



## Mid-Hudson Region *Commentator* October, 2006

Jean McGarry, President (845)336-6622  
 Shirley Kobran, Membership (845)382-6989  
 Emily Johnson, Newsletter (845)338-3554

*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

#### SEPTEMBER

<b>5</b>	7:15 to 9:15	Board meeting at Gloria Plasker's
<b>19</b>	7:00 to 9:00	Ulster County Charter Informational meeting, Temple Emanuel, Albany Avenue, Kingston
<b>28</b>	10:00 to 12:00	Financing Education Comm., Emily Johnson's
<b>30</b>	10:30 to 12:30	Bylaws Committee at Gloria Plasker's

#### OCTOBER

<b>3</b>	10:00 to 12:00	Financing Education Comm., Emily Johnson's
<b>3</b>	7:15 to 9:15	Board Meeting at Gloria Plasker's
<b>10</b>	10:00 to 12:00	Financing Education, Emily Johnson's
<b>17</b>	7:00 to 9:00	Consensus on Charter Schools, Kingston City Hall, Conf. Room 1 (2 <sup>nd</sup> floor)
<b>24</b>	7:30 to 9:00	Finance Committee, Margaret Sellers house

#### NOVEMBER

<b>7</b>	All Day	Election Day – <b>GO VOTE</b>
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#### 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 so as not to compromise the nonpartisan political policy of the League of Women Voters.

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## Prez Sez...

Greetings,

CHANGE! It seems to be the buzzword in my life lately. At work, changes in school procedures are afoot; I see the uneasiness among some members of the faculty. Our league is reorganizing our board structure; some members may find it uncomfortable. There is the proposed Ulster County Charter; some community members have voiced their concerns about this new form of government. Change is difficult; change is inevitable. Each of us has the responsibility to assure the change is for the good.

For over two years, detailed studies by a great number of people expending hundreds of hours of their personal time has produced a proposal substantially altering Ulster County's form of government. As president, I am mindful of our fundamental mission: to present unbiased nonpartisan information about elections, the voting process, and issues and to advocate for policies we find to be in the public interest.

In her closing remarks at my first faculty meeting, my principal concluded by saying that we should put the spin on the positives of change. I believe to that end, we should take that same advice with our proposed county charter. The benefits outweigh the negatives. For this reason the Mid-Hudson League has taken the position to support the charter. I urge you to help your league educate the public and advocate the charter's adoption on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Jean

## Saga of the Yard Sale

After many years of having good weather for the yard sale, we have had rain for two years in a row. Last year, you may remember, we had the sale on Saturday and were thoroughly rained out on Sunday. This year, we had rain on Saturday and after half a day of trying to manage the sale in Elizabeth Askue's house, we postponed it to the following weekend, with a tent in case of rain. The tent was needed.

Trying to sell things from Elizabeth's house was very difficult and can't ever happen again. As usual, we had people coming by 7:45 for a sale that opened at 9:00, and it was too wet to make them wait outside. They tried to buy the pictures from Elizabeth's walls and the china from her cabinet as well as the goods we had for sale. We had people in the basement looking at the goods that had not yet been carried up. When we closed the doors at about 1:00, we had taken in about \$900 and a great deal of grief.

The sale was reopened the following Saturday and Sunday, again troubled by inclement weather. Despite the adversity we took in about \$2000 total, with expenses for advertising and tent rental cutting down the profit to about \$1600. Not bad for a sale with uncooperative weather! Thanks to all who donated and worked at the sale and cleaned up afterwards. Final figures will be published when they are available. Maybe we should fund-raise another way next year...(continued next page)

### More Yard Sale

meanwhile we are very grateful to the people who worked so hard this year, particularly the Moriarty family who all pitched in above and beyond the call of duty as usual. Jean and Jim McGarry lent some of the sale tables. Irene McGinnis worked for both days and was a tremendous help to the sale. Other members, too numerous to mention, also helped hard and willingly and should consider themselves thanked for their good work.

Thanks also go to those who contributed money. We did not have a bake sale this year (and the goods would have gotten pretty wet if we had had one!), so your donations were very welcome as supplements to the sale of goods.

We made it, but it was a tough job.

### Address to the Legislature

At the Ulster County Legislature meeting on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, a public hearing on the charter was held before the legislature voted. Our president, Jean McGarry, made the following statement at that meeting.

“Chairman Donaldson, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Ulster County Legislature,

I appreciate the opportunity to be able to present this statement to you at this time. While it was delivered to all of you in writing on August 9<sup>th</sup>, the League would like to present its position orally so that its position is on public record.

“The League of Women Voters supports the concept of a charter form of government because it provides a maximum degree of citizen control over the form, substance, and operation of county government.

“We support this specific Ulster County Charter because it defines an efficient county government structure that fixes responsibility, describes the way the unit of government functions and responds to the will of the people.

