



Mid-Hudson Region Commentator

March, 2006

P.O. Box 3564

Kingston, NY 12402

(845) 340-2003

<http://midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org> info@midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| Chris Henning, President | (845)339-0509 |
| Shirley Kobran, Membership | (845)382-6989 |
| Emily Johnson, Newsletter | (845)338-3554 |

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

FEB.

| | | |
|----|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| 26 | 2:00 to 4:00 | HAVA meeting, Kingston City Hall |
|----|--------------|-------------------------------------|

MAR.

| | | |
|----|---------------|--|
| 7 | 7:15 to 9:15 | Board meeting at Gloria Plasker's |
| 8 | 7:00 to 9:00 | Financing Education study at Emily Johnson's |
| 18 | 10:00 to noon | General Meeting on UC Charter Proposal at City Hall, Kingston |

APR.

| | | |
|---|--------------|---|
| 1 | 9:00 to 3:00 | Health Care Mtg., Dutchess County Community College |
| 4 | 7:15 to 9:15 | Board meeting at Gloria Plasker's |

MAY

| | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| 6 | 2:00 to 4:00 | Followup health care meeting, Poughkeepsie |
|---|--------------|--|

In this issue:

Page

| | |
|---|--|
| 2 | Prez Sez HAVA Meeting |
| 3 | Dep Justice Law Suit LWV Nat. Convention Medicare Meeting |
| 4 | Health Care Mtg. Dutchess County County Charter Mtg. 2006 Debates |
| 5 | Efficiency & Reform Committee Mtg. Rpt. Death Penalty Conc. |
| 6 | Financing Education |
| 7 | Election Info. Plans Changing Bylaws State Reforms |
| 8 | Membership news Application form |

The Prez Sez...

Happy Valentine's Day!

I would like to let you know of some things that are coming up here at LWV Central. We would like to form a committee to look into the by-laws and apply changes if needed. If you are interested, please contact me. We have more great programs coming your way. Check our calendar.

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE check out our website. It is a wealth of information and we would love to know what you think.

I would like to thank all the board members for all the hard work they put in each and everyday. They are the best.

Chris

Public Meeting on Voting Machines and HAVA Initiative February 26. Kingston City Hall, 2:00.

This meeting is cosponsored by:

- * Ulster County Democratic Women UCDW;
- * New York Citizens for Clean Elections NYCCE;
- * American Association of University Women AAUW;
- * League of Women Voters, Mid-Hudson Region

It is a non-partisan, educational, public meeting to hear from voters about proposed changes to NY's election system and replacement of mechanical lever voting machines.

An expert panel including Rachel Leon, Executive Director of Common Cause New York, and Aimee Allaud of the League of Women Voters of NYS will be present to discuss issues and answer voters' questions.

Among issues to be discussed are:

1. Voting machines types : Optical Scan, Direct Recording Electronic (DRE)
2. Who selects new machines, when and how will the decision be made?
3. Is electronic recording of election results secure? What about recounts?
4. Why did HAVA decertify mechanical lever machines along with punch cards?
5. Oregon can vote on paper ballots under HAVA. Can New York?
6. What types of voter ID and voter data base does HAVA require?
7. How could voting be made accessible to all while protecting the integrity of the vote, the count, and any recounts?

As yet, no new voting machines have been certified for use, and New York is the last state to act. Training on use and care of the chosen machines must be done and time is getting short. We could possibly lose federal funding for the changeover, but it is important not only to make a choice but to make the right choice.

Although this is short notice by the time you receive the *Commentator* you should try to come and to bring others with you.

BE THERE!

US Department of Justice Law Suit

Because of our delay in selecting an approved voting technology under HAVA, the US Department of Justice has threatened to sue New York State for HAVA non-compliance. This situation makes it urgent that New York State adopt optical scanner technology without delay. If the Department of Justice sues and wins, the taxpayers of New York State will pay the full purchase price of our new voting machines. In that event, it is doubly important to adopt a cost-effective technology. Adopting optical scan technology now will save New Yorkers millions of dollars in cost of equipping all district polling places with the new technology.

