County Executive Mark Poloncarz

“Initiatives for a Smart Economy”

Thursday, November 21, 2013

5:30 a.m.—7:00 p.m.

Harlem Community Center
2600 Harlem Road

The County Executive will detail his initiatives and provide a realistic blueprint of specific actions to enhance the quality of life in the county by leveraging our assets and forming meaningful partnerships.

This program is free and open to the public!

Date Change

League of Women Voter’s 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 Report

Your valued membership in the League of Women Voters has wide reaching effects. You belong to one of the most respected organizations in the nation, state and our local community. Our reputation for fairness is especially evident during the election season when we receive many calls and requests for the Voters Guide and information about voting and candidates. We also receive requests to moderate candidate forums from community groups, because the League is known for its fairness and impartiality.

The League is also widely respected for the process it uses to develop the positions it uses to advocate for important issues that affect citizens. We all benefit from the advocacy efforts at the national and state level, as well as locally.

While each of us has issues that we especially value, we need to realize that both the state and national leagues need to set priorities on the issues that they pursue. Those priorities reflect a number of considerations. At the September state board meeting, Barbara Bartoletti, who has lobbied the state legislature ably for many years on behalf of the League, reminded board members that the issues chosen for action depend on two key things: strategy and timing. This is certainly true for the national League efforts also.

Each year at this time, the local Leagues in New York State make suggestions for the statewide issues that should form our legislative agenda for 2014. It’s vitally important that we visit our state assembly members and senators to promote the priorities that will be recommended by the state Issues Specialists and approved by the state board in December 2012. Please consider visiting one of your state legislators in March 2014 to urge her/his support of the League’s agenda. We must make our voices heard!

2013 Voters Guide - By now, you should have received the 2013 Voters Guide. We were disappointed at the low response by candidates this year. However, this year’s guide should be especially useful for information on the six proposed amendments to the state constitution. Of course everything in the printed guide as well as several more questions to candidates are available at Vote411 from our web site: www.lwvbn.org. Encourage everyone you know to learn more about candidates’ views by using either Vote411 or our online Voters Guide. We appreciate the grant from the M&T Bank Charitable Foundation for the print version.

Producing and delivering the Voters Guide takes many hours of work each year. There are a few people who deserve special recognition for their dedication to that effort this year. Kristin Allen, our able web master, was responsible for connecting each candidate who responded to our invitation with access to Vote411 to enter her/his information. In addition to administering Vote411, she provided expert advice and guidance for the entire process of producing a Voters Guide. Her dedication and skill is outstanding. The work to update the 370 distribution sites and coordinate the delivery of 25,000 Voters Guides was directed by Judy Clarke and Laura McDade. Many thanks go also to Mary Ann and Flora at the League office for the many phone calls that they made for the many tasks associated with printing and distributing the guides.

The able assistance of the delivery teams and other phone callers as well as that of Cassandra Paul and Eugene Abrahamson are proof of the adage: Many hands make light work.

Great Decisions

November Great Decisions: How Is the United States to Assess Threats?

As hard as it may be to believe, Great Decisions 2013 will be winding up with our Thursday, November 7th discussion from 10 a.m. – noon at 1272 Delaware. Joan Mondul is slated to lead us as we explore the topic, Threat Assessment: "How can the United States address the challenges of a weak economy, homegrown terrorism and nuclear proliferation? What threats and opportunities are presented by the ascendancy of China and by regime change in the Middle East?" As we do not meet in December, January and February plans for Great Decisions 2014 will also have to be made at the November meeting. Hopefully all interested will be able to attend.

Remembering Virginia Ziebarth

We sadly report the passing of long time League member, Virginia Ziebarth. Ginny had been in poor health for many years, but helped deliver the annual Voters Guide each fall through 2012. In former years, she was active in the Amherst League and Amherst Unit. Ginny was a lovely lady and League supporter who will surely be missed.
Lunch and Issues

The Amherst Unit sponsors Luncheon Issues for League members and the community. Their next luncheon is:

Friday, November 15, 3999 Maple Rd. Amherst, NY

Speaker: Steve Sanders, Amherst Town Board member and liaison to the Energy Conservation Committee (Climate Smart Initiative) will give update on progress that the Town of Amherst has taken or has in the works. The cost of luncheon is $16 all included and begins at 11:30 a.m. The public is invited. Contact Sally Metzger at events@lwvbn.org.

