



The League of Women Voters
of Buffalo/Niagara

VOTER

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***Pies & Pie Charts,
Brunch & Budgets!***



Saturday, May 16, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
Harlem Road Community Center
4255 Harlem Road, Amherst, NY 14226

From smooth roads to social services, from libraries to parks,
the Erie County budget affects our quality of life every single day.
Where does the money come from? How does it get allocated?

Even more important, whose priorities does the budget reflect?

How well does it serve our community?

How can we influence the budget process?

How can we make **our priorities and values** count?

Come and join us! You'll not only learn the answers
to these and other crucial questions,
you'll enjoy delicious pies and quiches, too!

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.

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President's Message

The 2015 Nominating Committee, chaired by Judy Weidemann, presented a slate of officers at the April board meeting. Many thanks to Judy, Margaret Brunson, Ramona Gallagher, Kathleen McCarthy, Lynda Stephens, Dorothy Tao and Lyle Toohey for your outstanding work to present a complete slate of able leaders for LWVBN. Once again the nominating committee has selected a good mix of people who will continue on the board and those who will be new members. Many thanks for your thoughtful and able work on behalf of LWVBN.

Thanks also to the budget committee for its fine work to craft a budget that proposes judicious use of League funds for League program events this coming year. We were fortunate to receive a large bequest last year that adds to our reserves. It's important that we make wise use of those reserves to insure the financial health of this League. While we have new members each year, we have a core of members who are no longer active and some of them decline to renew each year. Many of them continue to be staunch supporters of the League and we are most grateful that they are able to do so. Thank you, Amy Witryol, our able budget committee chair, Margaret Brunson, Rebecca Costanzo, Gladys Gifford and Lori Robinson.

Judith Clarke, our Volunteer Coordinator, worked especially hard to enhance the League presence at Naturalization Ceremonies and actually register new voters after the ceremony. In so doing, she developed closer ties with the Erie County Board of Elections, Federal Court and Erie County Clerk. The success of this effort was due mainly to her perseverance.

Rebecca Costanzo, Marian Deutschman, Gladys Gifford, Ramona Gallagher, Terri Parks and Lori Robinson will represent LWVBN at the 2015 State League Convention the first weekend in June. Once again, our League will be represented by a full delegation.

The drawing for the Big League Raffle will be held at this year's state convention. You should have received your raffle tickets in the mail. Last year, our League received its portion of ticket sales and a bonus because the winning ticket came from LWVBN. The Big League Raffle is an enjoyable way to support the work of the Education Foundation and our League. The tickets you sell need to be received at the state office by Friday, May 29, 2016. **Contact the League office if you need more tickets.**

One important use of Education Foundation funds is the annual Students Inside Albany conference. LWVBN will be well represented this year by Buffalo City Honors School junior, Kate Ryan. Kate will attend our Annual Meeting and make remarks about her experience.

The League of Women Voters of New York State has received an Organ Donation Partnership grant to encourage organ donation when people register to vote through our efforts. We encourage all League members who volunteer for our voter registration efforts to join us at a Regional Training Workshop in Rochester on Saturday, May 9 from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Lunch will be provided. The afternoon session will give members an opportunity to discuss our concerns with the members from the other Leagues that attend. **Please call our League office by May 6 to register and so we can arrange car pools for the drive to Rochester.**

- Terri Parks

Great Decisions

Marie Hanrahan will lead our Great Decisions 2015 discussion to take place Thursday, May 7 from 10 a.m. to Noon at 1272 Delaware Avenue. The topic is RUSSIA AND THE NEAR ABROAD. "As calls for closer ties with the European Union failed to be met, Ukrainians took to the streets in November 2013. As the movement later known as the Euromaidan, or 'Euro Square,' pulled western Ukraine closer to its European neighbors, another powerful force threatened to tear away the country's eastern half: Russia. Putin's pushback against European expansionism has the West wondering: If Putin's Russia isn't afraid to take an aggressive stance against Europeanization in Ukraine, what does that mean for the rest of Russia's neighbors?" This is a timely topic. I hope you will participate.

