

Commentator for May, 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

MAY		
5	10:00 to 12:00	Program Committee at Gloria Plasker's
14	8:00 to 4:00	Women's Health Fair at Tech City
20 to 22		State Convention for LWVNY in Albany
JUNE		
7	7:17-9:15	Board meeting at Jean McGarry's
21	6:00 to 9:00	Annual meeting at Unitarian Universalist Congregation on Sawkill Road, Kingston
JULY		
1	7:15-9:15 PM	Board Meeting at Jacki Moriarty's—old and new board members should attend for turnover
23	10:00 to 3:00	Planning session for 2005-2006 year at Jacki Moriarty's. Bring bag lunch.

The Prez Sez..

The Women's Health Fair is coming on May 14. This is a spectacular affair. I went for the first time last year to help at the door and I was amazed with the number of people who participate in this event. They have a great amount of information and fun exhibits, which include massages. Everyone likes the canvas bags you get at the door to hold all the goodies you get inside.

The State Convention will be happening May 20-22. I am excited to report that Hillary Rodham Clinton will be at the luncheon on Saturday.

It is never too soon to think about the Annual Meeting that will be on June 21.

Happy Mother's Day!!!! I would like to thank my mom for all that she has done for my family and me. I would not be able to do it without her. (And Dad too but he gets his on Father's Day).

Chris Henning

School Board and Budget Elections

Mark you calendars for school board and district budget elections on **May 17th**. Check with your local school board for polling places and ballot information specific to your district.

In the Kingston City School District, there will be four seats open on the school board and three candidates on the ballot. Appearing on the ballot will be the Rev. A.L. Coston Sr., pastor of New Central Baptist Church in Kingston, and incumbents Ian Horowitz and longtime League member Maureen Bowers. Because the deadline for ballot petitions has passed, any additional candidates will have to run write-in campaigns to be included in the election.

The budget proposal approved by the Kingston Board of Education for the 2005-06 year totals \$118.83 million. If adopted, this budget will increase the tax levy by 6.95 percent. If voters do not pass a spending plan after two ballots, the district will be forced to an austerity budget of about \$114 million.

Yard Sale -2005

The annual yard sale is our League's largest and most successful fundraiser. This year's chair is Jean McGarry. Once again Elizabeth Askue has kindly volunteered the use of her home and yard. Please drop your items off in her basement

The items we need include:
Furniture-Appliances-Household Supplies
Toys-Linens-Tools
Soft Cover Books-Cook Books
CD's-DVD's-Tapes, ETC.
Please No Clothing

Directions or questions? Call Jean at 336-6622 or Shirley Kobran at 382-6989.
The sale dates will be announced in the next issue...so stay tuned!

Women's Health Meeting

On April 19th the League was treated to a very informative program dealing with Women's Health.

Sponsored by the Women's Health Care Study group, this is the third such program that the League has hosted. The previous programs dealt with prescription drugs presented by the members of the Nekos-Dedrick's Pharmacy; and the second was the spring dinner of 2004 dealing with breast cancer issues which were addressed by Dr. Sheldon Feldman.

The April 19th program specifically addressed the updating of the Community Health Assessment report last issued in 1998, which was covered by Carolyn Short for the UC Health Department. Mrs. Short was pinch hitting for Dean Palen, the Public Health Director, who was teaching at UCCC.

This 5 year report, which is required by the state health department, provides 30%-40% of the county health department's funding.

Included in the report is a look at factors that affect the health and well-being of the community, comparing the community to national goals set by the Centers for Disease Control. This process is a way for the county to measure how well UC is doing comparing the county to past county figures as well as the state as a whole.

Mrs. Short included in her talk a reference to statistics, but with an interesting perspective. She suggested that in examining statistics one needs "to approach those fearsome tables and charts with a degree of skepticism" and realizing that such may not tell the entire story because the numbers may reflect people's views of what they think the questioner wants to hear rather than actual fact.

Dr. Laura Decker, a family practice physician, discussed several pertinent women's

health issues as she sees them in her practice. Dr. Decker confined her remarks to comments on osteoporosis and coronary heart disease.

She noted that in regards to osteoporosis there are over 10 million people, over 50 years of age, in the United States who have this problem, of which 80% are women.

The major risks for the condition are: having a family history, being female, thin, a smoker, Caucasian or Asian, having an inactive life style, current low bone mass, early menopause or a surgical one, using excessive alcohol.

She noted that to avoid the condition: stop smoking, engage in regular strength bearing exercise, be active, take calcium with vitamin D and to have a bone density test to verify one's status.

