



The League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara

VOTER

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10 times per year. Items
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Lunch and Issues

Peter Galie will discuss the New York State Constitutional Convention

Friday, January 13, 2017, registration at 11:30 a.m.
Scotch 'n Sirloin Restaurant
3999 Maple Road, Amherst, 14226

Every 20 years, New Yorkers decide whether or not there should be a constitutional convention. Even though the vote is a year away, now is the time for us to study the issue and send our input to the State League, which will be deciding in March whether we will support, oppose, or remain neutral on this ballot proposal.

Peter J. Galie, professor emeritus and former chairman of the political science department at Canisius College, is one of the state's leading experts on the history of the New York State Constitution and the mechanics of how a constitutional convention works. He has authored, co-authored, or edited too many leading books and papers on the Constitution to list here, so we'll just mention that his latest such project, as editor of *New York's Broken Constitution*, is being released by SUNY Press this month.



Make reservations online at lwvbn.org or call the League office at 986-4898 by noon on Tuesday, January 10.

Luncheon cost is \$20. Pay at the door with cash or check to LWVBN. To attend the program only (no charge), call 986-4898. All guests, please make reservations by January 10.

Mission of the League of Women Voters:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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Presidents' Report and Board Actions



Giving thanks

The election is over. League members certainly have mixed reactions to the national, state and local results. Many of us have volunteered in efforts to register voters and share their positions through Vote411 and our Voters Guides that were distributed at more than 350 locations in Erie and Niagara Counties as well as candidate forums for local candidates. We made presentations to organizations in person and in televised interviews and distributed bookmarks at public libraries urging people use our Voters Guides and vote. The efforts of our League members and those throughout the nation were impressive. We will recognize those efforts and the other volunteer efforts of League members at our Holiday Party. We hope you plan to attend whether you were able to help us in our work or have been a supporter through your League membership.

We hope you'll attend the Holiday Party on December 3. If you have not made a reservation, please contact the League Office today to learn if it is still possible to make a reservation. Call 986-4898 and leave a message or send an email to lwvbn@lwvbn.org.

Our guest speaker, Mary Travers Murphy, is the executive director of the Family Justice Center of Erie County, a non-profit agency that provides free services for domestic violence victims and their children.

Holiday Party attendees who would like to help the clients of the Family Justice Center are encouraged to contribute personal-sized toiletries or gift cards to Wegmans or Tops (the latter are especially welcome, because they can also be used for gasoline).

November board business

The board endorsed the three legislative priorities recommended by the Issues Committee to submit to the state League 2017: Campaign Finance Reform, Ethics, and Renewable Energy Plans. After review of the suggestions of all Leagues in the state, the state League board will select the priorities that we'll discuss with our local members of the New York State Senate and Assembly this spring.

We expect to be able to use PayPal for payment for dues, donations to our League and events online early in 2017. As is usually the case, things that seem easy to do often are more complex than expected.

Announcement

We're pleased to announce that the League continues to be represented on the West Valley Citizen's Task Force. League member Ann Lazroe was accepted as a member this fall and attended her first task force meeting via conference call. She will report to us about the ongoing work of this advisory group. You can learn about their work at westvalleyctf.org. We are pleased that Ann has agreed to continue the League's 19-year involvement with the task force through Lee Lambert's long membership.

Judy Metzger & Terri Parks

Great Decisions

Issues the next president and State Department will face

Next year's Great Decisions series of discussions will be both remarkable and lively.

As of November 3, 2016, nine people have signed up for the Great Decisions briefing books: eight regular at \$25.00 and one large print (text only, no pictures) for \$15.00. Since we will not be meeting until Thursday, March 2, 2017, I will not be ordering Great Decisions 2017 until February 1 – so if you are interested in joining, you may contact me anytime before then. In the hopes you are intrigued by the eight topics, they are: The Future of Europe, Trade and Politics, Conflict in the South China Sea, Saudi Arabia in Transition, U.S. Foreign Policy and Petroleum, Latin America and Political Pendulum, Prospect for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Nuclear Security. I hope to hear from you.

Bernice Baeumler

Election Services Committee

BMHA nominations and elections

October was a busy one for this committee. We conducted two nominations meetings at A. D. Price and Kenfield-Langfield. Later in November we conducted elections at those two sites.

In preparation for these elections, this committee prepared more than 950 mailings to be sent to these two sites. This huge effort was made manageable due to the dedication of its members.

Whether conducting nominations and elections at various BMHA sites or preparing mailings, this committee functions well due to the dedication of its volunteers. My heartfelt thanks to Judy Capodicasa, Kathleen Macaluso, Judith Clarke, Janet Goodsell, Lee Tetkowski, Marlene Katzel, Sally Metzger, Nora Mikes, Sue Stievater, Mike Egan [very delicious cookies], Judy Weidemann, Ramona Gallagher, Marianne Poprosky, and Janet Massaro for your efforts during the last month.