“The charter offers meritorious innovations by creating the elective office of County Executive who is answerable to all the people and establishing the elective office of Comptroller, who will exercise powerful fiscal oversight. In addition it creates a Charter Revision Commission, a Periodic Compensation Review Committee, an Inter-Municipal Collaboration Council, and a Commission on Reapportionment. The County Legislature is freed to concentrate on its primary function as a legislative, appropriating and policy-determining body.

“The allocation of power in county government is well distributed and balanced among the separate branches with each holding the others in check with adequate powers.

“We recommend passage of the legislation placing the Charter on the ballot for November, 2006 and urge approval by the voters of Ulster County.

“Thank you.

“Respectfully,  
Jean McGarry, President.”

## Charter Chatter IV

Elsewhere in The Commentator you will have read Jean McGarry's address to the County Legislature regarding the Mid Hudson LWV's position in support of the Charter. She was then followed by a number of speakers of whom the vast majority also posited positive comments. There were actually only two speakers who raised negative considerations.

The meeting was then adjourned by Chairman Donaldson for "9 minutes" to allow each party to caucus. When the meeting resumed we all held our breath or a few minutes while the voice vote on the charter was taken. With five Legislators absent, the tally was 27 to 1 in favor. It was a glorious moment of validation for the Charter Commission.

For our League it meant switching into high gear for campaign mode. The League Charter Committee has been meeting once a week since the end of July and has already planned an informational meeting. We are seeking working arrangements with other groups e.g. the Ulster County Chamber of Commerce who also supports the Charter and speaking engagements with other organizations eg AAUW and the Womens Club of Saugerties.

We expect to see you on September 19 at Temple Emanuel, Kingston at 7PM when Dr Gerald Benjamin will present the pros of the Charter and William West will present the cons. Get your friends and neighbors out too for a stimulating evening. Informing citizens is part of our League mission and we do it well.

---Renee Sachs

## Finances

Everyone is aware that the yard sale has been a primary fund-raiser for us for many years. As time passes, the yard sales have gotten bigger and required more work to plan, organize, and run.

Fewer of us are strong enough to do the heavy hauling. We have not had cooperative weather for 2005 and 2006. The Finance Committee chair, Margaret Sellers, invites ideas for other ways to raise funds for League operations. Everyone, put on your thinking caps!

Can we find sponsors for some of our activities? Can we charge admission for some meetings? Should we do League bus trips? Could we set up a luncheon group, trying out local restaurants and paying a participation fee? Many of you will have good ideas and you should suggest them to Margaret Sellers, 339-3180.

The first meeting of the Finance Committee will take place at Margaret's house, 80 Ringtop Road, in Kingston on October 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:30. Anyone interested is welcome to come and brainstorm.



## Financing Education II: Charter Schools

Financing Education Consensus Part II concerns Charter Schools. This study is to evaluate the New York State Charter School Act of 1998, its impact on traditional schools, and proposals for fiscal relief for affected communities. It is likely that the state will consider lifting the cap on charter schools after election and before next year. This gives the LWV a narrow window of opportunity to influence the debate. Although charter schools in New York State are primarily an urban phenomenon, they have the potential to affect education finances and educational outcomes on a state-wide basis. Thus, there will be a state-wide consensus by November...

School choice has been one of the most polarizing issues to hit the education arena in the past two decades. Proponents portray traditional public schools as bloated bureaucracies staffed by tenured slackers more interested in their salaries and benefits than in the education of their students. Opponents portray proponents of choice as setting about to systematically destroy the public school system, which has fostered this country's greatness through its ability to provide an educated workforce and one inculcated with core democratic values. What is missing from this discussion, and what the New York State Court of Appeals did recognize in the CFE litigation, is that it costs more to educate children with special needs. Thus, one must ask whether the school choice movement arises from systemic flaws within the public education system or from funding inadequate to allow for desired results.

The three hallmarks of charter schools nationally are autonomy, choice, and accountability. These schools operate with more autonomy and fewer regulations

under a charter issued by a public entity in return for enhanced accountability. With greater autonomy from one-size-fits-all regulations, charters are supposed to make better decisions tailored to their individual school communities. Proponents speculated that charters would have the freedom to operate in different ways from traditional public schools, attracting different teachers and programs and acting as incubators for innovation and improved student performance. Charters would be accountable to both students and their parents and to the chartering entities.

The stated purpose of charter schools in New York State is to improve student learning and achievement, increase learning opportunities for all students, especially at-risk students, encourage innovative teaching methods, create new professional opportunities for educators, provide school choice, and provide schools with opportunities to change from rule-based to performance-based accountability systems.

On October 17<sup>th</sup> at 7 PM in Conference Room 1 at City Hall in Kingston, we will be discussing and hopefully finding answers to the questions raised by the state LWV. (continued next page)

## More Charter Schools

So, what are charter schools? How are they financed? How have they functioned in New York State? Are they fulfilling their promise of innovation in education and increased student achievement? What is their effect on financing education throughout the state?

The state LWV has proposed a number of questions on charter schools for members to consider, discuss, and come to consensus about.

