LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF BUFFALO/NIAGARA

your
VOTER

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MONEY TALKS

Come for the film ...

Join us for the documentary ***Dark Money***! This 83-minute political thriller depicts how money from secret, out-of-state funders was used to buy influence with state legislators in Montana, and how a determined investigative journalist exposed their activities.

Stay for the discussion!

Does the Federal Election Commission protect us from such activities? Does New York State election law play a role? Share your thoughts over coffee!

Saturday, March 30, 2019
Registration at 12:30 p.m.
Documentary begins at 1:00 p.m.

Harlem Road Community Center Auditorium
4255 Harlem Rd., Amherst, New York 14226

Free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be provided.

RSVP: To reserve your place, send email to lwvbn@lwvbn.org or call the League office at 716-986-4898.

For more information about the documentary *Dark Money*, turn to page 3.

League of Women Voters Mission

The League of Women Voters is a good government organization that encourages informed and active participation in the political process, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League never supports political parties or candidates.

President's Report and Board Actions

The Citizens Lobbying Workshop on February 9 was most successful. Thirty-four people benefitted from Ann Converso's experience lobbying for issues related to the nursing profession. While we have different issues, the process is the same. The evaluations were extremely positive and people appreciated Ann's warm, informal leadership style. We registered four new members for the League that day! The only problem that day was parking. We had at least 60 people who wanted to attend, but needed to cut off registrations at 49, the limit for the room. Unfortunately a good number of the people who registered didn't arrive. We feel the full parking lot may have sent some folks away. Thank you, Ann!

At its February meeting, the board unanimously approved the applications of two fine students from West Seneca West Senior High School to represent our League at the Students Inside Albany conference in May. Gabriella Gelinas and Thomas Griffin received enthusiastic recommendations from their teachers to attend and both have strong interest in how government works. Many thanks go to Janet Goodsell for her work to recruit such outstanding young people for Students Inside Albany.

The board approved appointing Shirley Joy to the Budget Committee as a representative of a program committee as required by the bylaws and Deborah Schiffner to the Finance Committee. We look forward to working with both of these fine League members in the coming months.

The board also approved the response to the state League's request for recommendations for state program for 2019-2021. We suggested retaining all current positions as is and had no suggestions to offer for new program items.

The ***2019 Citizen's Guide to Local, State, Federal Elected Officials, They Represent YOU***, has been sent to our printer; you should receive your copy in the mail soon. It will also be posted on our website. While there weren't many changes to elected officials, there were a number of issues related to contact information that were more time-consuming than usual. Many thanks go to Mary Ann Turkla and Nora Mikes for tracking down the information.

Terri Parks

Great Decisions

Hopefully Buffalo weather will cooperate with our first 2019 Great Decisions meeting on Thursday, March 7, from 10 a.m. to noon at 1272 Delaware Ave. so I can exchange the briefing book you ordered for $29.80, and set up facilitators for the eight topics. Note: Great Decisions decided to eliminate India from the list. One new person, Liz Zausmer, ordered a book, and we welcome her. Look forward to seeing all of you.

Bernice Baeumler

New Membership Directory!

We publish a Membership Directory each year in February. You should have already received the directory and current list of board members and committee chairs online if you have shared an email address with the League.

If you would like a hard copy of the LWVBN 2018-19 Membership Directory and list of board members and committee chairs, please send $3.00 with your request to:

LWVBN, 1272 Delaware Ave., Buffalo, NY 14209

Are you a good listener and writer? Do you like organizing records?

The Nominating Committee is seeking candidates with such skills for the position of Secretary of the Board of Directors. This officer has the important job of documenting and maintaining the official business conducted by the League, as well as recording the summary of all decision-making meetings. If you are interested, please contact Kathleen McCarthy at 986-4898 or send email to lwvbn@lwvbn.org.

Kathleen McCarthy, Chair, Nominating Committee

Money Talks: Important Background on *Dark Money*

The Money in Politics Committee invites you to join us on Saturday, March 30, for a free viewing and discussion of the award-winning documentary ***Dark Money***. First shown nationwide on PBS, the film tells a story of secrecy, suspense, conflict, and determined sleuthing, against a background of Montana scenery. It is a tribute to the doggedness of an out-of-work investigative journalist, the altruism of a retired lawyer, and the involvement of both elected officials and candidates running for the Montana State Legislature. It also provides a look into the dysfunctional workings of the Federal Elections Commission, our country's election watchdog, and follows a similar flow of dark money into the State of Wisconsin.

