluating various proposals.

The study of the question of increasing efficiency of local government through consolidation or dissolution of the entities themselves and/or of the services they provide is a complicated endeavor. The state is so diverse that the study committee believes it is unlikely that a consensus that proposes one course of action for the entire state can be reached.

Given the immediacy of these issues, the study committee has decided to devote the first portion of the study to exploration of consensus in the following areas: 1. Is there agreement on the standards that the League should apply in assessing changes to state law that would facilitate the consolidation/dissolution process and/or the expansion of shared services; 2. Is there agreement on standards that local Leagues should apply in assessing proposals for consolidation /dissolution/ shared services in their service areas.

Insofar as the Leagues wishes to extend the study to consider mandating specific types of consolidations/dissolutions or shared services, the second portion of the study will occur next year after the first portion has been completed.

Overview of Current Governmental Structure

New York has a complex layering of 1,607 general-purpose local governments made up of 57 counties, 932 towns, 62 cities, 556 villages, all of which have taxing power, can issue debt and are covered by home rule protections under the state constitution, and 14 Native American reservations. The cities and towns completely cover all of the territory of the counties, leaving no unincorporated areas. None of the cities or towns cross county borders and, with one exception, cities and towns do not overlap. With respect to the villages, all reside within towns and 76 of the villages cross town boundaries. New York City operates as both a city and a county (the five boroughs are technically counties but operate under city government).

This structure leads to a layering of local governments. Village residents have three layers of government- village, town and county. Town residents live within two layers- town and county. The state has only five co-terminus (same borders) town/villages. These residents would have two layers- town/village as one and county. City residents outside New York City also have two layers- city and county. New York City and Native American Reservation residents have one layer of government.

The vast majority of these general-purpose governments were established prior to 1920 when the state was primarily rural. Very little change has occurred since then. Only three cities have been formed since 1920, the last being the City of Rye in 1942. The number of towns is unchanged since 1900 although there have been some changes within this total. Villages, the only form of municipal government that can be incorporated or dissolved solely by local action, have seen more change, with 125 villages having been created since 1925 and 37 dissolved as of 2007, with more changes occurring even today.

The state has seen tremendous changes in population size, economic activity, transportation systems, communication technology, and settlement patterns since 1920, and yet municipal classifications, boundaries and the laws under which these entities operate do not reflect this change. Historically cities and villages were created within the surrounding rural towns to respond to the needs of denser populations that required services not provided town-wide, the most obvious being water and sewer. These services were paid for by those within the cities and villages receiving that benefit. Today, while there are areas in upstate and in small portions of downstate that continue to reflect these stark distinctions, for the most part the services provided by towns no longer differ from those provided by their villages and cities.

The terms city, town and village bring a picture to mind that no longer holds true. Cities were traditionally the more populous and urban, towns more rural and villages small and somewhere between urban and rural. Ten towns in the state have populations greater than 100,000 whereas among the state's cities only the "Big Five" are that populous. Four of these towns have populations exceeding the population of the City of Buffalo-making them the largest municipalities outside of New York City.

Most of the state's cities (35 out of 62) have populations under 25,000 while 60 towns and six villages have populations greater than that level. The Villages of Port Chester, Mamaroneck, Ossining, Harrison (town/village) and Scarsdale (town/village) all have larger populations than the City of Rye in Westchester County. The Town of Hempstead is the largest municipality outside New York City in the state in terms of population.

Why is this important? It is important because cities, towns and villages have very different governing structures, revenue structures, tax and debt limits, access to revenue sharing and other forms of state aid and access to county and state services, grants and programs. Despite the many differences under state law for cities, towns and villages, the functions and services provided by the different classes have been converging, and as we have seen old designations no longer apply. Cities tend to receive more in aid from the state, yet many towns and some villages are larger than our cities with the same problems that population brings. A discussion of the different treatment of municipal classes and the impact on local governments can be found in a comptroller report "Outdated Municipal Structures" at www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/ under Research reports.

It is important to keep in mind that what a municipality is called is an artifact of the past and not a true reflection of how large, populous and urbanized an area actually is today. This uncertainty is one factor in recommending that initiatives to consolidate local government entities remember that "one-size-does-not-fit-all" and that the analysis should not be influenced by terminology but should be evaluated on the facts.

Of course, New York State government does not end with the general-purpose governments but also includes districts and other special government entities.

In addition to the general purpose governments discussed above, there are 1,811 special-purpose districts in New York with elected boards and the ability to impose taxes and/or issue debt directly or through the local government. These districts include school districts, fire districts, library districts, and other commissioner run districts, such as parks, water, sewer and solid waste districts.

The boundaries of these districts often cross town, village, city and even county borders creating issues of administration and taxing and coordination with multiple local governments. Many of these special districts operate outside of citizen and local press oversight and have election days outside of the General, Village or School District elections, resulting in low voter interest and turn out.

