



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY

SEPTEMBER 2006

PRESIDENT: TEE-ANN HUNTER 256-7249
MEMBERSHIP: MARIA EISNER 277-4404

EDITOR: ROBERT SILSBEE 273-1436
www.lwvtompkins.14850.com

MEMBERSHIP

We hope that you all had a wonderful, enjoyable and restful summer and are ready for starting League activities. Our first membership meeting is planned for September 18th with District Attorney Gwen Wilkinson as speaker. For more information see page 2 in this bulletin. There will also be desserts, prepared by Board members. We hope that many of you can attend and that you will bring a friend or other person interested in the League. We are always eager to have new members!!!

Another drawing point for people interested in the League is the gubernatorial forum announced in this bulletin. It has been initiated by the LWV of New York State.

We welcome two new members:
Tiina Kurman: P.O. Box 906, Ithaca, NY, 14851
273868

Bette Winkler: 107 N. Sunset Drive, 256-1927
Bette is already helping out, as Co-chair for Voter Service, with preparations for fall activities. Thank you, Bette!

There are still a good number of dues outstanding. If you have not paid yours yet, would you please do so as soon as possible. If you cannot find your form and envelope, give me a call at 277-4404

Maria Eisner

SEPTEMBER EVENTS

**GENERAL MEETING WITH
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
GWEN WILKINSON**
Women's Community Building
September 18 at 7:00 PM

GUBERNATORIAL DEBATE
Bailey Hall, Cornell
September 26 at 7:00 PM

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GENERAL MEETING: SEPTEMBER 18

We are pleased to announce that Gwen Wilkinson, Tompkins County District Attorney, will address the September 18 member meeting. Ms. Wilkinson will discuss one of her special concerns, domestic violence, particularly as it affects children.

Gwen graduated from Wells College with a B.A. in philosophy. She received her J.D. from the Dickinson School of Law in 1988. She has been a trial lawyer in Tompkins County for the last 16 years.

Two years out of law school Gwen began representing indigent criminal defendants under the assigned counsel program in Ithaca. From 1991-1996 she served as an assistant district attorney in the Tompkins County District Attorney's office. During this period she became a specialist in the prosecution of domestic violence and crimes committed against children.

Gwen served as a board member and Chair of The Advocacy Center of Tompkins County for many years. Gwen was elected District Attorney, and took office on January 1, 2006.

This is the first member meeting of the season and will be held at the Women's Community Building on September 18 at 7:00 PM. Refreshments will be served.

**NEW CO-CHAIR FOR PROGRAMS
CHARLOTTE GREENSPAN**

Charlotte Greenspan came to Ithaca in 1978 on a Mellon Post-Doctoral Teaching Fellowship. The fellowship was supposed to launch her on an academic career elsewhere, but she met Jerrold Meinwald, they married, and she has lived in Ithaca ever since. Her daughter, Julia, was born in 1983.

Charlotte was born in New York City and lived there her first twenty years, finishing a Bachelor of Arts degree at Queens College. She moved to Urbana, Illinois and earned a Master of Music degree from University of Illinois. She then moved to Berkeley, California and received a Ph. D. from the University of California. When asked to declare her occupation on official documents, she describes herself as a piano teacher, partly because independent scholar sounds too pretentious to her and housewife too simple.

Charlotte's political activities have been minimal. She was, for a short time, a member of the school board of the Ithaca City School District. She is proud of having been part of the Election Protection effort in Philadelphia in 2004—but maybe she should have gone to Ohio.

Charlotte travels frequently with her husband, who receives many invitations to lecture. Sometimes they do concerts together, he being a professional-level player of the flute. Their next few trips will take them to Spain, Japan, Brazil, and San Francisco. While on long plane trips Charlotte indulges in one of her hobbies, knitting.

LWVNY STUDY OF FINANCING OF EDUCATION

Phase II - Charter Schools

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the New York State Charter School Act, its impact on traditional schools, and proposals for fiscal relief for affected communities.

When the charter school legislation was proposed in 1998, the League opposed the original bill, believing that public funds should be used to support public schools, and because of our fear that charter schools would drain money away from traditional public schools, while continuing to require them to function as educators of last resort. The PTA, AAUW, and the School Boards Association joined us in our opposition to this legislation. In response to League's efforts some of its objections were resolved by the CHARTER SCHOOL ACT OF 1998. Although the Act did not address the League's concerns about funding, its explicit characterization of charter schools as public schools co-opted the League's ability to object to the funding mechanism under its current funding education policy.