Alan Dozoretz, Election Services Chair

LWVBN Online Discussion

Join the conversation!

Is there an article, book, TV program or web site you'd like to recommend? Did you go to a public hearing or event that sheds light on an issue that you want to share? Have you got strong opinions on recent news or current events? Tell other League members about it by subscribing to LWVBN's online discussion group, lwvbn-discuss.

You can sign up using the link at the bottom of the lwvbn.org members page or, if you have a Google account, go to the lwvbn-discuss website and ask to join (<http://groups.google.com/group/lwvbn-discuss>). You will receive an email invitation to which you must respond.

You may also send an email to Kris Allen, lwvbnweb@lwvbn.org, requesting to join.

Kristin Allen, Webmaster

Volunteer Coordinator

For those looking to take a more active role, and for those who already are

Ramona Gallagher and JoAnn Mecca volunteered as stringers for the AP wire service at the Board of Elections on primary day September 13, 2016. Janet Goodsell represented the LWVBN at a naturalization ceremony on September 14, 2016, at the Theodore Roosevelt site on Delaware Ave.

There were three naturalization ceremonies in October. Joyce Bol and Josette Cunningham were at the U.S. Courthouse on the October 6. Laura McDade and Jean Flowers represented the League at the Hamburg Middle School on October 13. On the October 27, Richard Hemann and JoAnn Mecca greeted new citizens at the U.S. Courthouse.

Our volunteers started the month of November with Janet Massaro giving a talk to the Westminster senior group. She spoke about the LWVBN and the upcoming election. The first naturalization ceremony of the month was attended by Janet Goodsell and Elisabeth Zausmer.

All of these volunteers step right up many times a year to fulfill our commitment to the community. Their work is very much appreciated by the League and (on a personal note) these folks make my job a pleasure!

We should be getting the 2017 naturalization ceremony schedule sometime within the next month. It will be sent out to our volunteers so that they can pick any dates of special interest to them. Members who have not had an opportunity to participate in our many volunteer projects are encouraged to join us! Most members find it very rewarding.

Judith Clarke, Volunteer Coordinator



Money in Politics Committee

December update

With shorter days and cold and snow likely in the months ahead, you might want to hunker down with a good winter book. Here are suggestions from the MIP Study's reading list and from MIP Committee members. We offer them for your enjoyment and enlightenment – and possibly a discussion get-together in the New Year.

Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress – and a Plan to Stop It by Lawrence Lessig was our choice from the LWVUS book list. Lessig argues that individuals of great wealth are destroying American democracy. A republic is a government whose power is held by the people. That power is lost when money influences lawmakers. Ferreting out quid pro quo corruption (bribery) is not the most important problem; rather it is the influence of the wealthy few that corrupts the trust of the people in their government. The solution: the people must take action to restore the founders' dictum that Congress be “dependent on the people alone.”

Corruption in America: From Benjamin Franklin's Snuff Box to Citizens United by Zephyr Teachout. From the Constitutional Convention in 1789 through the 1970s, Americans embraced a broad definition of political corruption as personal aggrandizement at public expense. Corruption was a temptation, but one to be prevented by clear legislative rules, not by court decisions. Teachout introduces examples of corruption cases and how anti-corruption laws were written, even though some cases proved to be unresolvable, confounding in their complexity or even (to us now) rather comical. Yet all were reform experiments debated by the body politic. Teachout argues the United States Supreme Court decisions -- from the 1970s to *Citizens United* and beyond -- were not only bad laws, they misunderstood the country's history and thereby diminished the ability of legislators to make those rules.

A Fighting Chance by Elizabeth Warren. Warren clearly explains how the Dodd-Frank Act came to be and its importance. Lobbyists' efforts were the largest ever brought to bear to kill the bill and especially the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. With the new administration's views, the continued existence of the Dodd-Frank Act is threatened. Even if the act is not abolished, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau may be. This means the greed of the banking and financial industry can again wreak havoc on consumers. Warren's book is readable, engrossing, and educating.

Dark Money by Janet Mayer is a remarkable and important piece of investigative journalism. Meticulously researched and footnoted, Mayer's book explains how the country's wealthiest individuals, led by Charles and David Koch, Richard Scaife and their other billionaire buddies, formed a tight-knit secret organization to finance the spread of their extreme libertarian views of no taxes and no regulations (while being found guilty of violating numerous environmental pollution and worker protection laws). At first the members used their vast wealth to finance conservative think tanks, and establish innocent-sounding foundations, but moved on to more profitable enterprises – generously endowing university chairs that would advance their philosophy, wielding threats and offering money to help write legislation, funding campaigns of elected officials, reaching down into state and local governments, including the judiciary.

