



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY

JANUARY 2008

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www.lwvtompkins.14850.com

IMMIGRATION

Consensus Meeting

**Tuesday, January 29 at 7:00 PM
Women's Community Building**

(more on page 2)

to have you picked up for this important meeting.

The NYS League has decided on a set of 2008 Legislative Priorities. They are mentioned elsewhere in the bulletin. It is exciting to see that our League's priorities of improving state government and making health care affordable and accessible are among the issues targeted.

I hope that this new year finds you healthy and energized to be more active in our League's ongoing activities.

Kay Sharp

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

HAPPY NEW YEAR! I hope that all of you enjoyed your holiday season and are ready to start the new year off with enthusiasm and dedication to the League's activities. I have written an update of the State League's activities elsewhere in the bulletin. Some of them are near and dear to our League's heart.

The winter months make attendance at our monthly meetings difficult for some of you; but I hope that you will make an exerted effort to attend our Annual Luncheon Meeting in February. We plan to discuss the directions that you would like the Tompkins County League to take in the coming years. We are also honoring members that have been a part of the LWV-TC for 25 or more years. It is impressive to know that there are some members that have been active for 50-60 years. So I hope to see you there. If you need help with transportation, please call me at 272-4748 so that I can arrange

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What's on YOUR Mind for the League?

ANNUAL LUNCHEON MEETING

SOUP AND BREAD AT NOON ON FEBRUARY 9 WOMEN'S COMMUNITY BUILDING

a contribution of \$3.00 is requested to help pay for the hall

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON MEETING

Due to scheduling conflicts, the February luncheon meeting has been moved to **Saturday, February 9 at noon**, at the Women's Community Building. Come enjoy some delicious soup made by our board members and socialize with other League members. After the meal, we will have a brainstorming session on how the LWV-TC can be more effective at engaging its members and the community. Put it on your calendar, and invite a younger friend who shares the League's goals. This is an important meeting, so please make an effort to come if you are able! For more information, e-mail mth3@cornell.edu

VOTER SERVICES REPORT

After a very busy October, November and December have been very quiet. We distributed the remainder of the New York State LWV 2007 Voters' Guides. They were left mostly at various places in the City of Ithaca, with some in Cayuga Heights and the Town of Ithaca.

We are looking forward to few quiet months until the School Board elections in the Spring.

CONSENSUS MEETING: IMMIGRATION

A LWV-TC study committee has been studying the problems and challenges immigrants face today and have reviewed and discussed the pros and cons of various suggested responses to issues concerning immigration. Please come. Hear the arguments presented by the committee, and help us reach consensus on the questions the LWVUS has posed. Meeting is at the Women's Community Building at **7:00 PM on Tuesday, January 29**.

2008 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE LWV-NYS

Emphasis will be placed on:

Good government

- Redistricting
- Campaign Finance Reform
- Legislative Procedures
- Election Law and Procedures
- Voting Technology
- Court Restructuring and Judicial Selection

Cost Effective and Accessible Health Care

Natural Resources, Energy and Environment

- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy
- Water Quality and Protection of Ground Water
- Smart Growth
- Transportation



Martha Robertson

Paul Mazzarella

John Spence

John Ward

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN TOMPKINS COUNTY

On Monday, November 26th we had a membership meeting in the Livesay room of the Social Services Building. There were 18 people in the audience, a sizable number considering that the Ithaca Journal twice announced the meeting with the wrong date. Martha Hamblin started the meeting with information about the LWV's position on affordable housing and its historic background. There were four speakers:

John Ward runs the local Red Cross shelter for the homeless. He told us that most of the people who use the shelter are working but cannot afford rent, so a lack of affordable housing is the major reason why people need the shelter. For this population, an affordable rental rather than home ownership is usually the goal. He also stressed the connection to transportation: affordable rentals may be available but are located in rural areas far from where people work, and adequate public transportation is not available. The Red Cross can provide homeless shelter for some time, but waiting periods for housing are definitely too long. Construction of single room occupancy housing in the city for

individuals in the shelter population would be a great help.

