



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY

JANUARY 2009

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JANUARY MEETING

NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

Professor Donald Beachler
Dept. of Politics, Ithaca College

Monday, January 26 at 7:30 PM
With Desserts and Conversation

Beverly Livesay Room
Human Services Building
30 West State St.
Parking Entrance from Seneca St.

I would like to welcome our new Vice-President for Programming, Florence Smith. She did a fantastic job in organizing the Fall meeting on immigrants. She is working on this month's meeting. I hope you will join us in thanking her for her acceptance of this demanding job.

Good health and happiness.

Kay Sharp

THE FUTURE OF ENERGY

On the cold slushy evening of November 24 some 30 LWV members enjoyed an entertaining and informative (yes, it is possible to have both) talk on the future of energy. The speaker, Professor Paul McEuen of the Physics Department at Cornell, began with a brief but comprehensive summary of the critical need to develop new sources of energy: the two essential ingredients being the finite supply of

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

HAPPY NEW YEAR! I hope all of you enjoyed your holiday season. I know I did in sunny Mexico. 2009 offers many opportunities for the League to get its message out in the community.

Our priorities this year are affordable housing, universal health care and improved government. I hope you will work with us in making in-roads toward these important issues.

We have our first meeting of the New Year addressing the issue of the National Popular Vote. I know this is a much-debated topic; so your attendance at our January open meeting is important.

We have started our study of this issue. National League has provided us with study materials. If you are interested in participating, contact Sunny Gooding.

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fossil fuels and the impact on the environment of burning fossil fuels. The scale of our energy use was effectively illustrated by comparing our own biological rate of using energy, equivalent to the power needed to light a 100 watt light bulb, with the average power we draw-on through our lighting, heating, transportation, growth of food, etc. which is a 100 times larger, 10 kilowatts, the equivalent of burning 100 light bulbs. Technology and the ready availability of fossil fuels have increased our ability to do work by a factor of a hundred.

There are many pathways proposed to alleviate our energy problems. Professor McEuen touched briefly on a number of these: wind, hydro, geothermal, waves or tides, "clean" coal, passive thermal heating, bio-fuel and photovoltaics. Each has its proponents; none offers a quick solution. Some, such as bio-fuel from corn, offer no solution at all to the energy problem but are promoted by the farm lobby. Many others offer some potential but require more research before their promise can be reliably assessed, though they are often highly touted by enthusiastic supporters. Others, like wind, are installed and running but arguments remain as to how much power is realistically available.

Paul chose not to review the relative merits of the large variety of potential sources but rather to outline in more detail the prospects for one of the several technologies that offer real potential: namely the large scale generation of electricity by photovoltaics, or solar cells. To set the scale for their potential he noted that photovoltaics could meet the *total* demand for power (not just electric power) for the U.S. using a total area of solar cells equal to that of Oklahoma; much less land area than would be required, for example, by growing crops for bio-fuel; and it could be wasteland or desert which would not be in competition for food crops. Although the installation cost, at current rates is prohibitive, the reduction of unit costs with mass production is anticipated to bring the cost to affordable levels for the solar technology to play a major

role as a clean and sustainable source of energy for the U.S.

What do we do to address the problem of meeting our energy needs in a clean and sustainable manner? The first and easiest step, and we know how to do it, is simply to reduce our rate of energy consumption, currently at the rate of 100 light bulbs per person, to 50, the level typical of Europe and Japan; and we can do it, not by walking everywhere and keeping thermostats set at 60 degrees, but by insulating our houses and using small cars with good fuel economy. The second is to support research on the many clean technologies and to subsidize pilot plants for those which have promise; and resist the pressures from farm and coal lobbies which offer a grand picture but one which may not be scientifically sound. Our problem is not so much to discover new technologies as to find the political will to support those which are known to have promise and discard those which are pushed by special interests.

Bob Silsbee

MORE ON THE JANUARY MEETING

The Tompkins County chapter of the National League of Women Voters (LWVUS) is participating in a LWVUS study on the National Popular Vote legislation (NPV) now being considered in many state legislatures. The National Popular Vote bill would guarantee the Presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes in all 50 states (and the District of Columbia). As part of the study, the League is holding a meeting on Monday, January 26, at 7:30 in the Livesay Room at the Human Services Building in Ithaca. Donald Beachler, professor of politics at Ithaca College, will speak on the subject. The talk will be followed by questions and discussion. The Public is invited.

