

INSIDE the New York City League

League of Women Voters of the City of New York

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Ahead of the Curve: The LWVNYC and Instant Runoff Voting

On Tuesday, October 1, New York City spent approximately \$13 million to hold a runoff election in the Democratic primary for the office of Public Advocate -- an office that has an annual budget of less than \$2.3 million and three dozen full-time staff. It was estimated that only 100,000 to 175,000 voted. Since there is no Republican candidate, this primary election virtually determined who would become the Public Advocate.

The high cost of an election for a low-budget office inspired Glenn Coleman in the September 27, 2013 issue of *Crain's New York Business* to suggest that the primary be decided by a coin toss. He counseled the two candidates: "...Seriously. Save these millions to be spent on your job search and use them instead to help the hungry and the homeless. Heads, you win the public advocate's office and its mighty responsibilities; tails, you might be long remembered as a true example of a public servant (and maybe emerge a campaign winner another year because you sacrificed today)."



In 2009, the LWVNYC began studying an alternative to costly, low-turnout runoffs: Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). IRV allows voters to rank their choice of candidates on the ballot in order of preference, eliminating the need for separate runoff elections and ensuring whoever wins has captured substantial support from the voters.

In New York City, this would mean that if no candidate for the city-wide elections wins the 40% minimum percentage required to win, the last-place finisher would be eliminated, and those votes would be redistributed according to the preferences noted on the ballots. The process would continue until a candidate achieved a majority of the vote.

In February, 2010, the LWVNYC Board adopted the position in concurrence with the LWV of Minnesota in favor of IRV for the following reasons:

- IRV saves taxpayer dollars by eliminating the need for a second separate election and for matching funds in the runoff.
- IRV helps absentee and military voters because the 2-week turn-around between elections doesn't allow adequate time to order, receive and return a ballot.
- IRV would allow better protection of the majority principle because with a 40% or less plurality, the winning candidate can be the last choice of a majority of the voters.
- IRV reduces negative campaigning because candidates may need the second ranking of their opponent and may not get it if the opponents' supporters are antagonized.

Message from the Co-Presidents

This fall is shaping up as an exciting period for your League, with city elections, including debates for mayor, comptroller, public advocate and for many local council seats all taking place during this period. We have also been busy with voter registration events all over the city. On September 24, we held an extremely successful National Voter Registration Day event at Bryant Park, along with eight partners, and several generous co-funders: CUNY, Rock the Vote, LWVUS and LWVNY. Among others, the presidents of both National and State Leagues addressed the crowd, while Co-President Mary Jenkins emceed. We even had a movie star, America Ferrera (star of *Ugly Betty*) join us at the podium representing VotoLatino and help with registering new voters. (Photos and excerpts from the speakers are on page 4.)

After a break during the summer months, in early October, we restarted our highly successful “Lunch with the League” series with an entertaining presentation by Baruch College Professor Doug Muzzio on what the primaries told us. Upcoming luncheons will cover discussion on the proposed Liquid Natural Gas terminal at Port Ambrose Thursday, November 7, and Health Exchanges and the Affordable Care Act Tuesday, December 3.

We encourage you to become active with your League and take part in events such as our recent visit to the UN on October 8 to receive a briefing on the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign, sponsored by our New York State League. Our local League was well represented by Women’s Issues Chair Nancy Schwartz and a half dozen NYC members.

Committees are also up and running on Affordable Housing, Women's Issues, Campaign Finance Reform, Membership and of course Voter Service. Committees are always happy to welcome new members. We need your assistance and support in all of these areas. Currently, we need members to write letters to your state representatives in support of the Women’s Equality Agenda. Meeting dates are posted on our website. Committee Chairs always appreciate an RSVP which can be done by phone (212-725-3541) or by email (office@lwvny.org). *Mary Lou Urban & Mary Jenkins, Co-Presidents*

Instant Runoff Voting (Continued from Page 1)

To test the reliability and advantages of IRV, the LWVNYC supported using IRV on a trial basis first, in filling vacancies on the City Council, and for military and absentee ballots in the 2013 citywide primaries which required second, separate runoff elections if no candidate received 40% of the vote. The results of these instant runoff initiatives could be used to determine the feasibility of substituting Instant Runoff Voting for the runoff elections in New York City, or for other elections in New York City or State.