- I. Should the New York State Charter Schools Act be amended?
- II.
  - A. Should a single entity have responsibility for granting, overseeing, renewing and revoking charters? (Now done by Regents and SUNY)
  - B. Should there be more stringent oversight of charter compliance renewal or revocation of charters?
  - C. Should there be greater emphasis on positive educational outcomes in renewals?
  - D. Should there be educational achievement equal or better than that of comparable district schools as a precondition for renewal?
- III.
  - A. Should we support limiting the financial impact of charter schools on their home districts?
  - B. Should we support a dedicated statewide funding stream?
  - C. Should we support a dedicated statewide funding stream for charter school students who previously attended parochial or private schools or were home-schooled?
  - D. Should we support transition assistance to district schools?
  - E. Should we support home district payment to charters based on the same standard used to pay operating aid to school districts?
  - F. Should we support public finance for charter school buildings?
  - G. Should we support separate levels of reimbursement for elementary and secondary education to charter schools like home district schools?
  - H. Should we support limits to the percentage of a district's school budget that could be paid to charter schools?
- IV.
  - A. If a charter school closes, should it still be counted toward the total number of charters granted or should a new charter be issued to another chartering entity upon closure of a charter school?
  - B. Should we support a limitation on the number of charters issued in NYS?
  - C. Should an increase in the cap be tied to increased accountability for educational quality?
  - D. Should any increase in the cap be tied to transition assistance to district schools?

E. Should any increase in the cap be tied to creation of a dedicated statewide funding stream?

- V. A. Should there be measures that would limit the percentage of children in a district who could attend charter schools?  
B. Should there be measures to prevent midyear departure?

- VI. A. Should we support public funding of academic research about the possible correlations between charter school characteristics and student academic success?  
B. Should we support public funding to measure educational growth in individual students as they progress from grade to grade in charter schools? (New York State is requiring traditional districts to adopt data systems that will enable them to measure value added to an individual student's achievement over time.)

Variables to look at in determining efficiency of charter schools might include length of day, per-student expenditures, profit vs. non-profit education management, rates of teacher certification and retention, class and school sizes, student selection, student demographics, size and location of district, stand-alone vs. shared facilities (see VI A).

Are these variables examined for district schools now?

## HAVA Again

New York State is still having trouble with implementing the Help America Vote Act.

1. New York will not be replacing lever machines in 2006
2. In 2006, a small number of ballot marking devices will be provided at a central location in each county for disabled voters
3. Lever machines are scheduled to be replaced by the September 2007 election
4. Purchasing decisions for 2007 voting systems will be made over the next few months by county election commissioners.

"Plan B" was developed to meet the needs of disabled voters by having a small number of suitable ballot markers available within the state (144 total throughout the state). The most popular purchase was the Avante Touch Screen. This device marks the ballots but does not count votes.

"Plan A" is the term for the next stage of replacement of lever machines in 2007. Plan A describes the process of testing, certifying, selecting and ordering new voting machines, followed by the acceptance testing, installation, training of poll workers and voters that must take place before first use in September, 2007. "Plan A" had to be provided to the Justice Department by August 15, 2006.

Eleven systems have been submitted by vendors for certification. Six are DREs and four are ballot scanner systems. The eleventh is a ballot marking system.

New York State has contracted with Ciber, Inc. to oversee the certification process. Ciber Inc. is one of the big three independent testing authorities, and it will create test plans for each system and conduct and manage the actual testing. A key consideration is whether the testing will

be conducted in an open and observable manner so that citizens can view it.

The League's representative on the Citizen's Election Modernization Advisory Committee, Bo Lipari, observed the ballot marking testing and certification process (for the machines used for the disabled in 2006). He will be actively involved in the next stage of certification, as the only member of the Committee with actual technical expertise.

Another hurdle is the creation of a statewide voter database, which also needs to be in place by September, 2007. Once certification is done and Boards of Election have chosen the machines they want, there will still need to be time for manufacture and for training election workers.

Another question is how many voters can be serviced by a single machine. The answer to this dictates the number of machines that must be supplied to each polling place to replace the lever machines which can each service 800 voters. The touch screen voting machines may only be able to service 400 voters on election day. If more than one DRE is needed to replace each lever machine, the high costs of acquiring and maintaining such machines will far exceed available HAVA funds and require county funds to supplement. The New York State Board of Elections is planning to do usability studies to find out the ratio of new machines to lever machines.

**What should you be doing about all this?** The county board of election commissioners have sole authority to decide on voting systems, and they are only accountable to the parties they represent. In order to make them more accountable to the public, the League and New Yorkers for Verified Voting have begun a Campaign for Accountability, calling for election commissioners to give

in detail their reasons for choosing a particular system before they order it.

We can give a detailed questionnaire for county legislators to use to ask the right questions of commissioners. We can write letters to legislators asking them to support a request for accountability. We can petition the County Board of Elections for accountability. We can urge county legislatures to pass resolutions calling for the most reliable modern voting system.

Voting is the most basic right we have in this democracy, and we must be sure that its ease and accuracy are protected and that everyone can vote and have their votes count.

I/we wish to become members of the LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region through May 31, 2007

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

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.