This is your opportunity to be part of the discussion about how we elect the President and Vice President in the future.

Florence Smith

HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE REPORT

In December, two health care community forums were held at Rebecca Elgie's house. These forums were a project of the Obama-Biden Transition Project to help Americans learn more about the issues involved and to provide input to the transition team as they develop a plan for the country. Both Ithaca Forums returned the evaluation forms strongly recommending a single payer health plan, publicly financed and privately delivered rather than staying with a private/public health system.

A national advocacy coalition called The Leadership Coalition for Guaranteed Health Care including doctors, nurses, labor, faith communities and health care advocates is conducting Call-In Days to contact our legislators and encourage their support of a single payer plan. A number of league members across the country want to encourage LWVUS to join this coalition. Another call-in day will be on January 15th urging our national representatives to attend a briefing on health care issues. Our health committee is urging members to call their representatives to urge their support for HR# 676, and to urge our Senators to draft a similar resolution for the Senate. If you would like to take part in these call-ins please let me know.

Last January, LWVUS made health care a priority and at the national convention members voted to establish a Health Care Task Force to develop materials for leagues to use in educating and advocating health care reform as outlined in our league position. The task force is made up of 7 members from different parts of the country. It is developing fact sheets and will write articles to be used by local leagues.

LWVUS has also joined a lobbying group called the National Coalition for Health Care (NCHC). It is a coalition consisting of over 70 member organizations medical associations, labor unions, businesses, religious groups and health care advocates. It focuses on healthcare

coverage for all, cost management, improvement of health care quality and safety, equitable financing and simplified administration. There is not much activity on its website, it will be important to monitor how this coalition proceeds.

When LWVTC submitted priorities for the coming year we put health care as one of the top three – along with affordable housing and good government. State and local Leagues will be asked to do legislative interviews with members of Congress. State Leagues will be asked to meet with their Senators and local Leagues will be asked to meet with their Representatives. Emphasis will be placed on meeting with new members of Congress. This will be a perfect time to discuss our concerns about the current health care system.

In March we would like to co-sponsor an educational forum for the community. If you want to help organize the forum, call Lucia Armstong or Rebecca Elgie. Our committee is revising a handout to distribute around the community to help focus on the issues of health care and the various proposed solutions to meet health needs for all.

The program for the LWVTC Annual Meeting in April will be on health care. Between now and the April meeting, keep watching for ongoing opportunities to learn more about single payer health plans, the pros and cons of the Massachusetts Health and how we can work to bring about a comprehensive and quality system to the United States.

Our next health care committee meeting will be Friday, Jan. 23rd – 12:00-1:00 to work on revising the brochure and 1:00-2:30 regular committee meeting. All are welcome. For more information call Rebecca Elgie 272-0621 or Lucia Armstrong 257-2748

Rebecca Elgie

BACKGROUND FOR THE NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE COMPACT

The League has a long-standing position in support of the direct election of the president by popular vote. Now, League members have the opportunity to consider whether to support the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV Compact) as a viable process to achieve that result. The NPV Compact would avoid the need for a constitutional amendment abolishing the Electoral College (EC), and would assure that the individual receiving the most votes would become president.

The NPV Compact proposal uses the mechanism of the EC. States that legislatively enact the NPV Compact would agree that their state electors would vote for the individual that received the most votes nationwide. Thus, the popular vote count from all 50 states and the District of Columbia would be added together. State elections officials in all states participating would award their electoral votes to the presidential candidate who receives the largest number of popular votes.

This alternative method of assigning a state's EC votes would take effect only when enacted by states collectively possessing a majority of the electoral votes. This 270-vote threshold also

corresponds essentially to states representing a majority of the people of the United States.

The plan includes procedural provisions to help assure smooth functioning of the agreement – conditions that deal with states deciding to withdraw from the Compact at the last moment, enforcement issues and recounts.

Currently four states have passed legislation to enact the NPV Compact.