Republic of Spin by David Greenberg is a fascinating look at how 20th century presidents have skillfully crafted their image to win public support for their political objectives. With a virtual army of personal advisors, speech writers, press agents, pollsters and journalists, and using the innovative tools and techniques of their times, Greenberg traverses the presidential landscape from Teddy Roosevelt's use of the “bully pulpit” to appeal directly to the public to FDR's mastery of the radio, Jack Kennedy's TV persona, with his boyish good looks, energy and accessibility, to Obama's Internet promise of “No Spin” — yes, the “Spin of No Spin.” Spin is both positive and negative and exists together with serious debate, political give and take, and truth telling. The challenge is to see through the emotional appeals and the overt manipulation, to uncover the political realities that lie beneath.

Members of the Money In Politics Committee

Education Committee

A visit to Gulen Charter School

When the State League specialist on financing education contacted our Education Committee about reported concerns of many Gulen Charter Schools, including one here in Buffalo, she encouraged us to look into it. We learned it is the Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School, located in the former YWCA on Franklin Street, and we organized a visit for October 27.

In preparation we read articles about this controversial large chain of 155 Gulen Schools in different states, said to be allied with the Turkish leader, Fethullah Gulen, who lives in Pennsylvania.

Mucahit Polat, the director of the school, spent most of that morning with our group of seven. He told us he is from Turkey, is a product of the ideas of Gulen, whom he described as a preacher and a teacher connected to government and to improvement of science education. Mr. Polat left Turkey during a severe economic recession, received a Ph.D. in math in New Jersey, and taught in New Jersey before coming to Buffalo. He was very cordial and answered our many questions. He claimed there is no connection now of the school with Gulen.

Initiated by two Ph.D. people from Turkey, studying at the time at the University of Buffalo, this school was chartered by the Board of Regents, and opened in 2004 as a college prep high school for grades 7-12, with emphasis on math and science. This year they added grade 5, and are looking for a second building. After serving as a “numbers person” (statistical analyst) for the school, Mr. Polat was named director in 2011. He said that prior to his arrival there had been severe performance and discipline problems.

We were led on a tour of the three floors. This school is different in that teachers get an added stipend for the extension of the school day until 4:30-5:00 p.m., and there are remediation classes for groups on Saturday. They start school three weeks earlier than public schools in Buffalo.

There cannot be any criteria for admission. The student population of 460 is mainly from downtown Buffalo. There is a waiting list, and a lottery is used. Classes have 15-18 students. None of the teachers are from Turkey. They do teach the Turkish language. Population is 80% African American, 8% Asian from Nepal and Bhutan, very few Hispanic, very few Caucasian, 85% poverty, 13% English language learners, refugees and immigrants. There are 45-50 special needs children with learning disabilities, hearing and speech problems, who have three teachers, and they work with the Buffalo Public Schools. 20% of the teachers stay more than five years.

Mr. Polat said the present board of directors includes University of Buffalo and Buffalo State College professors. Test results are reported favorably and a 100% graduation rate is claimed. Mr. Polat seemed sincere, dedicated and open to sharing his experiences.

Our committee would welcome anyone interested in working with us!

Lee Tetkowsky, Education Committee Co-Chair

Save the Date

The Waterfront Committee will present an update on the Outer Harbor at Scotch & Sirloin on March 23, 2017, as part of the LWVBN Lunch & Issues series. The program will feature Nicole Matteson of Our Outer Harbor on the public policy side and, on the ecology side, Margaret Wooster, an author and teacher who is well known as an authority on water and the ecology of our area.

Gladys Gifford, Waterfront Committee Chair

DC Voting Rights

Demanding full voting rights for all Americans ... even those in the nation's capital

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.

-- Statement of Position on Citizen's Right to Vote, as announced by National Board, March 1982

This was the first presidential election in 50 years without a functioning Voting Rights Act. Puerto Rico and other territories can vote in presidential primaries, but not in general elections. American Samoans are considered U.S. nationals, but not citizens -- they can't vote even if they move to one of the 50 states. For more than 200 years, residents of Washington, D.C., have had no voice (or only a very limited one) in their local government, and they were not even able to vote for president until 1961 (they are now entitled to three electoral votes). Their sole representation in Congress is a single "delegate" (who has no vote) to the House of Representatives.

Did you ever imagine that, as the League approaches our centennial, we would be a country that still fails to guarantee basic voting rights to all its citizens?

On November 8, the citizens of the District of Columbia overwhelmingly passed an advisory referendum supporting statehood for D.C. They and the League of Women Voters Educational Fund invite all League members to learn more about their fight and how you can help by signing up for their webinar, "Fix the Hole in Our Democracy," to take place at 7 p.m. EST on December 8. Register online at:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/2175019096115801091>.

