



**The League of Women Voters
of Buffalo/Niagara**

VOTER

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The **VOTER** is published
10 times per year. Items for
the March issue are due
Friday, February 7

Challenges and Strategies To Combat Human Trafficking

Featured Speaker: Deputy Elizabeth Fildes

Thursday, February 27, 2014

6:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Harlem Road Community Center

One block south of Main Street at 4255 Harlem Road

Amherst, NY 14226

Trafficking in persons and its associated crimes is the practice of modern day slavery. Trafficking is the fastest growing international crime generating billions of dollars in profits, while victimizing millions of the most vulnerable people.

Deputy Elizabeth Fildes, BS, MS is the Program Director of Human Trafficking for the Erie County Sheriff's Office. Deputy Fildes is a world-renowned sought after speaker on human trafficking issues. She has also lectured in Guatemala and Ecuador. Deputy Fildes has tackled the topic of Human Trafficking for the past seven years as head of the Western New York Human Trafficking Alliance task force, a group comprised of state and federal law enforcement officials.

This program is free and open to the public!



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.

CONTENTS

President's Report	2	Local Government	4
Local League Awards	2	Education	5
Naturalization	3	Campaign Finance Reform	6
Social & Economic Justice	3	News from NYS League	7

President's Report

Our last gathering was the holiday party at Michael's Restaurant. The strong League women and men who attended weren't dissuaded by weather reports of dire weather conditions, which as often happens these days, didn't materialize. There was spirited conversation at all the tables and everyone enjoyed a tasty meal and a chance to network and celebrate the season together. We learned some interesting things about each other, some which gave rise to appreciative chuckles.

The Buffalo/Niagara League will not participate in the national League agriculture update. There were just too many roadblocks to our participation. I'm sure the updates will address most or all of the concerns that we have and we'll find areas where we can promote action once consensus is reached.

Thank you to Janet Massaro and Joan Photiadis who have agreed to chair a local study committee for the two League of Women Voters of New York State studies that relate to ballot access and revisit term limits.

This will be the third year for LWVBN to present the Making Democracy Work Award to a deserving community member. The nomination form is inserted in this edition of the Voter.

We welcome League members on the two awards committees, Making Democracy Work and the Local League Awards Committee. Also, we welcome members to participate on the Annual Meeting Program committee. Please contact me at events@lwvbn.org or call the League office if you'd like to be involved in any of these activities. It is true that "many hands make light work". I'd like to add that many hand make work fun! Please join the fun.

Let our New Year's resolution be this: we will be there for one another as fellow members of humanity, in the finest sense of the word. - Goran Persson at Brainy Quote.

Terri Parks

Local League Awards

It's time to think about honoring local League Leaders again. Janet Goodsell has agreed to chair the Awards committee to nominate recipients for our two local league awards for board approval.

The Joan K. Bozer Leadership Award recognizes outstanding League Leadership that reflects on some of the many qualities that Joan has demonstrated in her long experience as a League and community leader. We selected five key characteristics exhibited by Joan that we feel are essential qualities for recognition, **Ethical, Innovative, Resourceful, Respected, Steadfast**. **Please submit a paragraph of up to 250 words that describes how your nominee embodies these characteristics. Be sure to include each characteristic as you write about your nominee.**

Last year we established a second award, the **League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara LEE Award**. The criteria for the award are a **Long Term Commitment to the League with Energy and Excellence**, in short, the initials, "LEE". The award honors Lenore Tetkowski, Leonore Lambert, and Lenore Banks. **Please submit a paragraph of up to 250 words about your nominee in which you note the approximate number of years the person served the League actively, and gives examples of her/his Energy and Excellence in League activity.**

Please email completed nominations to events@lwvbn.org by February 15, 2014. Be sure your name is noted as the nominator.

Thank you!

The update for the Distribution List for the Voter Guide is a time consuming process for our volunteers. They were able to completely update 26 of the 32 lists. Their hard work makes the job of the distributors of the Voter Guide much easier and it gives the Voter Guide Coordinator a clear estimate of the number of copies we need.