-Bernice Baeumler

Money in Politics :



Save this Page!

The League's Money in Politics Study Has Begun!

We will be **highlighting information each month in the Voter using the *Money in Politics Study Guide*, various other resource materials and readings.** (See the April Voter for an introduction to this exciting and necessary new League study.) The study guide will help us understand how campaign finance in the United States has evolved into the dysfunctional system we have today as well as the many remedies that have been proposed. League remains committed to fighting for effective campaign finance reforms at all levels of government. *However, we must go beyond our past and current work if we are to arrive at solutions we want to pursue today*

We start with an overview of the issue, with essential questions about campaign communications that the courts, legislatures and reformers have wrestled with for more than a century.

Political campaigns are about communications. The goal of political campaigning is to convince voters to be either for or against a candidate or issue. And communications require money.

- How should these communications be regulated? We acknowledge that the right to free speech has its limits (don't yell fire in a crowded theater). Should there be limits on the rights to free speech in the political arena? The Supreme Court says that the expenditure of money is a form of speech that cannot be abridged. Others argue that money merely *amplifies* the volume of speech and can be limited by law.
- Are other rights being ignored when the courts privilege First Amendment rights over all others? For example, is the right of citizens to a government uncorrupted by their representatives' dependence on the wealth of a few, or the right to participate fully in the political process, or the right of candidates and ideas to compete equitably in the electoral "marketplace," to be ignored because these rights are not clearly state in the Constitution? Some argue that the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment against discrimination must also be applied.
- The Supreme Court has narrowly defined the definition of corruption to mean *quid pro quo* corruption - or bribery. Others argue that when the citizens' right to a representative government is threatened, that too is corruption.
- Who has a right to communicate their opinions? Candidates and voters, of course, but how about others who do not participate directly in election – for example "associations of citizens"-- collective entities such as corporations, unions, organizations?
- How much are voters entitled to know about whom exactly is "speaking" to them?

The Brennan Center's 2010 Conference on Money, Politics and the Constitution asked these questions:

1. Does the First Amendment limit reform of money in politics? Can reform enhance First Amendment values?
2. Do voters have First Amendment interests at stake in the financing of political campaigns?
3. Should we look beyond the First Amendment to other constitutional principles?

We hope these questions will challenge you to read more but - better still, and in the best League tradition - to encourage you to participate in the Study Committee.

- Janet Massaro, Chair, Money in Politics Study Committee

Living Wage: LWVBN to hold Concurrence Vote at Annual Meeting

Please look inside your June 2015 Annual Meeting materials. You will find the Living Wage Position proposed for a concurrence vote at the June LWVBN Annual Meeting. In January 2015, after months of committee review, the Social Economic Justice Education Committee received LWVBN board approval to promote a concurrence vote at the LWVBN Annual Meeting. A two-thirds majority of members in attendance is required for concurrence. The basis for concurrence is the League of Women Voters of Kansas living wage study, along with committee findings on living wage issues and importance.

The term “living wage” means a wage or salary high enough that full time workers do not have to rely on government subsidies to support themselves and their families. Full time at 40 hours per week is 2,080 hours per year, a frequently used standard. A living wage may be adopted with legislation by governments or it may be adopted by an employer absent controlling laws. Living wages do not enable a middle class life style but they can provide self-sufficiency.

Contrast “living wage” with “minimum wage.” A minimum wage is adopted through legislation of governments including federal and state. In modern times minimum wages almost never enable workers to be self-supporting. New York State’s 2015 minimum wage is \$8.75/hour. Efforts failed to increase our state’s minimum wage during the recently completed budget process.