In the case of coronary heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in women in the US, the risk for such occurs with those who are over 55, have high cholesterol, have high blood pressure, are overweight, diabetic and have a family history of such.

It would appear that in either case one can help oneself by eating a diet low in fat, having regular exercise each day, getting 6-8 hours of sleep, not smoking, and having regular check-ups.

Both of the presenters seemed to stress the importance of women taking better care of themselves, knowing about one's body and symptoms and being one's own advocate for the type of care, tests, etc. that one believes one needs.

There was a Q & A session following the presentation.

Following the program the attendees had a second treat: wonderful desserts and really hot coffee provided by the auxiliary of Trinity Lutheran. Many thanks to the ladies and gentleman for capping off a very interesting program and meeting.

Capitol Beat Excerpt-Vol 5, No. 1

Albany is very quiet. It's almost as if no one in State government knows what to do next. After 20 years of wrangling over a budget into the late summer, the budget was done the week after it was due. But we don't seem to remember what should come next. Speculation is that the session will end earlier than late June. If so, and they do not address any of the "reforms" on the LWV's agenda, it will not be a productive session. Their first job is to pass a budget, but it is not their only job. I (Barbara Bartoletti) will try to sum up what happened in the legislature during the budget battles.

The budget was on time this year for several reasons. First and foremost, the voters in New York State get the greatest credit for an on-time budget. Their frustration level after 20 years of late budgets was taken out at the ballot box last November when three incumbents lost their seats primarily on the reform issue. Many candidates who ran for open seats ran on reform platforms and won. Legislative leaders knew that this year they had to bring a budget in on time and so began to work together.

Of course, the Court of Appeals decision last December which gave the Governor total control over constructing a budget helped focus them. The Court of Appeals ruling was the result of lawsuits going back to 1998 and 2000 in which the Assembly Speaker and then the Legislature sued the Governor for creating policy within the budget. The Court said that the Governor was the "constructor" of the budget and the Legislature could add, delete, delay or negotiate but could not "substitute" for the Governor's language in the budget. Another reason for the on-time budget was the

Governor's own poll ratings. His job approval was lower than it had been at any time in his tenure; he needed to look like a reformer and he could not let his legacy be one of never having an on-time budget during his Governorship.

The actual budget process was fascinating to watch. The Governor gets credit for pushing open the leaders' meetings held in the red room on the 2nd floor of the Capitol and were actually open (we had to push our way into the first one). They included the 2 minority leaders so there were actually 5 men in a room (5 may be their lucky number because the minority leaders did seem to have a calming effect on the usually caustic atmosphere around the Speaker and Governor). Having all the press and reform advocates in the room avoided stalemates or stonewalls. They couldn't just cross their arms and refuse to negotiate. A time frame was set up and followed. The joint budget conference committees were done in a very short time and were in many respects were just a reporting mechanism for what the staff had negotiated in private.

Rank and file legislators did get to articulate broad policy guidelines during these conferences and perhaps for now that is all that can be expected. The budget did get passed on the afternoon of March 31st in both houses. The atmosphere in both chambers was a little like a cross between New Year's Eve and the last day of senior year in high school. The Speaker presided in the Assembly, the Comptroller sat on the floor (actually on the floor) watching in giddy anticipation (he has to certify the budget balanced). After the last budget bill passed there was a standing ovation for the Ways and Means committee staff who had been there for days including Easter weekend. The same procedure was replicated in the

Senate with different players but the staff there also received a standing ovation. Clearly the leadership knows who to give credit to for the tenacious work of putting together a 106.6 billion budget.

Following the April 1 deadline, when the spotlight receded, the hard negotiations for the "big" issues that had been taken off the table during the open process began. You guessed it, behind closed doors. Funding in the amount of \$1.1 billion was still out there for TANF (temporary assistance to needy families), Environmental Protection Funds and HAVA money to fund voting machines and the statewide voter database along with Medicaid issues. Those issues finally got resolved 11 days later and the budget was finally done. That scene was much more typical of the Legislature; it was done at night with the bills warm from the copying machine. Even so, this process was an immense improvement.

CFE funding was not done. The Governor has appealed the decision of State Supreme Court that had taken the recommendations of the Special Masters. That appeal will now go to the Appeals Court and then to the Court of Appeals. The Legislature did agree to \$880 million more in education funding in this budget, but they didn't change the funding formula.