Our thanks go to the following League members who participated in this marathon task: Joyce Bol, Judith Capodicasa, Alan Dozoretz, Ramona Gallagher, Janet Goodsell, Judy M Huber, Ann Marie Malachowski, Barbara Metivier, Margaret Mergenhagen, Sandra O'Hara, Janet P Sciolino, Judy Weidemann.

Several of the volunteers completed more than one list and special thanks should go to our Office volunteer, Flora Summe and our Office Manager, Mary Ann Turkla who graciously completed all the lists that had not been assigned to League member volunteers.

Judith Clarke, LWVBN Volunteer Coordinator

Naturalization Ceremonies

Judith Capodicasa, Sue Steivater, Kathleen McCarthy, and Marjorie Gardner volunteered to represent the LWVBN at Naturalization Ceremonies in September. Sue and Judith attended the ceremony at the Theodore Roosevelt Site on Delaware Avenue. Kathleen and Marjorie were at the U.S. Courthouse downtown.

Susan Witt and Sandra O'Hara attended one Naturalization Ceremony in October.

Fall is a very busy season for our volunteers. We appreciate their readiness to serve on such important League projects.

Six LWVBN volunteers participated in Naturalization Ceremonies in November. Patricia Wille, Judith Hoffman, Gladys Gifford, and Alvin Schuster represented the League at the U.S. Courthouse. Freddie Cheek and Dorothy Tao assisted ceremonies at the Hamburg Middle School.

Kathleen McCarthy and Richard Hemann attended the December Naturalization Ceremony.

We are looking forward to filling the 2014 calendar for Naturalization Ceremonies with some new faces. If you have not had an opportunity to participate in one of these very moving events consider doing so in the coming year. All who participate have a very enjoyable experience.

Judith Clarke, LWVBN Volunteer Coordinator

Social Economic Justice Education Committee

The Social Economic Justice Education Committee has taken action to protest reduction of the federal food stamp program, known as SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Check our local League website, www.lwvbn.org, to see a copy of the letter published in the *Buffalo News* on November 19, 2013. With input from national League Advocacy staff, we took action locally to preserve a federal safety net program.

In September it appeared Congress would allow the Great Recession-driven increase in monthly food stamps allotments to expire, even though unemployment remains high and costs of fresh foods are rising. Stories of possible cuts to the regular SNAP program circulated as Congress struggled to adopt a budget. The federal fiscal year began October 1 with no budget in place. We are pleased that the League was among many organizations protesting SNAP reductions in a joint letter to the Congressional Conference Committee working on the Farm Bill that impacts the SNAP program. Check www.lwv.org to read the collaborative letter.

On November 12, the LWVB/N board supported the committee's suggestion to recommend LWVUS Federal Fiscal Policy position as one of the 2014 national League priorities. LWVUS usually identifies four annual legislative priorities upon which various actions are taken including memos to Congress, action alerts, and other advocacy efforts. We are concerned so many aspects of LWVUS Federal Fiscal Policy, adopted in 1984 after two years of study, are no longer part of U.S. policies. For example, the League supports a generally progressive income tax program with few preferences and inclusion of capital gains as ordinary income.

As stated in a *CPA Journal* article (October 2012), although our tax schedules are generally progressive, the various incentives adopted by Congress and signed by presidents have created a tax system that is not progressive. Progressive means that higher income earners pay higher rates on the higher parts of their earnings. We all pay the same rates for each bracket of income. It just happens that most of us never reach the higher brackets. In the 1950s, the highest bracket had a 91% rate. Now the highest bracket rate is 39.6% for the portion of income \$450,000 and above. Capital gains are not taxed with salary/wages income, but rather are taxed at separate, mostly lower, rates. The highest capital gains rate of 20% applies to investments and other qualified income held for at least twelve months.