In addition to these districts, the state has 1,302 local government entities with independent boards that are able to impose costs and/or issue debt with little local control. These entities tend to have appointed boards, although some are elected by a select group of people. These entities include BOCES, community colleges, consolidated health districts, joint activity districts, local development corporations, housing authorities, industrial development agencies, urban renewal agencies, water, sewer and utility authorities, parking and transportation authorities, among others. These entities range from local to regional in scope, and they vary in the degree to which they are independent of the local government's oversight.

Finally, in addition to the above, New York has thousands of other boards and councils without taxing authority, such as soil and water conservation districts, regional planning boards, stormwater-management districts, fire protection districts, health districts and vital records districts. Most of these operate within a town or county and are under the control of the local government.

Government in New York State is complicated, and the reasons for the lack of change in municipal boundaries – and/or classifications and rules – range from the lack of unincorporated land, which makes the expansion of cities extremely difficult; to state laws such as the "Selkirk Law" (1961), which requires: representatives of all affected areas (the city, the area to be annexed and the town as a whole) to agree to a city annexation of land, as well as a formal referendum of city and town residents and a special act of the legislature; extension of the Selkirk law to villages in 1963; home-rule protections for all local governments in the state constitution which limit the state legislature's ability to pass a law affecting a specific local government without a request from the local government itself; simple inertia; the sentimental attachment in local populations to existing government entities; the patterns of state aid to local governments based on traditional legal categories rather than more appropriate criteria; and the stake of local officials in the current structure. For those of you who are interested, you can find a summary of the local governmental entities in your county on the Attorney General's website, www.oag.ny.us.org.

The New League of Women Voters Hosts an Annual Political Institute

As the League of Women Voters began to take shape the question of a mission for this new organization was discussed. The main focus of the Women's Suffrage Movement, women's right to vote, had been accomplished. What should be the next step?

Founders of the League believed that the mission of this new organization should be Civic Education. Women had been marginalized as citizens prior to obtaining the vote and they needed to be brought up to speed on the issues of the day. As they began to study the issues, the LWV realized that all voters, not just women, needed to be more cognizant of the issues.

In keeping with this philosophy, the Erie County League of Women Voters joined with the University of Buffalo (a private university at the time) to present a three-day Political Institute each fall. It consisted of round table discussions, general meetings, luncheons and dinners. Speakers and experts from around the state and nation were invited to take part in the proceedings. Information about their topics is sparse, but we have found newspaper articles and programs that show the tenor of the Institute.

At the 1826 Institute, David Lawrence, a Washington, D.C. journalist and author, spoke about "Centralization of Government-Is it a Menace?" William Mosher, Dean of the School of Citizenship at Syracuse University, spoke about citizenship and Julius Pratt, Professor of Ancient History at UB, spoke about the history of federal aid.

In 1929 Oswald G. Villard, editor of The Nation magazine spoke about the Protective Tariff and Lt. Gov. Lehman spoke about State Government Problems.

In 1932 G. August Gerber, the candidate for Congress from the Socialist Party in New York, discussed New York Politics.

The institute devoted most of its efforts in 1934 to the Question of Reorganization of County Government. Speakers included Harry Freeman of the Buffalo Municipal Research Bureau.

As the country moved into the depression and World War II, it became more difficult to continue a formal institute, but citizen education through luncheon speakers and round table discussions continued. Many of the topics discussed remain relevant today.

Marie Hanrahan, Historian

Natural Resources News

Sandy Chelnov has set two dates at Daemen College on Main Street in Amherst to introduce the Low Carbon Diet to people who live and/or work in Amherst. On Monday evening, February 1, 2010, she'll introduce the idea and on Saturday, February 20, 2010, conduct "a full-blown Climate Change Café like we did with the LWVBN". Sandy hopes that the eco-teams that form out of this cafe will spawn others in the town. Of course, LWVBN members are most welcome to participate. Please contact Sandy if you're interested in more information about this important program at events@lwvbn.org.



Ellen Neumaier, Natural Resources Chair

Climate Change Tip of the Month

Researchers at Oregon State University calculated the lifetime impact of a few popular ways to reduce our carbon footprint. Here's what they found:

- Recycling newspaper, magazines, glass, plastic aluminum, and steel cans: 19 tons of CO2 saved
- Replacing old refrigerator with energy-efficient model: 21 tons saved
- Replacing ten 75-w incandescent bulbs with 25-w Energy-efficient lights: 40 tons saved
- Replacing single-glazed windows with energy-efficient windows: 133 tons saved
- Reducing miles driven from 231 to 155 per week: 162 tons saved
- Increasing car's fuel economy from 20 to 30 mpg: 163 tons saved

Lunch & Issues Scotch 'n Sirloin Restaurant

North Bailey Avenue at Maple Road
Amherst, NY

11:30 a.m.

\$15.00 per person payable at the door (Write checks to LWVBN)

We welcome your friends and neighbors to every Lunch & Issues.

Friday, January 15, 2010

Rick Gillert, Town of Amherst Planning Director will brief the group about public input review of the Amherst Master Planning process which begins January 28, 2010 for Amherst residents.

LWV Amherst was involved ten years ago. There have been many changes since that time. We encourage people to become reinvested in the decision-making.

Please reserve by January 12 with Sally Metzger or Judy Metzger at events@lwvbn.org..

