

# *Inside* the New York City League

League of Women Voters of the City of New York  
45 East 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY 10016 - Tel. (212) 725-3541 - Fax (212) 725-3443

Winter 2002

## **Letter to LWVNYC Members**

*by Robin Bahr, LWVNYC Chair*

Amy Beissel has returned to the League office as a part-time executive director. This is the best thing that has happened to the League in a year. As many of you know, Amy was the executive director from 1989-1996 and enhanced the entire operation with her extraordinary talent for administration. Since then she has volunteered in a variety of capacities, most recently as a member of the advisory board.

The position was proposed on a six-month trial basis as part of the League's Strategic Plan for independence. The board's recommendation was premised on its belief that if New York were ever to regain independence, the leadership must be freed to focus on outreach and development. The Transition Committee approved the plan.

There are risks involved. We are spending money for which we have no immediate replacement, and at a time when things are tough in New York. The city is in the midst of a recession. Nonprofits are in trouble with charity dollars going to relief efforts. Our corporate solicitation, which was postponed by the attacks on the World Trade Center, has produced minimal results. It is the board's feeling, however, that the greater risk is to

maintain the status quo, which holds no promise of growth. We chose to take the risk.

Our first and foremost responsibility will be to raise funds. Several ideas are under consideration. One is a fundraising breakfast in the spring featuring the city comptroller, and the Speaker and Finance chair from the new City Council, addressing the city's budget and spending priorities. Potential collaborators are being approached. Pamela Roderick is chairing this committee and needs help.

A second proposal is to revive the annual awards luncheon featuring a state-of-the-city address by the new mayor along with recognition of honorees who have contributed to the well-being of the democratic process and/or voter rights. We need a committee to work on this starting now.

We need help in promoting *They Represent You (TRY)* and *What Makes New York City Run?* This is crucial. Book sales and membership renewals are the only current ongoing sources of revenue. We also need help in filling book orders.

A campaign for new members is scheduled for January, which will feature a new

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**League of Women Voters  
of the City of New York**

**Officers**

Chair	Robin Bahr
Vice-Chair	Fannie Conner
Secretary/Treasurer	Barbara Barr

**Advisory Board**

Miriam Adelman	Shelly Loarwick
Laura Altschuler	Pamela Roderick
Marian Bott	Lillian Seidman
Katherine Flaherty	Elma Smolen
Adrienne Kivelson	Arlene Solomon
Donna Landay	Valerie Warner
LWV/NYS Liaison	Mary Lou Urban
<i>Inside Editor</i>	Patricia Young
Executive Director	Amy Beissel

**Tribute Fund**

**In Honor of**

Robin Bahr  
*by Laura Altschuler*

Mike Smolen's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday  
*by Laura Altschuler*

**In Memory of**

Francis Moore  
brother of Margaret Otis  
*by Elma Smolen*

Esther Schlanger  
*by Elma Smolen*

**This and That**

*by Mary Lou Urban*

I am pleased to report that reorganization of the LWVNYC Speakers Bureau is under way. We have held meetings to determine the topics and direction we want to take. We will supply information on League background, history of the women's vote, topics of current interest—we will be ready to tailor our material to meet most any request. Within the next few weeks a press release will be issued advising that the Speakers Bureau is up and running.

We are anxious to broaden our base of knowledge and if you have a particular expertise we would love to hear from you. If you want to spread the word of the League and its work, let us hear from you. We need you to make this endeavor a success.

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**News from the State League**

*by Mary Lou Urban*

Based on responses from local leagues statewide, the following topics have been selected as legislative focus for 2002:

1. Budget Process Reform
2. Access to Health Care
3. Council for the Indigent
4. Redistricting
5. Election and Voting Practices Reform

The state League will, of course, act as necessary when other issues on which we have positions arise.

It is not too late to form a committee to participate in the two-year state study "From Arrest to Sentencing." If you are interested in chairing this committee, please contact the N.Y.C. League office: (212) 725-3541. Money is available for forums, etc.

