



Rochester/Metro League of Women Voters

Mission Statement

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.

Voter education is one of the League's most important functions, and the League encourages all citizens to register and to cast an informed vote.

The League does not support political parties or candidates, but does take stands on important issues after careful study and research.

Membership in the League is open to all citizens of voting age.

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Save the Date for Our October Forum!

Campaign Finance Reform in New York State A conversation on the state of our state

October 11, 2012, 7-9pm
Brighton Town Hall • Auditorium

While much has been written about the importance of campaign finance reform in restoring public trust in our political system, the public is not well aware of New York's specific shortcomings relating to sky-high contribution limits, loopholes and weak enforcement. This combination permits widespread abuses and questionable practices.

How are we, the people, affected by the current campaign finance laws?

- Loss of public trust in our political system
- Loss of qualified candidates
- Loss of viable election process
- Special interests' concerns being addressed ahead of citizens' concerns

Prepare yourself to evaluate Governor Cuomo's proposed campaign finance legislation.

Bring your questions and your friends to our presentation on October 11, 2012 at 7:00 pm in the Brighton Town Hall at 2300 Elmwood Avenue Rochester, NY 14618.

As an extra bonus: Learn about our website Vote411.org – one stop shopping for all you want to know about voting on November 6: how to register, where to vote and what candidates say about important issues.

Please join us for this informative discussion. Everyone is welcome!

From the President



We started the new League year with two excellent programs.

Sheila Abeling shepherded the Fair Election Practices Campaign kickoff on September 5 by forming a committee with TIAR to review any complaints by candidates during the election season.

Gin Busack and Barb Grosh facilitated a different kind of League program on September 6 that addressed our concern regarding the harsh, divisive discussions that are symptomatic of today's political season. (See article on page 5.)

The national Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) program emphasizes the importance of being visible in our community. And thanks to these excellent programs this past month we have achieved a great deal. Our Fair Election Practices Campaign (FEPC) was covered by the D&C, YNN Channel 9 and WROC Channel 8. Our program on *Civil Discourse in Uncivil Times* was covered by the D&C.

We are grateful to Gretchen Shafer's cousin, June Shafer, for a substantial contribution to our Student Inside Albany fund that will cover the expenses for a second student each year for the next 8 years. Truly this investment in our local youth is a worthy memorial.

It is also the "little things" that your fellow League members do that make us all proud to be Leaguers. For example, Ellen DeGregorio and Gin Busack delivered in person the 50-Year Certificates to those qualified members who were not able to attend the annual meeting. They were greeted with warm smiles and big thank-you's for their effort.

We extend our condolences to our long time League leader, Ann Jones, on the passing of her husband, Bob.

Keep an eye on our League calendar on the website to be informed regarding League activities for October, including our October 11 program on Campaign Finance Reform.



Public Relations

It's a busy time of year for the League, and you know what that means for the person with the title of Public Relations Chair – a lot of press releases, media alerts, emails, phone calls and interviews, and (hopefully) sharing the coverage of League activities by local media outlets.

Last year at this time we were scrambling to get a media list together and structuring a proper press and media release template, to make sure we weren't being overlooked. I am pleased to say that one year later we have gained traction, as well as the attention of a plethora of local media outlets, including the Democrat & Chronicle, Messenger Post Media, Daily Record, YNN, Channel 8, Fox, Channel 10, WXXI and 55 Plus Magazine.

All this progress has me thinking: how and why have we received the amount of publicity we have in such a short time? And the answer is (I think) relationships, and providing these relationships with powerful and relevant content.

Continuing on the path we have created, I am confident our public profile in the Greater Rochester area will only get larger. Of course there is always room for improvement so I will make an effort to start posting articles in *The Voter* and online in order to keep members aware of the publicity we receive. Special thanks go to Georgia DeGregorio, Kathy Smith, Sheila Abeling, Gin Busack and Ellen DeGregorio for helping the new Public Relations guy make a splash with the local media.

If you have any suggestions or comments, please feel free to email me at pr@lwv-rma.org.

Brian Valenti

Public Relations Chair

Did you know...

- that Elizabeth MacNamara, President of LWVUS, writes a blog on the Huffington Post? Visit www.huffingtonpost.com and type "Elizabeth MacNamara" into the search box.
- that Elizabeth MacNamara, President of LWVUS, posts regularly on Twitter? If you have a Twitter account, follow and "tweet" her at "LWV of the US."
- that the LWVNY Hydraulic Fracturing Committee unanimously agreed to change its name to the Committee on Energy, Agriculture and the Environment?
- that LWVUS maintains a blog on its website? For info on many topical issues, read (and then comment) at www.lwv.org/blog.

