President's Message
At our core, we, the League of Women Voters are a grassroots organization. We begin this year focused on opportunities for our grassroots membership to shape how we support public policy issues.

Program Planning is the opportunity for each local League and their members to review the public policy positions that the LWVNYS takes action on. Now is the time to have a cup of tea (wine) and review the New York state League’s Impact on Issues, the document that outlines our public policy positions and some history of their use. At the very least, try the summary or go directly to some policy area of particular interest to you.

STATE CONVENTION!!!!
The LWVNYS Convention will go virtual this year, June 7-12, 2021. Workshops and Caucuses will be available Monday, June 7 – Thursday, June 10, 2021. The opening Plenary session will be the evening of Friday, June 11, followed by caucuses and roundtables and Plenary, Saturday, June 12. Saturday will likely be most of the day.

Please start thinking about any caucuses or workshops you would like to produce or suggestions for the state to produce. Email any suggested topics to Laura@lwvny.org.

Suzanne Stassevitch, President
League of Women Voters of NYS
smstass@mac.com

Legislative Update

Election Law
The State Senate passed a package of absentee voting reforms including the following:

- S.253: Legislation that would allow absentee ballots to be counted if they have stray marks or are missing a signature date https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s253
- S.264: Legislation to expand the deadline to submit an absentee ballot application from 17 days to 15 days ahead of an election https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s264
- S.492: Legislation to allow for drop boxes to be used for absentee voting https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s492
- S.631: Legislation to allow voters to submit absentee ballot application sooner than 30 days ahead of the election (the 2020 bill sunset in December) https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s631
- S.632: Legislation to allow voters to submit their absentee ballot request electronically (the 2020 bill sunset in December) https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s632
- S.1028: Legislation to require boards of election to have an absentee ballot tracker https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/s1028

The Senate also again passed constitutional amendments to allow for no-excuse absentee voting and same day voter registration. We have sent a request to the new the Chair of Assembly Election Law Committee so see if we can determine when these bills may be taken up in the Assembly.

The League is also working with our coalition partners to support passage of restoration of voting rights for individuals who are on parole. The League signed onto a joint letter to legislative leaders and Governor Cuomo calling for swift passage of this reform.

Good Government
Before the legislative session convened the League signed onto a letter urging legislative leaders to implement rules reforms that would ensure the legislature remain open and transparent while operating remotely.

Recommendations included: Providing both internet and phone options to listen and participate, to accommodate different levels of technology literacy and internet access; providing a fast and intuitive process for signing up to speak, and include an opportunity to request language or ADA accommodation; enabling some chat feature or a phone number to allow participants to report technical problems or send in clarifying questions; and providing visible information on the number of viewers watching, and allow hearing attendees to connect with other participants via chat or other forms to help to recreate some of the experience of participating in person. To date it does not appear that either house has followed our recommendations. We will continue to monitor the issue of remote transparency and may provide additional follow up to the legislature if issues arise.

Contact Jennifer Wilson, Legislative Director at Jennifer@lwvn.org for more info on any advocacy efforts.

Voter Services
Judie Gorenstein
LWVNYS VP for Voter Services judieL728@aol.com

The state League Voter Services Committee is working hard to prepare for another election season this year. With the pandemic, much of the work by our local Leagues and members last year to educate voters was done virtually. We learned a lot from this and are updating all of toolkits and handbooks to provide samples, templates and information about both virtual and in-person activities. Thank you to all who have helped in these efforts.

February 14 is the deadline for any voter to change their party affiliation for the upcoming primary on June 22nd. Please help announce this so the public knows this date!

Youth and Civics
2021 Students Inside Albany Conference

We are excited to announce that the 2021 Students Inside Albany (SIA) Conference will happen – just not in the format as it has in the past. The Conference will be a virtual event this year held on Friday, May 21st from 4:00-6:00 pm, and on Saturday, May 22nd from 10:00 -1:30 pm.