How is a living wage calculated? One source of regional data is the MIT Calculator prepared by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and available online. Other researchers have similar living wage tools. MIT’s tool is designed to provide a minimum estimate of the cost of living for low wage families, including food, housing, health care, transportation, childcare, etc. A typical family of four (two working adults, two children) needs to work at more than 3 full-time minimum-wage jobs (a 68-hour work week per working adult) to earn a living wage.

The MIT calculator shows living wage rates for various family sizes including family of one. Employers set wage levels regardless of family sizes, so living wage rates often use median family size as a living wage target. A living wage will be higher than most minimum wage rates. Until a family or individual can be self-supporting through full time work, government programs such as food stamps and childcare subsidies may be needed.

- Lynda Stephens, Chair, LWVBN Social Economic Justice Education Committee.

Everybody’s Waterfront: Upcoming Outer Harbor Events

Whose Outer Harbor? Thursday, April 30, 7:00 p.m., Burchfield Penney Art Center, 1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, 14222

Film by Robert Reich “With Inequality for All” and discussion of environmental justice issues on the Outer Harbor. Sponsored by Buffalo State Center for Economic and Policy Studies and Burchfield Penney Arts Center.

Everybody’s Waterfront: The Benefits of Parks and Open Space, Wednesday, May 6, 6:00 p.m. Burchfield Penney Art Center, 1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, 14222

Peter Harnik, Trust for Public Land, will discuss the economic, health, environmental, cultural and social benefits of parks and open space. Sponsored by 21st Century Park on the Outer Harbor.

SkyRide Buffalo, Saturday May 30, Outer Harbor.

The annual “Skyride Buffalo,” sponsored by GoBike, is a fundraising bicycle tour of historic locations, a scenic tour over the Skyway, and highlights the past, present and future of bicycling in Buffalo. Ride followed by a celebration at the Outer Harbor. For more information: www.skyridebuffalo.org.

- Gladys Gifford, Chair, Waterfront/Transportation Committee

League Volunteerism

Dorothy Tao and Lynne Vallone spoke at the Lancaster Women's Civic Group in March. Their talk will be part of a PowerPoint presentation that can be used by other League speakers.

February naturalization ceremonies were attended by Agnes Annis, Judy Weidemann and Janet Goodsell.

Judy Casassa, Joann Mecca, Kathleen Macaluso, Marie Hanrahan and Janet Goodsell represented the LWVBN at naturalization ceremonies in March. Our volunteers were busy in early April as well. Janet Goodsell and Sandra O'Hara attended the ceremony at the U.S. Courthouse on April 2nd.

Judy Huber and Joann Mecca monitored the lottery drawing at Enterprise Charter School and Lee Tetkowsky with Janet Goodsell monitored the lottery at Oracle Charter School.

-Judith Clarke, LWVBN Volunteer Coordinator

The following League Members volunteered to distribute the 2015 They Represent You brochures to city, town and village clerk offices: Lynne Vallone, Pat Costanzo, Rebecca Costanzo, Janet Goodsell, Dorothy Westhafer, Mary Egan, Ramona Gallagher, Margaret Brunson, Laura McDade, Sarah Metzger, Judy Metzger, Marian Deutschman, Judy Capodicasa, Judy Weidemann and Ann Converso. Thank you all!

-MaryAnn Turkla, League Office Manager

Naturalization Ceremony Procedure Changes

The LWVBN has been able to make some changes in the procedures our volunteers follow during the naturalization ceremonies that should result in increased voter registration.

In collaboration with the Honorable Hugh Scott, County Clerk Christopher Jacobs, and Board of Elections Commissioner Leonard Lenihan we were able to expand our efforts to register new citizens.

Giuseppe Ippolito, Courtroom Deputy Clerk for the Honorable Hugh Scott; Michael Cecchini, Deputy County Clerk; and Joel Little from the Board of Elections worked with the LWVBN to provide space for our volunteers to aid new citizens in filling out registration forms. In addition the forms will be picked up at all the sites except the U.S. Little Rock site and delivered to the Board of Elections where they will be counted so the League will be able to determine how effective our work has been.