LWV National Convention

Every two years, the LWV of the United States holds its convention. Officers and board members are elected, programs for the coming year are chosen, and stands on issues are re-evaluated. Each chapter can send voting delegates to the convention, and other members may attend. Our League has some money available for delegates' expenses. If you are interested in being a delegate or if you want more information, please let Christine Henning know.

The convention this year is in Minneapolis from June 10th to 13th. Even Minnesota should be snow-free at that time!

Medicare Meeting

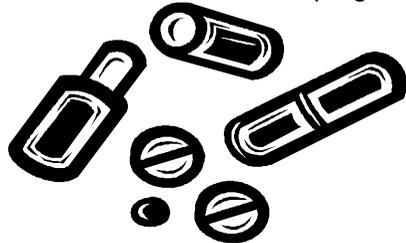
On February 18th, at 10 o'clock at Kingston City Hall, the League will hold an informational meeting on Medicare and the new Medicare drug benefit. This meeting is open to the general public. Its purpose is to demystify the relationship of the Medicare benefit to other existing benefits and to assist people in understanding how to choose a prescription plan.

There are over 150 programs available so choosing one can be a complicated decision. Coordination of Medicaid and Medicare drug benefits has proved to be difficult to implement, and many people are confused as to what benefits they are eligible for and how to go about getting them.

Speakers will be Blanche Duffy, the coordinator of Health Insurance Information Counseling Assistance Program for the Ulster County Office of the Aging; Timothy Higgins, the district manager of the Kingston Field Office of the Social Security Administration; and Laura Mulvilhill, the New York EPIC Outreach representative.

There will be time for questions and answers following the speakers.

Len Cane will moderate the program.



Dutchess County Health Care Discussions

Two important discussions on the future of health care in the United States spring . We urge all League members to attend.

The first will be a free community forum on "Examining Health Care: What's the Public's Prescription?" It will be held on Saturday, April 1 from 9 am to 3 pm at Dutchess Community College. The forum, part of the National Issues Forums which Dutchess sponsors on different topics each year, will include small groups of citizens debating alternative approaches to health care and a panel of national experts. Our League will be one of the co-sponsors.

As a follow up to this forum, the League, together with the American Association of University Women and the Older Women's League, will host a discussion on Saturday, May 6th from 2 to 4 pm at the Friends Meeting House, 249 Hooker Avenue in Poughkeepsie. The discussion, entitled "What's the Best Cure for the Health Care Crisis?" will focus on legislation now before Congress and in Albany to improve health care delivery to more Americans. The costs and benefits of these plans will be discussed by a panel of experts, which is now being formed. We hope participants will leave the discussion with enough information to lobby their elected representatives.

For more information on either of these sessions, contact Ellie Charwat by email [echarwat@ yahoo.com](mailto:echarwat@yahoo.com).or telephone her at (845) 462-7061.

These discussions should provide a complete picture of health care for people of all ages. They will complement and expand on the Medicare discussion in February. As we clearly have a crisis on health care in this country, everyone needs to gather

information, form opinions, and make our voices heard.

County Charter Meeting

The informational meeting on the proposed Ulster County charter will be held at Kingston City Hall on March 18th from 10 to noon. Gerald Benjamin, the chairman of the Charter Commission, will speak and answer questions about the proposal.

One of our members, Renee Sachs, was on the commission and worked on the proposal.

The decision on the charter will affect Ulster County government in a number of ways, and it is important for citizens to know and understand it so they can make an informed decision and express their opinions.

2006 State Candidate Debates

The LWVNYS plans to hold candidate debates across the state for the NYS Governor and Attorney General races as well as for the US Senate race. The State League will work closely with local leagues on co-sponsoring these events

We should also start considering what to do about more local debates for this election. Anyone interested in helping plan debates should contact Jill Hudler.