There are pros and cons to this plan, which are discussed in full in papers found on the LWVUS Web site. Summaries of these papers are also available. League members can learn more about the plan from these sources and consider its ramifications at consensus meetings across the country. Be sure to participate! Who better than the League to be ready to speak to this good-government issue?

To prepare for the consensus meeting, please read the complete version of this paper, available at <http://www.lwv.org> by the LWVUS National Popular Voter Compact Study Committee.

Sunny Gooding

LWV-TC CALENDAR—2008-2009

7:30	Mon.	Jan. 26	EDUCATIONAL MEETING— National Popular Vote	
			Professor Donald Beachler, Ithaca College	Human Services Building
7:00	Mon.	Feb. 2	BOARD MEETING	Old Jail
noon	Sat.	Feb. 28	LUNCH MEETING—School Superintendents — Panel	Wmn. Comm. Bldg.
7:00	Mon.	Mar. 2	BOARD MEETING	Old Jail
7:00	Mon.	Mar. 23	CONSENSUS MEETING — National Popular Vote	Wmn. Comm. Bldg.
7:00	Mon.	Apr. 6	BOARD MEETING	Alene Wyatt
7:00	Mon.	Apr. 27	ANNUAL MEETING—Health Care Roundtable	Salvation Army
7:00	Mon.	May 4	BOARD MEETING	Kathy Burlitch
7:00	Thur.	May 7	CANDIDATES' FORUM—ICSD School Board	IHS Auditorium
7:00	Mon.	June 1	BOARD MEETING	Kay Sharp
noon-				
9:00	Tues.	May19	SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS	

NPV STUDY COMMITTEE

The NPV Committee met on 1/5/09 at Kendal and discussed the materials now available on the National LWV website (www.lwv.org). These include the National Popular Vote Compact text, a background article, articles pro and con, the consensus questions and a reading list. We divided up the reading list and will report on the articles read to the other committee members at the next meeting, which is Friday, 1/30/09 at noon at Kendal. At that time we will also begin preparing for consensus--the consensus meeting is on March 23 at the Women's Community Building. We will also be discussing ideas generated at the January program meeting, which is on Monday, January 26, at 7:30 in the Human Services Building (see the announcement elsewhere in the Bulletin). The speaker is Professor Donald Beachler of IC who will be discussing National Popular Vote.

Sunny Gooding

**KNOW YOUR SCHOOLS —
PUBLICATION COMMITTEE**

Two committee meetings have been held to date, November 17, 2008 (6:30-7:30 p.m.) and December 17, 2008 (10:30 a.m.). Letters introducing the project and copies of the applicable sections of the previous edition of the booklet were sent to Tompkins County schools. Committee members are now in the process of collecting data and revising the booklet format. If you are interested in working on this project, please contact Kathleen Yen, 257-8199, <<mailto:kyen@twcny.rr.com>>kyen@twcny.rr.com for more information.

Committee Members: Kathleen Yen, Kay Sharp, Kathy Buritch, Deborah O'Connor, Ceil Spero, Margaret Myers, Peggy Robinson, and Rachel Richards (PTA Council liaison)

Kathleen Yen

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOMPKINS COUNTY: BOARD 2008-09

LWV NYS website
LWV US website
LWV-Tompkins County

leave message at 272-4748

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CURBING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

By Eleanor Revelle from the LWV-US

Facing the growing evidence that burning fossil fuels is contributing significantly to global climate change, policymakers are evaluating strategies for reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. They have two general approaches to consider.

Cap-and-Trade

With a cap-and-trade system, policymakers set a limit on the quantity of a pollutant (e.g., CO₂) that can be emitted in a given period. The total emissions allowed under this cap are divided into permits representing the right to emit a given amount (e.g., one ton of CO₂). The permits are then allocated to the sources covered by the program (e.g., power plants). At the end of the compliance period, each source must report all emissions and surrender an equivalent number of permits.

Since the number of permits is limited, they have financial value. Companies able to reduce their emissions at low cost can sell the permits they don't need to companies for whom the cost of reducing emissions is high. Each company has the flexibility to choose how to meet its emissions target, but market incentives encourage them to develop new, cleaner technologies. Over time, the cap is lowered to achieve more aggressive emissions-reduction goals.