At our November 13 meeting we reflected on our September 19, 2013 kick-off program, "Democracy at Risk". We were satisfied that 90+ people from various organizations and several students attended the September program. Our panel presenters collaborated with the committee and each other to present material that supported and complemented the other presentations. We were pleased that 44% of our audience returned the evaluation forms with 50% grading the program "outstanding" and 23% "above average". We continue to look at risk factors that impact our local, state and federal governments. We hope you will too. Become more informed by reading committee information and using links to articles and essays at www.lwvbn.org/studyadvocacy/index.html.

Please contact the League Office for more information about future committee meeting dates. We welcome you to join the committee or sit in on meetings.

Lynda Stephens, Chair, Social Economic Justice Education Committee

Local Government

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz presents his Smart Growth Plan to League Sponsored Event.

On November 21, 2013, at the Harlem Road Community Center auditorium, Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz gave an impassioned presentation of his economic development plan for Erie County: Initiatives for a Smart Economy.

Forty-five people attended and heard a clear and succinct overview of the plan that sets an agenda for Erie County for the next five years. The agenda includes initiatives for many League of Women Voter positions; i.e. smart growth, the establishment of an Erie County Energy Management Office; government/private collaboration efforts and clean water. Other plan initiatives include investments in education and training, an effort to synchronize employer needs with worker skills; establishment of an Erie County Economic Development Office in the Greater Toronto Area; analysis of the need for a new downtown convention center; establishment of an Erie County agribusiness park and reform of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency.

A number of questions were asked and answered by the County Executive. Some related to the environment. One young man asked about parks and another asked about to the County Executive's ability to work with the new legislative majority.

All 17 evaluations received ranked the overall program "outstanding" and "above average". Participants were enthusiastic about the positive impact this plan's implementation could have on Erie County. Stay tuned as Local Government monitors its implementation.

Lynne Vallone

LWVBN Statements on the 2014 Erie County Budget to the County Legislature

LWVBN presented two statements to the County Legislature pertaining various aspects of the 2014 Erie County Budget. The first was presented by Marian Deutschman, chair of the Local Government Committee; the second by Ellen Neumaier, chair of the Natural Resources Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed 2014 Erie County Budget.

My name is Marian Deutschman. I represent the League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara. The League is a non-partisan organization. At the local government level, League priorities include support for region-serving infrastructure such as sewers, water, highways, hospitals, regional cultural facilities and parks, libraries, central police services and environmental planning.

The Erie County budget has been criticized for relying too heavily on sales tax as a major source of revenue and for using surplus, or accumulated fund balance, to bridge the budget gap. The sales tax represents one quarter of the total revenue. Unlike the property tax, it is a volatile source of revenue subject to the whims of the economy. It is not only volatile but it is a revenue source that is estimated based on eight months of data when the budget is submitted to the comptroller on October 1. The Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority recommends close monitoring of receipts and strategic decisions in the event that this major source does not meet expectations. The Erie County Citizens' Budget Review Commission strongly recommends that the Legislature reevaluate the date of submission for the County Executive's annual proposed budget to allow adequate time to review and analyze the third quarter sales tax real revenue numbers and move back the deadline for the County Budget director's submission of revenues and expenditures to the Comptroller. They also recommend that deviations from the adopted budget be accompanied by an explanation of variances to better plan for realistic future costs. The League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara urges you to give serious consideration to these recommendations.

On the issue of amortization used by some comparable counties in New York State, amortizing pensions is an approach that must be used only as a last resort. The control board recommends that a minimum amount be amortized and repaid over the shortest period of time. No legislator wants to raise property taxes but this budget development began with a \$29.2 million gap and our county property taxes continue to be very low. Our real property tax rate was higher in 1993 than it is now.

We are grateful for the restoration of funding by this county executive on those items that enhance the quality of life in this community. If the legislature is not prepared to cut spending in the \$108 million portion of the budget that is discretionary, what are the alternatives? The rest of the \$1.5 billion budget is mandated. We urge you to look at the property tax as a more predictable revenue source to bridge the gap now and in the future.

