



The League of Women Voters
of Buffalo/Niagara

VOTER

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April 2014

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The **VOTER** is published
10 times per year. Items for
the May issue are due
Friday, April 4

The Local Government Committee of the League of Women
Voters of Buffalo Niagara presents
**Erie County: Can we afford NOT to raise county
property taxes?**



Chef's Restaurant 291 Seneca St., Buffalo, NY 14204
Tuesday, May 6, 2014 - Noon-2 p.m.

Panel discussion:

Panel members confirmed at this time are:

Scott Bylewski, *Chair of the Erie County Citizens Budget Review Commission*

Ken Vetter, *Chair of the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority*

Joseph Lorigo, *Majority Leader, Erie County Legislature*

Hot Buffet Lunch \$20 members, \$25 guests

*Call to reserve seat for program only, to begin at 12:30 p.m. (no charge but goodwill
donations accepted.)*

**Send checks payable to LWVBN to LWVBN, 1272 Delaware Ave., Buffalo, NY
14209.**

Reservation deadline April 29. For further information call LWVBN office
884-3550.

Free parking but carpooling is suggested.

League of Women Voter's Mission:

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.

CONTENTS

President's Report	2	Education	4
Great Decisions	2	Program Planning	5
Term Limits/Ballot Access	3		

President's Report

For many years, our League has conducted elections for the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA). In the absence of a current contract with BMHA, League volunteers under the leadership of League Election Chair, Alan Dozoretz, are conducting Resident Council elections as directed by the BMHA. An issue related to the most recent election for the officers of the Marine Drive Residents Council was reported in the Buffalo News in two articles on March 5 and 6. The League's efforts in a most contentious election were totally consistent with the directions from BMHA. At all times, the league volunteers conducted themselves in a professional and positive manner. The issues addressed in the Buffalo News relate mainly to disagreements between the Marine Drive Residents Association and BMHA. The League was caught in the middle of their differences.

We owe Alan Dozoretz, Judy Clarke and these volunteers who worked with him great appreciation for their work at the March 6 election: Mike Egan, Ramona Gallagher, Marlene Katzel, JoAnn Mecca and Helen Weintraub.

You should have received your copy of the *2014 They Represent You* by now. This helpful reference is one benefit of League membership. We have also sent the brochures to all public libraries, city and town halls in Erie and Niagara counties for distribution. It is also available at www.lwvbn.org. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to use the online version.

Our legislative priorities this year include the entire ten point Women's Equality Agenda, Revising the Paper Ballot to Maximize Usability, Early Voting in New York, the Moratorium on Shale Gas Extracting and Labeling Hazardous Waste. Our Action Chair, Christine Vogel, is making arrangements for teams of three League members to visit their assembly member and state senator in April or early May. **Please volunteer to be one of the team members.** We have the detailed talking points from the NYS League. It is most important that we take this opportunity to advocate on behalf of the League.

In an invitation by e-mail, Christine noted: Please email me if you are interested and I will forward you information about the League's 2014 agenda and then I will contact you as to your availability. This is not only fun, but meeting with our elected officials and questioning them on their positions is such a huge part of the democratic process. Her e-mail address is events@lwvbn.org. You may also call the League office.

April 8th marks Equal Pay Day, the day in 2014 when the average woman's earnings will catch up to what the average man earned in 2013. Women of color face an even larger discrepancy. It is truly shocking that more than 50 years have passed since the 1963 passage of the Equal Pay Act without achieving its goal.

We can still accept two delegates to represent LWVBN at the League of Women Voters national convention in Dallas, Texas on June 6-10. The first plenary session is at 1 p.m. on June 7. The convention ends at noon June 10. Please contact me by phone or email if you would like to join Ramona Gallagher and me at this year's convention.

Terri Parks

Great Decisions

Fran Holmes has agreed to kick off our 2014 Great Decisions discussions by leading the first one on Thursday, April 3 from 10 AM - noon at the League office at 1272 Delaware. The topic is DEFENSE TECHNOLOGY: From robotic planes to cyberweapons to 3D printing and human enhancement, new 'game-changing' technologies are moving from science fiction to battlefield reality - all during an age of fiscal austerity. However, in wrestling with the new we can actually learn a great deal from the past. Our forebears went through similar challenges with such once fanciful but now normal concepts as airplanes, submarines, and tanks. What are the 'killer applications' of the 21st century battlefield, and in turn, what are the issues that the U.S. must navigate in adapting to them? Heady questions we'll attempt to answer.