Fair Elections Practices Campaign

ABSENTEE BALLOTS:

Election Day is coming – November 6th! We need volunteers to open absentee ballots. It's a wonderful opportunity to do your civic duty, and the League really appreciates your efforts. Please contact Sheila at sheiler162007@gmail.com or 585-223-6819, if you are interested in helping.

FEPC:

On September 5 the League of Women Voters/ Rochester Metro Area (LWV/RMA) and The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester (TIAR) sponsored a Signing Ceremony/Press Conference in the Atrium of the Monroe County Office Building. That day gave candidates in the upcoming election an opportunity to sign the Pledge to conduct a fair, issue-oriented campaign. Also on that day the entire Pledge List was read, including all candidates who had previously signed the Pledge.

The Fair Election Practices Campaign (FEPC) began on August 27th and ends on Election Day, November 6th. Our FEPC Committee has begun hearing complaints.

A special thank-you to the committee members for all their efforts during this fair campaign season: Jim Morris, Ralph Esposito, Tracy Logel, Channing Philbrick and Kay Wallace, and alternates John Curran, Tom Frey, Lois Giess, Jim Peters, Sue Roberts and Jim Turner.

A special thank-you goes out to League members who have helped me with the 2012 Fair Election Practices Campaign: Barbara Hendry, Brian Valenti, Barbara Grosh, Georgia DeGregorio, Katherine Smith and Sally Brown.

NATURALIZATIONS:

On September 17th at SUNY Brockport we will be celebrating Constitution Day. Beth Feldman and Katherine Smith will be participating in the Naturalization Ceremony at the college and welcoming candidates as new citizens of the USA.

October 11th will bring two ceremonies: one at the Monroe County Office Building in the morning and one at the Federal Building in the afternoon. Marcia Eisenberg and Joan Rosenthal will welcome candidates in the morning, and Sheila Abeling and Beth Feldman will welcome new citizens in the afternoon.

Sheila Abeling
FEPC Chair

The Need for Ad Watching in 2012

From December through early August, 10 third-party groups spent just over \$108 million in ad dollars on the presidential contest, over half (51%) of it on 35 ads containing deceptive or misleading claims.

From December 1, 2011, through June 1, 2012, 85% of the dollars spent on presidential ads by the four top-spending third-party groups known as 501(c)(4)s was spent on ads containing at least one claim ruled deceptive by fact-checkers at FactCheck.org, PolitiFact.com, the Fact Checker at the Washington Post or the Associated Press.

The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania has funded www.factcheck.org whose mission is to “monitor the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players in the form of TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews and news releases. Our goal is to apply the best practices of both journalism and scholarship, and to increase public knowledge and understanding.”

A sister site, www.flackcheck.org, was recently established to examine the lighter side of spin. Its mission is to use “parody and humor to debunk false political advertising, poke fun at extreme language, and hold the media accountable for their reporting on political campaigns.”

Please take the time to visit and use these excellent resources!



Sunshine Corner

CITY COUNCIL

We need a volunteer to observe the City Council. This is a good way to keep tabs on your own community! (To view the full minutes from this and other meetings, please click here: <http://www.cityofrochester.gov/councilproceedings>)

IRONDEQUOIT TOWN BOARD

Our observer notes that Stephanie Aldersley, a Democrat tapped to fill Vinnie Esposito's seat in the Monroe County Legislature, has been replaced with a Republican. Peter Kelderhouse is the new town board member. (To view the full minutes from this and other meetings, please click here: <https://www.irondequoitrec.com/weblink7/Browse.aspx>)

MONROE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

The Legislature has budgeted! With the help of both Democrats and Republicans, the Legislature is working on a new burial policy for people who apply for financial assistance for burial.

The legislature received a great deal of information on fracking and fracking waste water. One speaker stated that the water can be radioactive far above federal limits. (To view the full minutes from this and other meetings, please click here: <http://www2.monroecounty.gov/legislature-agendasandminutes.php>)

WEBSTER TOWN BOARD

No LWV issues. The meeting was followed by the usual practice of taking live phone calls to the town supervisor from Webster residents who have questions or concerns. A wonderful opportunity for public input! (To view the full minutes from this and other meetings, please click here: <http://www.ci.webster.ny.us/Archive.aspx?AMID=41>)

Elaine Schmidt

Local Government Chair



Volunteer Opportunities

Committee members are needed on the Development and Nominating committees.

