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Terri Parks

President
884-3550

lwbvn@lwbvn.org

Judy Huber

Membership Chair
884-3550

lwbvn@lwbvn.org

Office:

1272 Delaware Ave
Buffalo, NY 14209
884-3550
Fax: 882-3797

Office Manager:

Eugene Abrahamson

Office Hours:

Tuesday and Friday
9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Always call before going to the office.

LWVBN Home Page

www.lwbvn.org

LWVNYS Home Page

www.lwvny.org

LWVUS Home Page

www.lwv.org

Kathleen McCormick

Voter Editor
884-3550

lwbvn@lwbvn.org

The VOTER is published 10 times per year. June items are due Friday, May 11, 2012.

League of Women Voters Buffalo/Niagara presents:

Transportation: WNY Path to the Future

A forum on immediate steps to foster sustainable transportation for the future of Western New York

Wednesday, May 9, 4:00–6:00 p.m.

Harlem Road Community Center, 4255 Harlem Road, Amherst

Panelists:

Amy Weymouth-Michaux and Kelly Dixon
Transportation Analysts
Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council

Dr. Wende A. Mix
Associate Professor
Geography and Planning Department, Buffalo State College

Senator Timothy M. Kennedy
58th District, member NYS Senate Transportation Committee

Sam Hoyt
Empire State Development Corporation, former NYS Assemblyman

Discussion to follow presentations by panelists. Event is free and open to the public.

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.

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President's Message and Board Actions

League members are again offering their services to moderate School Board candidates' meetings for this year's May 15th school board elections. This year's state and federal elections promise many opportunities to moderate and assist at candidate forums and also to register new voters. With new district lines for New York State and U.S. Congressional districts, we expect high interest in events that give voters opportunity to hear from candidates from all parties in the civil and impartial atmosphere of a League-led forum or debate.

We expect to need the help of many members of our League in voter registration or candidate forum efforts. Please leave a message at the League office (884-3550 or lwvbn@lwvbn.org) if you are willing to assist us with these important election year initiatives.

The Federal Congressional Election Primary is scheduled for Tuesday, June 26, 2012. The League supports having both federal and state primaries on that date, but as of mid April, no date has been set for the state primaries.

Eugene Abrahamson was a chaperone for this year's Students Inside Albany program and returned with much praise for the 54 students who attended and especially for our student representative, Ryan Montgomery. We look forward to hearing about this year's experience from Ryan, himself, at our Annual Meeting on June 2, 2012.

Marian Deutschman, chair of the 2012 Nominating Committee, presented the slate for election at the Annual Meeting to the board at its April meeting. Thank you, Marian, and committee members, Deborah Billoni, Ramona Gallagher, Marie Hanrahan, Judy Huber, JoAnn Mecca and Sandra O'Hara.

The Annual Meeting Packet that accompanies this edition of the Voter includes three important items: 1) Local Program for 2012-2013; 2) revisions to the LWVBN Bylaws; and 3) the proposed 2012-2013 LWVBN budget. At its April meeting, the board reviewed and recommended all three items for membership approval at the Annual Meeting. If you have questions about any of these items, feel free to contact the committee chair prior to the Annual Meeting. Each chair has agreed to include your questions and their responses in their presentation at the Annual Meeting.

Ramona Gallagher, Gladys Gifford and Terri Parks will be the voting delegates for our local League at the LWVUS Convention June 8-12 in Washington, DC.

League member, Amy Witryol, has announced her candidacy for the New York State Senate 62nd district. We congratulate Amy for undertaking this challenging effort and applaud her exercise of a fundamental political right of citizenship.

Terri Parks

Great Decisions

"The U. S. has had a history of advancing and supporting democracy around the world. What place does democracy promotion have in U.S. foreign policy today? With a choice of tools ranging from economic aid to military force, what are the appropriate yet effective methods that the U.S. should use to promote democracy?" We will address these questions in our second Great Decisions discussion, *Promoting Democracy: Foreign Policy Imperative?*, on Thursday, May 3 from 10 a.m.–noon at 1272 Delaware Avenue. Abbey Bernardis volunteered to lead our discussion, a particularly appropriate follow-up to our April discussion on the Middle East. We hope to have the same fine turnout as in April.

Bernice Baeumler

LWVBN News and Notes

LEAGUE HISTORY: JURY DUTY

Many people believe that once women won the right to vote, other rights and duties of citizenship followed automatically. Unfortunately this was not the case. The right to serve on juries in criminal trials is just one example.