The event continues the work of our committee as we study how money is spent to influence the leaders and laws of our democracy. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its landmark 2010 decision *Citizens United v. FEC*, determined that the Constitution's free speech guarantee must apply to money as well as to verbal utterances, writing, tweets, or any other means of communication.

Moreover, the court held that that government cannot restrict political speech based on the speaker's being a corporation and not a natural person. The ruling has opened up election campaigns to the vast monetary resources of corporations, unions, and other organizations with an ax to grind … or a profit to enhance.

There is a corollary to the rule that money talks – that money is the root of all evil. With the strokes of five pens, the deluge of special interest money now arrives at the offices of elected officials and office seekers, many of whom have proven how easily ethics can be buried under cash.

Following the Supreme Court's reasoning, a U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in *SpeechNow.org. v. FEC* that unlimited independent expenditures are permissible. The court ruled that large donors can spend as much as they want for or against a candidate as long as they don't coordinate with or provide obvious material help to the campaign. Voters often have no idea of the actual agenda of these donors and super PACs with their aspirational and flag-waving names. All those shiny campaign mailers that convince us of the brilliance of certain candidates, and the depravity of others, arrive at our mailboxes with no sender identified. These mailings are legal, and they attempt to influence our voting decisions with facts, or alternative facts.

Come and see **Dark Money** with us and follow the trail of dollars spent to influence the legislature of one lightly populated state. It is instructive about the need for citizens to be alert and informed.

Money in Politics Committee

First Call to State Convention 2019 – We Need You!

The League of Women Voters State Convention will take place at the Hilton Inn in Albany from Friday, June 7, to Sunday, June 9. We invite our League members to save these dates and plan to join the passionate and engaged leaders from across New York State for our biennial convention.

We hope to have a full set of delegates to this year's convention that will highlight 100 years of the League of Women Voters of New York State. Please consider being a delegate in 2019 and contact the League office if you're interested. The State Convention is stimulating and rewarding and will be most special this year.

WNY Women's March Date Change

The Women's March will take place on **Sunday, March 10, 2019,** from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m. at Niagara Square. The League is a co-sponsor of the march. Please wear your League name badge if you have one, a League button and League colors if you march. League members will be registering voters at the march.

Our Nuclear Times: Article 15

An Underground Tale: Chapter 2

Grizzled Mr. Pebble played a last winning card of the round, coughed, then hoarsely whispered, "I've been talking to my numerous, miniscule kin. They're all alike. They stick together. Impervious. Won't budge. That glacial dislocation still has 'em traumatized. And the trench excavations completely ditched their morale. I disown that confounded mass of clay – impediment to escape on all sides, downwards, and in an overhead cap. …" There was a pause.

"Nearby, my Cesium sisters escaped up and out through a chimney stack. They settled somewhere in a northwest prong. In any case, the chimney's gone. … An underground Strontium group has fanned out in a plume. Many were caught by ion capture, but some made it past a buried zeolite wall. … Closer to home, during several clever diversions – bathtub overflows – trench leachate got away." Ms. Rad added, "So, it's not impossible."

"I've seen Lake Erie shadows that form from humidity, precipitation, and winds. It's called the Lake Effect. That could be a great cover. I'm ready to go out fighting in any direction." Mr. Black was a shadow of his former self, fit only for shadow boxing. But he was still tough. "I've got experience. Ms. Splinter?"

"Pardners, patience. I grew up rooted in the good earth. There's a slow, healthy growth of plants – and plans. With prayer, our succor could even come from above. Superior forces may intervene. There's a chance for a kind of ascension – an exhumation." Mr. Pebble was encouraged. "We'll engage allies – erosion, corrosion, and climate change. …"

And so ends another episode of Trench Number Nine, at the nuclear waste site called West Valley, in Western New York. (For Chapter 1, see article 8 in the League of Women Voters Summer 2018 issue of the VOTER.)

Note: Pat Townsend was seated as LWVBN's representative at the end of the January meeting of the Citizens Task Force at West Valley, with fond memories expressed of Lee Lambert's service in this role.

