

Inside the New York City League

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

45 East 33rd Street, New York, NY 10016 • Tel. (212) 725-3541 • Fax (212) 725-3443 • (lwnnyc.org)

Fall 2003

Nonpartisan Elections

Where Do We Stand?

Join us to determine our position on this important city ballot issue.

Hear proponents and opponents discuss whether or not political party primary elections should be eliminated and replaced by nonpartisan elections for Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough Presidents and members of the City Council.

Thursday, October 16, 2003

6 to 8 p.m.

at our office – 45 East 33rd Street, 1st Floor

\$5.00 per member \$7.00 per non-member

Light refreshments will be served

At our 2003 Annual Meeting we voted to study and come to consensus on whether or not to accept nonpartisan elections for all elected city officials. A special committee met throughout the summer to monitor the activities of the Charter Revision Commission and study the proposal as put forward in their deliberations. At the end of August the Commission voted to place a question on the November ballot on nonpartisan elections. On page 5 you will find background information and a consensus question prepared by our committee. We encourage all members to attend this meeting. If you can't attend the meeting but want to participate in the consensus, fill in the ballot provided at the end of the briefing material and mail it to the League office so that it is received no later than **October 16th**.

**League of Women Voters
of the City of New York
2003-2004**

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Election Reform Debate Heats Up City's Summer

In addition to gearing up for this fall's City Council elections, the League has been busy monitoring a series of initiatives with far-reaching implications for New York City elections. As reported on page 1, a special committee, chaired by Barbara Barr, met through the summer in anticipation of the Charter Commission's adoption of a ballot proposal for nonpartisan elections. In July we testified before a State Board of Elections hearing on implementation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and League representatives have continued to participate in New York Voter Coalition activities. Implementation of HAVA remains as elusive as ever in New York, with a state plan short on specifics and unresponsive to the recommendations of good government organizations and advocates of the disabled and language minorities.

Voter registration remains a high priority and now we're focusing on "getting out the vote" of those we register. Under Fannie Conner's direction, material on the importance of voting was sent to more than 700 high school students we registered in 2002 and 2003. And, of course, we continue to fill speaking engagements, moderate candidates' nights and distribute educational material.

We updated last year's *Play a Primary Role* and we're working on a New York City supplement to the *LWVNY Facts for Voters*, which describes the two state ballot questions. The Charter Revision Commission passed two proposals in addition to the one on nonpartisan elections.

- Question #4 asks the voters whether they want to approve changes in charter-mandated purchasing methods.
- Question #5 proposes a range of administrative changes, including coordination of administrative law hearings, enhanced enforcement for the Conflicts of Interest Board and reconfiguration of the Voter Assistance Commission.

We hope to have this material, including information on city elections and descriptions, and pros and cons on the three city ballot questions, ready for distribution by the end of September. Please check with the office about availability (212-725-3541) and then stop in to pick up *Facts for Voters* to distribute in your community.

Tribute Fund

In Honor of

Helen Heller's new twin grandchildren
by Paula Miller

Jacqueline Levy's 50th birthday
by Lillian Seidman

Elma Smolen
by Ann J. Reiss

In Memory of

Amy Beissel
by Paula Miller

Lenore Chester
*by Helen Heller, Adrienne Kivelson
Rob Marchiony, Selma Toback*

Doris Warren
by Jane F. McConville

THE NYC LWV LOBBYING CORPS

The 2003 state legislative session proved to be interesting—if nonproductive—for those of us monitoring issues and procedures. The “3-men-in-a-room” scene (Governor Pataki, Assembly Speaker Silver and Senate Majority Leader Bruno) was interrupted by a revolt pitting the legislature against the governor over the budget. Other houses overruled the governor’s veto of the budget, voting item by item 109 times. Some reformers and newspapers wrote of a new day dawning in Albany. As it turned out, however, an exception didn’t repeat itself beyond the budget fight. The Lobbying Corps will be watching and reporting on possible future muscle-flexing by the legislature.

