



Commentator, v.I, i.7

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 League 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

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.

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COMMENTATOR FEBRUARY 2009

CALENDAR		
2009		
February		
21	10:00-12:00	Brunch meeting on direct voting and the Electoral College at the Everett Hodge Community Center 15-21 Franklin Street, Kingston
MARCH		
2	10:30-11:30	Ulster Observer Corps meeting, Monkey Joe's, Broadway, Kingston
3	7:15-9:15	Board meeting at Gloria's
11	1:30-3:00	Book repair, check with Elizabeth
18	10-noon	Discussion of the state budget with Jay Gallagher, head of Gannett news bureau in Albany, and Barbara Bartoletti, LWVNYS lobbyist, at the Friends Meeting House, 249 Hooker Ave, Poughkeepsie.
APRIL		
7	7:15-9:15	Board meeting. Place TBA
18	10:00-12:00	Consensus brunch meeting on Golden Hill at the Town of Esopus Library in Port Ewen
MAY		
5		Board meeting. Place TBA
19		Statewide School Budget Vote
20	6:00-8:30	Annual Meeting & Pot-Luck Supper at the Town of Esopus Library, 128 Canal St., Port Ewen
JUNE		
2	7:15-9:15	Board meeting. Place TBA
7	1:00-3:30	Charter honoree luncheon at Wiltwyck Golf Club honoring Cindy Bell, Lee Cane, Tom Kadgen & Reneé Sachs

Check our Calendar on-line at
<http://midhudson.ny.lwvnet.org/calendar.html>
 for updated information.

Prez Sez...

Greetings,

As I write this, our country is faced with enormous economic challenges. Governments at every level as well as individuals and families are prioritizing their wants and needs and making difficult choices. The League of Women Voters, like the rest of the country, must also make tough choices in its attempt to balance the need to fulfill its mission statement and work within the constraints of an economic downturn.

On the National level, the League has made the difficult decision to suspend publication of the National Voter until the League's finances are healthier. In another cost saving initiative, the LWVUS Board will hold a "virtual" council rather than convening in person. On a local level, the Mid-Hudson Region has realized substantial savings through e-mailing the Commentator to most of the membership. If you are still receiving a hard copy of the Commentator, would you please consider receiving it on-line? A quick e-mail to my address posted in the Commentator is all it will take to GO GREEN.

As we wend our way through these difficult times, please know that the Board of Directors of the Mid-Hudson League is most appreciative of your continued membership and financial support. We pledge to continue to offer interesting and informative programs, ever mindful that your contribution to our current finance appeal be used judiciously.

Jean

Meeting & Brunch 2/21

Almost 4 (!) Decades and Still Trying

**We Guess It's Time to Rethink the Electoral College
Sat., February 21, 10 AM, Everett Hodge Community Center,
15 - 21 Franklin St. in midtown Kingston**

Did you know that the LWV has been officially opposed to the Electoral College since 1970? Well, we have, and you can see that we've gotten nowhere. And there's very little hope we'll get the hoped-for constitutional amendment any time soon.

So it's no surprise that when a group of people came up with a way to give U.S. citizens the ability to vote for their president directly, and without having to pass an amendment to the Constitution that would abolish the electoral college, many LWV members took interest. And no surprise too that at last spring's LWVUS convention, the delegates adopted a new study, "The Advisability of Using the National Popular Vote Compact among the States as a Method for Electing the President."

Although four states (Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, and New Jersey) have already entered into the Compact, and although Common Cause is strongly behind it, most people have never heard of it. And your local LWV board agrees with the delegates to the national convention that this is indeed something that a group like ours should at least look at, if not support. So we're holding a meeting to inform you about the Compact and see if you're ready to answer the consensus questions that LWVUS has supplied to get you

to help it decide whether to go to bat for the Compact (or not).

We're fortunate to have Joel Lefkowitz, Associate Professor in the Political Science Dept. at SUNY New Paltz, willing to help us present the study materials and answer your questions.