Marian Deutschman, Chair, Local Government Committee

My name is Ellen Neumaier. I speak on behalf of the Buffalo/Niagara League of Women Voters to ask that you approve the Energy Officer position for Erie County.

As you know, the League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization. We don't support or oppose candidates or political parties. Our aim is to help ensure that citizens are informed about issues of local, regional or national concern through candidate debates, issue forums, community dialogues, voter guides and more, so that they might better participate in the democratic process.

However, the League does take positions on issues and these positions are reached by way of careful study and in the end represent the consensus of the membership of the national organization. A few years ago the National League reached a consensus that Global Climate Change needs to be one of its priority issues. The League is fighting to protect the environment and the public's health. Wise management of natural resources and energy production is critical for our nation's future.

When local League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara members heard an official from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Climate Change make a plea for more local participation in the New York State sponsored Climate Smart Community program in Western New York, we decided to advocate for and support efforts by local government to become more climate smart. We quickly realized that doing so entails becoming *energy* smart. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions that scientists tell us cause climate change, we need to use energy more efficiently, as well as simply use less, especially energy generated from fossil fuels. Also, thankfully, greater energy efficiency and conservation in county operations means saving taxpayer dollars, making the investment in an energy officer for Erie County a good investment. With the expected results of lowered energy usage, the position will more than pay for itself.

Again, I speak on behalf of the Buffalo/Niagara League of Women Voters to ask that you approve the Energy Officer position for Erie County.

The position of Energy Officer subsequently was approved by the Erie County Legislature, providing the staff time for Erie County to set in motion actions to become a climate smart community in its operations.

Ellen Neumaier, Chair, Natural Resources Committee

Education Committee

At our last meeting on November 21, 2013, our guest was Molly Dana, a parent of 1st & 4th graders in West Seneca as well as a previous elementary teacher with an M. A. in Curriculum Instruction. She and her husband, an 8th grade Math teacher, question the new Common Core Standards along with the link to high stakes testing. Requiring the adoption of the Common Core Standards in the competition for "Race to the Top" in 2009 had great influence on fund-strapped states. Problems arise especially when testing starts at the beginning of the (K-8) school year. Students are tested in all subjects, including Physical Education, Art and Library where test wording and graphics are seen as inappropriate. In addition, meaningful teaching does not result because of timing of the tests and test security. Teachers never see the test results, which are to be used in evaluating them. The tests are produced by an out of town, for-profit company without educator input. The two big issues are (1) inadequate teacher preparation for the proper implementation of Common Core Standards and (2) the amount of instruction time given up to test taking and the resulting negative effects on students.

In addition to being extremely informative, Molly distributed sheets that had explanations and web sites for more information, as well as an Opt Out (refusal to have students take tests) parent sample letter. Her school had 54 parents opt out of about 400 total students. The number of Opt Outs can have funding consequences for schools, including how Title I money is spent. We all agreed that U.S. schools are not failing as claimed by some. For one, poverty issues need to be faced as well as school curriculum.

West Seneca plans to have a Community Meeting on the Common Core and High Stake Testing in February. Many other districts are holding community meetings as well. On November 22 meetings were held in Lancaster and Depew (reported in the Buffalo News City & Region section).

Given that the lively discussion with Molly took up most of the meeting, a much needed extra planning meeting for the March LWVBN Forum: "Learn More About Common Core" will be held at 1:30 pm, Thursday, January 9 at JoAnn Mecca's house 68 Richmond Street in Buffalo.

Dr. Laura Klenk, an Assistant Professor in Literacy at Buffalo State College, was rescheduled to meet with the committee on January 16, 2014. She will share information on portions of the Common Core Standards. As always both meetings are open to all. The Education Committee meetings are the third Thursday of each month (with the exception of December) at 1:30 pm at our League Office - 1272 Delaware.