It is likely that the state will consider lifting the cap on charter schools within the next year. Even though charters in New York State are primarily an urban phenomenon, they have the potential to affect education finance and educational outcomes on a statewide basis.

Definition of Charter Schools

The New York Charter Schools Act of 1998 authorizes the establishment of charter schools, which are public schools operated under charters issuable by the Board of Regents. Interested individuals and groups may apply to local school boards, the trustees of the State University of New York, and the Board of Regents. New York is now among 35 states and the District of Columbia offering charter schools. While there are common elements

among charter schools nationwide, New York's law has several unique features and prescribes application requirements.

Charter schools get their name from the fact that they are schools operated according to a charter or plan that describes how they will function, including their educational philosophy and approach and their financial operation. Any charter school opened under the provisions of this law will have the flexibility to operate free of many state and local educational laws and regulations. But charter schools will be held accountable to the provisions of the charter school law, the provisions of the charter authorized for the school, and the same health and safety, civil rights, and student assessment requirements applicable to other public schools.

How Charter Schools Are Formed

Under the new law, charter schools are public schools funded by tax dollars according to formulas described in the legislation. Any teacher, school administrator, parent or community resident, or a group of such individuals, may apply to establish a charter school. Such individuals or groups may apply to establish charter schools in conjunction with colleges, universities, museums, libraries, not-for-profit corporations, or for-profit businesses or corporations. In addition, existing public schools may elect to convert to charter schools. Existing private or nonpublic schools, however, may not convert to charter schools.

There is no upper limit on the number of students the charter school may serve, but there is a lower limit of 50 students. There is also no upper limit on the number of teachers that may work at a charter school, although there is a minimum requirement of three teachers. Charter schools may not select students on the basis of any criteria other than the students' ages or grade levels.

The law stipulates that an application to establish a charter school must provide the

mission of the proposed school and its educational program and student achievement goals, information on how the school would be organized and its budget and fiscal plan, the number of students proposed to be served in the school, the school calendar and proposed school day schedule, and other information.

Charter schools may be located in part of an existing public school building, a private work site, a public building, or any other suitable location. The Office of General Services shall annually publish a list of State-owned buildings that are vacant or unused totally or in part. Upon request, school districts must provide a list of vacant and unused school buildings or portions thereof.

For purposes of transportation, a charter school is to be considered a nonpublic school. This means that districts that would be required to provide transportation of their students to eligible nonpublic schools would also be required to provide transportation of their students to an eligible charter school.

Private persons and organizations may provide funding and other assistance to a charter school.

A charter school may not discriminate against students or employees and may not limit admission on the basis of any ability or other condition. However, a charter school may be a single-sex school. Any student who is qualified to attend a public school is also qualified for admission to a charter school, if he or she is in the age range of the students the charter school applies to serve. The school district of residence of students attending a charter school may, but is not required to, allow such students to participate in athletic and extracurricular activities. Services for disabled students may be provided by the charter school, by the school district where the charter school is located, or by contract with another provider.

Much more information is available at the LWVNY web-site: <http://www.lwvny.org/>

LWVTC CALENDAR FOR 2006-2007

September 5	Board Meeting (Mary Berkelman)		7:30
September 18	GWEN WILKINSON	Women's Community Building	7:00
September 26	CANDIDATES' FORUM: GOVERNORSHIP	Bailey Hall, Cornell	7:00
October 10	Board Meeting (Kay Sharp)		7:30
October 26?	CANDIDATES' FORUM: LOCAL OFFICES	Ithaca Town Hall	7:00
November 6	Board Meeting (Debbie Levin)		7:30
November 20	CONSENSUS MEETING: CHARTER SCHOOLS	TBA	7:00
December 2	Board Meeting (Maria Eisner)		9:30AM
January 1	Board Meeting (Old Courthouse)		7:30
January 20	BRUNCH WITH LAREN SIGNER	TBA	TBA
February 5	Board Meeting (Old Courthouse)		7:30
February 27	MARY RUSSEL—REDISTRICTING	TBA	7:00
March 5	Board Meeting (Old Courthouse)		7:30
March 27	CONSENSUS MEETING OR READING BUDGETS	TBA	7:00
April 9	Board Meeting (Kathy Burlitch)		7:30
April 24	ANNUAL MEETING: CLEAN MONEY, CLEAN ELECTIONS— —JESSICA WISNESKI	TBA	7:00
May 7	Board Meeting (Charlotte Coffman)		7:30
June 4	Board Meeting (Tee-Ann Hunter)		7:30

See our calendar at <http://lwvtompkins.14850.com/#calendar> for more dates of interest to voters.

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY; AND MORE!

