

# Commentator

## for November, 2005

The League of Women Voters of Mid-Hudson Region  
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**Mission Statement:**

*The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.*

### CALENDAR

<b>NOVEMBER</b>		
<b>1</b>	7:15 to 9:15	Board Meeting at Gloria Plasker's
<b>8</b>	All day	<b>Election Day – Go Vote</b>
<b>9</b>		Deadline to register for UN day
<b>16</b>	All day	<b>UN Day (see page 8 for registration)</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Cancelled</b>	
<b>DECEMBER</b>		
<b>6</b>	7:15 to 9:15	Board Meeting at Gloria Plasker's
<b>18</b>	2:00 to 4:00	Holiday Gathering at Jacki Moriarty's
<b>JANUARY</b>		
<b>3</b>	7:15 to 9:15	Board Meeting at Gloria Plasker's
<b>14</b>	10:00 to noon	General Meeting at City Hall

## **The Prez Sez...**

Greetings and salutations everyone.

Our membership mixer was a great success. Marcia Merrins was an informative and inspiring speaker. The food was great and the company was fantastic. I want to thank our Dutchess members for making it through horrible traffic jams on both bridges. We were glad you made it.

I would also like to thank our program committee for all the work they put into all of our programs. The membership mixer's success is due to their hard work and efforts.

I just came back from a meeting featuring Barbara Bartoletti as our speaker. She informed us of all the LWWNYS's successes this year in regard to reform. She also reminded us that people rely on the LWV for information that is clear and nonpartisan. They trust us more than any other organization. We all left the meeting with a lot of information. She definitely opened my eyes to the inner workings of government.

Chris

**Please note that the November General Meeting (scheduled for the 19<sup>th</sup>) has been cancelled. The Program Committee is putting its efforts into the holiday gathering and next year's meetings.**

## **The Criminal Justice Council**

The first meeting of the Criminal Justice Council took place on October 25, 2005 at 3:30 PM in the legislative chambers of the Ulster County Office Building. Opening speakers included Glen Noonan, Chair of the Efficiency/Reform Committee; Al Meyer, Chair of the Criminal Justice Committee; Robert Parete and Brian Shapiro, members of the Efficiency/Reform Committee.

The first topic was centered on the escalating average number of inmates in the jail. Jacki Moriarty addressed the council regarding the LWV findings in our Criminal Justice Study.

These topics will be further addressed by the council:

- ✍✍ The need for the criminal justice programs to be evaluated and
- ✍✍ The need for a common criminal justice data base to process cases more efficiently and to collect the data necessary for long term planning.

Our LWV will be very interested in following the progress of this new committee.

## **In Memoriam**

Joel Kobran, son of Shirley Kobran, died on Monday, October 17, following a long illness. Although Joel had little connection with the League other than to take messages for his mother, Shirley has been active in the league for many years, and has served on the Board in many capacities. Currently, she is Membership Director and she has continued to serve despite Joel's worsening condition and death. We grieve for and with Shirley while we admire her strength and devotion to her family and her duties.

## **Financing Education in NYS**

A debate and discussion on Financing Elementary and Secondary Education in New York State was hosted by Marist College on October 19th. Presentations were made by Frank Mauro, of the Fiscal Policy Institute (also representing Campaign for Fiscal Equity), and E. J. McMahon, of the Empire Center for New York State Policy, Manhattan Institute. Joining the discussion were Assemblyman Tom Kirwin and Joel Tyner.

The discussion addressed several questions:

1. How should the responsibility for financing education be divided between the state government and local school districts?
2. What kind of taxes should be used at the local level, and what kinds at the state level, to fund education?
3. Do additional resources improve educational outcomes?
4. How can New Yorkers ensure that the money devoted to education is used effectively and efficiently?

No conclusions were reached, but it was pointed out that except for STAR, New York State has not increased its share of public school budgets, and STAR is distributed in a disequalizing manner according to Frank Mauro.

There are proposals around for funding education by income taxes only. The volatility of this was discussed. A combination of property taxes and income taxes was suggested.

Our League will continue to study this very complicated, but pertinent problem.

## **Vouchers Suggested Again**

A bipartisan group of senators has introduced "The Hurricane Katrina Elementary and Secondary Education Recovery Act," a bill that would funnel public dollars into private schools through the creation of "student accounts." This looks a lot like a federal school voucher program.

An alternative way to educate displaced children, was through the bipartisan education relief bill introduced in Congress in early September. This was rejected in favor of the "student account" scheme.

Current law already allows local school boards to contract and supervise the spending of public funds by private schools in order to meet the needs of students under extraordinary circumstances such as these. These "equitable participation" provisions protect students' civil rights and prevent private schools from realizing significant financial gain at the public's expense. Given the extraordinary circumstances, the "equitable participation" model might have been better.

In the House, Reps. John Boehner (R-OH) and Bobby Jindal (R-LA) have unveiled a proposal to create "family education reimbursement accounts" which would allow the direct payment of funds to private schools accepting displaced students.

