

INSIDE the New York City League

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

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<http://www.lwvnyc.org> ♦ office@lwvnyc.org

Spring 2009

2009 Annual Meeting

SATURDAY, MAY 30

9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Workmen's Circle Building, 45 East 33rd Street (between Park and Madison)

- 9:30 Registration & refreshments
10:00 Business Meeting
 Report of Bylaws & Budget Committees (*see enclosure*)
 Committee reports: City Affairs, Education, Legislative Action, Voters Service, NPV
 Highlights of the year
11:00 Conversation with the Management Team (*see page 2*)
12:00 Break for lunch
 Speaker: Adam Cohen, New York Times Editorial Board
 Mr. Cohen is a lawyer and author with a particular interest in legal issues, politics and technology. Before joining the *Times* in 2002, he was a senior writer at *Time*; he also worked as a lawyer for the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, AL. His most recent book is *Nothing to Fear: FDR's Inner Circle and the Hundred Days that Created Modern America* (Penguin HC, 2009). A native of Manhattan, he is a graduate of Bronx High School of Science, Harvard College and Harvard Law School.
1:30 Conversation with the Management Team (*continued*)
2:00 Reports: Annual Award Luncheon, LWVNYS Convention
2:30 Preview of Calendar for 2009-2010
2:45 Direction to the Board
3:00 Adjourn



Registration Form for 2009 Annual Meeting

- _____ I am a paid-up member of the LWVNYC and will attend the annual meeting.
_____ Enclosed is a check for \$20, payable to LWVNYC, for registration and lunch OR
_____ I will attend and will pay \$25 at the door.
_____ I am unable to attend and **enclose the proxy form from page 8** of this newsletter.

Name _____ # attending _____

Postal address _____ zip code _____

Telephone _____

E-mail (for LWVNYC use only – will not be shared) _____

Please reply before May 21st to LWVNYC, 150 Broadway, 14th Floor, NY NY 10038

From the Management Team

You are invited to join a conversation with members and officers at our Annual Meeting on Saturday, May 30.

What have we accomplished in '08-09?
 Were you involved?
 Were the membership meetings satisfying?
 What did we fail to do?
 What should our plans for '09-'10 include?
 What's on your mind?

During the business portion of the meeting we will discuss the proposed budget for the coming year and proposed amendments to our bylaws (see enclosure). We will also hear about the controversy surrounding voting machines and our role in coming mayoral debates. We also hope members will bring comments, ideas and suggestions so that we can have a lively discussion of the important issues facing our organization in these momentous times.

As described on page one, our speaker will be Adam Cohen, a member of the editorial board of the *New York Times*. In addition to his books, he has written opinion columns on subjects ranging from "Stud's Terkel's Legacy; A Vivid Window on the Great Depression" and "Are Cuts in Hours and Pay an Alternative to Mass Layoffs?" to "No One Should Have to Stand in Line for 10 Hours to Vote."

Registration form on page 1. Sign up today.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

Since 2003, Alison Alpert has been executive director of the New York City League. Her creativity, acuity, computer skills, research skills, and understanding of League policy have helped us find new directions, including a grant from The New York Community Trust for our acclaimed course on How to Run for Public Office.

Alison's sense of humor, compassion, and patience with the public and with all of us, combined with her smarts, have made our office ambiance very special, and more effective. We regret that she will be leaving our staff this spring to have more flexibility in her life but she will leave a lasting impression on all of us. Thank you, Alison.

Laura, Robin, Jane, Sheila, Gladys

Women in Politics Today



League Co-Chair Gladys Krasner presents a yellow rose, symbol of the women's suffrage movement, to guest speaker Debbie Walsh.

March was Women's History Month and on the evening of March 30th more than 40 members of the LWV joined with members of the Junior League in a celebration that focused on women in politics today. Following a description of the work of the Junior League, which was founded in 1901, and a brilliant presentation by League co-chair Robin Bahr on the joint interests of the two organizations and the work of the LWV, Gladys Krasner introduced Debbie Walsh, Director of the Center for Women in Politics at Rutgers University (CAWP).