What more does the League want from the session? Our first priority is completion of HAVA implementation. The important issues of voting machine selection, disability access to polling places and verification of ID's has yet to be done by the joint conference committees in the legislature. The biggest problem is the conference committees are not meeting and there is finger pointing about whose fault that is. The League has called for this committee to meet quickly to resolve the outstanding issues so adequate

poll worker and voter education can be done before the 2006 election. There is speculation that ID verification legislation is so politically contentious that it will be one of the last pieces of legislation done in the session. STAY TUNED.

The League also wants ethics reform, lobby reform, and public authorities reform. Legislation has been introduced in both houses of the Legislature, but there is a sense that these issues may be kept until next year, which is again an election year. The League will continue to push for reform issues as we go through the last several weeks of the session. Please check the League's website for action on CATT.

---Barbara Bartoletti (edited)

Balancing Justice Update

The Balancing Justice Committee has produced final objectives for their mission and has created a resolution to go before the Ulster County Criminal Justice System Committee in May. Follow-on action by the Balancing Justice Committee will depend on what results are forthcoming from the Ulster County committee's deliberations.

The full report of the committee and the text of the resolution will be in the Annual Report for the League, as space does not permit including it here. You can find the resolution on our new website as well:

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

Whatever the outcome of the resolution, however, the Balancing Justice Committee assures us that "the bulldogs will continue to worry the bone."

League members should be aware that this committee has been working hard for a number of years and doesn't yet see the end in sight.

Students Inside Albany Conference Wrap-up

Kate Wilsey had a great time attending the conference. "It was a lot of fun!" Initially, those participating were given schedules and listened to a number of guest speakers and lobbyists. She met other students from across the state, they made friends easily and felt welcomed from the start.

Kate shadowed her Congressman, Maurice Hinchey, on the first day; toured the capital, the offices, and went to the room where they saw how live broadcasts were made. The next day she and other students from the area toured with Senator John Bonacic.

The essay contest winner was a young man from the Stuyvesant area. His essay contained a lot of facts.

It was a fascinating educational experience.

-Karen Goertzel

Voter Service

League moderators are in great demand and very busy.

Elizabeth Askew and Fran Hofler moderated the Town of Rosendale's Environmental Committee when it presented its plan to the community.

Cindy Bell and Christine Henning handled moderating and timekeeping duties May 2 for the Onteora School District's Meet the School Board's Candidates Night.

Other moderating dates for School Board Candidates Nights were:

May 9th Elizabeth Askew and Fran Hofler in New Paltz

May 10th Newly formed Catskill League will handle the Catskill meeting with help from the Saratoga League. In 2004 Emily Johnson and

Karen Goertzel did the honors; and Cindy Bell will handle, at the request of Highland, its candidates' night on May 10. She also needs a timekeeper.

Later in May, Barbara Vanitalie will handle the Pawling event.

More moderators are needed **now**: the Kingston City Schools Parents Council needed a moderator and timekeeper for May 10 at the Miller school at 6:30 PM; **and in the future**. If you are interested, please call Karen Goertzel at 679-7009.

The Town of Clinton in Dutchess County has already requested a moderator for a candidates' night to be held at the Clinton Town Hall in Rhinebeck on October 28, 2005.

Publications

First Vote, is a concise guide for first time voters (immigrants, High School students) or a refresher course for experienced voters. It is available free of charge by calling Cindy Bell, League Publications Director, at 336-5763 or by e-mail cbell1000@aol.com or by mail PO Box 53 (Main Street) Ruby, New York 12428. It is never too early or too late to read this very worthwhile publication.

Women's Health Fitness Expo

Don't forget this event. Sponsored by the Greenspan Center for Women's Health at the Kingston Hospital, it will take place on Saturday, May 14.

This is a **reminder** for everyone.

The event will be held from 8-3 at Tech City, Bldg. 5 North.

Last year was the first year that the League assisted in this very worthwhile endeavor.

If you are able to work a few hours to help out at the League table, please call Shirley Kobran at 845-382-6989.

Legislative Agenda 2005

Equity in School Financing

The League has chosen **Equity In School Financing** as a top Legislative Agenda item for 2005 primarily because of the necessity for the Governor and the legislature to meet the July 2004 court-imposed deadline for reform of the state's funding formula. The League has supported the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) lawsuit with an amicus brief and eight years of civic engagement work. The League's position on **Financing Education K-12** under the State Finances section of *Impact on Issues 2003-2005* is as follows:

- Although the Court of Appeals remedy was limited to ensuring an adequate education for the plaintiff's clients, New York City's school children, the League believes that any remedy must be applied statewide and further equity in education financing.
- While the League does not wish to see per pupil funding reduced in any school district, there are high needs districts for which funding clearly should be increased.
- The League believes that it is the State's responsibility to narrow the gap between districts with varying abilities to pay for school funding, and to make the financing system understandable to the public.

