



The League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara

VOTER

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Lunch & Issues

Citizen Science, Environmental Health & Social Justice in Buffalo's West Side

Friday, January 16, 2015
Scotch and Sirloin Restaurant, 3999 Maple Road, Amherst 14226

Guest Speaker: William L. Scheider, PhD.

William Scheider taught nutrition at Buffalo State College for 25 years with an emphasis on nutritional ecology, environmental and health effects of the food system, risk communication of foodborne hazards, food security, and nutrition education. He joined the Department of Epidemiology and Environmental Health at the University of Buffalo in 2004 and taught there until his retirement at the end of 2013. He works with grassroots community organizations concerned with reducing air pollution and improving access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food.

Luncheon is at noon, followed by the presentation

The Luncheon costs \$18. The public is invited.
Please make reservations by January 14 with Judy Metzger, or Sally Metzger,
events@lwvbn.org

We also remember our friends at Haven House at this time of year with socks,

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 Message

As I write this, 2014 has few remaining days and my email Inbox has been quite inactive. Hanukah and Christmas festivities with family and friends have been uppermost in folks' activity as they should be at this season, but when you receive this first edition of the Voter for 2015, League activity will have returned to high gear again. I expect that I'll see you at one of the *two* consensus meetings for the State League Ballot Access study on January 21 and 22. Janet Massaro, Joan Photiadis and their committee have worked diligently and shared their research in the last few issues of the Voter. I look forward to a lively discussion among thoughtful people before we reach consensus. It's important that the League continues all its efforts to have fair elections.

Program Planning

The process for evaluating the state League's program and positions begins now. We shall review the state League's positions and decide if we want to keep them, update them, revise them or delete them. We also need to discuss any new positions you might want the state League to consider for new studies or concurrences. The responses from all of the local Leagues are reviewed by the state League Board in March. The Board's recommendations are then presented to the delegates at state Convention in June for consideration and a vote. Our League will focus on this effort at the meeting of the Issues Committee on February 2, 2015, at the Harlem Road Community Center at 4:00 p.m. All League members are invited to participate in this opportunity to influence the state League program. If you are unable to attend the program, but have a program suggestion, please write it along with your rationale for the program idea and send it to me at the League office or by e-mail to events@lwvbn.org

- Terri Parks

Great Decisions

Just a reminder that anyone still interested in joining us and obtaining a 2015 briefing book (\$18.00) for Great Decisions has until February 1 to contact me. Janet Sciolino has also ordered one: welcome Janet! I look forward to seeing everyone on Thursday, March 5 from 10 a.m. - noon at 1272 Delaware.

-Bernice Baeumler

Consensus Meetings for Ballot Access:

Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2015 at 1 p.m., League Office, 1272 Delaware Ave., Buffalo 14209

Thursday, Jan. 22, 2015 at 7 p.m., Harlem Road Comm. Center, 4255 Harlem Rd., Amherst 14226

League of Women Voters of New York State Legislative Agenda

The Issue Specialists and state Board discussed a new legislative agenda document in December. It was decided that we would no longer be creating a legislative agenda brochure identifying a couple of the issues that the state League will be working on during the upcoming legislative session. Instead we will be creating booklet with one page on each of the main issues that we monitor: election law, government reform (ethics, campaign finance reform), health care, judiciary, environment, women's issues, transportation, financing education. We will have a summary page, which may include a couple of other issues that don't need a full page for explanation of the issue. We are still working on exactly what this document will look like, but we're hoping it will be some kind of booklet to be distributed. With this new approach, we believe that members, the public and legislators will see the full breadth of issues (rather than the few listed on the former legislative agenda brochure) that we are monitoring, even if we don't expect to accomplish all of these during this session.

-Laura Ladd Bierman, LWVNY

Campaign Finance Reform Update

When I first asked the question “How do we create a public campaign financing program?”, Sally Clarke, a Seattle City Council member, who worked on her city’s program, responded this way – it’s a combination of art and science. I realize now how true and encouraging her remark would be.