We are mindful that the pandemic has changed the way we organize this program, but the benefit will be that issues of importance to our young people will still be recognized. During this program, as with the usual in-person conference, we plan to have

STATE VOTER
Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy
January 2021
a packed agenda filled with tools to instruct our students on how to influence public policy decision-making at the state level. Similarly, the highlight of the in-person program of meeting with legislators will remain as we arrange virtual meetings in small groups with state legislators to discuss issues and advocacy. Each local League is encouraged to select two high school students to attend this virtual conference at no charge to the students or the local Leagues.

While the program is free for students to attend please note, that the State League still will incur some expenses affiliated with this conference and we would greatly appreciate any small donations from local Leagues or individuals to cover these costs (click here to donate). Stay tuned for the full program outline and details on forms to be completed by the selected students in the next few weeks.

Contact Laura Ladd Bierman, Executive Director, at Laura@lwvn.org for more information.

New York Youth Civics Initiative:

Are you a young person interested in learning more about advocacy? Are you committed to furthering your civic involvement? Please consider joining the New York Youth Civics Initiative. In response to the pandemic, young people like yourself, are organizing around a myriad of issues that continue the conversation on both the impact of issues and the need to vote consistently. To learn more, email Crystal Joseph at campus@lwvnyc.org or Jason Bohner, Founder of the Youth Civics Initiative at: jason@nyyci.org.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Regina Tillman, rmt371@live.com

LWVNY DEI Task Force: Has been meeting virtually since August 2020 with good attendance and our most recent discussions included the following:

- Ways in which a “DEI lens” has been applied by local Leagues to their GOTV activities (i.e., partnerships with Operation PUSH and NAACP, door hangers in and postcards to historically poor turn out communities, lawn signs, Hispanic radio PSA’s, VR in non-traditional locations e.g., in a Mosque, supporting voters in long lines occurring in underserved communities, bus signage to broaden the audience for our message to “be a Voter”.)

- Beginning to identify how to include Organizational Equity as part of our LWVNY Strategic Plan. To do that, we have to understand the differences between the standard objectives of Equality versus today’s goals as relate to Equity. For assistance in your understanding:
  - Equality – is a system in which everyone has the same amount of resources provided despite their existing needs or assets.
  - Equity – is fair treatment in access, treatment, opportunity, and advancement for all while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.
  - Confirmation that local Leagues that have not yet started to adopt the LWVUS DEI Policy, and placed it in visible locations, do need to begin. Although aspirational in its tone, it holds us to account for our actions, to both our members and to our communities. Our team will be assessing related metrics to be utilized to help track progress in process and outcomes (impact).

DEI Assessment Survey: As of January, the State League has joined the ranks of the local Leagues represented on the Task Force who have completed a DEI Assessment Survey. I understand that discussion where sometimes difficult, but I hope

Redistricting Update and Plans

Jennifer Wilson
LWVNYS Deputy Director
Jennifer@lwvn.org

Redistricting Advocacy

This month the State Legislature convened to begin the 2021 session. The Senate and Assembly have already passed a constitutional amendment to alter the voting structure of the state’s new Independent Redistricting Commission. We issued a memo of opposition to all members of the Senate and later a statement of opposition to members of the press.

The Commission has continued its regular meetings and we have provided notes of these meetings in our Friday emails to our members. Most recent meetings have focused on funding for the Commission. Initially the FY 2020-2021 budget had indicated there was $750,000 available for the Commission through the Department of State, but more recent reports have stated there is actually $1 million available as grant funding through the SUNY Research Foundation. In December, before we were aware of this discrepancy, we issued a joint letter to the Governor urging him to work with the Department of State to ensure these funds are released. The League also issued an action alert to all members urging them to contact the Governor’s office to direct the Department of State to release these funds.

At the Commission’s most recent meeting, the Co-Executive Directors indicated that SUNY Research Foundation had said the funding may be delayed for an additional 3 weeks but did not say why this delay persists. We again worked with our partners to issue a letter to legislative leaders to order that these funds be immediately released.

Although we have not yet seen the Commission’s budget request letter, early reports have indicated the Commission will be requesting $3.9 million for FY 2021-2022. Once we see the final budget request and Governor’s proposed budget we will work to advocate for the funds that are requested by the Commission.