The 2003 legislative session provided Leaguers with hope that many positions we hold would be enacted into law. Alas, that did not happen. For example,

we supported bills that would create an independent legislative budget office, including provisions to make information accessible to the public. We also supported proposed legislation expanding the legal definition of lobbying to include lobbying of state agencies. This latter bill seemed likely to pass because of the recent scandals within the MTA. (Those of you who attended the annual meeting on May 31 participated in a letter-writing campaign on these two issues.)

We did have one big victory: the 2003 Clear Indoor Air Act which bans smoking in all restaurants and bars statewide was kept intact despite attempts to gain exemptions. This was a significant victory for public health.

KEEP THESE DATES OPEN: **TUESDAY, APRIL 20, OR TUESDAY, APRIL 27.**
MEMBERS OF THE NYC LWV WILL TRAVEL TO ALBANY, MEET WITH STATE LEAGUE
LOBBYIST BARBARA BARTOLETTI, ATTEND HEARING SESSIONS AND/OR
LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS, AND VISIT LEGISLATORS’ OFFICES.

Join the Lobbying Corps!

Help us more effectively advocate for the positions we support and against legislation we oppose. The League has positions (long-held) on election law, health care, the judiciary, natural resources, social policy, state finances and women’s issues. Among the issues with which we are currently concerned are: financing public education, implementation of the Help America Vote Act, judicial selection, campaign finance, lobbying laws and other open government matters.

From January through March 2004 we will be interviewing state legislators in their district offices and discussing with them our legislative priorities (to be announced). We will provide information and hold briefing sessions before we venture out. Members with computers will be able to download information supplied by the state League. The Lobbying Corps meets every month, usually on the fourth Thursday. Join us!



Gemma Fastiggi, a member of our Lobbying Corps, speaking on behalf of the LWVNY in support of the Candidate Accountability Act. Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria) announced introduction of the legislation at a City Hall Press Conference on Sunday, August 10. The legislation will make candidates running for public office responsible for any illegal actions made on their behalf by their campaign staffs and require more complete financial disclosure.

(Photo supplied by Assemblyman Gianaris’ office.)

Sign up and become involved.

----tear off-----tear off ----

**To: Phyllis Wells, LWVNYC, 45 E. 33rd St.,
Rm 331, New York, N.Y. 10016**

Name _____

Address _____

Apt. _____ Zip+4 _____

Phone No. _____ Fax _____

E-Mail Address _____

Names of state legislators (if known):

Calendar

September 25	Lobbying Corps Meeting League office - 11 a.m.
October 7	UN Briefing on the Status of Human Rights for Children at the UN (by reservation only)
October 9	Education Committee League office – 10:30 a.m.
October 10	<i>Last day to register to vote in November 4th election</i>
October 16	Nonpartisan Elections Membership Consensus Meeting League office – 6 p.m.
October 30	Lobbying Corps Meeting League office – 11 a.m.
November 4	<i>Election Day</i>
November 13	Education Committee League office 10:30 a.m.
November 27/28	<i>Thanksgiving – office closed</i>

Branch Meetings

Members are welcome to attend any branch meeting. Call the League office for additional information.

Jackson Heights (Queens)

Contact: Barbara Barr

Date/Time: Monday, October 27 at 2 p.m.
Monday, November 24 at 2 p.m.

Midwood (Brooklyn)

Contact: Rose Yalan

Janet Vickrey

Date/Time: Friday, October 24 at 1 p.m.
Friday, November 21 at 1 p.m.

North Shore (Queens)

Contact: Marjorie Ferrigno

Date/Time: Wednesday, October 22 at 12:30 p.m.
Wednesday, November 19, 12:30 p.m.

Riverdale (Bronx)

Contact: Pat Young

Southeast Queens

Contact: Mary Cox

Date/Time: Saturday, October 18 at 2 p.m.
Sunday, November 23 at 2 p.m.

Upper West Manhattan

Contact: Sylvia Berman

Date/Time Tuesday, October 14 at 11 a.m.

Education Committee Focuses On Fiscal Equity and Governance

The Education committee has identified two priorities for study in the coming year.