The Development Committee has overall responsibility for fund raising and is responsible for grant proposals as well as writing and mailing of the annual appeal letter in the fall. If you are interested in helping to ensure the future of the League or would like additional information about the committee, please contact Gaynelle Wethers at 389-2008 or gdwether@naz.edu.

The Nominating Committee encourages League members to volunteer for program planning, voters services (such as enrolling voters), fund raising and other leadership and committee roles. If you are interested in helping members to find just the right places for their talents, or for further information, please contact Lois Winterkorn at 671-1257 or loiswinterkorn@rochester.rr.com.

Representatives are needed to represent LWV/RMA at the following local environmental groups:

- Federation of Monroe County Environmentalists
- Monroe County Parks Commission
- Monroe County Water Quality Coordinating Committee.

For further information or to volunteer, please contact Jane Schmitt at 334-0588 or mjane@rochester.rr.com.

Local Government

The Local Government Committee has contacted area towns inquiring whether they hold work sessions or "workshop" meetings in addition to their regular town board meetings. We have found that many towns do schedule workshops regularly, and that some towns schedule a workshop only when necessary.

As a first step, the Local Government Committee plans to send a letter to all the towns expressing our concern that the public may not be aware that business can be conducted at a workshop. Also in question is whether the towns publish an agenda and allow public input at a workshop.

We will keep you informed of our progress on this important issue!

Elaine Schmidt

Local Government Chair

Who Loses with Current Campaign Finance Laws?

It is sad to say that we, the people, lose!!

It is not well known outside Albany that the existing system of reporting campaign contributions is routinely ignored. Many people, including the League of Women Voters, believe that enactment of strong campaign finance laws which are adequately enforced constitute the pathway to solving major election problems by increasing voter participation, enabling candidates to compete more equitably for public office, and lessening the impact of special interests on governmental processes.

When most of the money spent on politics comes from a small number of people who can afford to contribute large amounts of money, the result is unequal political power. The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) recently found that over one-third of the money that state candidates and political parties raised last year came from just 127 ultra-wealthy donors.

On October 11 we will present an educational program that LWVNY has developed to inform us of:

- the current state of campaign finance laws and their enforcement, weaknesses and limitations
- other states' laws and their enforcement
- alternatives for consideration in New York State.

This will prepare us to evaluate the proposed legislation expected soon from the governor's office.

See you there!!

Welcome New Members

Gloria Read
Dallas Nelson

Reminder:

Don't forget two important websites to guide you through the political season:

Flackcheck.org

and

Vote411.org

VOTE411.ORG
ELECTION INFORMATION YOU NEED

September 6 League Program a Success

Creating Civil Conversation in Uncivil Times, our Thursday, September 6 program, drew a wide variety of participants, most of whom were new to the League. We thank our facilitators from the National Coalition Building Institute, Steve Jarose and Navie James, for their dynamic leadership. In addition, we thank our League members who contributed time and effort through the summer to make the program a success.

The goal was to develop ways to listen more carefully to those with different points of view by being aware of the important steps that we must practice to de-escalate our natural tendency to "stress out" over disagreements on subjects dear to our heart.

Upon completion, four attendees formed a committee to address the specific questions regarding access to health care and to report back to our members through our website. If you were not able to attend but would like to join us for this limited commitment, please email Georgia DeGregorio at georgiatd1@gmail.com.

How about a League Book Club?

For over a year, your Membership Committee has been discussing a League book club. Writers & Books has offered to work with us to establish one. The concept would be to read and discuss books that relate to League positions. They could be fiction or non-fiction. An example would be reading *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and discussing our natural resource positions as they relate to this classic. This would combine our love of reading with discussing the political implications of what we read.

We would probably start after the New Year. Interested? Email us at georgiatd1@gmail.com and let us know!



Social Policy

VOTER PROTECTION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS

In 2010 New York State changed several laws to provide voting protection to domestic violence victims. Voting is a right that sometimes has been denied to victims of domestic violence. Balancing their need for safety against their desire to participate in the voting process, victims were forced to choose between registering to vote and forgoing voting in order to maintain their personal safety and the confidentiality of their address.

Polling places are a matter of public record and, by law, are easily accessible. They can become ideal places for victims to be stalked or confronted by their abusive current or former partners.