Paul Mazarella represented Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, which has been working for 30 years to revitalize downtown and to develop affordable housing. He explained that an "affordable" property should cost the owner no more than 30% of his income. The median price of houses in Tompkins County in 2000 was \$93,000 and rose to \$168,000 in 2006. Even though there are available jobs in the county (employment rate in Tompkins County is below 2%), 40% of the workforce lives outside the county. The rental market does not favor median or low-income families either, as student rentals skew the market, driving rental prices up. In the city, 74% of residents are renters, compared to 46% in the county and 32% in the US.

John Spence spoke for Better Housing for Tompkins County. This organization helps low and median income families and seniors buy homes and keep them maintained. It offers information on the financial aspects of home ownership and gives some financial support, e.g. deferred mortgages for 5 years. It provides housing rehabilitation, mostly for low-income

seniors or disabled people, and manages rental apartments. The current emphasis at the agency is on creating a sustainable system such that affordable housing is not lost when an owner sells the property at market rate. Housing trust funds, at either the state or national level, are one way to create a sustainable system. Cornell and TCAD are also getting involved in this issue, as they realize that their viability depends on their workforces having access to affordable housing.

Martha Robertson, county legislator for the town of Dryden and chair of the county planning committee, pointed out that a healthy regional economy depends not only on jobs, but also on places for the workforce to live and contribute to the community. When people do not have stable housing and have to move frequently, their lives become stressful and their children may perform poorly in school; many people in Tompkins County live on the edge, but the problem is fixable. The county has a plan for nodal development that would concentrate growth in areas that already have

infrastructure. Mass transit would be improved between the nodes, allowing more people to live closer to where they work. They would invest a larger part of their income and pay their taxes in the local economy, commuter traffic and road maintenance costs would decrease, children could attend better schools. The Tompkins County government is now involved in several projects, including incentive zoning, a community housing trust, employer assistance, and a community housing affordability fund. Unfortunately, under state law, the county has no authority to regulate zoning, so must persuade the municipalities to participate in their development plan. We can encourage our municipal governments to do so. We can also let it be known that affordable housing is needed by the people we meet every day in the supermarket, who work in the shops, beauty parlors, garages, and banks, the secretaries and janitors at Cornell and Ithaca College and many more. More information about the county's housing strategy can be found at <http://www.co.tompkins.ny.us/planning/>

Maria Eisner & Martha Hamblin

LWVTC CALENDAR—2007-2008

(tentative items in italics)

7:00	Tues., Jan. 29	GENERAL MEETING:	Women's Comm. Bldg.
		CONSENSUS MEETING ON IMMIGRATION	
7:00	Mon., Feb. 4	Board Meeting	Old Jail
Noon-9 PM	Tues., Feb. 5	NYS PRIMARY DAY FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION	
Noon	Sat., Feb. 9	ANNUAL LUNCHEON MEETING:	Women's Comm. Bldg.
	Note date change	What's on YOUR Mind for the League?	
7:00	Mar. ?	GENERAL MEETING: TBA	
7:00	Apr. ?	ANNUAL MEETING: TBA	

NEWS FROM THE STATE LEAGUE

Lead Poisoning

LWV-NYS is represented in the Coalition to End Lead Poisoning, which has achieved passage of Childhood Lead Poisoning Primary Prevention and Safe Housing Act in the NYS State Assembly and is garnering support for the bill (S6350) in the Senate.

Smart Growth Cabinet for NYS

Our State position on land use and sprawl is: In order to conserve natural resources and improve the quality of life for its residents, NY State should take a proactive role in regional land use planning, enhancing urban neighborhoods, containing urban sprawl, and protecting agricultural land, open space, watersheds and other sensitive areas.

Governor Eliot Spitzer has created a Smart Growth Cabinet to review state agency spending and policies to determine how best to discourage sprawl and promote smart land use practices. The Cabinet will coordinate cross-agency activities and develop “smart growth” policies that cater to New York’s unique regional needs.

“Smart growth is smart business,” said Governor Spitzer. “As our economy and population grow, it is vital that we ensure the development of vibrant, livable communities.”