Meanwhile, the Senate bill would use local education agencies (LEA) to distribute funds from the LEA to any school educating an eligible child on a per capita basis. The Senate bill would allow parents to choose where students go to school and then send government money to those private and religious schools on a per capita basis.

## League Online Survey

Both Ulster and Dutchess County and Dutchess County Candidates responded to our online League Survey. Over 70% of candidates for the Ulster County Legislature and 67% of those running for the Dutchess County Legislature responded to 3 key survey questions supplied by the League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region. Two of the three questions were specific to each county while a third, on affordable housing, was the same for both.

The Ulster County questions:

- ?? What is your position on Ulster County's having an elected county executive?
- ?? What role do you feel Ulster County has in providing nursing home care for its disabled and elderly population?
- ?? What role should Ulster County play in providing affordable housing to its working population?

The Dutchess County questions:

- ?? What should Dutchess County do about the overcrowding of the jail?
- ?? What should Dutchess County do to preserve open space while supporting economic development?
- ?? What is Dutchess County's role in providing affordable housing to its working population?

The public can see how the candidates from their district, as well as all other districts, responded to the survey questions by visiting the League's Web site at [www.midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org](http://www.midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org) . This information is provided to help people become informed voters.

For individual responses and complete statistics you need to look on the website; however, a few observations can be made here:

- ?? In both Ulster County and Dutchess County, Democrats responded much more than Republicans. In Ulster County, 84% to 59%. In Dutchess, 81% to 54%.
- ?? In Ulster County, incumbents responded more than new candidates (81% to 62%). In Dutchess, 65% of incumbents and 70% of new candidates responded.
- ?? Democratic newcomers responded more (83% in Ulster County) than Republican newcomers (38% in Ulster County). In Dutchess County, the difference was less notable.
- ?? In Ulster County, Republican incumbents responded more than Democratic incumbents
- ?? In Dutchess County, Democratic incumbents responded more than Republican incumbents
- ?? In Ulster County, 3 of the 4 Green Party candidates, all newcomers, replied. The one Independence candidate did not.

The website contains a list of all the candidates who responded and who did not respond. You may find this information revealing when deciding who you want to have represent you. This information is as of October 20, so you should access the website for later data.

If you cannot access the website yourself, have a friend print the information for you.

## **Barbara Bartoletti Speaks**

On October 18<sup>th</sup>, Barbara Bartoletti spoke to our general meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation. She began by telling us that the LWV is trusted and relied on by citizens and by government officials alike. In fact, a recent poll showed that the LWV is considered more reliable than Governor Pataki, Attorney General Spitzer, and Senator Hillary Clinton. Barbara, who is the Legislative Director of the LWVNYS in Albany gave us a remarkable and breathtaking rundown on what is happening "Inside Albany."

Barbara spoke of the successes the League has had this year in cleaning up the budget process. She acknowledged that the league was not the only actor in making this happen, as any political action is the result of a number of factors. The public was disgusted with the 20-year history of late budgets, and were beginning to vote out incumbents who seemed responsible for it. One of the major improvements is the creation of a State Budget Office which will be responsible for predicting the state revenue for the coming year. This will avoid the standoff in which the governor, and the senate and house leaders argue over the proper figures to use.

Other changes move the fiscal year from April 15 to May 1, making revenue prediction more reliable, and set a two-year financial plan for school aid. This permits the school districts to set their budgets based on real numbers for state aid.

Another stride forward was in the area of campaign finance reform. Contributions at the county level will now be reported electronically, making

it possible to see money that used to be funneled invisibly from county to state party funds and then to candidates.

The Assembly reform to eliminate "empty seat" voting has had one awkward consequence for lobbyists. Assembly-men now have to stay in the Chamber in order to be there for votes, and are less available to constituents and lobbyists than before. The deli in the Capitol is now a good "stake-out place" for those wishing to speak to an assemblyman. The Senate has no such rule.

State authorities which previously were acting almost autonomously will now be policed by a Public Authorities Control Board.

There are still many reforms that need to be made; some may be made in the next session; others may take a long time, politics being the wheeling and dealing that it is.

Barbara spoke about the two proposals (formerly called "propositions") that will be on the ballot. The League has not taken a position on the second one, which is the transportation bond act. Our opposition in the last election was based on the fact that there were no particulars about how the money would be spent; the League was not comfortable giving "carte blanche" to the state. This time there are particulars, so the League has no position.

Proposal one puts the budget changes into law, sets last year's funding as a "contingency budget" if the new budget is not ready on time, and generally incorporates the changes for which the League has been advocating for years. (cont.page 6)

The League supports Proposal One.

Selection of voting machines to conform to the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) is another political hot area. Every county Board of Elections is entitled to choose what machines it wants from those approved by the state. It is not yet clear what machines will be offered by manufacturers for state acceptance, presumably both direct recording and optical scan machines will be available.