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**Contribution to LWVNYC from Ohio LWV**

The NYC League was the recipient of extraordinary support from the Ohio League who sent us \$100 in October as an expression of their sympathy and solidarity in the wake of September 11. It is this kind of sensitivity and concern that has characterized the American spirit in times of crisis. It is heartwarming and reaffirming to know that this spirit exists within our own organization.

## Letter to LWVNYC Members

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brochure designed by Pamela Roderick. Lifetime TV has agreed to fund the brochure and mailing as they did with the corporate mailing.

We are targeting professional women, minority activists, and retirees as prospects. We need a committee to undertake this project.

The Speakers Bureau has been revived by Mary Lou Urban. Our Public Relations Committee will promote this as well as all of our programs and services.

Former LWVNYC president Nicky Heller is chairing the revival of our City Council Watch Committee. We will be monitoring the new City Council in its administration and revitalization of New York.

The state and national Leagues are undertaking studies in which we might play a crucial role. Election Reform, Balancing Justice, Court Reorganization—these are subjects of national importance in which we should have a voice. We desperately need an Education chair to initiate and direct our participation on studies of public importance.

Progress has been made in the last six months. TIS has continued to function. The

newsletter has been published. There have been branch meetings. We've held two membership meetings and the program chair, Elma Smolen, is planning to hold meetings every other month. Dorothy Kreiselman organized a theatre outing and another is in the works. Two League letters have been published in the *New York Times*. We've made national public service announcements on voting, which were aired before November elections across the country. All of this has helped our cause and given us greater presence and voice. But it is not enough.

We must raise a minimum of \$30,000 per year to function. We must find people who will take responsibility for functions that are critical to our mission, i.e., fundraising and program and we must engage in activities that warrant funding. Unless we meet these challenges, we cannot hope to regain independence.

We are now asking each of you to give to the League in terms of service and/or financial support. We have six months in which to prove ourselves worthy of the opportunity we've been given with Amy Beissel. If you truly believe in this organization, renew your commitment now and ensure that the LWVNYC is a voice in this city's future as it has been in its past.

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## Do You Concur with the Proposed New LWVUS Position on Trade?

A proposed new LWVUS position on trade has been developed, and the LWVUS Board is seeking concurrence directly from individual League members. You will find the proposed position, along with a response form, in your December 2001/January 2002 *National Voter*. If you want to do more to prepare, reread the articles on trade that have appeared in the last several issues of *The National Voter*—available on the LWVUS website at [lwv.org/members/trade](http://lwv.org/members/trade).

## Branch Meetings

Meetings have been scheduled by the branches listed below:

### BRONX

#### **Bronx**

Contact: Lee Abramowitz

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, Feb. 19; 1:30-3:00 pm

Topic: Redistricting

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, Mar. 19; 1:30-3:00 pm

Topic: Women's History

#### **Riverdale**

Contact: Pat Young

Please call for information.

### BROOKLYN

#### **Midwood**

Contact: Rose Yalan  
or Janet Vickrey

**Date/Time:** Friday, Mar. 22; 1:00 pm

**Date/Time:** Friday, Apr. 26; 1:00 pm

Please call for additional information.

### MANHATTAN

#### **Upper West Manhattan**

Contact: Sylvia Berman

**Date/Time:** Monday, Jan. 21; 11:00 am

Topic: International Trade

**Date/Time:** Monday, Feb. 18; 11:00 am

Topic: City Affairs

### QUEENS

#### **North Shore**

Contact: Marjorie Ferrigno

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, Feb. 20; 12:30 pm

Topic: Consensus-LWVUS Trade Position

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, Mar. 20; 12:30 pm

Topic: Immigration

**Future Dates:** April 17; May 15

#### **Southeast Queens**

Contact: Mary Cox

**Date/Time:** Sunday, Jan. 20; 3:00 pm

Topic: Education Scholarship Program

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, Feb. 20; 3:00 pm

Topic: International Trade

### **Volunteers Needed**

- Coordinator, Newsletter/Mailings
- Chair, Volunteer Recruitment
- Chair, Education

Call Robin Bahr at the League office Monday-Wednesday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. if you are willing to take on one of these responsibilities or any related tasks.

### **School Board Elections Committee**

We would like to form a committee to "Get Out the Vote" for school board elections 5/2002. The committee will select a target area, design hand-outs, develop and implement the outreach strategy and work with and/or be part of the Speakers Bureau. Your input is needed.