Alternatives to Incarceration

The League of Woman Voters has a position against mandatory minimum sentencing for non-violent drug offenders. Currently NYS has a wide variety of programs which divert such offenders into treatment programs as an alternative to incarceration.

The Federal Supreme Court has just ruled that the disparity in sentencing between drug offenders sentenced for crack as opposed to powdered cocaine is unconstitutional. Many federal prisoners are now eligible immediate sentencing relief.

HAVA Update

On November 5 the US Department of Justice filed a motion with the Federal District Court of the Northern District of NY to require that New York must replace all lever voting machines by September 2008 (first federal election) and must expand ballot marking devices (BMDs) for the presidential primary in February 2008. The DOJ argues that New York must comply with the federal law, and the state has already received one extension of the 2006 deadline. The state cannot continue to operate federal elections utilizing voting systems that do not meet the requirements of the federal statute (accessibility, verifiability).

LWV-NYS, along with other organizations, issued a press release deploring the position of the Justice Department on the grounds that the safeguards written in the NYS HAVA implementation statute would be endangered by the imposition of a 2008 deadline and would risk electoral chaos in a presidential election year. See the LWV-NYS website for more specific information.

National Popular Vote

Last May delegates at the LWV-NYS Convention voted to study the question: Should NY State join the Compact for a National Popular Vote? (see page 9 for the draft ‘Compact.’) On October 31 the State League was informed by the LWV-US liaison, Xandra Kayden, that LWV-NYS would not be able to take action on any position resulting from the study. Based on this response from the US League, the NYS League has disbanded its committee to study this issue.



HEALTH CARE NEWS

Will Retiree Health Care Benefits Be There When You Need It?

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ruled last week that employers could reduce or eliminate health benefits for retirees when they turn 65 and become eligible for Medicare. This policy allows employers to establish two classes of retirees, with more comprehensive benefits for those under 65 and more limited benefits or none at all for those older. Lawyers for the Commission said that the new Medicare drug benefit (Part D) had strengthened the case for the regulation because it guaranteed that retirees 65 and older would have access to drug coverage. The Commission pointed out that employers are not required by federal law to provide health benefits to either active or retired workers.

It was an accident of fate that employers started providing health benefits after World War II when there was a freeze on salary increases and they began offering health care as a fringe benefit to attract workers. Now more than 10 million retirees rely on employer-sponsored health plans as a primary source of coverage or as a supplement to Medicare. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for employers to be able to afford to provide health benefits and compete in the global market. According to the Government Accounting office, only 59% of large employers and fewer than 10% of small employers offer health benefits to retirees. According to surveys by the Kaiser Family Foundation, premiums for employer-sponsored health insurance rose an average of 6.1% this year and have increased **78%** since 2001.

In their last contract negotiations the three big auto makers made a deal with unions that they would pay into a trust intended to pay for health costs of UAW retirees. However this plan assumes that health-care inflation falls to 5 % by 2013 and stays at that level despite the fact that

it has averaged almost double that rate for the last few decades. Many feel that it will be difficult to keep its commitments unless the federal government has a national health-care system within the next few years.

Many employers and labor unions had told the Commission that if they had to provide identical benefits for retirees under 65 and over 65 they would just drop retiree benefits altogether. Some feel that this rule will help employers continue to voluntarily provide health benefits. Others such as AARP and other senior advocates feel that this rule gives employers free rein to use age as a basis for reducing or eliminating health care benefits. The new policy creates an explicit exemption from age-discrimination laws for employers that scale back benefits of retirees 65 or older.

Polls indicate that 60% of Americans support a government publicly financed health plan. However, some indicate that those who have insurance are concerned about losing benefits under a new plan. Therefore, most of the Presidential plans allow those with private insurance plans the choice of continuing with that plan. However, it is becoming clear that even those of us with 'good' plans cannot be assured that they will continue, and Medicare is not an adequate plan without a supplemental plan if you have serious health care needs. Those who advocate for a 'Medicare for All' plan are talking about an extended and expanded Medicare plan. To continue offering plans by private insurers is not going to reduce the cost of health care, which is the key issue. Insurance companies are market driven and the only way they can make money is to deny care. We need a publicly financed system that will provide guaranteed, affordable, comprehensive health care for ALL.

