



Mid-Hudson Region Commentator March, 2007

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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.

The LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region covers the Mid-Ulster County area and the Dutchess County area. We belong to the LWV of New York State and the LWV of the US.

CALENDAR			
MARCH			
	6	7:15 to 9:15	Board meeting at Gloria Plasker's
	10	10:30 to 12:00	General Membership Meeting, Kingston Area Library "Education: How do we stand?"
APRIL			
	10	7:15 to 9:15	Board meeting at Gloria Plasker's
	14	10:30 to 12:00	General Membership Meeting, Kingston Area Library "Education-Bright Spots on the Horizon"
MAY			
	1	7:15 to 9:15	Board Meeting at Gloria Plasker's
	5		Women's Health Fair
	15	6:00 to 9:00	Annual Meeting, Unitarian Universalist Church

Non-Partisan Statement

The League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region is a nonpartisan organization which does not support or oppose candidates for public office but does encourage its members as individuals to participate actively in the political process. The League acts on those issues the membership chooses for study and action.

Board members will use discretion in any political activity and determine in advance from the local and/or state board that such activity will not compromise the nonpartisan political policy of the League of Women Voters.

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Prez Sez...

Greetings,

As I write this column, winter has sprung on the Hudson Valley. Having been lulled into the comfortable feeling of a snowless winter, the shock of this onslaught makes one want to curl up and wait for the daffodils. But of course, the league's high-powered members would never let that come to pass. I'd like to take time out to personally commend a couple of our relentless members who have devoted so much time to the league's efforts.

You cannot think about criminal justice reform in Ulster County without thinking of Tom Kadgen. For seven years, Tom has spearheaded criminal justice reform in Ulster County. His latest effort is a comprehensive report to the Criminal Justice Committee urging implementation of a common database to combine and analyze criminal justice information.

The work of the Charter Committee continues under the able leadership of Cindy Bell. Getting the charter passed was a daunting effort; overseeing its implementation will require constant vigilance. In addition, as the Efficiency and Reform Committee of the Ulster County Legislature continues to study HAVA as it relates to choosing new methods of voting, Tom and Cindy have also stepped up to serve as watchdogs of these proceedings to keep us informed.

While I've expressed my thanks to Tom and Cindy, space doesn't permit me to name the many members and describe their particular contributions that help make our community a better place to live.

I do want you to know, however, your efforts on behalf of the league and the Mid-Hudson Region are greatly appreciated. --

Jean

Update on Balancing Justice

In February of 2005, the Mid-Hudson LWV presented the Ulster County Legislature with three suggestions that were derived from our 5-year Balancing Criminal Justice study. The recommendations were:

1. To establish a criminal justice council that would review all aspects of the criminal justice system
2. To develop the means to determine the costs and effectiveness of criminal justice-related agencies and programs
3. To develop a comprehensive management system that would aid processing and allow data analysis

The recommendation to establish a criminal justice council was adopted by legislative resolution 225 in July of 2005. The others have yet to be realized.

Having waited two years, the LWV Board has decided to return to action and call for the creation of a comprehensive data system and the establishment of some way to evaluate programs.

A report was created and distributed to the leadership and legislators on the Criminal Justice and Efficiency and Reform Committees in support of these recommendations, and calling on them to make these projects a priority. We

hope our efforts will prove fruitful. This is the time for action!

The Community Corrections Program (CCP) has been merged with Probation and will be undergoing significant operational changes.

CCP has been in operation for 15 years. Approximately 1500 clients have been processed through its program—to the tune of 45 million dollars or so in custody, administration, Medicaid and Social Services costs. Throughout its 15 years this program has never undergone an outcome study; we have no idea how many of its clients were successful in remaining free or were subsequently incarcerated for another offense or for violating their probation.

This is a very expensive experiment to walk away from without trying to find out its rate of success. -- Tom Kadgen

Contributions

We have received twenty responses from members in reply to our request for contributions. \$990 was given to the chapter for expenses and advocacy and \$325 was given to the Education Fund. Many thanks to all!

Annual Meeting Date

The annual meeting will be held in May this year, rather than in June as it has been in previous years. June seems to be an overcrowded time for many people and May will be a more practical time. The meeting will be at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation on Sawkill Road in Kingston as usual.

News from the World of Voting

Machines

In cooperation with the LWV of Saugerties, our League is studying the various choices of voting machines for Ulster County, and the status of this issue with state and local officials. The final decision rests with the Ulster County Board of Elections Commissioners Thomas Turco and John Parete.

New York is the last of the 50 states to make a switch from a lever machine to one more representative of our society and this mandate comes from the federal government. The deadline was 2006, but there are numerous problems in making the change. These are some of the issues:

- a. State officials procrastinated with this issue and only began the process in earnest about a year ago.
- b. The company that was contracted to test all machines was decertified in May of 2006 (the exact circumstances are mysterious at the moment – there are groups trying to gain information but there has been little cooperation). All testing has ceased and no other company has been contracted to continue the work. Each time the manufacturers made changes to the machines, the process had to start all over from the beginning and many changes were made and continue to be made.
- c. The Board of Elections of New York State has not made a choice and most local boards are waiting to see what they elect to recommend before choosing their own systems.
- d. The process is so far behind that it will be too late to institute for the

2007 election. It is universally agreed that the 2008 presidential election would be the wrong time to make such a massive change, so the new projection to have a system in place has been moved out to 2009. The LWVNYS supports this concept, as a rush to a decision may end in making an inappropriate one.