The first meeting will be held on Saturday, February 2, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. at the League office, Room 331.

## LWVNYC Member Questionnaire

Kindly respond by February 9, 2002 — LWVNYC, 45 East 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY 10016

Today, the New York City League is evaluating the service it provides to you and the community. Your answer to the questions below will enable us to better address the issues in our fast-paced, technologically oriented society.

*Please print*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

1) League member since \_\_\_\_\_

2) As a League member, have you been active in the organization?  Yes  No

2a) If yes, please list position(s), committee(s), special assignments, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

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3) The League is managed by “too few” volunteers, which limits our activities and services. We need more involved members—please become one by checking your area(s) of interest.

<input type="checkbox"/> Development/Fundraising	<input type="checkbox"/> Membership	<input type="checkbox"/> Voter Registration/School Board Elections
<input type="checkbox"/> General Office Work	<input type="checkbox"/> Event Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Membership
<input type="checkbox"/> Lobbying	<input type="checkbox"/> Grant Writing	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Study Items	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Speaking	

3a) If you have not attended any recent meetings, please share reason(s). \_\_\_\_\_

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4) Which of the following influence you to attend League meetings?  
 Topic  Speaker  Day  Location  Time

5) Would you attend panel discussions on study items?  Yes  No  
Would you attend luncheon/breakfast or dinner with featured speakers?  Yes  No

6) What city issue(s) would you like the League to study? \_\_\_\_\_

7) What national issue(s) would you like the League to study? \_\_\_\_\_

The League is primarily funded through membership dues, and contributions from members and non-members. In answering the following questions, please remember that \$37 of your annual dues goes to support our national and state leagues.

8) Would you pay \$75 to \$100 to attend a fundraiser that involves a major speaker?  Yes  No

9) Would you pay a small admission charge to attend a forum or hear a speaker of interest to you?  
 Yes  No

10) Any suggestion or comments you have would be appreciated.

Thank you for your time and interest.

## REDISTRICTING

*On Saturday, December 8, 2001, David Wells, a noted authority on legislative redistricting, gave a fascinating talk to the N.Y.C. League on the intricacies of redrawing congressional, state legislative and City Council lines as required after each census. Below is a summary he prepared of his remarks.*

Redistricting, which generally takes place every ten years following each federal census, largely determines the political character of our law-making bodies and therefore affects the disposition of every issue at every level of government.

Apportionment means the assignment of a specific number of seats in a legislative body to a particular geographic area. Today, the only reapportionment of importance is the assignment of numbers of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives to each state, based on their populations. This is an automatic process.

Districting means the division of a geographic area into geographic districts for the purpose of electing members to a legislative body.

Gerrymandering means drawing district boundaries in such a way as to give a special advantage to one political party or one faction or specific individual candidates.

Until the 1960s, there were huge population differences between districts, resulting in great political advantages for rural areas over urban areas and, because cities tend to be more liberal politically, for conservative over liberal political forces. In New York state, this meant almost permanent Republican control of the legislature until the system, which was embedded in the state constitution, was ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1964.

Today, all districts in a legislative body must have virtually equal populations. But while the urban vs. rural dimensions of the issue have vanished, the partisan political ones have not. Redistricting battles still pit Democrats against Republicans. Furthermore, a relatively new form of gerrymandering—"bipartisan gerrymandering" under which the political parties often strike informal "agreements" under which district lines are drawn

to provide advantages to certain favored legislators of *both* parties—has become quite prevalent. This type of gerrymandering has been widely practiced in New York state since the mid-'70s—a period during which Democrats have held the Assembly and Republicans the Senate continuously.

In the past 20 years, race has become as important an element of redistricting battles as partisan politics.

There are several different ways to gerrymander when one party or group controls the process. The type used depends on whether the controlling party is the usual majority or minority in a particular area.

In the upcoming redistricting at the congressional level, Republicans may gain a few seats because of population gains in "sunbelt" states, but in New York, which will lose two House seats, it may be difficult to take one seat away from each party because population growth has been much larger in the metropolitan area than upstate.