Unfortunately, the trials did not happen. But the notable expense of the recent NYC runoff election has given new momentum to those in favor of IRV.

Two IRV bills have been introduced in the City Council. Council Member Brad Lander is the sponsor of Intro 1066 which would establish Instant Runoff for all city elections. The bill provides for a voter referendum to approve this change in the City Charter. The second bill, Intro 1108 is sponsored by Council Member Gale Brewer. This bill would provide for a pilot IRV program for absentee and military ballots, a proposal in line with the LWV's earlier position. We have not taken a position on the Lander bill because it goes beyond our concurrence on IRV for citywide primary runoffs. However, we are very pleased to see this issue raised in the Council. Please join us as we continue to participate in the debate and consider which proposals are most feasible and consistent with League policy.

So Near, Yet So Far...

What Happened to the Women's Equality Agenda?

Governor Cuomo's Women's Equality Agenda, unveiled in his State of the State Address on January 9, 2013, contained ten points. Both the media and anti-abortion groups pounced immediately on the tenth point: Reproductive Health. This item was designed for the sole purpose of bringing New York State in line with Federal law in case the Supreme Court strikes down *Roe v. Wade*. Since Federal law takes precedence over State law, the law is already being applied. Federal law "protects a woman's right to obtain an abortion when the fetus is not viable (can't live outside the uterus), or when necessary to protect a woman's life or health." New York State law does not include "a woman's health" but protects her life.

From the Governor's announcement in January until the waning days in June, the 800-member Women's Equality Coalition kept up the pressure to pass all 10-points of the Agenda. On Monday of the final week of the session, with the State Senate in mind, the leaders of the Coalition voted to divide the Agenda into ten separate bills. On Thursday, the Assembly passed in one omnibus bill all ten points. The Coalition cheered and was cautiously optimistic.

On Friday, it was the Senate's turn to act. There are 33 Democrats and 30 Republicans in the Senate. The leadership is shared by Republican Dean Skelos and four Independent Democrats—Jeffrey Klein, Diane Savino, David Carlucci, and David Valesky—who have chosen to leave the regular Democratic caucus. From the very moment the Agenda was announced, Senator Skelos stated that he would never allow an abortion bill to be brought to the Senate floor for a vote.

On that emotion-packed Friday, the first person to introduce a bill was Independent Democratic Senator Klein. He tacked Reproduction Health onto a non-controversial bill and brought it to a vote. All the Republicans and two Democrats (Simcha Felder and Ruben Diaz) voted against the bill. Lacking those two votes, the Democrats were short of the 32 needed to pass legislation. After that, all nine bills containing the other points of the Agenda passed almost unanimously. At this point, normally, representatives of the two houses would meet in conference and negotiate one bill for the Governor's signature. This did not happen, however. Women Assembly members absolutely refused to consider legislation without the inclusion of Reproductive Health. Speaker Sheldon Silver declared the session ended and the Assembly left for its summer vacation.

The Coalition has not given up. The New York State League of Women Voters recently sent out a letter to all Women's Equality Coalition members urging participation in a letter-to-the editor campaign during the month of October. This is the first step in a campaign to finally enact the Agenda into law. Please join our Committee in this continuing effort and check our website <http://lwvny.org/> for our next meeting date. *Nancy Schwartz, Chair*

...And What Happened to Campaign Finance Reform?

Hopes were high early in 2013 that significant reforms could be enacted in Albany. Governor Cuomo endorsed campaign finance reform (CFR) in his proposals to the Legislature. The Assembly had passed CFR legislation several times and promised to do so again. And, although in the past, the Republican-controlled State Senate had blocked CFR, in 2013, the Senate Republicans shared control of the chamber with four Democrats who had split off from their Democratic colleagues and formed their own Independent Democratic Caucus (IDC). Observers hoped that the IDC could be convinced to vote with the 28 Democrats to enact comprehensive CFR legislation which would include public matching funds for State candidates (modeled on NYC's law), limits on the amounts candidates could spend, and new enforcement mechanisms.