Rebecca Elgie

MEMBERSHIP

This will be the last month for members who have not paid this year's dues to catch up. We lost a few members this year and, unfortunately, did not have a large enough increase to make up for them all. By February 1, 2008 the LWV-US will let us know how we stand. The next Bulletin will bring you an updated membership list.

Here are the names of some new members:

Mr. Richard Allmendinger 1414 Hanshaw Rd.
 Mr. Robert Kibbee 6115 Meklemberg Rd.,
 Mecklenberg, 14886
 Ms. Carol A. Battenfeld 306 Ithaca Rd.
 John and Jane Lumley 743 Snyder Hill Rd.

Welcome to our League!

Maria Eisner

CONTINUATION OF LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS HISTORY

On May 21st, 1919 the House passed the 19th amendment by a vote of 304 to 89; the Senate followed on June 4th with a vote of 56 to 25. Ratification of the amendment by 3/4 of all states was completed on August 26, 1920. The last convention of the NAWSA, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, held in February of 1920 in Chicago, was turned into the founding convention for the National League of Women Voters, now called the League of Women Voters of US. Its headquarters were to be in Washington, D.C. Carrie Chapman Catt who was instrumental in the start of the League, stood back from becoming its first president. Maud Wood Park, who had been the chief lobbyist for the organization in Washington, was elected for the position. Several state and

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY: BOARD 2006-07

LWV NYS website

www.lwvny.org

LWV US website

www.lwv.org

LWV-Tompkins County

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local Leagues had already sprouted up in states where women had the vote through their state's constitution.

Carry Chapman Catt, a very active woman of those early days, lived to see American women voting in a national election and voted in it herself. She seems to have been an amazing person. Not only was she apparently inspiring, enthusiastic, energetic, full of ideas, but also an astute politician. In 1916, when the women's franchise was being considered in Congress, she organized a work force that spread throughout the country. She sent her women to the states to entice voters and lobby legislatures (36 states were needed to pass the amendment in Congress) and she also sent women to Washington to lobby Congress on women's behalf. Realizing that her pacifist view was cause for opposition to the women's movement, she urged women to support the war effort by volunteering in the Red Cross, serving soldiers in canteens and standing in for farmers in the production of food. It turned out that President Woodrow Wilson, who was initially opposed to the movement but influenced by the important contributions of women in WWI and by pressures from his three daughters, became an advocate for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. After the war was over, Carrie Chapman Catt resumed her pacifist stance and delivered some fiery speeches against wars in general and in favor of the League of Nations.

At the first League convention Carrie Chapman Catt urged her listeners not just to be voters, but to become active in the party of their choice in order to enhance their effectiveness as citizens. At the same time she foresaw the difficulties and misunderstandings that might confront members of an organization, ostensibly nonpartisan, who also participated in political parties and supported or opposed legislation. Yet she believed that League members should and could be influential through knowledge of issues and support of enlightened legislation. The primary task of the League should be to work for the political development of this country by eliminating illiteracy, educating the

voters, improving political methods, i.e. the conduct of campaigns, etc. "The first thing we should stand for is Efficiency in Government," she said. She also had the idea of accepting "independent-minded" men as members and calling the League, League of Voters. That was in 1921, but it took until 1974 before men were invited to join the League. The business of a name change has surfaced several times since, but nobody ever came up with a satisfactory solution.

In its second convention in Cleveland in 1921, the National League of Women Voters had a long list of resolutions and recommendations like:

Opposing any weakening of the National Prohibition Law;

Endorsing a bill for the protection of maternity and infancy care, legislation which was adopted soon thereafter and was probably the beginning of the welfare state;

Endorsing the principle of physical education in schools, through state action with federal aid;

Urging the National Government to do everything possible for the women held in harems in the Near East;

And many more.