First is funding for public education. The recent Court of Appeals decision on the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's lawsuit charged the state legislature with responsibility for reforming the state's funding system by July 2004, to ensure that New York City schools are adequately funded.

In view of this far-reaching and historic decision, the New

York City League will urge the state League, which filed an amicus curiae brief on the CFE law-suit, to adopt educational equity as a priority for legislative action in 2003-2004 and to reaffirm its position that children in school districts throughout the state are entitled to adequate and equitably funded education.

The second priority of the committee is governance. With the elimination of community school boards, the role of parents and community residents in the

school system is unclear. How and in what ways can parents have their voices heard and community partnerships developed to benefit public education?

These are crucial issues which impact on the well-being of the city and the state of New York. We will report on our activities at the September meeting and welcome any of you who share our commitment to reform funding and administration of public education in New York.

Nonpartisan Elections

How would they work, as proposed by the Charter Revision Commission?

- **Which offices will be subject to nonpartisan elections?** Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate, Borough President, City Council member.
- **How would candidates get on the ballot?** Designating petitions could be signed by any registered voter in the council district, or borough or city, depending on the office. Number of signatures required:
Mayor, Comptroller, Public Advocate – 7,500. Borough President – 4,000. Council Member – 900.
- **How many elections will be held?** There will be an election in September which will replace the current party primaries and be open to all candidates securing the required number of petition signatures. The two candidates receiving the highest number of votes in the September election will compete in a November election.
- **What role will political parties play in nonpartisan elections?** Candidates may indicate their political affiliation, by initials only, next to their names on the ballot, i.e., Jane Smith (D). A political party may not contribute to a candidate's campaign. The Campaign Finance Board shall have the power to bring charges if evidence is found of such contributions.
- **When would nonpartisan elections go into effect if this proposal is approved?** The day after Election Day 2005. This would cover any special elections that may occur between 2005 and the general election of 2009 and all city elections thereafter.

Nonpartisan Elections Pros and Cons

Arguments in Favor of Nonpartisan Elections:

- All registered voters will be able to vote in all elections, as opposed to the present system where only those enrolled in a political party can vote in the party's primary.
- Any registered voter will be able to sign a designating petition for their candidate whether or not they are enrolled in a political party.
- No political party may contribute to a candidate.
- Elections will be open to a more diverse range of candidates.
- The power of political "bosses" will be reduced.

Arguments in Opposition to Nonpartisan Elections:

- It would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Campaign Finance Board to regulate spending by political parties, and limitations on such spending may be unconstitutional.
- There is no minimum threshold percentage required for the two candidates in the November election.
- It may confuse voters who use party affiliation as a barometer to determine a candidate's philosophy.
- It favors wealthy candidates who do not participate in the Campaign Finance program.
- It has resulted in lower voter turnout in other municipalities which have changed to nonpartisan elections.

Consensus Ballot--for Members only

We encourage you to attend the League meeting on October 16.

If you are unable to attend, please return this ballot so it will be received no later than October 16.

Should the LWV-NYC support the ballot proposal to adopt nonpartisan elections ?

_____yes

_____no

_____undecided

Comments: _____

Name: _____

Mail to: League of Women Voters, 45 East 33 Street, Room 331, New York, New York 10016.

**Welcome New
Members**

Virginia Gilbert
Julia Graham
Elizabeth Hancy
Rhoda Isaacs
Irma McEachnie
Janis Rivera
Reba Shimansky
Margaret Stillman
Estelle Tsantes
Diane Vargas
Ronie Wattman

**ONLY CURRENT PAID-
UP MEMBERS
MAY VOTE ON
CONSENSUS
QUESTIONS.**

If the date on the mailing label indicates that your membership has expired, you may enclose your renewal with the nonpartisan election consensus ballot. Annual Membership Dues: \$50, individual, \$65, household.

Welcome Alison!!!

We are very pleased to announce that we recently hired Alison Alpert as part-time Office Manager. She has extraordinary skills and extensive experience working with nonprofit organizations.

Generally, Alison will be in the office between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday.

Beth Stark who served us so well for more than a year has returned to academia.

We welcome Alison to our League family and wish Beth well in her new endeavors.