New York State Laws of 1996, Chapter 702 allowed domestic violence victims or members of their family to vote at the Board of Elections with special paper ballots. However, that law did not define who is a "victim of domestic violence" or who is a "member of their family." New York State Laws of 2010, Chapter 38 amended the law by expanding the requirement that a victim must have left the original residence due to threats of physical harm, to now include threats of emotional harm not just to themselves but also to members of the "same family or household." The 2010 amendment defined "family or household members" as:

- Persons related by consanguinity or affinity.
- Persons legally married to one another.
- Persons formerly married to one another regardless of whether they still reside in the same household.
- Persons who have a child in common regardless of whether such persons are married or have lived together at any time.
- Persons who are not related by consanguinity or affinity and who are or have been in an intimate relationship regardless of whether such persons have lived together at any time.

While voter registration access is sometimes limited to political parties or candidates, journalists and academia, a study conducted by The California Voter Foundation (from "Voter Privacy in the Digital Age: A Report by the California Voter Foundation" by Kim Alexander and Keith Mills. May 2004) indicates that 22 states have unrestricted access to voter records. Currently New York State allows for voter registration records to be made public to ANYONE who submits a request in writing and cites the correct law reference. This access to registration records unintentionally places domestic violence victims in a position

of vulnerability and risk, rendering their address of residence easily available to their abuser. For victims seeking to rebuild their lives, the threat of having such information become public is, quite simply, unacceptable, and they will choose the absence of participation in the voting process over the risk of harm to themselves and their families. New York State Laws of 2010, Chapter 73 created Election Law §5-508 which allows victims of domestic violence to have their election records kept separate from the publicly available election information.

In order to have their information kept confidential, a domestic violence victim must apply to the Supreme Court in the county where they reside for a court order requiring the County Board of Elections to keep their registration information confidential. They must have been a victim of a family offense or violent felony which resulted in emotional or physical injury, or the substantial risk of emotional or physical harm to themselves or their child. They must also be a "member of the same family or household" as defined above.

This is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We encourage individuals to exercise their right to vote. It is important to remember these important protections so that everyone can vote AND remain safe.

Carly Wise-Levick

Social Policy Chair

A special thanks to Amy Schwartz at Empire Justice for her technical assistance.





Coming Events!



September

25 National Voter Registration Day

27 LWV/RMA Board Meeting

October

11 Campaign Finance Reform/Vote 411.org, 7-9 pm, Brighton Town Hall

25 LWV/RMA Board Meeting

30 Debate between candidates for the 25th Congressional District: Incumbent Louise Slaughter and challenger Maggie Brooks at Nazareth College. Sponsored by LWV/RMA and WROC, channel 8

November

6 Election Day

8 Concurrence on Michigan's Great Lakes Consensus

15 LWV/RMA Board meeting

January

12 Saturday Member Meeting at Buckland Park, 1341 Westfall Road in Brighton

Photos from September 5 FEPC Ceremony



Board meets at 5:30 pm on the fourth Thursday of each month. Board meetings are open to membership. Local Government Committee meets monthly at the Brighton Town Hall, Stage Room. For details, call Elaine Schmidt 530-7414.

Membership Committee meets monthly at Brighton Town Hall, Stage Room. For details, call Ellen DeGregorio 473-3502.

10:00 am Naturalization Ceremonies are held at Monroe County Office Building, 39 W. Main St.

1:00 pm Naturalization Ceremonies are held at Federal Court House at 100 State Street

Forums are open to the public. Calendar information subject to change.

For more complete information, consult our website at www.LWV-RMA.org, call 262-3730 or e-mail us at info@lwv-rma.org



**Rochester/Metro
League of Women Voters**

PO Box 10573
Rochester, NY 14610
p 585-262-3730
www.LWV-RMA.org

**NEXT VOTER
DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 1!**



**Exercise
your Franchise
and
VOTE!**

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President
Brian Valenti
Vice President
John Schmitt
Treasurer

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Voter Editor
Chris Burleigh
Voter Layout & Production
Carly Wise-Levick
Social Policy
Sheila Abeling
Voter Servic
Gaynell Wethers
Development
Kathy Smith
Advocacy

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Ellen DeGregorio
Chairperson, Membership
Elaine Schmidt
Chairperson, Local Government
Barbara Grosh
Chairperson, Voter Services
Ernest DuBois
At-Large

Goals of the League of Women Voters:

- To encourage informed citizen participation in government and politics
- To influence public policy through education and advocacy

Join the League Today!



Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Check Amount: _____

Level of Membership: _____

Please send this form and your check payable to
League of Women Voters/RMA to:

LWV/RMA
PO Box 10573
Rochester, NY 14610

or join us online at: www.lwv-rma.org/join.php

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS:

Individual/Associate\$75
Household\$105
Susan B. Anthony/Frederick Douglass\$150
Carrie Chapman Catt\$200
Student (full-time/under 25)\$25
Low income, call office Sliding Scale