In New York State, women did not have the right to serve on juries until 17 years after the suffrage amendment was passed. Bills to give women equal responsibility for jury duty were introduced in a number of sessions of the New York State Assembly, but it was not until September 1, 1937 that such a bill was finally passed and signed by Governor Lehman.

The final passage of the legislation was due in no small part to continuous lobbying by the New York State League of Women Voters. The Erie County League contributed greatly to this effort by participating in hearings in Albany and presenting petitions containing hundreds of signatures. Many hours were also spent educating women about the jury system. Speakers from states which already had women serving on juries were invited to teach women about jury service and the meaning of this obligation.

As a footnote to the passage of this legislation, Senator Philip Kleinfield introduced a companion bill that gave women an automatic exemption from jury service. Not until 1975 were all juries to be chosen from a pool that "excluded no element of the community."

Marie Hanrahan, League Historian

LEAGUE MEMBERS IN THE COMMUNITY

In March, Mary Herbst and Dianne Rubin registered voters at the invitation of the Buffalo State College library staff. Thanks, Mary and Dianne!

On May 3rd, Joyce Bol will moderate and Judy Clarke will assist at a school board candidates' meeting sponsored by the Williamsville PTA Council. On May 7th, Judy Huber will moderate a school boards candidates' meeting sponsored by the Amherst Central PTA Council. Many thanks to Joyce, Judy Clarke, and Judy Huber for sharing their time and expertise.

League members shake hands with new citizens and present each with a voter registration form and LWV materials at citizenship ceremonies in the new Federal Courthouse. Susan Stievater, Sue Marom, Sally Moehlau, Jeanne Ensminger attended in April. Kathleen McCarthy and Lillis McLean will attend in May. JoAnn Mecca and Bernice Baeumler will attend in June. Thanks to them all for their willingness to represent the League at these moving ceremonies.

If you are interested in volunteering at a League activity, please contact Mike Egan (lwvbn@lwvbn.org).

Mike Egan, Volunteer Coordinator

LWVBN MEMBER LIST

A membership list that includes all active LWVBN members as of May 1, 2012 is now available. Members with an e-mail address will receive a membership list by e-mail at no cost. All members may request that a printed list be mailed to them for a donation of \$5.00. If you would like a printed membership list, please send your request, with a check written to LWVBN, to the League Office, 1272 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY, 14209.

Election Services

The national League of Women Voters was formed on February 14, 1920, as a mighty political experiment to help newly franchised women exercise their responsibilities as voters. During the past 92 years, continuing into the present, the League has strenuously labored to broaden, improve, and strengthen our precious democratic process. Our local league has committees whose goals are the very same.

The Election Services Committee has contracts with West Side Community Services and the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority to supervise elections at their various sites and to their boards. These elections are also important sources of income for our local League.

Planning and preparing for an impartial, organized, and unbiased election can be a very labor intensive and time consuming process. One such election is the 2012 election of tenant members to the BMHA Board of Commissioners. To be able to sustain the League's reputation as a highly qualified arbiter of elections, the Elections Committee is requesting assistance from the membership. No experience is necessary. There are two occasions to serve: 1) Wednesday, June 13, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. at the League Office for tallying and sorting ballots and 2) Friday, June 15, 2012, at 12:00 p.m. at BMHA Offices at 300 Perry Street for the final ballot count. Carpools can be arranged.

Please contact Alan Dozoretz (lwvbn@lwvbn.org) if you would like to volunteer or know more.

Alan Dozoretz-LWV Election Services Chair

Social-Economic Justice Education

The committee has been busy learning about factors that shape the global economy, especially the United States economy. We have been reading relevant books and articles. At our January 18 meeting, Lynne Vallone reported on *Democracy and Social Ethics, 1902*, by Jane Addams. Lynda Stephens reported on *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future, 2010*, by Robert B. Reich. At the February 15 meeting, we decided to post committee purpose, references and, eventually, findings on the LWVBN website. Visit the LWVBN Committees page to read our purpose (<http://www.lwvbn.org/lwvbnactivities/committees.html>). President Terri Parks circulated a notice of our work to leaders of Leagues around the nation. Responses were received from Leagues in Larimer County, CO, Chicago, IL, and Suffolk County, NY.