Drawing on CAWP's extended research, Ms. Walsh reminded us that the "gender gap" only came into being in the 1980s, with women tending to favor a stronger role for government in economic and social affairs. Although women vote in a higher proportion than men, they are underrepresented in elective office. There are many reasons for this, Ms. Walsh noted, including the fact that, contrary to most men, women tend to hesitate to put themselves forward "if they do not feel they know enough."

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

Officers

Co-Chair	Laura Altschuler
Co-Chair	Robin Bahr
Co-Chair	Jane Colvin
Co-Chair	Sheila Hosni
Co-Chair	Gladys Krasner
Secretary:	Elinor Miller

Office Administrator	Lakisha Adams
Inside Editor	Toni Coffee

Board of Directors

Miriam Adelman	Adrienne Kivelson
Toni Coffee	Donna Landay-Laden
Fannie Conner	Jeanine Plottel
Beatrix Dinitz	Lillian Seidman
Patricia Friedland	Mary Lou Urban
Helen Heller	Valerie Warner
Kathy Jacobson	Phyllis Wells

Rose Yalan

New Voting Machines and Election Reform Remain High On League's 2009 Agenda

Even as we await the State Board of Elections' certification of precinct-based optical scanners (pbos), the New York State League is supporting efforts to make the plan for implementation of HAVA (the federal "Help America Vote Act") transparent and to improve poll worker recruitment, materials and training.

While some people have begun lobbying to keep the familiar mechanical lever machines, we continue to support New York's acquisition of the paper ballot optical scan system. This would accompany the ballot marking devices purchased last year to enable persons with disabilities to vote at the polls.

In "Citizen's Right to Vote" (2006), the League of Women Voters of the U.S. resolved to support only voting systems which:

- Provide a voter-verifiable paper record that is the official record of the voter's intent.
- Allow the voter to verify this paper record while still in the process of voting.
- Allow verification of vote totals by an independent hand count of the paper record.
- Allow routine audits of the paper record in every election.

Lever machines do not meet any of these standards. In addition, lever voting machines are not accessible to many people with disabilities, who have a right to cast a secret ballot using the same voting system as everyone else.

From the State League

In preparation for the State LWV Convention which will be held in Syracuse on May 15-17, the State Board has proposed a new study of local government, focusing on the possible consolidation of small units of government in all parts of the state. The Convention will also offer opportunities for delegates to share ideas and techniques in such important areas as membership, voters service, and development, and to join in support of two major fundraising initiatives of the State League, the Big League Raffle and the Silent Auction.

Two books of tickets for the raffle have been sent to all League members. This is not just a fundraiser for the State League; with your support it can become a major fundraiser for the City League as well, with 20% of the net proceeds from tickets sold by LWVNYC members going to our own coffers. The winner will receive 25% of the net proceeds and the local League that sells the winning ticket receives an additional 5%. To request additional books of tickets, call the State League office at 518-465-4162 or email Stephanie@lwvny.org. Surely **you** will sell the winning ticket.

Also up and running in advance of the Convention is the LWVNYS Silent Auction. Some of the items available for bids are: four tickets to a Yankees baseball game; five-day bed & breakfast stay for two in Oxford, England; bed & breakfast weekend for four on Martha's Vineyard; Chef's Delight Gift Crate, featuring New York State items; case of assorted wines; picnic at Saratoga Performing Arts Center (picnic basket and two tickets for the ballet). The auction is on-line at www.lwvny.org. Both League members and non-members who are not attending the Convention can bid by filling out the bid form which is on the website and mailing it or faxing it to the League office or by calling the State League office at 518-465-4162 by May 11. (See website for instructions.) We hope you will bid early and often.

The League is a member of the State Board of Elections' HAVA Task Force, reconstituted since its last meeting in 2003 for the purpose of amending the New York State HAVA Implementation Plan. This new task force has a broader and more diverse representation of civic organizations. The League joined other task force members in submitting recommendations to assure more openness, transparency and opportunity for public participation in the planning process.