The Buffalo Fair Elections Committee (BFEC) was established May 27, 2014 by the Buffalo City Council to propose a public financing program for Buffalo’s elected municipal offices. The Committee consists of representatives of different organizations and has been meeting twice a month at City Hall. Three Co-Chairs share responsibilities for planning and conducting the meetings – Megan Connelly (Partnership for the Public Good), Jim Anderson (Citizen Action) and myself, Janet Massaro (LWVBN). The Committee has divided the program into more manageable components, each to be researched and discussed separately, understanding that all will ultimately fit together (“perfectly”) in one comprehensible whole. The Committee meetings are open to the public. Call me if you are interested in attending.

This January will mark the 5th anniversary of the US Supreme Court infamous Citizens United decision. Activists across the country will march and rally at their state capitals and in Washington D.C. Many others, including local Leagues in NY State, will be viewing the documentary *Pay2Play*. We hope to make arrangements to show it locally.

The LWVUS and other good government organizations wrote to President Obama requesting that he veto the omnibus appropriations bill that was amended at the last minute to include “the most corrupting campaign financing provisions ever enacted.” Congress has since passed and the president has signed the legislation. Read the National League’s letter and other campaign finance reform action items on the LWVUS website.

As the year 2015 begins, we encourage all LWVBN members, new or not so new, to join the Campaign Finance Reform Committee. There is much we can learn and do to promote League’s position on the local, state, and national level.

-Janet Massaro

Membership

We welcome and look forward to working with new LWVBN members, Rebecca Costanzo, Nancy Detine, Margaret Mount, Cassie Wilson and Kate Dickey.

Thank you, League members who have renewed their membership. *Note:* if you are not sure about your status please contact the office. (Mary Ann at 884-3550)

There are many opportunities to serve on a committee for our League. We welcome you and your friends at our monthly forums noted in the VOTER and on our website www.lwvbn.org.

-Judy Metzger, Sally Metzger, Arlene Miles, co-chairs

Advocacy Training Session

The state League will be holding its annual Advocacy Training session on **February 3 (from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.)** in New York City. The State Advocacy team, including our Issue Specialists, will be presenting information on the League's expected action during the upcoming legislative session. We hope that holding it in NYC this year will encourage more downstate members to come learn about our advocacy agenda. Plans are being developed to organize a lobby day later in the spring in Albany for members to directly lobby their legislators in Albany. **To attend the Feb. 3rd Advocacy Training Day, please call or email Katrina at the state office (518-465-4162 or katrina@lwvny.org).**

A Living Wage: Why We Need One

The League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara (LWVBN) Social Economic Justice Committee reviewed the national League of Women Voters (LWVUS) Social Policy positions and noted these positions promote equal opportunity and justice. A *living wage* policy, one that could be legally adopted by governments, is not specifically addressed in existing LWVUS positions. That means LWVBN cannot join at this time with other organizations to advocate for local living wage policies that promote self-sufficiency and reduce poverty.

We were aware the League of Women Voters (LWV) of Kansas had conducted a living wage study, adopting a living wage position in 2000. The policy covered Kansas state government and for-profit businesses that receive tax incentives and/or other public funds. We learned our local League could concur with the Kansas League position if local membership agreed to such a concurrence. Unlike development of new League positions that require studies, a concurrence does not require a study. Of course we must learn more about “living wage” in general and the LWV Kansas living wage position in particular. Some of our findings are included in this article. Our committee will ask the LWVBN board to bring up a concurrence vote at the 2015 Annual Meeting in June.

The United States economy has evolved into a *service economy* that employs people in lower paying jobs than the old industrial economy that was frequently unionized and had higher paying jobs. Since the 2008 Great Recession, there has been a substantial increase in the number of working poor and increased participation in government subsidized safety net programs like SNAP (food stamps).

Ideally a living wage (i.e. hourly wage rate) is set high enough to provide sufficient income, without government assistance, for food, clothing, housing, energy, transportation, health care, education, child care, and a small amount of discretionary income. We realize adoption of living wage policies and ordinances by local governments may be difficult. We understand the initial *living wage* adopted may not lift people high enough out of poverty to eliminate reliance on all government programs. However, a living wage can improve families’ economic conditions. Once adopted, policies can be enhanced to promote more self-sufficiency.