While you'll need to come to this meeting if you want to understand the Compact fully, here's a very basic explanation.

First of all, it actually USES the electoral college. The Compact-joining bill would just require that all the states who join would agree to hand over ALL their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states plus the District of Columbia - even if that candidate was not the popular choice of their state. The bill would take effect only when enacted, in identical form, by states possessing a majority of the electoral votes - that is, enough electoral votes to elect a President (270 of 538). Once the required number of states has joined, others would likely jump aboard just to avoid being left out. Brilliant, no?

But not so fast. There are problems too. Come help us sort through these and decide whether the problems with the Compact are even worse than the problems presented by the current system. It's not easy, and it really does need the thoughtful deliberation that League members are famous for bringing to public policy.

And we need YOU! We'll provide a tempting array of brunch foods (you know how well some of our folks do this!) to fuel your brain cells - as well as the usual study materials you'd expect from the League.

PLEASE JOIN US!

Observer Corps Reports

**Ulster County
Legislature Meeting
2/11/09**

Chairman David Donaldson granted Privilege of the Floor to County Executive Michael P. Hein who presented the first State of the County Address. (Access the county web site at <http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/> to find the Address under Press Releases.)

Notable resolutions passed included:

- Authorizing purchase of various vehicles at a maximum estimated cost of \$299,300 and authorizing the issuance of \$299,300 bonds to pay for the cost. Substantial discussion and debate centered on the necessity of bonding and the number of vehicles to be purchased prior to the development and implementation of a Fleet Management Plan.
- Extending the additional sales tax rate of one percent for an additional period of at least twenty-four months.
- Authorizing agreements with NYS to establish a Domestic Violence Program within the office of the District Attorney.
- Adopting Ulster Tomorrow - a sustainable economic development plan - as an element of the county's Comprehensive Plan.
- Urging the New York State Legislature and the New York State

Board of Elections to enact laws, rules and regulations that specifically authorize the continued use of lever-style voting machines.

The full agenda and text of the offered resolutions (without amendments adopted at the meeting) can be found at <http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/resolutions/index.html>

--Jean and Jim McGarry

Ways and Means Committee 2/4/09

The Ways and Means Committee was convened by Chairman Alan Lomita at 4:49 PM on 2-4-09. All members except Legislator Zimet were present.

Over 20 resolutions were handled during the course of the meeting which lasted just over an hour.

Initially, Dr. Edward Brown was confirmed as Commissioner of Mental Health and Paul J. Hewitt was confirmed as Commissioner of Finance.

While most of the resolutions were passed without comment, some raised questions and comments from the committee members prior to passage.

The resolution to purchase 11 vehicles caused some questions as to cost and need. However, following discussion it was accepted that financing the purchase by short term bond notes would be cheaper.

Considerable discussion ensued regarding the resolution concerning a grant awarded by the state to UC for dealing with the county Domestic Violence (DV) Program. DA Carnwright explained that this would enable his office to improve the work up and prosecution of DV cases. The concern raised was whether the county would have to continue paying the increased salaries if the money used to raise salaries in 2009 was not available in 2010 To resolve this, an amendment will be made by Brian Cahill at the next meeting of the Legislature that this is a stipend. Further, if such monies are not available from the state next year then the county will not be responsible for continuing to pay the monies so involved

The resolution to amend the UC personnel policy manual and handbook to include provision for health insurance benefits for heterosexual domestic partners of UC employees equal to those currently provided to spouses was defeated. While there was much discussion and the opinion that this process would involve only a small group of people was expressed, the question of costs that had been suggested, i.e., \$70,000 to \$225,000 needed to be further investigated. The resolution will be sent to the full Legislature with a negative declaration.

The resolution to set a public hearing date on Local Law establishing a sex offender free zone in UC was defeated. The UC law is like the Rockland County law. The latter has recently been declared unconstitutional by the court. This decision will be appealed. The committee seemed to feel that it was premature to even set a public hearing for the UC law given these circumstances.