Report on the Efficiency and Reform Committee Meeting

Having attended most of the meetings of the 2004-2005 Efficiency & Reform Committee, I was very pleased to see that this year's members Bischoff (chair) Bartels, Busick, Cummings, Liepmann, Rodriguez, and Shapiro were eager to take over from where the last committee members Noonan (chair), Busick, Harris, Lomita, Maloney, Parete (Robert), and Shapiro, left off.

The E&R committee of 2004-2005 led the way for the Charter Commission and the Criminal Justice Council. Unfortunately they were not able to get through their recommendations for fleet management (to oversee the county's vehicles) and contract management (to oversee contracts and lease agreements for county departments).

First on the agenda was a long discussion about voting machines that was temporarily tabled until all members could see a demonstration of what machines were under consideration. Of utmost concern to all members was the integrity of the electoral process.

The LWV position at all levels on voting machines calls for machines where the voters can verify the choices they make, where counts and recounts can be verified and tampering is unlikely. This had led the League to recommend the use of optical scan machines. However, choices must still be made at state and/or local levels.

The second part of the meeting took on a whole new flavor as Brian Shapiro recommended that the committee should recruit citizens and county employees to take part in the committee's efforts to bring forth efficiency and reform. This was immediately adopted by all, and immediately

acted upon, by inviting Kevin Lamont (local president of the CSEA) to play a role in committee discussions.

Bartels recommended that all committee meetings be recorded and put on the county's web site which would go much further than providing information to the legislature and public through minutes.

This, if adopted, would make Ulster County THE leader in 21st century open county government.

The final discussion concerned the makeup of the ethics committee, which will be taken up again at the next meeting

Chairman Bischoff portrays a "lets get it done" attitude and he definitely has the talent behind him to get it done. All but one of the members are veteran legislators with established track records of "know how"

I left the meeting with a feeling of confidence.

-- Tom Kadgen

National LWV Death Penalty Concurrence

Plans are underway by several state Leagues including New York to promote a national position on abolition of the death penalty at the League's national convention in June. Twenty-one local Leagues (including the Mid-Hudson Region) responded, all positively, to our survey regarding a national position.

Financing Education

The League of Women Voters of New York State is updating our study of financing education in our state. Our local league is starting a further study on financing education as well.

As a start for this continuing effort, we present an overview of the School Tax Relief (STAR) program.

The STAR program was enacted in 1997 to provide needed tax relief for home owners across the state. In 2006-2007, \$3.4 billion is appropriated for the existing STAR program comprising the enhanced STAR exemption for eligible senior citizens, the basic STAR exemption for other home owners and the New York City Personal Income Tax reduction. This represents an increase of \$49 million from 2005-2006.

For 2006-2007, a new STAR Plus program is proposed that would provide an estimated \$530 million in taxpayer savings in 2006-2007. Under STAR Plus, a rebate check of \$400 will be provided to home owners who reside in school districts that adopt a spending cap limiting school spending increases to the lesser of 4% or 120% of the increase in the Consumer Price Index. Exceptions to the spending cap would be provided for increases in enrollment, capital projects, certified emergencies, judgments, tax certiorari proceedings and court ordered funding to provide a sound basic education. Taxpayers in fiscally dependent city school districts having a population of less than one million will also be eligible for STAR Plus if their district adopts a spending cap.

The 2006-2007 Executive Budget would also ensure that senior citizens are protected from the impact of inflation on their enhanced STAR exemption. For the 2006-

2007 school year, the \$50,000 enhanced exemption for income-eligible senior citizens will be adjusted from \$50,000 to \$56,800 to reflect the increases in the cost of living adjustments (COLA) since the full implementation of STAR. Similar cost of living adjustments will be made automatically in future years. This will generate additional STAR savings of \$72 million in 2006-2007.