National Voter Registration Day

National Voter Registration Day is a celebration of our democracy and the largest one-day effort to register voters across the country. It falls on every third Tuesday of September.

The LWVNYC celebrated National Voter Registration Day in Bryant Park on September 24, 2013, partnering with City University of New York (CUNY), Jewish Association Serving the Aging (JASA), National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, New York City Board of Elections, New York Organ Donor Network, Rock the Vote, and Voto Latino. We raffled off some great prizes, handed out information, registered new voters, and listened to our featured speakers talk about the importance of voter registration.

Jay Hershenson, Senior Vice Chancellor for University Relations, spoke proudly of CUNY students' civic involvement but noted that "only an estimated 21% registered Democratic voters and 11% registered Republican voters voted in the September 10 primary election; in the 2009 citywide general election, only 18.4% of New Yorkers participated."



Amanda Brown, National Political Director, Rock The Vote: "Our democracy is only strengthened when more people participate...Are you registered to vote? That's our question for you today. Join the movement. Get in on the action. Celebrate with a voter registration!"

Elisabeth McNamara, President, League of Women Voters (left): "Cheers to the League of Women Voters of NYC and all of our fantastic partners who have made today possible. We are thrilled to be part of this day because voter empowerment is what we have been doing for nearly 100 years, since winning women the right to vote."



Sally Robinson, President, LWVNY (right): "Please encourage your friends and family to register to vote, to use Vote 411.org, the League's online voters guide, and to show up at the polls on Election Day."



America Ferrera, Actor, Activist and VotoLatino Representative, registers a new voter at the NYC League's National Voter Registration Day event in Bryant Park.



Elaine Rockoff, Director of Community Based Programs, JASA: "As the largest agency serving older adults in the New York metropolitan area, JASA recognizes the importance of voter participation among seniors as well as all New Yorkers. It is a constitutional right and civic duty for all eligible citizens to register to vote and have their voices heard."

Committee Reports

The **Environmental Action Committee** invites members who wish to help preserve the City's high-quality drinking water and who wish to have an influence on issues related to energy usage and climate change to come to our meetings. For the past few years, our committee has been focused on the unconventional process of drilling for natural gas called "hydraulic fracturing" or hydrofracking, for short. We have worked with our state LWV committee to write letters to the governor regarding drilling and related regulatory and health issues, and we have mobilized our members to take action with legislators at key moments. We have had many big and small victories in our efforts. One instance was when the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), which seemed poised to issue drilling regulations and thus move forward to permit hydrofracking in its Basin (which supplies drinking water to 15 million people), decided at the 11th hour not to move forward after receiving hundreds of thousands of public comments. Join us if you like David v. Goliath situations!

While New York State is not currently moving to permit hydrofracking within its borders, we are asking LWVNYC members to contact their City Council members to insist they pass legislation to prevent the hydrofracking waste and wastewater from other states from being transported into our wastewater treatment facilities, into landfills, and on our roads.

Our present focus is directed to infrastructure projects that are related to the unconventional drilling as well as to the exporting of the gas. Many of these projects are moving along at a rapid clip and with little public input. One example is the focus of our "Lunch with the League" event on Thursday, November 7. Two speakers will discuss a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) deepwater port off the NY/NJ coast among the shipping lanes named "Port Ambrose." One speaker will represent Liberty Natural Gas, the corporation applying to construct the port, and the other speaker will be from Clean Ocean Action representing a coalition against the port. There will be a question and answer period after the speakers present. Please join us for what promises to be a captivating event, followed by a lovely lunch. *Mary Anne Sullivan, Chair*

If you like people you'll love the **Membership Committee**. We are seeking new ways to recruit, engage and retain members and we need your energy and ideas. During a fruitful and active 2012-13 year, we held an orientation meeting on the evening of September 17 at which our Advocacy Committee Chairs presented plans for the coming year. We accepted speaking engagements from local groups from all the boroughs where we gained new members. This year we began seeking more sponsors for our monthly "Lunch with the League" meetings and recruiting members from among attendees. Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 19 at 1:00 pm. Please come and share your suggestions for increasing and maintaining our membership!