Carbon Tax

A carbon tax is imposed on fossil fuel suppliers at a rate that reflects the amount of carbon that will be emitted when the fuel is combusted. The tax is included in the price of the coal, oil, and natural gas supplied to wholesale users and ultimately is passed on to consumers. By raising the price of carbon-based energy, the tax creates incentives to reduce energy use, stimulates demand for more energy-efficient products, and promotes a shift to cleaner fuels and renewable energy.

Emissions Certainty

The strength of the **cap-and-trade** approach is

that it sets firm limits on emissions. The cap is set at a level designed to achieve a desired environmental outcome (e.g., a reduction of CO₂ emissions to 80 percent of 1990 levels by 2050).

A **carbon tax** allows the quantity of emissions to fluctuate as the demand for energy rises or falls. Allowing emissions to vary from year to year gives firms the flexibility to abate less and pay more in taxes when abatement costs are unusually high (and vice-versa when abatement costs are low). In order to achieve climatic goals, the tax rate can be adjusted over time to attain greater emissions reductions.

Price Predictability

The advantage of a **carbon tax** is that it fixes the price of carbon emissions. It creates a permanent incentive to reduce emissions, thereby encouraging investment in alternative fuels and energy-efficient technologies that have high up-front costs.

Under a **cap-and-trade** system, the price of emissions permits may vary considerably from year to year. An especially cold winter, for example, could increase the demand for energy and cause a spike in the price of permits. This volatility could weaken incentives to invest in cleaner technologies.

Simplicity and Transparency

A **cap-and-trade** system requires new institutions (e.g., a system to allocate permits, markets where firms can buy and sell permits, a means of monitoring emissions and trades). Auctioning permits rather than distributing them free could help promote simplicity and transparency.

A **carbon tax** can be levied and collected via existing institutions with experience in enforcing compliance. It is simpler and less expensive to administer and enforce than a cap-and-trade system. Its underlying premise—the price of energy should include the environmental costs associated with its production—is transparent and readily understood.

POLITICS IN ACTION

Shall we shoot the deer? How many votes does it take to elect a vice-chair? Who really owns that land? Where should we get our water from? Should that road be widened? What guidelines need to be established for wind-farms?

Have you ever wondered how those decisions really get made? There are six villages, one city, nine towns and one county in Tompkins County. Each, as far as I know, has a legislative board or council and these are where the decisions are being made.

Take the time to attend a meeting or two. See how it works. Ask questions. Give the board members your viewpoint. How else are they to know the views of their constituents? If you want to go well prepared, agendas and minutes of past meetings are available on the web for many of these boards.

Collected below are meeting times and places for those boards with informative web-sites. Take an evening off and attend a meeting: you may find it good entertainment.

Bob Silsbee

Tompkins County	1st & 3rd Tuesdays	5:30 pm	320 N. Tioga St., Ithaca
Town of:			
Caroline	1st Tuesday	7:00	Midline Rd. & Rte. 79, Slaterville Springs
Danby	2nd Monday	6:30	1830 Danby Rd., Ithaca
Dryden	2nd Wednesday	7:00	Town Hall, 93 East Main St., Dryden
Enfield	2nd Wednesday	6:30	168 Enfield Main Rd., Ithaca
Groton	2nd Tuesday	7:30	Town Hall, 101 Conger Blvd., Groton
Ithaca	check: www.town.ithaca.ny.us/		215 N. Tioga St., Ithaca
Lansing	1/21, 2/25, 3/18, 4/15	6:00	Town Hall, 29 Auburn Rd., Lansing
Newfield	2nd Thursday	7:00	166 Main St., Newfield
Ulysses	2nd Tuesday	7:30	10 Elm St., Trumansburg
City of Ithaca	1st Wednesday	7:00	108 East Green St., Ithaca
Village of:			
Cayuga Heights	1st & 3rd Thursdays	7:30	836 Hanshaw Rd., Ithaca
Dryden	3rd Thursday	7:00	16 South St., Dryden
Freeville			
Groton	3rd Monday	7:00	108 Cortland St., Groton
Lansing	1st & 3rd Mondays	7:30	2405 N. Triphammer Rd., Ithaca
Trumansburg	check: www.trumansburg-ny.gov/		56 E. Main St., Trumansburg

YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS

SENATORS:

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