For questions or assistance on signing up for the webinar, contact Betsy Lawson at blawson@lww.org.

Adapted from the LWVUS November 10, 2016, League Update

Election 2016

A banner year for VOTE411.org

The numbers are in, and LWVEF is thrilled to announce that this was the biggest year for VOTE411.org in its 10-year history! Thanks in large part to the many Leagues from 32 states that participated by creating online voters' guides on the site this year, we saw unprecedented traffic and visibility, including: more than four million users nationwide (more than doubling our traffic from 2012), nearly 25 million page views, and a truly unparalleled amount of candidate information -- ensuring every single voter in America could come to the site to find localized information about who was on their ballot. VOTE411 was featured multiple times by The New York Times, ran in a Spanish-language PSA on TV Azteca for months leading up to Election Day, reaching up to 39 million Hispanic individuals, and was successfully placed in hundreds of local media stories, thanks to the hard work of participating Leagues.

Reprinted from the LWVUS November 10, 2016, League Update

LEAGUE-SPONSORED EVENT

We hope you'll consider attending this program -- it should be interesting and informative.

The League is happy to be one of the co-sponsors.

BELVA LOCKWOOD: TRAILBLAZER FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Presented by Maryann Saccomando-Freedman, Esq.



Wednesday, December 7, 2016, 6:00 p.m.
The Buffalo History Museum
One Museum Court, Buffalo NY

Presented by
The Association for a Buffalo Presidential Center
and The Buffalo History Museum

Free and open to the public

Post-Election Reflections on Politics



This election marked the first time in history that the New York primary mattered.

Bob McCarthy, political reporter for The Buffalo News, provided his own “Reflections on Politics 2016” on November 17 at the Harlem Road Community Center auditorium for an attentive group of 50 people who were delighted to have him answer a wide variety of questions.

McCarthy has covered all major elections in New York State and Western New York since 1992, including 14 national conventions. He was named by Brill’s Content magazine as one of New York’s 10 most influential political

journalists, and is often a panelist for local and statewide debates. Bob began by giving us a backdrop to the presidential election, quickly charting all the scandals in New York State, the impact of the Great Recession, and the presidential primaries that rarely matter in New York. He said Trump was close to winning Erie County despite there being 135,000 more Democrats in the county (Nixon was the last Republican to accomplish that feat). Bob jokingly described Cheektowaga as a barometer of 90,000 people: “As Cheektowaga goes, so goes the nation!”

Some have described this election as “the impossible happened” against all odds and all expectations. Trump’s campaign used free media in unconventional ways. Hillary Clinton was hampered by long-term baggage. The amazing campaign left the Republican and Democratic parties wondering where they are going. Bob predicted that we’re in for a crazy ride in the next few months and years, with the likelihood that President Obama’s executive orders will be overturned and legislation introduced or rescinded on issues such as clean air, trade, energy and immigration. The popular vote suggests that Trump does not have a mandate and more than 40 percent of the eligible voters never exercised their right to vote.

It’s clear that the man who vowed to make America great again now faces great challenges.

Marian Deutschman, Issues & Action Chair

Membership Committee

Welcome to our new members

Five new members have joined since the last edition of the Voter. They are: Susan Kims of West Seneca, Alice Roth of Tonawanda, Sarah Handley-Cousins of Williamsville, Melissa Weiksnar of Buffalo, and Barbara Brooks of Holland. We wish you all a hearty welcome and want to let you know that you have great timing -- you are just in time to attend the annual Holiday Party. If you can make it, we are very much looking forward to meeting you there!



OF BUFFALO/NIAGARA
1272 Delaware Ave, Buffalo, NY 14209-2401



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



December & early January Meetings & Events

Visit lwvbn.org for the latest event details

Saturday, 12/3, 11:30 a.m.

LWVBN Holiday Party

Rizotto Ristorante, 930 Maple Road

Williamsville, N. Y. 14221

Thurs., 12/8 7:00 p.m.

**LWVDC “Fix the Hole in Our Democracy”
webinar**

Tues., 1/3, 4:00 p.m.

Issues Committee, Harlem Rd. Community Center

Mon., 1/9, 4:00 p.m.

Board Meeting at the League office

Wed., 1/11, 1:30 p.m.

Local Government Committee at the League office

Be sure to check your email and our website for other events as they are scheduled!

League meetings are open to all! Come and bring a friend to learn what we’re doing.

Reminder

The deadline for the Winter Voter is Monday, 1/2/2017. Please send committee reports, event write-ups, photos, meeting notices, and other submissions to our copy editor, Nora Mikes, by email to nora_mikes@yahoo.com (675-5025).