At the March 12 meeting, we heard from Dr. Ted P. Schmidt, Associate Professor in Buffalo State College's Economics and Finance Policy Institute. Dr. Schmidt provided a broad overview of the economy. He also commented on diverse economic theories and the impact of politics in economics. The role played by de-regulation of financial institutions in our current fiscal crisis was noted.

The April 16 meeting featured the showing of a recent "Moyers and Company" program, entitled "Politically Engineered Inequality". Bill Moyers interviews authors Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson. We invited Peace Center members, who have initiated a committee with similar interests, to join us.

Check out our web site posts. Join us when you can.

Lynda Stephens, Social-Economic Justice Education Chair

The League of Women Voters:

Where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement.

Work with the LWV to help shape the issues that keep our community fair, vibrant and strong.

Social-Economic Justice Education Committee Book Report

Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future, Robert B. Reich, 2010

Author – Robert B. Reich is Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the Richard and Rhoda Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley. He served in three national administrations, most recently as secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton (first term only).

Summary – Reich notes the 2008 economic downturn but states that Wall Street was not primarily responsible. He argues the real problem is structural: increasing concentration of income and wealth at the top, and a middle class that has had to go deeply into debt to maintain a decent standard of living. The middle class does not have the income to consume what the economy can produce. He compares the current situation to 1928 and the Great Depression. The middle class has incurred more debt to cope with declining incomes and the rich often use their wealth for speculation. These are key problems. Many Americans conclude the game is rigged for the benefit of a few.

Reich's assessment is that the American economy must be rebalanced so that its benefits are shared more widely, as they were decades ago. Until this transformation is made, our economy will experience phantom recoveries and speculative bubbles, each more distressing than the one before. In the late 1970s the richest 1% took in less than 9% of the nation's total economy. The boom of the 1990s followed Clinton's tax increases, not previous tax cuts. In other words, the tax increase did not stall economic growth.

By 2007, the richest 1% took in 23.5% of the total economy. The last time income distribution was so concentrated at the top was 1928. The assets of the 1% are invested in financial instruments, not their houses like the middle class. Other factors that changed the nature of the US economy and employment structure include global competition and labor-replacing technologies. Inflated home prices influenced by low mortgage rates encouraged the middle class to borrow against the values of their homes. When the housing bubble burst, many people lost their homes due to foreclosures.

Reich suggests strategies to improve the economy: strengthening safety nets, improving education and job training, and other actions to enable the middle class to flourish. However, some political leaders took a different path. Many embraced de-regulation and privatization, attacked the diminished labor unions, cut taxes on the wealthy, and "shredded" social safety nets. Reich refers to the "basic bargain", i.e. workers need to be able to purchase what the economy produces. He gives the example of Henry Ford who gave his workers unusually high wages so that they could buy his new autos. The basic bargain has been broken.

Reich believes that the government stimulus and the bank bailouts were necessary. Otherwise, the economic problems would have been worse. The challenge is both economic and political. He details how unemployment, low wages, inflation, and the expanded role of the Federal Reserve have impacted our economy. Americans are becoming outraged at a "rigged game." Wall Street was "made whole", but Main Street was not. Lobbying and other money in politics discourages economic and fiscal reforms.

Reich argues for new jobs in a green economy and reform of government policies including progressive tax reform and restoring safety nets. He believes we should move towards more income equality so that the middle class can sustain our consumer economy.

For more information related to this book, go to Robert Reich's blog: www.robertreich.org.

Lynda Stephens, Social-Economic Justice Education Chair

Students Inside Albany Conference Report

Ryan Montgomery represented LWVBN at the *Students Inside Albany* conference on March 25–28. Ryan was among 54 students, ages 16–18, who attended the conference. Students came from 37 local Leagues and Members at Large units from across New York State to immerse themselves in the process by which public policy is proposed, enacted and changed.

During the four day intensive training, students toured the capitol building and met with elected officials. A junior at Bennett High School, Ryan met with Senator Grisanti who introduced him to Senators Kennedy and Gallivan. He also met with Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes in the Assembly Chamber.

Ryan and other students also learned from elected officials, journalists, good government organizations, and LWV experts about tools they can use to influence public policy. Topics included lobbying, how to run for office, transparency in government, and the role of media in politics.