The LWVNYS is lobbying for the use of optical scanners. Our local study group has found the following reasons to support the state League's position:

- a. *Smaller initial cash outlay* – Optical Scanners can handle up to 4000 votes each, so fewer machines will be required, though due to the rural quality of our county, we will still need the same number of different polling places. The savings will come into play when multiple election districts are located in the same building.
- b. *Ease of Voting* – People will fill out a paper ballot in a privacy booth, then take their completed ballot to the machine, where it will be fed through, the machine will record the vote and the paper will be deposited in a secure, closed box on the other side of the machine.
- c. *No waiting* – Because there can be several privacy booths, people can take their time in making their choices before bringing their completed ballots to the machine.
- d. *Errors can be corrected* – Votes are not registered until the ballot is passed through the scanner, so errors can be corrected before the

vote is cast. If there are double-voting errors, the scanner will reject the ballot.

- e. *Verifiable paper trail* – The stored paper ballots will provide access to a paper trail for purposes of auditing votes or for recounts.
- f. *Recyclable paper* – The ballot paper can be recycled and possibly use recycled paper.
- g. *Scanner storage* – The Optical Scanners are small and easily stored.
- h. *Absentee Voting* – The absentee votes can be cast on the same ballot paper and passed through an optical scanner rather than counted by hand as they are now.

The other system under consideration is the DRE (Direct Recording Electronic) machine. It is felt that these systems are less desirable because:

- a. They must replace lever machines 1:1.
- b. DRE use will result in long lines of voters waiting for others to make and register their choices, especially in the first year. The touch screen technology is intimidating and difficult to understand for citizens who are not computer-savvy.
- c. This system will require more training of inspectors, many of whom have little or no experience working with electronics. Many local inspectors have expressed anxiety over these types of machines and have vowed not to work with them.
- d. DREs require climate-controlled storage. They are delicate

electronics and will require all the care that a computer would.

- e. At least one of the proposed DREs will give voters a take-away receipt, thereby making it possible to verify a vote and opening the door for selling votes. This will also present privacy issues for family and workplace.
- f. Thermal paper used in DRE machines is not recyclable and is difficult to read.

Recently, Oregon's successful Vote-By-Mail system has come under scrutiny by local officials. More on that later.

The League is sponsoring a "Campaign for Accountability" requesting local commissioners to present their choice to the public before making an investment in the system. Our study group will present this concept for the consideration of Messrs. Parete and Turco.

It is crucial that the correct decision be made to implement changes in the system that carries our votes and we encourage thoughtful consideration and a transparent process. While the Federal government will foot 95% of the up-front costs, it is Ulster County that will pay for maintenance and upkeep in the future and, should the system fail, the taxpayers of this county will be responsible for 100% of any replacement costs. Having had the benefit of the experiences of other states, it is our hope that we may learn from their mistakes.

If you want to be a part of history, join us! Please contact Cindy Bell at 336-5763 or email her at CBell1000@aol.com.

"It doesn't matter who casts the votes, it's who counts them that matters."

-- Joseph Stalin

Or in this case, what counts them.

Education Study Group Presents

Two-Part Program

“Public education is everyone’s responsibility,” says Wendy Puriefoy, president of Public Education Network. “Public education is the single most important public institution in a democratic society. It is our ultimate department of defense against poverty, ignorance, hatred, and intolerance. It is the vehicle by which we transmit democratic and civic values to future generations, and it is the means by which we produce an educated citizenry capable of civic leadership, personal virtue, public deliberation, and economic and social vitality.”

Exercising our collective responsibility for educating Kingston’s children, we will be asking “Where Do We Stand” on Saturday, March 10th. Selected data from the NYS school report cards will be presented by James Douglas, an assistant superintendent from the Kingston School District’s Office of Curriculum and Instruction. He will assist us in interpreting the data to understand both strengths and shortfalls in recent student performance. Adding to the dialogue will be the voices of former Kingston students who have agreed to share with us insights about their unsuccessful efforts at earning a high school diploma. A parent of struggling students will also share her perspectives. At the end of this meeting, participants should have an understanding of the particular challenges our community faces in preparing all students to be responsible and productive citizens.

The program continues on Saturday, April 14, with “Bright Spots Ahead” as we look at some promising educational approaches which are being used successfully in other communities to meet similar challenges. More on the April program will appear in next month’s *Commentator*. Plan now to attend both meetings and join in the dialogue on the present and future of public education in our city. It is everyone’s responsibility.

Both meetings will be held in the Kingston Library’s community room from 10:30 to noon:

March 10th: “Educating Kingston’s Children: Where Do We Stand?”