The State Board of Elections remains under federal court order to implement a new voting system for the fall 2009 elections. However, the lab contracted by the SBOE to test the voting systems which are under consideration has announced that it cannot finish testing until after the dates of these elections. The Board has asked the court to extend the deadline.

As we continue to monitor the process of selecting new voting equipment and advocate for a safe, accessible, re-countable and accurate system, the League is also active in supporting legislation which would remove unnecessarily restrictive voting requirements and increase enfranchisement, such as the simplification of the absentee ballot application.

Adrienne Kivelson

A Better Way to Elect the President

LWVNYC members have agreed that there is a viable method for achieving the long-held LWV position that calls for direct election of the President. At a meeting on February 24, supplemented by postal responses, we concluded that the National Popular Vote Compact (NPV) would be the best way forward.

Since 1970, when Leagues throughout the country studied the mechanism for electing the President, the LWVUS has stated that “the direct-popular-vote method for electing the President and Vice-President is essential to representative government” and the Electoral College should be abolished. Over the years, attempts to pass a constitutional amendment to achieve this change, which must be approved by a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress and ratified by three-fourths of the states, have failed.

The National Popular Vote Compact proposal offers a way to achieve the result of direct election of the President without amending the Constitution. Under the state legislation proposed to establish the NPV, the popular vote totals from all 50 states and the District of Columbia would be added together to obtain a national grand total for each presidential candidate. Election officials in all states participating in the compact would award their electoral votes to the candidate who receives the highest total number of votes nationwide. The compact would take effect only when states holding a majority of electors, now 270, agree to participate. To date four states have passed the compact into law: Maryland, New Jersey, Hawaii and Illinois. Compact bills have been introduced in 44 additional states including New York. (The full text of the compact is available at www.lwv.org.)

At the consensus meeting, members heard presentations by our study committee and discussed the seven consensus questions presented by National. It was agreed that action by states through a compact process is an acceptable way to alter the method for electing the President and Vice President; it was also agreed that support for a compact does not mean we must abandon efforts to abolish the Electoral College by amending the constitution.

Local leagues around the country have been going through a similar discussion process and will be sending their conclusions to the LWVUS board by May 1. The national study committee will formulate a position based on these grassroots opinions. This position will be forwarded to the national board for adoption by the National Council at its June 11th meeting.

Marjorie Kelleher Shea

EQUAL PAY COALITION OF NEW YORK CITY

The LWVNYC is a member of a dynamic coalition of about 30 organizations called the Equal Pay Coalition-NYC (EPCNYC). The State League is in the forefront of this advocacy movement statewide. Our immediate goal is passage of the NY State Fair Pay Act (A3911, S955).

In the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Congress established equal pay protection for people whose jobs involve the same work. In 2007 this protection was weakened by the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear Time but it was restored in the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which was the first bill signed into law by President Obama.

So why do we need a Fair Pay Act? Previous legislation, including the Ledbetter Act, has dealt only with people whose jobs involve the same work. The Fair Pay Act would extend protection by making it unlawful for an employer to discriminate on the basis of sex, race and/or national origin by paying different wages for work of comparable skill, effort and responsibility. The concept of comparable jobs can be hard to establish but here is one example: in Los Angeles County, the jobs of children’s social workers, who were mostly female, were found to be comparable to the jobs of probation officers, who were mostly male. Average annual pay for social workers was \$35,000; the average for the probation officers was \$55,000.

The New York State Fair Pay Act has passed the Assembly with bipartisan support every year since 2002 but has never come to a floor vote in the State Senate. This year, with Democrats in control of the Senate, the Coalition believes the chances for passage have improved.

The bill was voted out of the Labor Committee in early April and is now in the Finance Committee. As of the 8th of April, the senators from New York City who are members of that committee and are co-sponsors of S955 are Liz Krueger, Thomas Duane, and Ruben Diaz, Sr. Other members of the Finance Committee from NYC are Carl Kruger (Chair), Velmanette Montgomery, Kevin Parker, Toby Stavisky, Martin Dilan, John Sampson, Jeffrey Klein, Bill Perkins, and Frank Padavan.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: As constituents, write or call members of the Finance Committee and urge them to co-sponsor S955 and/or vote for it to be discharged from the committee.