Lee Cane, Observer Corps

Human Services Committee 1/22/09

The Legislative Health Services Committee was convened by Chairman Rob Parete at 6:30 January 22, 2009 and adjourned at 7:40PM. All members of the committee were present.

The committee held an executive session for members.

Following that, the public meeting was reconvened. Additional attendees represented the American Heart Assoc., American Cancer Society, and the UC Heart Healthy Coalition.

The first order of business approved referral of a motion to the county legislature to approve confirming Dr. Edward Brown as Director of Mental Health.

The committee then dealt with a draft law which if passed the Legislature will require chain food service operators (there are 31 in UC) to post calorie information on menus. There was considerable discussion by the committee members and comments from the representatives from the above mentioned community organizations in support of the proposed law.

Motion passed to refer draft law to Legislature, Laws and Rules Committee for an opinion, and to support having a public hearing.

Next item of business dealt with draft resolution that if passed by Legislature would allow heterosexual domestic partners of UC employees to receive health insurance benefits equal to those currently provided to spouses.

Following discussion during which it was decided that it was important to know how much this would cost as well as how much the non-employee's premium charge would be, a motion was passed to refer the matter to the Human Development Committee to review as well as Ways and Means.

The chairman asked the committee to send any ideas on health care to him or to Karen Binder.

Lee Cane, Observer Corps

Human Development Committee 1/26/09

The Human Development Committee was convened 1-26-09 at 4:45 by Chairman Gregorius and was adjourned at 6:20. All members were present except for Legislator Hansut.

This session of the committee dealt with changes brought about by the introduction of the county executive form of government.

Chairman Gregorius told the committee that Deputy County Executive Marshall Beckman had been invited to attend as was DSS Commissioner Rodriguez. All Health Services Dept. heads and Social Services report to Deputy Beckman.

Chairman Gregorius said it is important that Beckman and the committee develop a working relationship. Mr. Beckman advised the committee that while he would not just come to committee meetings, he would come whenever the committee and his group had matters to work on together.

Chairman Gregorius stated that the Legislative Personnel Committee would also be part of this committee's responsibility. Deputy Bea Havranik would be representing the County Executive's Office.

The committee discussed the site of future committee meetings and decided to hold its future meetings at the UCOB.

Most of the meeting time was spent discussing the work and salaries of the attorneys at DSS. Both the Commissioner and Michael Iapoco, a DSS attorney, explained that the DSS attorneys have an extensive work load and their salaries are in the high 40's. DSS has had great difficulty recruiting attorneys to fill the present vacancies as well as retaining those hired. As a result DSS has had to hire a

contract attorney because the work continues to grow and DSS must be represented in any court that the cases must be tried in.

The committee determined that this was a matter that the county executive would need to address and decide on. Then the committee and the Legislature would address the money aspect.

Next the committee addressed a resolution proposed by Legislator Frank Dart concerning provision of equal health insurance benefits for heterosexual domestic partners of UC employees as are currently provided to spouses. It was presented at the Health Services Committee; which recommended that it be referred to the Human Development Committee for further handling.

Following discussion, the committee voted to accept the resolution and refer it to the full Legislature. Deputy Beckman will check with the Personnel Director as to the actual full cost of the effort and advise the committee. Chairman Gregorius said that should the cost be more than the \$70,000 indicated, an amendment to the resolution will be necessary.

The last item brought up for consideration was the case loads particularly in Medicaid...now about 850 per examiner. Chairman Gregorius said this was a topic about which the committee had been concerned for some time and needed to discuss. Dr. Rodriguez indicated that the cost would be fully reimbursable to hire, there is room at DSS, and while a responsibility of the County Executive, the question is why aren't staff being hired?