The collaboration was aided by input from League members Joyce Bol, Terri Parks, and Dorothy Tao, as well as Eva Hassett from the International Institute.

The response of our local government agencies in this effort was very gratifying.

-Judith Clarke, LWVBN Volunteer Coordinator

Important - Date Change

Event Date Change:

The May 6 Membership Meeting ("It Started With the Vote!") has been Rescheduled. It will become program at the July Picnic. Details will be published in the June Voter.

Important Announcement

All LWVB/N members are invited to participate in the discussion and decision related to the following update in the League Position related to the selection of New York State Constitutional Convention delegates at the May meeting of our board of directors, Monday, May 11, 2015 at the League Office at 4:00 p.m. The League is asked to either support the change or retain the current position wording as noted below. The discussion and decision for this Update will be the first item of business of the day. You do not need to stay for the remainder of the board meeting. Please call the League office 884-3550 by 3:00 p.m. that day if you plan to attend.

Materials for Constitutional Convention Update

Purpose: The purpose of this update is to determine whether there is member agreement on updating the Delegate Selection portion of the League 1993 Constitutional Convention position.

- To make it more flexible and adaptable for the future (bringing it more in line with most League positions), and
- To clarify how the board should consider any reforms or lack thereof to the delegate selection process as part of the decision on whether or not to support the proposal for a constitutional convention when it comes up again for a vote in 2017.

This is a limited update, not a study, and we are not asking local leagues to reconsider any substantive aspect of the current position on the delegate selection process. Because of this, we are not asking local leagues to answer questions but instead to approve an updated statement. This update is not intended to consider whether or not the League will support or oppose the proposal for a constitutional convention that will be on the ballot in 2017. The state board will decide that question in light of current policy concerns and the entire League position.

Background: The New York State constitution can only be changed by amendments approved by two consecutively elected state Legislatures, or through a constitutional convention convened by a specific process described in Article XIX of the constitution. That Article provides that every 20 years the public has a chance to vote on the question of whether to hold a constitutional convention -- "Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend the same?". In addition, the Legislature can place the question on the ballot at any time. There are three public votes involved in the constitutional convention process.

- Whether to hold the convention,
- The election of delegates, and
- Approval of any amendments to the constitution.

The last time the proposal for a constitutional convention was on the statewide ballot was 1997 and it was voted down. The League was one of the main groups opposing the 1997 proposal under the 1993 Constitutional Convention position. See pages 70-74 in Impact on Issues or go to: <http://www.lwvny.org/advocacy/impact/issues/government/ConstitutionalConvention.pdf>

Delegate Selection Process: The delegate selection process is governed by both the state constitution and by state election law. The constitution provides that for each Senate district (currently 63) there are three convention delegates, for a total of 189. There are also 15 delegates elected on a statewide basis. The election of delegates is done at the next general election following voter approval of a constitutional convention by referendum. Any change to this provision electing the majority of delegates by senate district would have to be done by constitutional amendment. Any constitutional change to the delegate selection process would have to be on the ballot at the same time as the proposal for the convention itself, i.e. 2017, because the change would have to be approved by the state legislature elected in 2016 (first year serving would be 2017). However, a number of other changes to the method by which delegates are elected, access to the ballot, public financing, etc. could be done by statute between now and November 2017.

The last constitutional convention held in New York was in 1967 and the public rejected the constitution it produced at the polls. The 1967 convention was the result of legislative initiative (as opposed to the vote every 20 years) and the convention leadership was the legislative leadership.