TUESDAY, APRIL 28, IS NATIONAL PAY EQUITY DAY.

Phyllis Wells

LWV & NYC Bar Assn. Forum on Mayoral Control of NYC Schools



l.to r.: Christopher Cerf, Diane Ravitch, moderator Marcia Kramer, Joe Williams, Robert Jackson

Has mayoral control improved the city's education system and benefited NYC school children? Is there too much emphasis on testing? Do parents have enough opportunity to participate in critical decisions? Do we have valid statistics for graduation rates and test scores? And, in the final analysis, should the state legislature re-authorize the current system when the law which created it expires on June 30?

On Wednesday, March 11, more than 150 League members and others attended a forum on mayoral control of NYC schools co-hosted by the League and the NYC Bar Association's Committee on Education and the Law. The panel of speakers included Christopher D. Cerf, Deputy Chancellor of the NYC Department of Education; the Hon. Robert Jackson, Chair of the Committee on Education in the City Council; Diane Ravitch, Research Professor of Education at NYU and author of *The Great School Wars: a history of the New York City public schools*; and Joe Williams, Executive Director of Democrats for Education Reform and author of *Cheating Our Kids*. Marcia Kramer, Chief Political Correspondent for WCBS-TV, was moderator. The panelists were allotted ten minutes each to present their views before responding to questions from the audience.

While none of the panelists support return to a system of decentralized control, they varied widely on how well students, teachers and parents are faring under the current structure and what should be done to improve it.

Citing statistics of higher test scores and graduation rates, Cerf argued that mayoral control of the school system has made a positive difference. He urged preservation of what works in the current structure and welcomes discussion aimed at increasing transparency and parent participation. Mayoral control is necessary, he believes, because it enables the incremental change and risk-taking that are required; it places a premium on action versus being hobbled by the lowest common denominator of consensus and involves all interest groups.

Diane Ravitch favors mayoral control but sees a need for greater transparency in decision-making and more opportunities for parent participation. In her view, the mayor should appoint an independent Board of Education whose members would serve for a set term and would appoint the chancellor. She took issue with Mr. Cerf's statistics and recommends a professional auditing agency to evaluate test scores and graduation rates.

Joe Williams suggested that it would be more productive to debate checks and balances rather than mayoral control. He agreed that the mayor is not held sufficiently accountable. He recommended that the Special School Investigator should not report to the mayor but to the District Attorney or Public Advocate.

Robert Jackson spoke up strongly for greater empowerment of parents and cited the confusion that has resulted from the continuous changes made by the Mayor and Chancellor. He recommends strengthening the legislative and oversight powers of the City Council and creating an independent body to audit and analyze data.

Jane Colvin

BRANCHES

North Shore (Queens)*

Contact: LWVNYC office (212) 725-3541

Bronx/Riverdale

Contact: LWVNYC office (212) 725-3541

Southeast Queens

Contact: LWVNYC office (212) 725-3541

Upper West Manhattan

Contact: LWVNYC office (212) 725-3541

**We note with sadness and fond memories the resignation of Marjorie Ferrigno, longtime chair of the North Shore branch. Marjorie has served the League and the North Shore members in countless ways and we are very grateful. We congratulate her on her 93rd birthday and heartily endorse her promise that "of course, I'll be a League member forever."*

They Represent You 2009

Enclosed with this issue of *Inside the New York City League* is your free copy of the new edition of *They Represent You*, the League's unique, comprehensive directory of elected officials in Washington, Albany, City Hall, and all five boroughs. In addition to contact details for elected officials, TRY includes district maps, the election calendar, information on terms of office, political parties, community boards, term limits, and the NYC Department of Education. Additional copies are available from the League office at a cost of \$8 plus tax and shipping. The publication is made possible by a grant from Con Edison.

HOW TO RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE In New York City

We are pleased that the law firm *Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP*, is offering their office in midtown Manhattan for our seminar, **How to Run for Public Office in New York City**. The seminar will be held over two days in May: Saturday May 2 and 9, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

For more information or to register, please call Alison at the League office, 212-725-3541.