We are planning a public program to be presented April 23, 2015. If you would like to join our committee, check with the League Office at 884-3550 for committee meeting dates and times.

-Lynda Stephens, Chair, Social Economic Justice Education Committee

Naturalization Ceremonies

Members who volunteer to represent the LWVBN at the Naturalization Ceremonies finished off 2014 with five visits. Mike Egan and Joyce Bol attended the Nov. 13 ceremony. On December 4, with little notice, Gladys Gifford and Alvin Schuster represented the LWVBN at a ceremony held to make up for one originally scheduled during the snow storm. Two more ceremonies were held in December: Sue Stievater and Terri Parks represented the League on the 11th; Kathleen McCarthy and Judy Weidemann participated in a December 18 ceremony. Thank you all all!

-Judy Clarke, Volunteer Coordinator

In Memoriam

Clarine Radt, longtime League member and Amherst Unit officer passed away on December 8. She was active in the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst. Clarine worked on the League’s Vital Statistics study and lived at Canterbury Woods in her later years. She was always interested in and stayed informed about League activities even when she was no longer active. We will miss her.

The Vote on Salary Increases for Erie County Elected Officials

The 2014 Erie County Citizens Salary Review Commission was appointed for a three-year term to review the salaries of all elected officials in the county, except for the District Attorney. Formed under the Erie County Charter, the Commission had not convened since 2004. It is charged with the responsibility of recommending salaries that are fair and equitable not only for the present but also for the future. They reported their recommendations to the county executive and the county legislature.

The current salaries under review were last set approximately 18 years ago. The Commission compared the salaries of elected officials in other counties of commensurate size, population, median family income, and median real estate value in New York State. With the exception of the District Attorney's salary, over the last 24 years one salary increase was instituted, and that was in 1996. The Commission also considered the fact that the legislature has been reduced from 17 legislators to 11 over this period of time.

Based on these and many other factors, deliberations, discussions and other input, the Commission made the following recommendations for increases: County Executive from \$103,248 to \$126,400; County Comptroller from \$80,613 to \$98,750; Sheriff from \$79,092 to \$102,400; County Clerk from \$79,092 to \$91,800. They recommended that the members of the Legislature remain at the salary of \$42,588 with no increases to the \$5000 stipend received by the majority and minority leaders or the \$10,000 stipend given to the chair of the legislature. They recommended that the increases should go into effect with the 2015 budget year.

The county executive did not include the raises in the 2015 budget. The comptroller and the county clerk made public statements about not accepting pay increases if the legislature approved them. As expected, the legislature unanimously voted against each pay increase proposal.

The 2014 Citizens Salary Review Commission Recommendations is available online at <http://www2.erie.gov/exec/index.php?q=erie-county-citizens-salary-review-commission>

You can read the report and see the chart (exhibit IV) that compares official salaries in Erie County with all other counties in New York State.

-Marian Deutschman, Local Government Committee Chair

Honoring Our Local Leaders!

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 to be approved by the Board.

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.**

The **League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara LEE Award** is presented a League member who has made 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

or mail them to: Janet Goodsell, by February 15, 2014. Be sure your name is noted as the nominator.



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February Meetings

Tues., 2/3, 4:30 p.m.
Issues, Harlem Rd. Community Center

Mon., 2/9, 4:30 p.m.
Board Meeting, League Office

Wed., 2/11, 1:15 p.m.
Local Government, League Office

Wed, 2/11, 10:00 a.m.
Transportation, League Office

Thurs., 2/12, 9:30 a.m.
Natural Resources, East Aurora

Thurs., 2/19, 1:30 p.m.
Education Committee, League Office

Important Notice

All copy for the March Voter is due by Feb. 6

Please send all March Voter copy to Terri, events@lwvbn.org

A Reminder:

Consensus Meetings on Ballot Access will be held on January 21, 1:00 p.m. at the League Office
and on January 22, 7:00 p.m. at the Harlem Road Community Center