Maria Eisner

NY PRIMARY DAY—FEBRUARY 5

For information go to our website:

<http://lwvtompkins.14850.com/>

For candidates answers to 5 critical questions click on "**[LVW-US Presidential Primary Voter Guide](#)**"

For other information about the Primary and links to candidates' websites, click on "**[New York Ballot for Primary Election](#)**"

Two other sources of election information:

SmartVoter.org

Vote411.org

THE NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

A proposed compact among the states to change the U.S. electoral procedure.

Article I—Membership Any State of the United States and the District of Columbia may become a member of this agreement by enacting this agreement.

Article II—Right of the People in Member States to Vote for President and Vice President Each member state shall conduct a statewide popular election for President and Vice President of the United States.

Article III—Manner of Appointing Presidential Electors in Member States Prior to the time set by law for the meeting and voting by the presidential electors, the chief election official of each member state shall determine the number of votes for each presidential slate in each State of the United States and in the District of Columbia in which votes have been cast in a statewide popular election and shall add such votes together to produce a “national popular vote total” for each presidential slate.

The chief election official of each member state shall designate the presidential slate with the largest national popular vote total as the “national popular vote winner.”

The presidential elector certifying official of each member state shall certify the appointment in that official’s own state of the elector slate nominated in that state in association with the national popular vote winner.

At least six days before the day fixed by law for the meeting and voting by the presidential electors, each member state shall make a final determination of the number of popular votes cast in the state for each presidential slate and shall communicate an official statement of such determination within 24 hours to the chief election official of each other member state.

The chief election official of each member state shall treat as conclusive an official statement containing the number of popular votes in a state for each presidential slate made by the day established by federal law for making a state’s final determination conclusive as to the counting of electoral votes by Congress.

In event of a tie for the national popular vote winner, the presidential elector certifying official of each member state shall certify the appointment of the elector slate nominated in association with the presidential slate receiving the largest number of popular votes within that official’s own state.

If, for any reason, the number of presidential electors nominated in a member state in association with the national popular vote winner is less than or greater than that state’s number of electoral votes, the presidential candidate on the presidential slate that has been designated as the national popular vote winner shall have the power to nominate the presidential electors for that state and that state’s presidential elector certifying official shall certify the appointment of such nominees. The chief election official of each member state shall immediately release to the public all vote counts or statements of votes as they are determined or obtained.

This article shall govern the appointment of presidential electors in each member state in any year in which this agreement is, on July 20, in effect in states cumulatively possessing a majority of the electoral votes.

Article IV—Other Provisions

This agreement shall take effect when states cumulatively possessing a majority of the electoral votes have enacted this agreement in substantially the same form and the enactments by such states have taken effect in each state.

Any member state may withdraw from this agreement, except that a withdrawal occurring six months or less before the end of a President’s term shall not become effective until a President or Vice President shall have been qualified to serve the next term.

The chief executive of each member state shall promptly notify the chief executive of all other states of when this agreement has been enacted and has taken effect in that official’s state, when the state has withdrawn from this agreement, and when this agreement takes effect generally.

This agreement shall terminate if the electoral college is abolished.

If any provision of this agreement is held invalid, the remaining provisions shall not be affected.

Article V—Definitions

For purposes of this agreement: “Chief executive” shall mean the Governor of a State of the United States or the Mayor of the District of Columbia;

“Elector slate” shall mean a slate of candidates who have been nominated in a state for the position of presidential elector in association with a presidential slate;

“Chief election official” shall mean the state official or body that is authorized to certify the total number of popular votes for each presidential slate;

“Presidential elector” shall mean an elector for President and Vice President of the United States;

“Presidential elector certifying official” shall mean the state official or body that is authorized to certify the appointment of the state’s presidential electors;

“Presidential slate” shall mean a slate of two persons, the first of whom has been nominated as a candidate for President of the United States and the second of whom has been nominated as a candidate for Vice President of the United States, or any legal successors to such persons, regardless of whether both names appear on the ballot presented to the voter in a particular state;

“State” shall mean a State of the United States and the District of Columbia; and “Statewide popular election” shall mean a general election in which votes are cast for presidential slates by individual voters and counted on a statewide basis.

YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS

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