NEW MEMBERS

Eugenia Alexander
Kenneth H. Barr
Elsie Diamond
Lucille Friscia
Faye Ginsburg

Jane Hanson
Lyn Hill
Jacqueline Russo
Jeannine Schoos
Albertine Simpkins

TRIBUTES

In honor of Joan Koven
by Nicky Heller

In memory of Gladys Hyman
by Laura Altschuler

In memory of Gladys Hyman and Pauline Helpern
by Upper West Manhattan branch

We are grateful for the 63 years of dedication, commitment and generosity to the League of Pauline Helpern, who passed away on March 20 at the age of 104. A member of the Upper West Manhattan Branch, Pauline served on the Telephone Information Service at the League office for many years and was engaged in voter registration activities.

After moving to the Esplanade at an advanced age, Pauline continued her efforts as a League member by making certain that all of the residents of this senior residence were registered to vote. She arranged for meetings of our branch at the Esplanade and for League speakers to address the group and distribute information prior to elections. She continued to be a staunch advocate for the League even after her 100th birthday. She is survived by her son Martin, to whom we send our sympathy.

Sylvia Berman

The New York City League was further diminished this winter by the passing of Gladys Hyman, a long-time member of the Upper West Manhattan branch. A resident of Washington Heights for nearly sixty years, Gladys also gave her time and support to local groups such as Community Board 12 and the Fort Tryon Circle Block Association, which she founded. She was also secretary of the Medieval Festival Guild of New York, which revived the medieval festivals of 1983-88. Her interests ranged from current events to opera and ballet and she was a star athlete. Our sympathy goes to her son Gene and to her many friends and neighbors.

We also mourn the loss of Seena Parker, who passed away in April. Seena was a dedicated teacher and active member of the Workmen's Circle who became active in the League "by accident" when our office was located next door to the Workmen's Circle and she stopped in to inquire about our work. She appreciated our materials and joined two of our committees, as well as visiting schools to talk about registration and voting. We send our sympathy to her son Jeremy.

From our Committees

The Legislative Action Committee adopted

Health Care as one of its priorities in the fall and resolved that our greatest contribution to this cause would be to provide education to the public on reform possibilities. Together with Hunter College we organized a forum of experts on "Building a New Health Care Program For America," to be held at Hunter on May 5 at 6:00 p.m. The response to the announcement of this event was immediate and the program quickly sold out so we have had the satisfaction of serving the League's core mission to provide education on key issues of public policy as well as reinforcing our ties with Hunter College.

For the first time in five years, Common Cause and the State League did not organize a Lobby Day in Albany for members. As a result, our committee will conduct its advocacy with our elected representatives in their home offices. Highest on our agenda for these meetings are Campaign Finance Reform and Funding for Public Education, as mandated by the Court of Appeals following the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, as well as Health Care. We will act once legislation is introduced on any of these issues, so that we will be able to discuss specific bills with the legislators. Our committee also supports the City Affairs Committee in its efforts to reform election law and will include these bills in our advocacy efforts when they are available.

These personal calls will constitute our principal opportunity this year to influence the 91 men and women who represent New York City in Albany. We need your help to extend our reach and maximize our influence. Please call the League office, 212-725-3541, if you would be able to participate in local lobbying visits.

In response to a "Call to Action" from the national League, members of the Legislative Action Committee met with Congresswomen Maloney and Clark and Congressmen McMahon, Weiner and Nadler to discuss health care, greenhouse gas emissions, and partisanship. This was designed as a listening tour, to get a sense of the mood of Congress on these issues early in the session. These legislators are all committed to the concept of health care for all Americans through the expansion of existing programs and approve caps on greenhouse gas emissions. They also deplore the excessive partisanship in Congress but were not able to suggest ways of reducing it.

The Legislative Action Committee meets once a month, usually on the fourth Thursday, and welcomes new members. There is no better way to learn about League program at all levels of government, and to understand how the legislative process works. Join us!!!