Of the two types of machines, the league favors an optical scan machine rather than a direct recording machine. Vote tracking is more easily done, as the machine prints a paper ballot for tracking purposes as well as tallying votes. The voter has a chance to review the ballot before submitting it. The optical scan machines are also more sturdy and easy to store.

DRE machines are more complex and require more care in storing and moving. They need to be stored in temperature-controlled places. States that have used DREs have had a few problems about software, loss of counts, and other anomalies.

There is a potential problem for making a choice, however. Both optical scan and direct recording machines are manufactured by the same companies, and their profits are higher for the DREs, both for initial price and maintenance. Naturally, the lobbyists for the manufacturers are pushing the DRE machines.

Barbara took questions from the floor at the end of her talk and over refreshments afterwards. Her enthusiasm for her work, her knowledge of state politics and her high

energy presentation made a memorable evening for all attendees.

### **Radio Iraq for Women**

Iraq is in a critical period of transition particularly for women. For more than 40 years, psychological warfare and physical threats silenced women economically, politically and socially. Iraqi women have an opportunity to break this imposed silence and establish a new role in the molding of Iraq's civil society – or, risk watching what little freedom they had slip through their hands.

As reported by the Wall Street Journal, Radio Almahaba began broadcasting in March 2005 from Baghdad as the first independent women's radio station in Iraq. It is non-governmental, non-religious and non-ethnic. Radio Almahaba's broadcasters have a powerful ability to promote open discussion and, in turn, create change. They are pioneers in Iraq, broaching a range of subjects from raising children to voting in Iraq's new elections.

As a result of war-related violence, women make up well over 60% of Iraq's population. With only 24% of women literate, the radio is the most effective medium through which Iraq's silent majority can find their voice. Radio Almahaba leads the way for women, in particular a new generation of young women, to think new thoughts, to have new dreams and to take action for themselves, their families and Iraqi society.



## **Holiday Gathering**

Come one, come all to our annual holiday gathering at the Moriarty's home on December 18 from 2:00 to 4:00. Every year they open their home to us for a wonderful afternoon reception. No business, just an opportunity to meet other league members and enjoy their company, not to mention the goodies to eat and drink!

The Moriartys live at 167 Apple Hill Road in Rolling Meadows (Hurley). Go to the league website for a map or call 331-3418 for directions.



## **UN Day in New York**

A more serious gathering is the UN day sponsored by LWVNYS among others. A version of the registration form is on page 8 of this newsletter. You should have received a card reminding you to register as well.

This year the topic is "Briefings on the Status of Democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan" and it should be very informative.

The optional lunch is always very good; usually there are some ethnically appropriate foods and there is an opportunity to mingle with members of other leagues and other organizations.

If you have not before visited the UN building, it is a very impressive place well worth touring.

You need to be at the building by 9:00 AM to go through security. A group of local league people are going to the city by the Metro North train about 7 AM, if you want to join them for company on the trip.

Remember it is important for people to be reminded about the UN, as very little is being taught in history classes these days.

## **A Few Reminders**

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is still under threat. The House and Senate have passed language in their bud-get resolution that would pave the way to oil drilling in ANWR. If Congress passes a bud-get reconciliation bill formally opening the Refuge, the battle to protect these pristine lands will be lost. **Tell your Representative and Senators** that the budget reconciliation must not pass with oil drilling revenues from ANWR.

Provide your e-mail address to your local league if you have not already done so. The LWVUS will use them judiciously.

- ?? The LWVUS *never* sells or ex-changes member or donor email addresses.
- ?? The LWVUS *never* uses member email addresses to renew local League members or solicit Nationally Recruited Members (NRMs).
- ?? The LWVUS *never* spams members. All you get is the League Voice newsletter unless you sign up for something.

**League of Women Voters of New York State, UN Day Registration**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Day Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Register for Briefing Member \$50.\_\_\_\_, Non-member \$70.\_\_\_\_ Student \$20.\_\_\_\_  
Register for Lunch Buffet \$32.50\_\_\_\_ Tour of UN \$11.50 \_\_\_\_  
Enclosed \$\_\_\_\_\_ (check payable to LWVNY Mail to LWVNY, 35 Maiden Lane,  
Albany, NY 12207  
For credit card registration call 518-465-4162 Registration deadline 11/9/05

**LWV of Mid-Hudson Region Membership Application or Renewal to 6/30/06**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Member (\$50)\_\_\_\_\_ Family Membership (\$65)\_\_\_\_\_ Extra contribution \$\_\_\_\_\_**

**\_\_\_\_\_ Please call about local LWV meetings or \_\_\_\_\_ Please do not call.**

**Mail with check to:**

**Treasurer, LWV of Mid-Hudson Region, P.O. Box 3564, Kingston, NY**  
**12402**

**If you know someone who might like to know more about the League of Women Voters, please provide name and address below and send this slip to:  
Shirley Kobran, 53 Schuler Lane, Lake Katrine, NY 12449  
We will send information out as quickly as possible.**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State, Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_ **e-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your name** \_\_\_\_\_