Lee Tetkowski & Maxine Insera

Campaign Finance Reform Update

Throughout the spring and fall of 2012 the League continued to offer our “powerful” PowerPoint on campaign finance reform, adding to our presentation the devastating revelations of political corruption that rocked Albany in the spring and underscored our call for reform. As a result of these scandals Governor Cuomo appointed a Moreland Act Commission to investigate and to recommend reform. Barbara Bartoletti, the State League’s Legislative Director, presented the LWVNY’s reform proposals to the Moreland Commission on October 28th. **You can read the State League’s full statement on their website, www.lwvny.org.**

In December the commission issued its first report highly critical of state’s “pay-to-play” political culture together with a list of reform measures that closely follow those long sought by LWV and other good government groups. We can look forward to another contentious legislative session beginning in January, as the legislators and the governor stake out their respective positions on campaign financing in this election year.

Closer to home, things were a lot calmer, but no less interesting. In the fall, Buffalo City Councilman, Joseph Golombek, offered a proposal to incorporate a public campaign financing system for Buffalo modeled on one successfully used in New York City. LWVBN joined other community organizations to support the councilman’s initiative. In our statement we emphasized that public financing alone cannot solve all campaign funding problems. A successful program must include: lowered contribution limits, strict disclosure and reporting requirements, and, a nonpartisan enforcement agency empowered to punish violators with sufficient penalties. **The LWVBN statement is on our website, www.lwvbn.org.**

We’ll need your active support for Campaign Finance Reform in 2014. Do you have Questions? Need more Information? Call the League Office.

Term Limits . . . Ballot Access

A study of these two important election issues has begun. League members across the state will be asking these questions:

Should there be term limits for members of the New York State Legislature and other statewide elected officials?

Should registered voters be allowed to vote in a primary regardless of her or his party affiliation?

Should individuals be allowed to run for office on different party lines?

According to a Siena poll taken last April an overwhelming majority of New York State voters favor term limits and a slimmer but still a majority favor limiting a candidate to one party line.

What are your opinions? We want to know.

The study will continue through 2014 and end in early 2015 and will result in consensus (member agreement), a League Position Statement, and League Action. This is where League wants to be, able to participate fully in the ongoing debates, knowing that our position has the active support of our members.

Whether you are new to League or a “well-seasoned” member, this is a great opportunity to learn, discuss, debate, and come to member decision about two current and contentious political issues. Welcome.

Joan Photiadis & Janet Massaro, LWVBN Study Group Co-Chairs

Memories of a Special League Member, Mary Zaehringer

Mary was our own computer long before computers. Her memory for details would amaze us. What Mary didn’t carry inside her head, she lugged from her car trunk into meetings in the form of large file boxes. Like the laptop today, those files were at her fingertips.

Striving for perfection best describes Mary’s MO (Modus Operandi). The Erie County League periodically published a “Guide to the County Government”. Mary was proofreading the book prior to its publication one year that was to be presented to the Erie County Legislature at its opening fall meeting. There was no book to present. Mary was still proofreading. She assured everyone that she’d take care of it, and she surely did. She placed the book covers on the desks and tables of the legislators on the appointed day. The contents were eventually published to rave reviews.

Mary had other notable qualities -- a sense of humor, asking probing questions of speakers, love for her family and compassion for those less fortunate. She said that for her the League had been her college education. She impressed and inspired many with her knowledge and understanding. We had deep respect for her fine mind and hard work.

Because the League of Women Voters was most important to Mary, her family has requested that memorials to Mary be donated to LWVBN. A memorial gift is one way to remember her accomplishments with gratitude. She made a difference in our lives and in the community.

Joan Photiadis & Lee Tetkowski

News from the League of Women Voters of New York State**Making New York State Work, 2014 Legislative Agenda**

Campaign Finance Reform: Support lower contribution limits, increased disclosure and a system of small donor matching funds. In particular, support stronger and effective campaign finance enforcement with increased penalties for violations.