Robin Bahr & Phyllis Wells

Education Committee

The February 26 meeting of the Education Committee was devoted to a discussion of charter schools. The invited speaker was Lorraine Skeen, an educator who spent most of her career in the New York City public schools and has served as a District Superintendent, principal of P.S. 171 in East Harlem, and a consultant to several charter schools. Her presentation examined what she considers the realities of charter schools, as opposed to their own romanticized view of their accomplishments.

One of her major concerns is the contrast between overly generous remuneration of administrators and the exploitation of young and inexperienced teachers. The committee raised questions regarding the overhaul of the NYC school system in recent years and continued its spirited discussion after the meeting through email.

It has been the State League's position that more research is needed before additional charter schools are permitted and the committee endorsed this view.

In March, in lieu of its formal meeting, the committee attended the forum on mayoral control of the schools presented by the League and the Bar Association (*see page 3*). Members also helped publicize the on-line election for the Community and Citywide Education Council (CEC) which was held from April 6 to 22. According to the Grassroots Initiative, this was the first entirely on-line election in the country. It was the first time that all parents were able to vote for CEC members and to demonstrate their desire for greater involvement and influence in educational policies.

In our continuing effort to learn more about the realities of public education in New York City and the effects of legislative decisions on school operations, the committee will hear Professor David Bloomfield of Brooklyn College and CUNY Graduate School at our meeting on April 23. New members are always welcome.

Dr. Jeanine P. Plottel

Spring Calendar

April

Thursday, 30th 12:00 – 2:00 Annual Awards Luncheon – Hotel Roosevelt

May

Saturday, May 2 & 9 9:00 – 4:00 “How to Run for Public Office” (see page 6)

Tuesday, May 5 6:00 p.m. “Building a New Health Care Program for America” - co-sponsored with Hunter College
(<http://lwwnyc.org/calendar.html#building>)

Thursday, May 14 10:30 – 1:00 City Affairs Committee*

Friday-Sunday, 15th-17th LWVNY State Convention, Doubletree Inn, Syracuse (see page 3)

Thursday, May 21 11:00 – 1:00 Legislative Action Committee*

Saturday, 30th 9:30 – 3:00 LWVNYC Annual Meeting (see page 1)

**All committee meetings are held at the League office: 150 Broadway, 14th Floor*

HELP WANTED

There is a continual need in our office for volunteers to help with various kinds of office work and to answer telephones. The location is 150 Broadway, between Liberty St. and Maiden Lane (within steps of the Fulton St. stop on the 4 & 5 subway, a short walk from the Park Place stop on the 2 & 3). For details, call 212-725-3541.



ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE AND PROXY FORM

Article IX, Section III, Quorum: One hundred voting members, or 10% of the total members entitled to vote, whichever shall be less, shall constitute a quorum at the Annual Meeting. The record in the office of the LWVNYC of paid-up members as of 60 days prior to the Annual Meeting shall determine the voting membership count for this purpose. Any member entitled to vote may designate by written proxy another member to be present to vote in his/her stead. Mailed proxies must be received at the League office no later than three (3) business days prior to the Annual Meeting.

Please sign and date the proxy where indicated, print your name next to your signature, and return to the League office by May 26, 2009 (LWVNYC, 150 Broadway - 14th floor, New York, NY 10038).

PROXY FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING OF
THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
to be held on May 30, 2009

KNOW ALL MEN AND WOMEN BY THESE PRESENT the undersigned member of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York hereby constitutes and appoints Elinor Miller or _____ (member may select agent) my true and lawful attorney and agent in my name, place, and stead to vote as my proxy at the Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York to be held on May 30, 2009 or at any adjournment thereof for the transaction of any business which may legally come before the said meeting, and to act as fully as I would do if personally present; and I hereby revoke any other proxy heretofore given by me.

Witness my hand this day of _____ 2009

Signature

Print Name

If no name is filled in, the named designee will be deemed the appointed agent to exercise the Proxy. If you fill in a name, only your named agent will be authorized to vote as your agent at the Annual Meeting.