Although there is little current prospect of changing the way legislative districts are drawn, there are two ways reform could be achieved. One is by taking the power to draw districts away from the legislatures and turning it over to a bipartisan commission. This has been done in about a dozen states and in New York at the city level (for Council districts). The problems are that commission members tend to reflect the wishes of those who appointed them, and that bipartisan commissions often result in bipartisan gerrymandering.

The second route to reform would be to require that districts be delineated on the basis of certain logical, specific, enforceable rules: population equality, geographic contiguity and compactness, and a minimal splitting up of counties, towns and cities.

## Letter from LWVNYC to New York City Council Members

Congratulations on your election to the City Council. We wish you great success in addressing the needs and concerns of all New Yorkers.

One of your first responsibilities will be to adopt Council rules. These rules have a very decisive impact on the effectiveness of the Council. In your deliberations we urge you to follow the mandate of the Charter as well as the intent of the Commission by incorporating the following principles:

- Enhance the ability of individual council members to speak for and represent their constituencies
- Enhance the power and independence of council committees
- Enhance public participation by open thorough debate
- Create a timely and responsive budget process

The League of Women Voters has always been committed to fostering open and participatory government. We have previously gone on record in support of charter reforms to make the Council an equal partner with the mayor in governing the City of New York, and we would like to see Council rules that reflect this principle.

The League also endorses efforts to use the web for disseminating information to the public as an appropriate response to current New York City Charter mandates, such as section 42, to “make publicly available” at least 36 hours prior to a stated meeting of the Council the proposed agenda and a list of all

proposed local laws or resolutions to be considered, and to provide complete transcripts of Council meetings and public hearings.

Some proposed reforms of the Council rules were enacted in the Charter revisions of 1989 that the League strongly supported. In addition to section 42, cited above, section 36 states, “No local law shall be passed until it shall have been in its final form and upon the desks of the Council members at least seven calendar days, exclusive of Sundays, prior to its final passage, unless the Mayor shall have certified as to the necessity for its immediate passage and such local law be passed by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of all Council members.”

Also, section 46 says the first-named sponsor of a proposed local law or resolution shall be able to require a committee vote on it and that a majority of the Council may discharge a bill from committee. Attention to these three provisions already in the law will assist in implementing the principles cited above, but much more remains to be done.

The League has reinstated its “Council Watch” program to provide consistent and continuous public monitoring of the Council. At the end of the year we plan to recommend other changes in the Council rules to help achieve the four principles enunciated above.

Please accept our very best wishes for a year of accomplishment and service. We look forward to working with you

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### Save the Dates:

March 16, 2002  
June 8, 2002

Women’s History Month Celebration  
LWVNYC Annual Meeting

## Testimony for the New York City Campaign Finance Board Hearing December 11, 2001

*Submitted by Laura Alschuler, LWVNYC Special Projects Coordinator*

From the League's perspective, the abundance of candidates in the 2001 election cycle resulted, first and foremost, from the imposition of term limits. The ability to run for office without having to face a well-known, well-financed incumbent attracted serious candidates who might otherwise have stayed out of races. This was certainly the case with the lively contest for public advocate, which produced an added bonus. The televised debates, as mandated by the Debates Law and the press coverage surrounding them, provided voters with a much greater understanding of this office. This is not to say that the League supports term limits, but that's a discussion for another day and another place.

Secondly, the availability of matching funds for contributions under \$250 certainly made it possible for a more diverse group of candidates to enter Council races, have the resources to get their message out and in many cases, win.

However, we are concerned that the financial reporting process and the delays in reimbursement more seriously impede the newer and less experienced candidates than those who have party backing or can afford to hire sophisticated financial advisors. While we understand and applaud the board's careful scrutiny of financial reports, we urge you to review your procedures to assure that campaign financing really levels the playing field and not just gives the more experienced team an added advantage.

The *Voter Guide* is a most valuable resource and we particularly appreciated the

board's extraordinary efforts to produce and distribute not just one, but two guides this year. Since the *Guide* provides voters with an unbiased description of candidates and the pros and cons of ballot issues, we believe it should be the only campaign literature paid for and distributed by a city agency, board or commission. This year the Charter Commission spent government funds on a citywide mailing to promote its own recommendations. We consider this an inappropriate use of scarce tax levy dollars. There is certainly a role for issue advocacy in every election. We believe that role should be played and paid for by nongovernmental organizations.