Bernice Baeumler

Term Limits/Ballot Access - What Do You Think?

Our committee members have been busy this past month reviewing the recent research on term limits. Arguments for and against term limits were vigorously debated by states in the 1980's and 1990's, leading a number of states to adopt term limits at that time. Since then numerous studies have been undertaken to assess the effects of these term limit reforms. In this issue we have summarized the basic arguments for and against term limits for state legislatures.

Arguments FOR term limits:

- Term limits fulfill the promise of a citizen legislature by allowing more people to serve as elected officials. It helps ensure that legislatures will not be dominated by career politicians.
- Term limited legislators will pay more attention to their constituents and spend less time seeking campaign contributions and responding to special interests.
- Term limits will remove long time incumbents (dead wood, corrupt officials). It will result in a more diverse legislature in terms of race, ideology, age, religion, professional background and socioeconomic status.
- The power of lobbyists and other interest groups will be weakened because they will not be able to form long-term relationships with legislators.
- Most states have term limits for governor and this has worked well. Legislators should be treated in the same manner.
- Term limits will generate more interest and thus greater voter turnout in state elections.

Arguments AGAINST term limits:

- Term limits interfere with the fundamental right of voters in a representative democracy to elect their representatives. "We already have term limits – they are elections."
- Removing experienced and knowledgeable legislators weakens the legislative branch of government. A weak legislature upsets the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches of government.
- Term limited legislators will seek short term solutions to problems rather than thinking of long term consequences.
- Term limited legislators will not have time to gain institutional knowledge and policy expertise and will turn to lobbyists and bureaucrats for information about issues and how to handle them. Since these groups are not elected, they are not answerable to voters.

Our research has led us to some surprising, unexpected and thought provoking conclusions. We will discuss these outcomes in the next VOTER. But you need not wait until then. We are eager to hear from you, our members on this important League consensus issue. Have you questions or comments about term limits? Is there an issue that you would like the committee to address? Let us know by contacting us at lwvbn@lwvbn.org.

Education Committee Forum on Common Core

If you missed attending the rescheduled Education Committee program on March 18 at the Unitarian Universalist Church you missed an impassioned community forum to help us Learn More about Common Core. The controversial common core learning standards were developed by the Council for Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. It is a state-led effort that established a single set of educational standards for K-12 with emphasis on English and mathematics. The standards have been adopted by 45 states. In doing so, these states have increased their eligibility for Race to the Top funds.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Mark Garrison, a nationally recognized education policy analyst. He raised many questions about who sets the common core standards, the way they work, and whose interests they serve. Do they lower the costs of education? Do they privatize decision-making? Do they lower the level of education? Are we moving from public to private control? Are students viewed as products?

The panelists followed his presentation, beginning with Robert Christmann, former school superintendent and currently executive director of the WNY Educational Services Council. He has already discerned significant value in common core while observing some of the best teaching he has ever seen. He believes old standards are inadequate and the need to address the quality of public education is urgent.

Dr. Mira Tetkowsky Berkley, associate professor and chair of the department of curriculum and instruction at SUNY Fredonia, raised the question of how can common core standards create eager learners when there is such a wide range of variability in young children. She stated that young children learn best through a variety of hands-on experiences and activities and also brought many examples of published modules that might be used by teachers.

Molly Dana, full-time mother and public education advocate who taught for five years, regrets the over-emphasis on data and expressed concern about the development of the whole child and the stress that she has observed among children related to the high stakes testing.

Danilo Lawvere, an ESL teacher with three children, focused on visuals of demonstrations and the scope of resistance to the common core standards throughout the country.

The audience submitted written questions largely dealing with the perceived punishing effects of testing that yields no data to assist children to improve, as well as poor preparation and implementation of common core standards and its effect on teachers, parents and children. Several teachers in the audience spoke with great frustration about the materials they must use in their Buffalo schools and the inflexibility of city administrators.