Evie Katz & Mary Jenkins, Co-Chairs

Despite a National League position on **Affordable Housing** and previous efforts by National, State and local Leagues, the supply of affordable housing continues as one of the most pressing issues, especially for NYC residents. The need for affordable units is great and the supply is small and shrinking. In addition, a side effect of a city doing well economically is gentrification. In an effort to remedy this deplorable situation, the New York City League has started a Study leading to action on Affordable Housing. We hope to present educational materials to members at a meeting in early 2014, and a consensus meeting shortly thereafter.

We have focused on Inclusionary Zoning since Mayor Bloomberg has rezoned about 40% of the city. He has bragged about affordable units created by this rezoning. Statistics show that few developers have used the incentives. It is easier for larger developers who know their way through the city agencies and have more market-rate units to balance the affordable ones. The impact of new development on loss of units through higher rents or demolition is harder to measure. One thing we hear over and over is the need to make creating these units mandatory and required after resale of the development.

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2013 Debates

After a busy Primary Election Season which concluded with a first time run-off election for Public Advocate, we were involved with several City Council General Election Debates and the first broadcast debate for Mayor on October 15.

Bill De Blasio and Joe Lhota faced off on Channel 7 on Tuesday, October 15 with veteran News Anchor Bill Ritter moderating. This debate was sponsored by WABC, the League of Women Voters of the City of New York, Univision and the New York Daily News and held in the WABC studio in front of a live audience.

Eight debates for Manhattan City Council Districts 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 and one for the Manhattan Borough President were taped at the Manhattan Neighborhood Network. The questions were prepared by the League of Women Voters and were moderated by League members Tiana Leonard, Adrienne Kivelson, Rosemary Shields, and Kate Doran (right). The debates will air several times before the November 5 Election Day and are available via links on our website www.lwvnyc.org.



The League's contact information including www.VOTE411.org and the brochure of the six ballot issues which would amend the New York State Constitution were prominently displayed at the close of each debate. *Laura Altschuler, Special Projects*

Campaign Finance Reform (Continued from Page 3)

The State League, with energetic help from the City League's CFR Committee, joined other good-government groups to lobby members of the Senate seeking enactment. Members of the City League's CFR Committee gathered constituents and visited the offices of influential legislators seeking to persuade them to support the reforms.

Unfortunately, it was not to be in 2013. Late in June, the Senate adjourned without taking up the Assembly-passed CFR bill, forcing the reform coalition to look to 2014. In frustration, Governor Cuomo appointed a Moreland Act Commission to investigate corruption in State government. Supporters of CFR hope that results of the Moreland investigations will provide new momentum for the enactment of CFR in the January 2014 Legislative Session.

The first meeting of our CFR Committee, co-chaired by Arthur Schiff and Rosemary Shields, will be at 1:00 pm on November 20, 2013. Manhattan State Senator Liz Krueger is expected to attend the Committee's meeting where plans will be discussed to work toward the successful enactment of CFR legislation in the 2014 Legislative Session. We look forward to welcoming you.

Arthur Schiff, Co-Chair

Affordable Housing (Continued from Page 5)

The Committee has been working to learn more about the housing situation in our city. We are currently exploring the roles played by the City Council, City Planning Commission and Community Boards. Committee members are interviewing Council members. Some are attending meetings of the Planning Commission and City Council Committees. We are learning more about the role of HPD (Housing, Preservation and Development).

Our goals are to lobby to implement the standards we have set in the past for housing, to build further detail into our efforts to make the League more visible in the city and make a difference for the city's residents. Our next meeting is on the Thursday, November 21 at 10:30 am. Please join with us as we tackle this complex but compelling issue. *Carole Mehlman, Chair*

Did You See This? “What About Sal?”