April 14th: “Educating Kingston’s Children: Bright Spots Ahead”

LWVNYS Charter School Position

The board’s December adoption of a charter school position, following completion of phase II of our financing education consensus, enabled the League to weigh in with the legislature in opposition to the immediate increase in the number of charter schools. Although no agreement was reached, Eliot Spitzer has indicated support for increasing the number of charters, so that this issue will probably emerge when the legislature returns in 2007.

“The League recognizes that charter schools represent an educational experiment whose efficacy has never received appropriate validation. More-over, a review of the performance of charters in New York State indicates that, while some

do an excellent job of educating children, others are less successful than the most substandard traditional public schools. Therefore, the League supports public funding of academic research into the characteristics of charters that lead to student academic success.”

“Authority to grant, oversee, renew, and revoke charters other than those granted in public school conversions, should be vested in a single entity. Charters should be subject to more stringent oversight of charter compliance in the renewal/revocation process, with greater emphasis on positive educational outcomes.

“The League supports measures to limit the negative financial impact of charter schools on their home districts, including: transition assistance; home district payment to charters based on the same standard used to pay operating aid to school districts...; separate levels of reimbursement for elementary and secondary education to charter schools based on what the home districts spend for the level of schooling provided; limitation of the percentage of a school district’s budget that could be paid to charter schools. The League is opposed to State provision of capital construction and renovation services and reimbursement of capital expenditures for charter schools.

“The League supports limitation of the number of charters issued in New York State. As a general matter, it believes that the number of charter schools should not be increased without prior successful implementation of the improvements outlined in this position. In

lieu of amendment of the Charter School Act to increase the total number of charters that could be granted, it supports retention of the current total (100) with amendment of the Charter School Act so that a charter could be reissued if a charter school ceased to function for any reason. Any increase in the cap on charter schools should be tied to amendment of the Charter School Act so that charters are required to prove positive educational outcomes for all children (disaggregated by special needs) exceeding those in traditional public schools as a precondition for charter renewal. To more accurately measure student outcomes in charters and to compare them to those in traditional public schools, the League supports public funding to measure educational growth in individual students as they progress from grade to grade in charter schools (a value added approach).

Financing the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) Order

On November 20, 2006, the New York State Court of Appeals reaffirmed the state’s responsibility to increase funding for New York City schools. Although its decision established as reasonable an additional funding figure of \$1.9 billion in operating expenses, or \$2.5 statewide, adjusted for inflation from 2004, the court noted that the governor and legislature were best able to arrive at the appropriate figure to provide all New York City students with the opportunity for a meaningful high school education. To that end the Campaign for Fiscal

Equity, which the League supported in this litigation, has called for additional funding of between \$4 and \$6 billion for NYC, a figure previously supported by both Governor Pataki and Governor-Elect (now Governor) Spitzer.

The League's positions support the higher level of funding in two respects. First, the LWCVNYS new financing education position provides that money must be sufficient to enable children to meet all Regents standards in addition to enabling districts to provide a sound basic education, the constitutional minimum. Those of you who have followed the CFE litigation will remember that the first Court of Appeals decision in this case noted that funding need not be at a level sufficient to enable children to meet all Regents standards. While this distinction was relatively unimportant in light of the Appellate Division decision supporting CFE funding in the \$4 to \$6 billion range, it becomes paramount in light of the intervening Court of Appeals decision in support of the lower minimum remedy. Secondly, the LWVUS has a position in support of early childhood education, including preschool, as part of its social policy position advocating early intervention for children at-risk. Studies

have shown that at-risk children enter school without the requisite readiness skills, and that they are unable to overcome the initial gap. Quality preschool education can help alleviate this gap. In keeping with these positions, the League has joined a number of advocacy groups in calling for a higher level of funding.

Implementation of the CFE order on a statewide basis is one of the League's legislative priorities for 2007. We urge all League members to write our legislators in support of the higher level of implementation.

Membership News

Several of our members have been fortunate enough to get away from winter at least for a brief time. Emily Johnson and Renee Sachs have been to Florida, and Lee Ridgway has been in the Caribbean.

Members will be needed to help out at our booth at the Women's Health Expo in May. If you are interested, call Shirley Kobran. We've done this for several years, and it has been fun.

John Moriarty was in the hospital for almost a week, but is now out and about again.

I/we wish to join the LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region through May 31, 2008

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: *(eve)* _____ *(day)* _____

Email: _____

I/We enclose: Individual Membership (\$50) _____ Household Membership (\$65) _____

Additional gift to the LWV Education Fund (*tax deductible:*)
(*Send a separate check which MUST be payable to NYSLWV Ed Fund*) \$ _____

If this is a Household Membership, please include the name and email address of additional member(s) _____

Check here if you prefer NOT to be contacted about local LWV meetings ____

Will read *Commentator* on website____ or Please mail *Commentator* ____
**(Update the above form and return it to us with your check at
PO Box 3564, Kingston, New York 12402)**

If you know someone who might like to know more about the League of Women Voters, please send this slip with his/her name and address to: Betty Chin, 69 The Hills Port Ewen, NY 12466
We will send out information as soon as possible.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ **E-mail:** _____

Your name: _____

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

Be sure to visit our Advertiser's Page at
<http://lwvny-bulletins.org/Capital Region/Mid -Hudson-2006-10-ads.pdf>