Local Government

Did You Know?
On or before the 15th day of October of each year the Erie County Executive submits to the legislature a tentative budget for the ensuing fiscal year, a financial forecast for the two subsequent years, a capital program for the next six fiscal years and an accompanying message. When submitting the 2014 Tentative Budget Revenue and Expense Projection to the Comptroller, County Executive Poloncarz has stated categorically that the 2014 county tax rate per thousand of assessed value will not increase from the 2013 rate.

Did You Know?
The Erie County Legislature is composed of 11 members elected one from each of 11 legislative districts.

Did You Know?
The fiscal year of the county begins the first day of January and ends with the last day in December.

Did You Know?
The County Legislature sets aside October and November to evaluate every line of the county budget to make appropriate decisions to amend, delete or approve dollars in December for next year. The legislature is allowed to delete positions and spending, but to amend, they must have a majority vote that is subject to veto by the County Executive.

Did You Know?
Following approval of the annual county budget, no additional unassigned General Fund balance shall be appropriated as revenue during the fiscal year without the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the total membership of the County Legislature.

Did You Know?
The League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara has a local government committee that is studying the county budget, attending budget hearings, interviewing legislators (and others) to learn and then present our findings to the membership for your guidance in taking action. We welcome additional members at our meetings that take place on the second Wednesday of each month at 1:15 p.m. at the LWVBN office. Join us to uncover the mysteries of the county budget and its process.

Marian Deutschman, Local Government Committee Chair

New Member Bio/Profile: Sophie Chimera

I moved here from the United Kingdom in 1998 after getting married to a Buffalonian whom I had met whilst teaching English in Japan a few years prior. I am a social studies teacher at Lake Shore Senior High School where I teach Participation in Government to seniors. I live in the Elmwood village area and have one son in second grade who attends Olmsted 64. My husband is also a teacher of English at Niagara Wheatfield. I wanted to join the League because I understand how important it is to get involved in the political process and would love the opportunity to professionally and personally grow through my membership.

IF YOU HAVE NOT RENEWED YOUR LEAGUE MEMBERSHIP, PLEASE DO SO ASAP.

QUESTIONS?

Call Judy Metzger or League office at 884-3550 on Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Thanks!

LWVBN Membership Committee
Education Committee

How Does the Implementation of the New Common Core State Standards Measure up to League’s Education Position?

The League believes a basic role of the federal government in funding education should be to achieve equity on the basis of need.

Based on last year’s LWVUS consensus, our position includes that the role of the federal government should:

- Provide broad common standards, developed by educational experts, upon which states and local education agencies can build.
- Provide a suggested curricular structure as a guide for developing the states’ own curricula.
- Provide a national assessment to determine how well individual students have mastered national criteria.
- Provide a national assessment that informs districts of comparisons to other similar districts.

The adoption of the Common Core Standards was to be optional for the states. However, the federal government required states to support Common Core Standards in order to be considered for Race To The Top funds. These new standards were meant to set goals, not to drive curriculum. However, many teachers, administrators and parents are very critical of the lack of input from them, and of the high stakes testing to measure learning of these new standards. Some believe much is age inappropriate and prevents creative teaching.

The Bill Gates Foundation has spent many millions promoting Common Core State Standards and the lead writers of the new questionable tests. The Pearson Corporation is profiting as it creates and publishes the enormous number of changed teaching materials and tests.

The Education Committee will be exploring more about the implementation of these new standards. Join us on the third Thursday of each month at 1:30 p.m. at our League office – 1272 Delaware.

Lee Tetkowski, Education Committee Chair

Voter Services Update

Forty-one volunteers plus our office manager participated in the League’s 2013 Voter Registration efforts out of which nineteen worked at more than one venue. We had nineteen venues, five of which had two days of registration. Registrations we delivered to the Boards of Election (Erie County mostly, but some to Niagara County) totaled forty-four new voters, forty-eight change forms, and three absentee ballot applications. We also handed out fifty-eight to-be-taken-home registration forms and nineteen absentee forms. We were more successful in 2012, that year being a presidential election year. Kate and I are recommending that in future additional venues might be pursued. The League has permission to arrange for registration efforts at NFTA locations. During National Voter Registration Day – September 24th - we partnered with the Urban League. Kate and I are thankful for all the volunteers. Some people passing by the registration tables complimented the League’s work and were happy to see the League registering voters.

Thank you to Ramona Gallagher and JoAnn Mecca for reporting the results of the primary election on September 10 for the Associated Press.