Among the suggested ways of making the system more equitable are the following:

- Create better measures of pupil need, which are inadequately reflected in the current aid formulae (e.g., poverty indicators, pupil count).
- Create better measures of the local and/or regional cost of goods and services.
- Address the needs of HIGH NEEDS DISTRICTS as a top priority.

Possible sources of money include:

- Look at State sources of revenue for a greater share of funding to reduce excessive reliance on the property tax; reassess STAR benefits.
- Continue efforts to improve outmoded property tax assessment and collection systems in some parts of the state, e.g., Westchester, Suffolk, Rockland.
- Lift the income level of the property tax circuit breaker from \$18,000 of adjusted gross income to a higher level reflecting inflation; phase in property tax above that level.

There is obviously much more to this issue than can be addressed here. For more information go to the League's website at www.lwvny.org.

**Annual Meeting Pot Luck Supper
June 21 6-9 PM!
Come one, come all! Vote for officers!
Hear reports of activities!
Meet your friends! Eat good food!
Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Sawkill Road in Kingston.**

**The chapter website
is up and running at
[http://midhudson.ny.
hvnnet.org](http://midhudson.ny.hvnnet.org)
Have a look at it!**

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Member (\$50)___ Family Membership (\$85)___ 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 _____

Annual Meeting, 2005

Please note: The annual meeting for this year has been **changed** from the Unitarian Church on the Sawkill Road to the Woodstock Reform Church in Woodstock. The Woodstock Reform Church, located in the center of the village, is the site of League annual meetings for many years.

The date is still Tuesday, June 21, 2005. The evening's festivities will commence at 5:30 with wine and cheese. Supper will be served at 6 PM. The League's meeting will start at 7 PM sharp. Adjournment is scheduled for 9 PM.

Everyone will be called during the first week of June by members of the League Board to find out what culinary masterpiece you will bring to the supper. Please start thinking now and be prepared to respond (dieting is not allowed for this evening).

The program will include an introduction of the local representatives to Students Inside Albany, a presentation of and voter on the annual budget, election of officers and directors for the 2005-06 year, update on ongoing activities, progress on the development of the Website and future study considerations.

We look forward to a really grand evening. Please plan to attend; and bring a friend to become acquainted with other League members, perhaps to become one.

Annual Report: Each year the League produces an annual report; this year will be no exception. In addition to the agenda for the meeting (see above), the final reports of the various portfolio's and studies and actions are included.

The president and chairmen of the following should provide their final reports to **Lee Ridgway by May 25, 2005:** president, the Dutchess Unit, finance, membership, public relations, publications, voter service, program committee, the Commentator, and the studies/activities: Community Accountability for Public Education, Women's Health Care, Impact of Alcohol and Drugs on Ulster County Youth and the status of the Balancing Justice Action. **Moderators Needed:** It was noted elsewhere in the Commentator that there is a pressing need for moderators and timekeepers. This is one of the major services offered by the League to various organizations throughout the League's area and surrounding counties. Please consider becoming part of this very vital program by signing up at the annual meeting or calling Karen Goertzel at 679-7009. Training is provided later in the fall. **Yard Sale:** Scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, August 27th and 28th, Jean McGarry has agreed to be the chairman this year; and Elizabeth Askue, 338-1667 will once again provide her home acreage for the site. Start collecting and bring to Elizabeth's now. **Membership:** Do you have one name of someone you think would be interested. Call Shirley Kobran 682-6989. **Telephone Squad:** Great way to help and get to know members. Call Shirley Kobran to volunteer. **Book Rescue Committee:** The League has been inundated with hundreds and hundreds of books...an easy way to bring fun, excitement and pleasure to so many. Call Elizabeth Askue 338-1667 if you can provide a few hours a month to make these books usable. Over 11,000 children's books have been distributed already. **Sign-ups: On the reverse side is a copy of the sign up sheet. Please review. Consider now which one of the committees you would like to participate on. Be prepared to do so the night of the annual meeting. We recognize that there are members who can not attend the annual meeting, but would like to be involved. After reviewing the list of committees, please sign up and return your copy to Gloria Plasker, 106 Park Avenue, Hurley, NY. before the annual meeting on June 21.**