Significant criticism of the 1967 convention process as “closed” and concerns expressed prior to the 1967 vote over the delegate selection process, resulted in an early focus on delegate selection by the *Temporary Commission on Constitutional Revision* appointed prior to the 1997 vote by Governor Mario Cuomo. Shirley Eberly, President of the LWNYS, was a member. *Attached is an excerpt from a sourcebook on DECISION 1997 published by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute on Government. This book is considered the most comprehensive source of information on the constitutional convention process. The excerpt includes the Delegate portion section of the Commission report and provides details on both sides of several issues related to the delegate selection process.

Given that reform of the delegate selection process is entirely in the hands of the state Legislature, some recent commentators have noted that requiring the Legislature to pass specific delegate selection reforms as a prerequisite to calling for a constitutional convention gives the Legislature a means of blocking the only process by which citizens can directly change the constitution.

This concern is the main rationale for consideration of an updated position. Consensus to approve the updated position will make it clear that the state board should consider the achievement of delegate selection reforms described in the position as factors in deciding whether or not to support the proposal for a constitutional convention, as opposed to a necessary prerequisite for such support.

Past League Action : A brief study of the New York constitutional convention process was undertaken in 1992 and the board adopted a position in 1993. (See Impact on Issues: <http://www.lwny.org/advocacy/impact/issues/government/ConstitutionalConvention.pdf> According to the background in *Impact on Issues*, “. . . in December 1996, the LWNYS board of directors voted unanimously to oppose the November 1997 ballot question regarding the convening of a constitutional convention in 1999. The board’s decision was based on the state legislature’s failure to reform the delegate selection process and concern that valued provisions of the constitution might therefore be jeopardized.” The 1996 board treated changes to the delegate selection process as factors to be considered in the decision whether or not to support a convention. They also clearly intended public financing as part of the suggested reforms but that did not get in the actual position.

The position’s current paragraph on **Convention Delegates** is as follows:

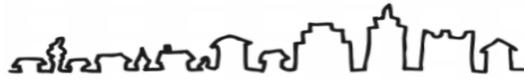
A delegate body of workable size should be elected by a fair, nonpartisan process. In accord with League principles, delegates should reflect our society with representation of women, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic minorities. The candidates’ positions on issues and convention goals should be widely publicized to enable voters to cast informed votes at their election. Present office holders should not be eligible to serve as delegates; however, they might be considered as consultants. A constitutional amendment will be necessary to meet some of these criteria.

Updated Position on Convention Delegates: Below is an updated position on Convention Delegates that addresses the following concerns with the position.

- Clarifies that these reforms are a consideration, not a necessary component, in deciding whether or not to support a constitutional convention. This is in fact how the 1996 board interpreted the position.
- Drops the ambiguous “workable size” and revises the representation language.
- Adds public financing for delegates, as was intended to be in the position according to contemporary materials.

The League supports the following reforms as positive factors in deciding on support for a constitutional convention. Delegates should be elected by a fair nonpartisan process that complies with federal voting rights provisions and eases ballot access to encourage participation by racial and other minorities. Public financing should be provided for candidates and their positions on issues and convention goals should be widely publicized to enable voters to cast informed votes at their election. Statewide office holders, state or federal legislators, and state judges should not serve as delegates.

* Please note that the source book attachment is a sixteen page booklet. It has been sent by email to all League members who receive email messages.

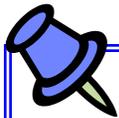


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May Meetings

Tues., 5/5, 4:30 p.m.

Issues, Harlem Rd. Community Center

Thurs., 5/7, 10:00 a.m.

Great Decisions, League Office

Mon., 5/11, 4:00 p.m.

Board Meeting, League Office

Mon., 5/11, 3:00 p.m.

Waterfront Committee, Central Library

Wed., 5/13, 1:15 p.m.

Local Government, League Office

Thurs., 5/14, 9:30 a.m.

Natural Resources, East Aurora

Thurs., 5/21, 1:30 p.m.

Education Committee, League Office

**REMINDER: All copy for the June Voter is due May 8, 2015
Please do NOT send PDF files. They will be returned to you!**