The Legislature does have the ability to create policy in such matters. - Lee Cane, Observer Corps

Meeting 3/18 Poughkeepsie

"Still Broken: New York's Legislature, Now Controlled by Democrats, Struggles to Make Spending and Revenue Add Up" **Presented by the League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region at the Friends Meeting House, 249 Hooker Avenue, Poughkeepsie**

New York State is due to adopt a new budget on April 1, and on Wednesday, March 18, at 7 PM, the LWVMHR will offer the public an up-to-the-minute look at where the budget-making process stands as it enters its last few days.

The evening will feature **Jay Gallagher, the chief of the Gannett News Service's Albany bureau since 1989, and Barbara Bartoletti, the legislative director of the League of Women Voters of New York State since 1988.**

They will explain how the Legislature and the Governor are trying to meet the needs of New York in a time of financial crisis - and where politics continues to get in the way.

The event's timing is intended to help attendees get the information they need as they make final calls to their legislators to express their hopes and concerns about the budget in this historically difficult year for the state and the country.

In addition to his position with Gannett, Gallagher is a regular panelist on the statewide public television show, "New York Week in Review." His many honors include the 2002 top award from the National Association of Capitol Reporters and Editors for wire service beat coverage of a state capitol.

Bartoletti oversees all legislation of interest to the League in the state legislature, lectures statewide on advocacy/issues and citizen

participation in government, does political commentary for *Channel 9 News* in the Capitol Region, and comments on good government issues to statewide newspapers.

The March 18th meeting is free and open to all. Following their remarks, Gallagher and Bartoletti will take questions from the audience.

The Poughkeepsie Journal is the media sponsor of the event. A member of the newspaper's editorial board will be present at the event.

Member News

Tom Kadgen has been appointed to the Ulster County Board of Ethics.

Members have been traveling over the winter: Lee Ridgway was away for seven weeks on a cruise; Emily Johnson went to Florida for a week; Jean and Jim McGarry went to Hawaii. John and Jacki Moriarty are off to Washington for the World Affairs Council, and Bill and Chris Henning are just back from Cancun. Renee Sachs' trip was cancelled because of her traveling companion's illness. I'm sure others have traveled and I didn't hear about it!

Other Programs of Interest

Concerned about New York's rivers, lakes and coasts? Learn more and speak up at one or both of these public forums.

Mon., 2/23, 7 - 9 pm, at North Junior High School, 301 Robinson Road (9W, just south of I-84) in Newburgh

In connection with the Hudson's Quadricentennial, Kit Kennedy, Special Deputy Attorney General for Environmental Protection, will tell you what AG Andrew Cuomo is doing to protect the Hudson River and hear what your concerns and priorities are.

For a poster about this event:
www.oag.state.ny.us/calendar/Hudson_River_Enviro_Forum2.pdf

Sat., 2/28, 2 - 4:40 pm at the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies Auditorium, Plant Science Bldg., 2801 Sharon Turnpike, Millbrook

Against a backdrop of record beach closings and a continual decline in commercial fishing, the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Council issued a report, "Our Waters, Our Communities, Our Future," calling for action to protect the state's coastal waters and coastal communities.

The report recommends a "ecosystem-based management" approach that will coordinate the efforts of various state agencies to address issues including land use, water quality, building capacity and research goals.

The Council wants public input on the report before submitting it to the Governor and Legislature later this year. Thus this meeting and others across the state.

For more info go to www.nyoglecc.org or contact Samantha Bartling at (518) 474-1844.

I/we wish to become members of the LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region through May 31, 2009

Name:

Currently Member(s)?:

Address:

Telephone: (day)

(eve)

Email:

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

Household Membership (\$75)

Additional gift to the LWV Education Fund (*tax deductible*;) for our use

(Please send a separate check which **MUST** be payable to NYSLWV Ed Fund)

\$

If you are upgrading to a Household Membership, please include the name and email address of new members

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

Will receive *Commentator* online____ or will read it 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)**

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