The first study group meeting will be held on March 8th at 7 o'clock at Emily Johnson's house, 10 Kiersted Avenue, in Kingston. Call Emily at 338-3554 for directions if you need them and for further information about the study.



Election Information Plans

Each year the LWVNYS produces a statewide *Voters Guide* that includes information on national and statewide candidates. LWVNYS hopes to establish a cooperative agreement that may get the guide placed in some newspapers across the state, which would give the League terrific visibility.

The format of this year's guide is not yet known; last year it was a sort of tab-loid that came in two sections so that there could be early warning of registration deadlines and such, and later information about the candidates when they were definitely on the ballot.

If the guide is not published in our local newspapers, we will once again distribute it to local voters. We will also try to produce a local candidates' guide, probably on our website as we did last year.

LWVNYS is also working on providing electronic information for our voters by introducing the *Smart Voter* website to voters in our state on a pilot basis in selected areas. This website, owned by LWV California, has the ability to provide voters with a personal ballot and polling place lookup information as well as information on elections and candidates. Check it out at www.smartvoter.org.

Changing Our Bylaws? Why?

Periodically every organization should look at its bylaws and see whether they still reflect how business ought to be done and is being done. For instance, our bylaws call for three vice-presidents, one to deal with local issues, one to deal with State issues and

one to deal with National issues. Do we still divide up responsibilities that way? Do we need three vice-presidents? Should we have more or fewer portfolios? Should the Program Committee be under a director?

It may be that everything is cool as is in the bylaws and that we need a few minor changes (if any). But we won't know without looking at them. If you are interested, talk to Chris Henning.

State Reforms Sought in 2006

The State League, along with Citizens Union, Common Cause/NY, NYPIRG, and the Brennan Center for Justice, gave Governor Pataki and state lawmakers a mediocre C- for their 2005 Legislative Session. The season began on an optimistic note with promises of reform. However, voters' high hopes were not realized.

Notable achievements included approval of a state budget by the beginning of the fiscal year, legislative rules changes that could significantly change the way Albany works, using reform as a key platform in the 2004 election and re-election campaigns, and reform as a major theme of the 2005 State of the State message.

However, the most significant reforms lie ahead. These include redistricting, a campaign finance, ethics and lobbying reform, and legislative rules changes. Go to the state League website (www.lwvny.org) and sign up for action alerts. Responding by sending messages to the governor and state lawmakers takes only a few clicks of the mouse and can make a real difference.

Membership News

Our member, **Evelyn Ness**, who has been living out of town for a year or so is now back in Kingston. We hope to see her at our meetings and are delighted that she is back. Welcome home, Evelyn!

We have a new member this month. Her name is **Renee Danboise**, and we will have an introduction to her in a later issue. In the meantime, welcome to her! Greet her if you see her.

As we move into the age of electronic communication, we hope to use the internet for more of our notices. We post information on the website (<http://midhudson.ny lwnet.org>), and in fact we often have more detail there than we can send out on paper. If you can, do check out the website and refer to it regularly.

However, in order to send out information to you directly electronically, we need to have accurate, up to date email addresses for you. These will only be used by us for LWV communication and not be made available to anyone else. Please give them to us by calling Emily Johnson (338-3554) or Fran Hofer (331-6396). Many thanks for your cooperation.

Membership Application

Join now for membership to June, 2007
Fill out the following fields and mail with the appropriate size check to the Treasurer, PO Box 3564, Kingston, NY 12402

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Family membership: \$65. ____

Individual member: \$50. ____

Phone about meetings __yes __no

Send e-mail notices __yes __no

Extra contribution: \$ ____

If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution, please make out a separate check payable to the LWVNYS Education fund. Our chapter can use this money for educational programs

If you know someone who might like to know more about the League of Women Voters, please give us his or her name and address and send this slip to:

Shirley Kobran
53 Schuler Lane,
Lake Katrine, NY 12449.

We will send out information as soon as possible.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Your name: _____

Do you have any comments about the League or our programs? Shirley would like to hear them too.