Friday, February 19, 2010

Andrea Rebeck, architect and Preservation Specialist for Preservation Buffalo Niagara covering seven counties in WNY, will speak about the behind-the-scenes challenges in preservation and restoration and about current priorities for regional preservation. Andrea is a member of the Orleans County League of Women Voters.

Please reserve by February 16 with Sally Metzger, events@lwvbn.org.

Amherst Unit News

We thank all who brought gifts for Haven House to December's Lunch & Issues and to Sally Metzger for delivering them.

We continue to observe Town Board meetings on the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month at 3:30--note the Town Board, which has almost all new members, began January 4th, Contact Joyce Zobel at events@lwvbn.org to join our observer corps.

We look forward to a productive 2010 and welcome your suggestions for programs.

Judy Metzger, Sally Metzger, Arlene Miles Co-coordinators

Pictures of League events should be submitted to LWVNYS for possible inclusion on the state website. Be sure to include a brief explanation and caption identifying the local League, people and event.

The delivery of the electronic **New York State Voter** from LWVNYS to all of our members started in November. The December 2009-Early January 2010 edition of the *LWVB/N Voter* described how to arrange for an electronic edition if you have an e-mail address and didn't receive the November 2009 edition of the **New York State Voter**.

Paper copies of the NYS Voter are now available at \$5.00 each to those request it. There will be paper editions for November 2009. January, March and May 2010. You may arrange for a print edition by calling Stephanie Lopez at 518-465-4162 or sending a request to: Stephanie Lopez
Program Coordinator
League of Women Voters of New York State
62 Grand Street
Albany, NY 12207.

Membership dues and contributions to the LWV are not deductible as a personal or business expense for tax purposes.

JOIN

CUT OUT AND MAIL TODAY

Make check payable to **LWVB/N** and send to **LWVB/N**, 1272 Delaware Ave., Buffalo, NY 14209-2401 (Attn: Membership Chair, Judy Weidemann)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$62 Individual (Basic Membership) | <input type="checkbox"/> \$95 Household
<i>(2 members living at the same address)</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Carrie Chapman Catt Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> \$30 Student membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$90 Elizabeth Cady Stanton Membership | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Susan B. Anthony Membership | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enclosed is my additional contribution of \$_____ | |

Unit Affiliation
(optional)

Amherst
 Buffalo Metro
 Clarence

Name (s) _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ e-mail _____

Please send me the LWVBN VOTER via email.

This includes local, state and national League dues.

Membership

Dear League Members,

The Membership committee will contact members who have not renewed in the past two years in an effort to "pull them back" to the League. If you know any members who fall in this category, please ask them about rejoining. Contact me at events@lwvbn.org. and I will send them a letter giving reasons for rejoining the LWVB/N and a membership application.

Yours in League,
Judy Weidemann, Membership Chair

If you change your email address, please send an email notifying us of the change from your new email address to: lwvbn@lwvbn.org, and to me at events@lwvbn.org. We need this notification to reach you by email with the latest news, advocacy requests, and information.

Elsa Bondar, LWVB/N Grassroots Coordinator

If you're willing to receive your VOTER by e-mail, please send a request to me at events@lwvbn.org. You will help the environment, save printing and postage costs, and learn about upcoming events at least a week earlier than folks who receive the printed copy.

Terrí Parks, VOTER Editor

Welcome to New Member: B.J. Lewis Depew NY 14043

In Memoriam

We were saddened to learn that our long time League member, Miriam Becker, died unexpectedly at her home on December 13, two weeks after her 92nd birthday.

For a great many years Miriam participated actively discussing League issues and contributing to Great Decisions, the Charter Schools Committee and other program events. Her wise, sometimes piercing comments were well known.

Miriam helped found the Buffalo Peace Center in 1967. She was also instrumental in starting a Women's International League for Peace and Freedom chapter in Buffalo, and was an avid spokesperson against the Viet Nam War. She was honored with an award by the Peace Center about two years ago. Another of her passionate involvements was with the Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

Her friends appreciated her sincerity, intelligence, experience, and generosity. Her lifetime dedication to the promotion of a peaceful world was admirable. Many will miss Miriam.



Lee Tettkowski

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2010

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT 1:15 p.m.	14	15 LUNCH & ISSUES Page 6	16
17	18	19	20	21 NATURAL RESOURCES 9:30 a.m. CHARTER SCHOOLS 1:30 p.m.	22	23
24	25	26 ISSUES COMMITTEE 4:30 p.m.	27	28	29	30
31	2/1 BOARD MEETING 4:30 p.m.	2/2	2/3	2/4 GREAT DECISIONS Page 2	2/5	2/6
2/7	2/8	2/8	2/10 LOCAL GOVERNMENT 1:15 p.m.	2/11	2/12	2/13
2/14 	2/15	2/16	2/17	2/18 NATURAL RESOURCES 9:30a.m. CHARTER SCHOOLS 1:30 p.m.	2/19 LUNCH & ISSUES Page 6	2/20
2/21	2/22	2/23 ISSUES COMMITTEE 4:30 p.m.	2/24	2/25	2/26	2/27