To provide the opportunity for donors to support the educational portion of our program with tax-free donations we have established the LWV Education Fund under the auspices of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County (more information about the Foundation at http://www.communityfoundationoftc.org/current_funds/funds.php). We are continuing our drive, begun with your dues-notification letter of this summer, to establish the largest possible initial financing of this fund. We have been gratified by your response to that request and thank all of you who have contributed.

But now a special opportunity! We have been offered a matching grant of up to \$15,000 for contributions received before the end of December of this year. A contribution now, in addition to the tax-deduction, will be doubled thanks to this remarkable offer by our generous donor. Please make your contribution to the Educational Fund NOW! If you have already contributed to the fund, consider making an additional contribution to take advantage of this offer; or if you were planning to contribute next year, consider doubling your money by making that contribution before the end of this year.

Checks should be made out to the Community Foundation of Tompkins County, with the notation LWVTC Education Fund on the Memo Line, and mailed to the Foundation at 309 North Tioga St., Ithaca, NY 14850. More information on making gifts, including online credit card donation, is available at the Foundation website given above.

VOTER SERVICE

School Board Candidates' Forum

A successful School Board Candidates' Forum was held on May 11 with about 70 people in

attendance. Gratitude is expressed to members of the Parent Teacher Association, the American Association of University Women, and the Tompkins County LWV who helped with this event. Diane Conneman was the moderator; Barbara Smith videotaped the event for later broadcasting on Pegasys; Libby deProse and Kathy Burlitch served as time keepers; and Kay Sharpe, along with a screener from each co-sponsoring organization, screened the submitted questions.

Gubernatorial Debate

The LWVNYS and co-sponsor, Zogby International, announced the Gubernatorial Debate to be held at Cornell University in Ithaca at Bailey Hall at 7PM. Charlotte Coffman has represented the LWVTC in the ongoing planning sessions for this event. The debate will be cablecast live on NY1 News and NY1 Noticias in NY, Capital News 9 in Albany, News 10 Now in Syracuse and R News in Rochester. The cablecast availability of the debate in other parts of the state is being developed, as is the radio network.

Local Candidate Forum

The Tompkins County LWV hopes to sponsor a meet-the-candidates night in October for local candidates. Candidates are being consulted. Details are not yet available.

Publications Distributed

Copies of *Voter Guide 2006*, which contains voter information such as registration deadlines, absentee ballot procedures, and voting procedures, are being distributed by LWV members to strategic locations throughout the area. *First Vote* brochures, designed for first-time voters, were included in packets given to new citizens at the Ithaca Naturalization Ceremony, August 17, 2006.

Charlotte Coffman and Bette Winkler

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL OFFICE

Voter registration deadlines are approaching in many states and the 2006 general election is just two short months away. Make sure you, your friends and family are registered to vote (see <https://electionimpact.votenet.com/lwv/voterreg/index.cfm>)—and know your rights on Election Day. As states and localities throughout the country work to implement more effective election regulations, the League of Women Voters stands ready to help you make sure your voice is heard. Go to http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voter_Information&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=73&ContentID=4210 to find more information about registering, learn about candidates and events in your area, and plan your trip to the polls. Also, keep an eye out for some exciting new voter materials and the new LWV online voter site, *VOTE411*, in the coming weeks.

Mary G. Wilson, President, LWVUS

THE LEAGUE IS MAKING NEWS...

Celebrating Women's Equality Day

August 26th marked the 86th anniversary of the day the U.S. Constitution was amended to grant women the right to vote. Read the comments of LWVUS President Mary G. Wilson at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voter_Information&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=73&ContentID=6072

Securing a victory in a Florida Voter Registration Case

On August 28, a Florida judge issued an injunction preventing the implementation of a law that could impose penalties on civic groups undertaking voter registration projects. In granting the preliminary injunction, U.S. District Judge Patricia A. Seitz wrote that the law has a "chilling" effect on the constitutional rights of civic groups like the LWV that work to register thousands of new voters each election year. The League of Women Voters of Florida

was the primary plaintiff in the case (*League of Women Voters v. Cobb* (case no. 06-21265).