The New York City Finance Board and public campaign financing have been a beacon to the rest of the country. We support all efforts to clarify procedures and enhance training to achieve full and timely disclosure of contributions to all political campaigns. The system is still a work in progress and we do not recommend any further restrictions on contributors or the use of public funds until there has been a full review of the 2001 election cycle.

We just had an election where the winning candidate for mayor did not participate in the campaign finance program and spent more than any mayoral candidate in history. This was his right. However, we believe the citizens of New York would be better served if all candidates for citywide office participated in public financing and in the debates. This is our goal for 2005.

**Excerpts of Testimony on the  
Debate Program for the New York City Campaign Finance Board Hearing, Dec. 11, 2001**

*Comments submitted on behalf of the LWVNYC by Laura Altschuler, Special Projects Director, and on behalf of WABC-TV by Dan Forman, News Director, pursuant to the requirement of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to assist the Campaign Finance Board (CFB) in evaluating the operation and effectiveness of the Debate Law.*

In this election cycle WABC-TV and LWV cosponsored the first comptroller debate, mayoral primary and runoff debates, the alternate forum for minor party candidates, and the “leading-contender” mayoral general election debate. A Republican Primary Debate (was) turned down by Michael Bloomberg. He did not participate in the campaign finance program—was not obligated to participate.

The attacks on the World Trade Center affected all of us in NYC. We applaud CFB’s efforts in trying to keep the program going.... We continued our efforts to publicize all debates and forums and...to get out the vote.

The Debate Program did help educate the voters. In the rush to name Mayor Giuliani as a candidate or a write-in, or to eliminate term limits, voters learned the consequences of voting for term limits. Voters had some understanding of the mayor’s powers and responsibilities; less true of those of the comptroller and public advocate. After watching these debates, voters had a far better understanding of these officials and the roles they play.

As a result of polls, phone calls to the League’s Telephone Information Service... we would like to make the following points.

1. There remains a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of sponsors, cosponsors, broadcasters and of the CFB, under whose auspices the debates are held. All sponsors should be credited, as stated in the MOU, each time the debate is broadcast.

2. We appreciate that the *Voter Guides* were mailed in a timely fashion to all registered

voter households. (But) there was less advertising and publicity given the debates by the CFB than had been promised and expected.

3. While no legal problems occurred...we ...believe that as the CFB administers the Debate Law, the CFB or the city should indemnify...sponsors, many of (them) nonprofits.

4. Unless the Board of Elections finds a more accurate way to report election returns, the possibility of a runoff election and...a runoff debate will continue to be a cliffhanger. The double counting caused by putting more than one Election District on a voting machine in the Democratic Primary without adjusting the tally sheets should go the way of the “butterfly ballot” in Florida.

5. We appreciate your leaving the production details to the sponsors. Hearing from NYC residents and having reporters “live” in ...the boroughs made for a stimulating format. Survey respondents appreciated that immigration, education, crime, infrastructure and fiscal preparedness were discussed....

6. The polling criteria developed by the CFB and the sponsors was fair and effective.

The debates were broadcast on WABC-TV and WNYC radio. Video and sound tapes were provided for transmission in Spanish and Chinese. Copies of the debates were provided (to) Crosswalks and Channel 13.

We would be interested in reviewing the testimony generated by these hearings before making any recommendations regarding changes to the Debate Law.

**Citywide Meeting**

**Saturday, February 9, 2002 — 12 noon-1:30 p.m.**

**Buffet Luncheon**

**LWVNYC Headquarters**

Workmen's Circle Building—45 East 33<sup>rd</sup> St., Ground Floor Conference Room

**Guest Speaker:** Eva Moskowitz — City Council District 4

**Topic:** New Perspectives—City Council 2002

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**I/we will attend the citywide meeting on February 9:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Check payable to LWVNYC: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Members: \$10.00 Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Nonmembers: \$15.00 Names: \_\_\_\_\_