Barbara Frackiewicz

In Memoriam

Two fine League members for more than 50 years each died in the past few months. Ruth Korn and Eleanor Cain both served the League in many ways through work on a variety of committees. Ruth had strong opinions like many other League members and was forthright in expressing them.

Eleanor Cain also was one of the people who started the Western New York Peace Center. Janet Massaro remembers her as being always available to help. She was smart, dependable and optimistic, and greeted Janet with a smile whenever they met. Eleanor was 99 when she died in early February.

Naturalization Ceremonies

League volunteers welcomed a total of **353 new citizens** at the most recent six ceremonies. With the assistance of Bob Hellwitz from the Erie County Board of Elections, 337 of them have been registered to vote – that's a return of more than **95%** of voter registration forms. Kudos to all!

Deborah Shiffner welcomed 55 new citizens on January 17 at the U.S. Courthouse. Judy Weidemann, Mary Michael Egan, and Elaine Cusker assisted at a last-minute call for volunteers at a new venue at the Key Bank Center on January 29, where 108 new citizens took their oath. (Continued on the next page)

When the January 31 naturalization ceremony, canceled due to the blizzard, was rescheduled for February 6 at the U.S. Courthouse, Judy Casassa and Deborah Shiffner stepped up on short notice to welcome 52 new citizens. Presiding Judge Hugh Scott was thrilled when they achieved a **first-time return rate of 100%** of voter registration forms!

Ann Converso welcomed 52 new citizens on February 7 at the U.S. Courthouse. Kathleen McCarthy and Deborah Shiffner welcomed 36 new citizens at the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural Site on February 15.

Our stalwart volunteers have braved some very challenging weather conditions! Thanks to all for your stamina and determination.

Patricia Wille, Volunteer Coordinator for Naturalization Ceremonies

Photo by Bob Hellwitz, our Board of Elections partner at these ceremonies.

Money in Politics Update

Supreme Court tackles partisan gerrymandering … AGAIN

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) has announced the following good news: The U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments challenging North Carolina's 2016 congressional redistricting plan, one of the most egregious partisan gerrymanders in American history. The case will be heard the morning of March 26, 2019.

The Southern Coalition for Social Justice, Campaign Legal Center, and University of Chicago Professor Nicholas Stephanopoulos represent the League of Women Voters of North Carolina in the case, *LWVNC v. Rucho.* The court will also hear the Maryland redistricting case, *Benisek v. Lamone.*

In 2018 we wrote about the case *Gill v. Whitford*, a challenge to Wisconsin's gerrymandered assembly maps. At that time, the Supreme Court sent both the Wisconsin and North Carolina cases back to district court with clear instructions. With that guidance, the district court ruled that North Carolina's map was clearly a partisan gerrymander, and thus unconstitutional to use in the state.

"We are hopeful that the court will set a standard that can rein in partisan gerrymandering once and for all," said Celina Stewart, Director of Advocacy and Litigation for the LWVUS. "There is no better time to establish a process, with the 2020 census approaching, which will guide the next round of redistricting and ensure district lines are drawn in a manner that reflects voting populations, not politicians in power." LWVUS President Chris Carson added, "District lines must be drawn in a way that reflects our communities. Only through independent citizen-led redistricting can we truly create fair maps."

The hard work and persistence of the League of Women Voters of North Carolina has paid off! Jennifer Bremer, Chair, Fair Districts NC, invites all of us to Washington to observe and/or stand outside the Supreme Court and cheer with them on March 26, 2019.

Janet Massaro, Chair, MIP Committee

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

March 2019 Calendar

Tuesday, March 5, 4:00 p.m.
Issues/Program Committee
Harlem Road Community Center

Thursday, March 7, 10:00 a.m. - noon
Great Decisions
League Office

Sunday, March 10, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.
WNY Women's March
Niagara Square

Monday, March 11, 3:30 p.m.
Board of Directors
League Office

Wednesday, March 13, 1:30 p.m.
Local Government Committee
League Office

Thursday, March 21, 1:30 p.m.
Education Committee
League Office

Saturday, March 30, 12:30 p.m.
Money Talks
Harlem Road Community Center

Please remember to wear your League name badge to all League events.

We thank the sponsors from our Celebration of 100 years of Women Suffrage in New York State: the Erie County Commission on the Status of Women, Ingold Law, Kirsits & Associates and New York State Women, Inc., Buffalo Niagara Chapter