By The Editorial Board of *The New York Times* Published: August 8, 2013

“On Tuesday night voters in New York City will be able to watch a live televised debate in the Democratic campaign for mayor. Five candidates were invited: Christine Quinn, Bill de Blasio, William Thompson Jr., John Liu and Anthony Weiner. Sal Albanese was not.

He didn’t meet the eligibility requirement for the debate, which WABC-TV is co-sponsoring with Univision, The Daily News and the League of Women Voters. Invitations were sent in April to the candidates who at the time seemed likely, in the sponsors’ judgment, to raise enough in donations to qualify for matching public funds under New York’s campaign-finance law.

Mr. Albanese, a former City Council member, might eventually qualify for public funds but hasn’t yet, and organizers felt sure in April that he wouldn’t — so he’s out. Mr. Albanese complains that the organizers bent and broke their own rules — first by adding Mr. Weiner, who wasn’t around in April, and then by keeping Mr. Liu, who has no public funds (the New York City Campaign Finance Board voted this week to withhold money from the Liu campaign, citing evidence of fund-raising violations).

Mr. Albanese notes that another big exception was made for the Republican debate, which has only three candidates, two of whom, John Catsimatidis and George McDonald, are not taking public funds. Organizers figured Joseph Lhota couldn’t debate himself, so they invited everybody. They did the same with the comptroller debate between Scott Stringer and the self-financed Eliot Spitzer.

This is a shabby way to treat Mr. Albanese. Yes, he is low in the polls, but he has been a thoughtful contributor to this long, lively campaign. Shame on the organizers, especially the League of Women Voters, for not standing up for Mr. Albanese. They should let voters hear about his plans to fix the schools, his ideas on mass transit, sanitation, public safety, parks. If there is room for only five candidates, then drop Mr. Weiner.”

Well, We Said That... Letter To the Editor: Published: August 20, 2013

Re “What About Sal?” (editorial, Aug. 9), criticizing the League of Women Voters and WABC-TV for not including Sal Albanese in a televised mayoral debate:

“The League of Women Voters of the City of New York has partnered with WABC-TV and other news media over the years to provide voters with the opportunity to learn about the qualifications and positions of candidates who are serious contenders for city office.

These debates have always been structured around several criteria that are fair and equitable. Mr. Albanese failed to meet these criteria, and that is why he was not invited to participate in the debate.

Since there are often more candidates for an office than can reasonably be accommodated in a one-hour debate, we believe that the voters benefit most when they can hear from the candidates who have a possibility of being elected. Our longstanding criteria require candidates to demonstrate significant voter interest and financial support.

Voter interest is determined by the data collected by at least two reliable polls. The financial-support criteria are based on the candidate’s meeting the minimum fund-raising requirement as established by the Campaign Finance Board, whether or not the candidate is participating in the Campaign Finance Program.

Your editorial calls for removing one candidate from the debate who meets the criteria for both voter interest and financial support (Anthony D. Weiner) to include Mr. Albanese, who doesn’t meet either. This is neither fair nor equitable.” *Mary Jenkins, Mary Lou Urban, Co-Presidents*

In Memoriam

Marie Conner
Kathy Jacobson
Robert Kivelson
Mary Martin

Calendar of Events and Meetings

Lunch with the League: “An LNG Port Among the Shipping Lanes Outside NY/NJ Harbor?”-
Thursday, November 7, 2013 (4 West 43rd Street, Suite 615, New York, NY 10036)

Committee Meetings (4 West 43rd Street, Suite 615, New York, NY 10036)

Affordable Housing - Thursday, November 21, 10:30 am

Campaign Finance Reform - Wednesday, November 20, 1:00 pm

Environmental Action - Wednesday, November 13, 12:15 pm

Membership - Tuesday, November 19, 1:00 pm

NYC Disaster Preparedness (Organizational meeting) - Monday, October 28, 11:00 am

Save the Date:

The LWVNYC Ed Fund Annual Award Luncheon
Friday, May 2, 2014 At the Roosevelt Hotel