More at

http://www.brennancenter.org/presscenter/releases_2006/pressrelease_2006_0828_Florida.html

Sponsoring a National Conference on the Public Financing of Elections in September

On September 8-10 in Washington, D.C. the LWVUS will cosponsor "Seize the Moment: a National Conference on the Public Financing of Elections" with Public Campaign and other coalition partners. The three-day conference will allow participants to explore new opportunities, hone their advocacy skills and learn from those who have made change happen where they live. It's not too late to make your plans to attend today. You may register online at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voter_Information&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=73&ContentID=6058

Encouraging Greater Electoral Participation among U.S. Hispanics

The League has partnered with ZGS Communications, the largest independent owner of *Telemundo* affiliate television stations, to launch *Tu Voto, Tu Voz*, a public awareness campaign to encourage voter registration and electoral participation among U.S. Hispanics. Read the Telemundo/LWV public service announcements at http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Video_Collection&CONTENTID=6084&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm%20LWVUS will hold a kickoff event at the National Press Club on September 28th to celebrate the launch of this project.

Educating About D.C. Voting Rights

The LWVEF has begun its work on a year-long education and outreach project to build awareness across the nation about D.C. citizens' lack of full voting rights. The LWVEF will work with Leagues in 20 communities, to be announced later this year.

Gubernatorial Debates

ALBANY, New York- The League of Women Voters of New York State (LWVNYS) and cosponsor, Zogby International, have announced date changes and details for two scheduled debates.

The Gubernatorial Debate to be held at Cornell University in Ithaca, originally scheduled for October 18, 2006, is being changed to September 26, 2006. This debate will be held at the university's Bailey Hall at 7:00p.m. The debate will be cablecast live on **NY1 News** and **NY1 Noticias** in New York, **Capital News 9** in Albany, **News 10 Now** in Syracuse and **R News** in Rochester. The cablecast availability of the debate in other parts of New York is being developed, and the radio network for the debate is being developed.

The second date change is for the Gubernatorial Debate being held at WNET Studios in Buffalo. The debate, originally scheduled for October 26, 2006, will be held on October 12 at 8:00PM. This debate will be offered live on **WNET – TV** and **WNET - AM**. Additionally, all nine New York State public television stations have agreed to carry the debate. The debate will also be offered to all public radio stations in New York

The date changes were necessary as a result of on-going negotiations among LWNYS, debate partners, including media, and the candidates. LWVNYS is happy to announce agreement to participate on the part of all candidates currently on the ballot for these two debates. We look forward to these two informative and educational debates.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY: BOARD 200607

LWV-Tompkins County	leave message at 273-8350		lwvtc@twcny.rr.com
LWV NYS website			www.lwvny.org
LWV US website			www.lwv.org
Officers:			
President	Tee-Ann Hunter	256-7249	thlwv@hotmail.com
VP Program	Debbie Levin	273-7746	dlevin01@twcny.rr.com
VP Membership	Maria Eisner	277-4404	mle3@cornell.edu
VP Finance	Sunny Gooding	277-3598	shgooding@clarityconnect.com
Secretary	Kay Sharp	272-4748	
Treasurer	Alene Wyatt	257-1894	alene@lightlink.com
Directors:			
Past President/Action	Mary Berkelman	257-6450	mberkelman@twcny.rr.com
Director-at-large	Libby deProse	257-6678	deprose@lightlink.com
Voter Service	Charlotte Coffman	272-7551	cwc4@cornell.edu
Co-chair, Programs	Charlotte Greenspan	257-0035	jm63@cornell.edu
Publications/PR	Kathy Burlitch	539-7316	klburlitch@frontiernet.net
Phone	Linda Duttweiler	277-0006	ldutt@twcny.rr.com
Bulletin	Robert Silsbee	273-1436	rhs1@cornell.edu
Off-Board Members			
Events Coordinator	Germaine Colvin	257-5446	gcolvin111@aol.com
Web Master	Michael Duttweiler	277-0006	mdutt@twcny.rr.com
Co-chair, Voter Service	Bette Winkler	256-1927	bwinkler@twcny.rr.com

YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS**SENATORS:**

Hillary Rodham Clinton US Senate, 476 Russell Senate Building, Washington, DC 20510
202-224-4451 Syracuse Office: 315-448-0470
e-mail: senator@clinton.senate.gov web-site: clinton.senate.gov

Charles E. Schumer US Senate, 313 Hart Senate Building, Washington, DC 20510
202-224-6542 Syracuse Office: 315-423-5471
e-mail: senator@schumer.senate.gov web-site: schumer.senate.gov

REPRESENTATIVES;

Sherwood Boehlert 2246 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515
202-225-3665 Cortland Office: 607-758-3918
e-mail: sboehlert@mail.house.gov web-site: www.house.gov/boehlert

Maurice Hinchey 2431 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6335 Ithaca Office: 607-273-1388; 123 S. Cayuga St. #201
e-mail: mhinchey@mail.house.gov web-site: www.house.gov/hinchey

League of Women Voters of Tompkins County
50 Hickory Circle
Ithaca, NY 14850