Eugene Abrahamson, LWVBN office manager, accompanied Ryan to Albany. Eugene said, “It was certainly delightful and all the students were respectful and truly very inspiring. Laura Ladd-Biermann and her efforts need to be applauded.”

A LWVNYS report on the conference includes feedback from students. Here are some of the student comments:

- “It makes me want to make a change in my community and maybe go further and one day be an assemblymember.”
- “I realized how active lobbyists are and it takes a lot of time to keep up on the issues and stay involved to elect the best people and encourage them to make the best choices.”
- “We always hear about federal government in school so it was interesting to hear about state government.”
- “I now realize how my voice is and isn’t heard. I want to be heard.”
- “It’s a great learning experience for anyone interested in politics, whether as a future voter or a future politician.”
- “It has gotten me a lot more interested and now I’m excited to implement change in my community.”

Read the complete report and see more photos by visiting the LWVNYS website (report:http://www.lwvny.org/youth/SIA/2012_SIA-Summary.pdf; photos:<http://lwvny.org/youth/SIA/gallery.html#tour>). Look for a photograph of Ryan and Assemblywoman Peoples-Stokes in the “Assembly-Senate Visits” set.



Eugene Abrahamson (left) and Ryan Montgomery (right) at the *Students in Albany* conference.

New York State League News

Issues and Advocacy: Sally Robinson

On March 15th, the Legislature passed both new state legislative district lines for 2012 and a proposed constitutional amendment establishing an independent commission for 2022. A joint statement with Citizens Union describing our support for the amendment and a *Frequently Asked Questions* on the amendment was sent to all members.

LWVNYS supported the constitutional amendment because we believe that it affords an opportunity for structural reform to the process even though it falls short of our ideal, as often happens with legislative reforms in Albany. While we understand some Leagues may be concerned over this support in light of the disappointment many felt over both the gerrymandered 2012 lines and the failure to achieve an independent process for 2012, we believe that it is fully consistent with our position on redistricting.

Congressional lines have been finalized by the federal court following a failure to reach an agreement by the state Legislature. The state legislative lines agreed to on March 15th will stand unless they are successfully challenged under either voting rights grounds or the Senate Democrat's litigation over the addition of a 63rd senate seat.

Transportation: Gladys Gifford

The New York State budget agreement, announced March 28, keeps faith with transportation needs in the State, including public transit. Of special note is the one-year arrangement to distribute the revenue from the Corporate and Utilities Tax equitably across all public transit systems. Previously, these revenues had gone entirely to the New York City transit agency, MTA. However, this tax is collected state-wide, and Governor Cuomo initiated the effort to distribute its revenues more fairly, i.e., state-wide, proportionate to population size served by public transit agencies. Appropriate action is to urge legislative support for making this state-wide distribution permanent.

The BRIDGE Act was passed by the Senate but died in Assembly. It returned to the Senate Finance committee as S1071B. This bill pushes New York State to abide by the law enacted in 1991, a "lock-box" which intended for the gasoline tax to be used for road and bridge repair and maintenance. Appropriate action is to urge support by all Assembly members.

The budget agreement mentioned the Tappan Zee Bridge. Excellent work is being done by the Westchester League to insist that the process be transparent even while agreeing that a replacement bridge is necessary. However, the new bridge should include a public transit component in the final design.

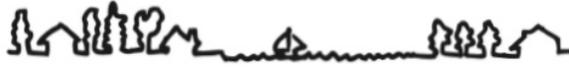
Elections Report: Aimee Allaud

It's three primaries for New York State voters! Yes, despite concerted efforts by your State League and collaborative efforts with the New York State Elections Commissioners Association, and the New York State Association of Counties, New Yorkers will vote in a third primary, possibly on September 11 (second Tuesday in September) or in August. No bills have been introduced in the Legislature yet to change the date.

We have set Better Ballot Redesign as our goal for the remainder of the legislative session. There is still time to affect positive change for the paper ballots voters will use in this presidential election year if we let our legislators know that some simple changes like removing "clutter" and enlarging font size/type will make a big difference.



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May 2012

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1 Issues 4:30 p.m.	2	3 Great Decision 10:00 a.m.	4	5
6	7 Board Meeting 4:00 p.m.	8	9 Transportation Program: Path to the Future 4:00 p.m.	10 Natural Resources 9:30 a.m. Local Government 1:15 p.m.	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 Education 1:30 p.m.	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	June 1	2 Annual Meeting 10:00 a.m.