Joyce Bol, Voter Services Chair

Natural Resources Committee Gearing Up for the Agricultural Update

(to the tune of “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands)

We've got the Agricultural Update on our hands!
We've got the honey bee predicament on our hands!
We've got pesticides that kill them on our hands!
We've got the whole world on our hands!

We've got the GMO problem on our hands!
We've got aquifer depletion on our hands!
We've got food security issues on our hands!
We've got the Ag Study on our hands!

We need all your help to study this Update!
Join our research team before it's too late!
League can make a difference in our fate!
We've got the Ag Study on our plate!

Help the Natural Resources Committee lead the studies necessary for LWVUS' Agricultural Update!
Contact Ellen Neumaier at events@lwvbn.org
Fine Turnout for “Democracy at Risk” Forum

On September 19, 2013 the League presented “Democracy at Risk” to an audience of about 100 people. The event, coordinated by the LWVB/N Social Economic Justice Education Committee, was held at the Burchfield Penney Art Center. Panelists included Lauren Breen, Associate Clinical Professor at the Consumer Financial Advocacy Clinic at UB Law School, Ronald Deutsch, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, Sam Magavern, Co-Director of the Partnership for the Public Good, Anthony Neal, Associate Professor of Political Science at SUNY Buffalo State, and Ted Schmidt, Associate Professor of Economics and Finance at SUNY Buffalo State. The panel moderator was Sandy White, management consultant and former WIVB TV talk show host.

Dr. Schmidt began the program with a history of the development of income inequality since WWII. The income gap was narrowest through the 1950s with widening beginning in the late 1970s. The gap has continued to grow through to the present. Federal fiscal policies favoring the wealthy, globalization, economic restructuring with recurring job losses, the creation of lower income jobs, along with the recent Great Recession have brought about the widest income gap since before the Great Depression. Both major political parties enabled policies and made decisions that widened the income gap. Ron Deutsch shared fiscal information specific to New York State, informing us that the income gap is widest in New York due to the state’s fiscal policies. He demonstrated that influences of money reduce the influence of less affluent voters, and thus extend inequalities, weakening democracy. Professor Breen shared stories from the Consumer Financial Advocacy Clinic, including how creditors sell consumer debt to businesses that engage in questionable practices and “work the criminal justice system” to drive up the amount of the debt owed by individuals.

Dr. Neal traced the creation of federal government structures, reminding us that our nation is a republic, not a direct democracy. He pointed out the founders were generally from the wealthy class who crafted a form of government that, while allowing for some opportunity for less wealthy people, generally was designed to preserve the wealthy class. Even Dr. Schmidt’s slides of the eras of narrowest income gap, show the top 20% holding over 60% of the country’s wealth. Some of us were dismayed by the “republic” reminder; some of us were not sure why he described it.

Sam Magavern provided evidence of extreme income inequality at the local level, demonstrating that Erie County’s gaps follow race and geography. Buffalo is home to the most minority residents and also has the lowest median household income. He pointed out that if all Erie County incomes are counted, the county median is higher than the US median income! Magavern also suggested solutions. Engaged voters can make a difference. Organizing community groups and community members can also produce change. He gave examples, including progress at Buffalo’s Inner Harbor where community benefit agreements commit developers and business owners to fair employment and living wage practices.

We received evaluation feedback from 40 audience members who thought overwhelmingly that the program was outstanding (50%) and above average (23%). The audience included members of LWVB/N, co-sponsor American Association of University Women (AAUW), supporting organizations WNY Peace Center, St. Joseph University Parish Social Justice Concerns Committee, the Partnership for the Public Good, Coalition for Economic Justice and Citizen Action of New York, along with students of the panel members, and members of the NAACP/NSBE. Moderator Sandy White drew our attention to failure of today’s media to tell us what is important, and instead producing “infotainment” programming that has less value for society. It was an interesting evening that challenged us to work towards change that benefits all of us and reinvigorates democracy.

Lynda Stephens, Social Economic Justice Education Committee Chair

Holiday Party: December 9th in Hamburg

Please join us at the League’s 2013 Holiday Party, Monday, December 9 at Michael’s Banquet Hall, 4885 Southwestern Boulevard, Hamburg, from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. We welcome guests and potential new members to a tasty meal, stimulating conversation, and entertaining surprises.

The buffet dinner cost is $24 per person. Reservations are due by December 2. Send your check payable to LWVBN with the names of the people who’ll attend to the League office, 1272 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14209.
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NOVEMBER 2013

Copy for Dec./Jan. Voter due 11/6/2013