Election Reform: Improve election processes to extend, encourage and protect voting, including paperless and Election Day registration, early voting, better ballot design, improved polling place management/poll worker training, a single June primary, and measures to ensure the integrity of all ballots.

Natural Resources: Support protection and management of New York's natural resources in the public interest, including energy conservation and energy options from renewable sources.

Women's Equality Agenda: Support equality for women and their families through preserving access to reproductive health care, ensuring fair treatment at work, and helping survivors of violence.

Other League Positions: The League also has positions on other Government Issues including Ethics, Transparency, and Individual Liberties, as well as Health Care, the Judiciary, State Finances, and Social Policy, including Transportation Policy, under which we can and do take action.

The 2014 League Legislative Agenda brochure will be available in early January. Contact your local League to receive a copy. It will also be posted on the state League website.

Advocacy Training Day

Would you like to learn more about the League's positions and what we expect for action this legislative session? Lobby Day (or more accurately, Advocacy Training Day) will be held on **Monday, February 3, 2014 in Albany**. All members are encouraged to attend. Explanation of the state League's positions and projected action will be discussed. The state League Issue Specialists will present information on the current status of legislation in their areas. Attendees will be able to observe either the Senate or Assembly from the Galleries and attend committee meetings scheduled for that day (schedules won't be available until the week prior to Lobby Day). If members wish, they can schedule meetings with their own legislators. The \$10 fee includes lunch. Call Katrina (518-465-4162) by Jan. 17 to reserve your spot!

State Regional Workshops are Open to all Members

The state League is organizing regional workshops around the state during March and April 2014. Currently, dates have been set as follows:

Saturday, March 8, Binghamton Public Library, Binghamton, 10: 00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 29, Cold Spring Harbor Library, Cold Spring Harbor (Long Island), 10:00 a.m. – 4:00p.m.

Additional Saturday dates and locations will be set for **Albany and Rochester**.

Workshops will include topics such as Vote 411, Membership and Leadership Issues, Fundraising, Issues and Advocacy, Candidate Forums Issues (organizing and moderating), and more! Local Leagues will be sharing their best practices and success stories. Come network with League members from our area. All members are invited to attend all or part of the day and all local League Board members are **strongly** encouraged to attend at least one of the workshops.

LWVBN will car pool to the Regional Training in Rochester. We'll alert folks to that date and publish contact information for car-pooling. It will be a great way to connect with league members from nearby leagues as well as learning about other League issues.

The League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara welcomes the following new members for 2013/14:

Ann Marie Bowman, Sophie Chimera, Ann Converso, Michael Guerra, Jr. Jan Jezioro, Rachael Kavanaugh, David Krellner, Jayne Murray, Barbara Murphy, Kelly Murphy, Katherine Pierce, Cheryl Seifert, Joan Simon and Christine Vogel. Thank you for joining the League team of dedicated, civic minded and fun people!

Judy Metzger, LWVBN Membership Chair



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MID JANUARY 2014 & FEBRUARY 2014

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
January 5	Board Meeting 6 4 p.m. LWV office	7	Loc. Gov. 8 1:15 p.m. LWV office	Natural Resources 9 9:30 a.m.	10	11
12	13	LWVUS Birthday 14	15	Education 16 1:30 p.m. LWV office	Lunch/Issues 17 11:30 a.m. Scotch & Sirloin	18
19	20	21	Soc/Econ Justice 22 1:30 p.m. LWV office	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	February 1
2	3	Issues 4 4:30 p.m. Harlem R. C.C.	5	6	Copy due for March Voter 7	8
9	Board Meeting 10 4 p.m. LWV office	11	Loc. Gov. 12 1:15 p.m. LWV office	Natural Resources 13 9:30 a.m.	14	15
16	17	18	19	Education 20 1:30 p.m. LWV office	21	22
23	24	25	Soc/Econ Justice 26 1:30 p.m. LWV office	Human Trafficking Prog. 27 Harlem Rd C.C. 6-8:30 p.m.	28	

Copy for March Voter due 2/7/2014