While we left with no concrete examples of common core standards and whether they are working or not working to improve education, we certainly have a greater understanding of the controversies related to the standards, how their implementation has differed from one school district to another, and the powerful effect they have on children, parents and teachers.

Marian Deutschman, Education Committee

League Co-sponsors Income Inequality Talks & Film with Buffalo State College

On Thursday, April 24, at 5 PM at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center, 1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, 14222, University of Massachusetts professor Dr. Robert Pollin will speak on solutions to income inequality to be followed by a viewing of *Inequality for All*, a new film with former US Labor Secretary Robert Reich that describes trends in recent economic history of the United States. The event will be followed with time for Q&A. The following day, Friday, April 25, from noon to 1:30 PM, Dr. Pollin will speak on the topic of the federal debt and deficit, at Buffalo State College, Bulger Center, Rm South 2.

YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND “WELCOME SPRING!” MEMBERSHIP SOCIAL
Wednesday April 30th from 5-7 PM at the League Office, 1272 Delaware Ave.
 (Parking and entrance in rear of building)

New and prospective members are invited. Seasoned leaguers too. Enjoy a light supper and get acquainted with League members, our office and office manager and board members. RSVP by April 24th. Email events@lwvbn.org with your name and the name(s) of your guest(s). We look forward to hearing from you!

Membership Committee

PROGRAM PLANNING—YOUR IDEAS NEEDED

Members are invited to submit ideas for the 2014–2015 League of Women Voters Local Program Focus at the Issues and Action Committee meeting on April 1. The committee meets at 4:30 p.m. in the Harlem Road Community Center (4255 Harlem Road, Amherst, NY 14226). The 2013-2014 Local Program Focus is available on our website: www.lwvbn.org. The proposed Local Program will be presented to the board and then to the membership at our Annual Meeting on June 14, 2014. We welcome your participation.

Janet Goodsell, Issues and Action Committee Chair

Equal Pay Day Advocacy Opportunity for all League Members

The League is a member of the New York State Pay Equity Coalition (NY\$PEC), which has been working for years to level the economic playing field for women and families. Now, working with the Women’s Equality Coalition made up of over 850 organizations across New York, we are hoping to make major progress on passing the Women’s Equality Act legislation as well as the pay equity bills that the New York State Assembly has championed and will be passing again on Equal Pay Day, April 8th.

Equal pay for comparable work benefits everyone. Women’s wage parity would have a positive impact the local economy and result in:

- Less difficulty making ends meet at the end of each month
- Less stress on local safety net resources now devoted to low-income families
- A more stable work force with lower turnover rates
- Easier retirement planning with more time to spend on leisure activities
- On average, each woman who is fully paid has about \$8,200 more to spend annually on housing, consumer products, medications, and to put toward retirement.

If you have not already done so, please contact your local newspaper to remind them about this issue. We seek to publicize Equal Pay Day and the disservice it is to everyone that women’s earnings continue to lag behind those of men.

Terri Parks

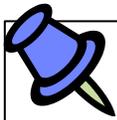


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April Meetings

Tues., 4/1, 4:30 p.m.

Issues Committee, Harlem Rd.
Community Center

Thurs., 4/3, 10 a.m.

Great Decisions, League Office

Mon., 4/7, 4 p.m.

Board Meeting, League Office

Wed., 4/9, 1:15 p.m.

Local Government Committee
League Office

Thurs., 4/10, 9:30 a.m.

Natural Resources, East Aurora

Wed., 4/16, 1:00 p.m.

Term Limits/Ballot Access Committee
League Office

Thurs., 4/17, 1:30 p.m.

Charter Schools/Education Committee
League Office

Mon., 4/28, 1:30 p.m.

Social Economic Justice, League Office

Additional Dates to Remember

Tues., 4/8 - Equal Pay Day

Thurs., 4/24, 6 p.m. - Income Inequality Event
Burchfield Penney

Wed., 4/30, 5-7 p.m. - Membership Social

Copy for May Voter due 4/4/2014