Redistricting Campaign

On January 14th the League held its campaign kickoff webinar. We had 239 participants signed up and around 150 who attended. The PowerPoint presentation is posted on the state League website and can be viewed here: https://www.lwvnyonline.org/advocacy/redistricting/2021/january/New-York-State-Redistricting-Campaign-Kick-Off-PowerPoint.pdf. The full YouTube of the event can be viewed here: https://youtu.be/yCyA2vSA5scs.

The League has also hired our Fellow to help us in our redistricting campaign. Alison Martinez will be assisting us in our work. Here is her bio: “Alison Martinez is a second year graduate student in the Higher Education Masters program at the University at Albany. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a minor in Leadership Studies in 2019. During her undergraduate career she served as the Student Association Director of Intercultural Affairs, Student Liaison for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Student Affairs Department, as well as Public Relations Chair for the Ephus Nu Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. Inc. Alison has since been accepted into the 2021 Women and Public Fellowship Program through the Center of Women in Government and Civil Society. Through her placement at the League of Women Voters, Alison hopes to strengthen her leadership skills in public advocacy, merging her passion for education and public policy to drive civic change.”

The League has scheduled a second campaign webinar for January 28th at 6:30 pm (TODAY). This webinar will be an expert panel discussion which will be open to public participation. Click here to register for the event: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_E5KpYE9ZTS26l7EryOyZQ. Our expert panelists will discuss the status of New York State’s Redistricting Commission, how to engage in Unity Mapping, and how to involve community organizations in the redistricting process. Participants can submit their questions ahead of the forum here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSlyA0QLkK5ATbB4o4XWvgpU9sMugJ_AW4iLq977vagq/viewform.

Featured Panelists:
Rosalind Gold, Chief Public Policy Officer for NALEO Educational Fund
Jerry G. Vattamala Director, Democracy Program, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Jeff Wice, Adjunct Professor & Senior Fellow, New York Law School
Moderated by Jennifer Wilson, Deputy Director, League of Women Voters of New York State.
that they were nevertheless valuable in determining potential next steps for your League. Next Steps: The results will be aggregated shortly for the Task Force to disseminate and compare against while a state-wide plan of action is being fashioned. Also, these results will be used to consult with DEI workshop speakers and educators as we plan for conducting DEI-related state-wide training, beginning this year.

Resources available: A handout referencing how to apply a “DEI Lens” to LWV events (used by this writer at the regional training in NYC, held in March 2020) is now made available through an upcoming LWVUS DEI webinar scheduled for February 18, entitled, “Event Planning Through a DEI Lens and How to Apply it for The Day of Action”. Register here: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZIvf-uuj4uGNOONLV9ifsf28SzeGdMnuHe All League members are invited to attend.

From LWVUS
LWVUS has offered a number of webinars on different topics in the last few months - and more are scheduled! Here are links to the past ones in case you’d like to learn more - and a link to see what’s scheduled in case you’d like to join any in the future. Click on blue words for links to the recordings, articles, and schedule.

Please find a copy of the slides attached and a recording and referenced resources below:

- LWV Webinar: Navigating Non Partisanship in Hyper Partisan Times
- LWV Webinar: 1/21 DEI and Nonpartisanship
- LWV Webinar: Combatting Mis/Disinformation
- LWV Resource: LWV Impact on Issues
- LWV Resource: Exercising our Power – Navigating c3 and c4
- Article: How hard is it to vote in your state?
- Resource: Rethink Media

Check here for LWVUS regular webinars!

Local League News
On January 24, the LWV Scarsdale kicked-off its centennial year with a special Speaker Panel which included: NYS Attorney General Letitia James; NYS Senate Majority-Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins; NYS Assemblywoman Amy Paulin and Westchester DA Mimi Rocah. The event was moderated by former League President, Janice Starr. Here is the video: https://youtu.be/3De-v9LV494

The Ballot Box is the monthly radio show of the League of Women Voters of New Rochelle. Co-hosted by LWVNR members Tamar Tait and Nina Luban, the show features local, state, and national electoral issues and other civic matters. The Ballot Box maintains an ongoing, non-partisan conversation about the rights and responsibilities of – and the issues that face – our representative democracy. Listen to past shows here: http://wvox.com/shows/the-ballot-box/

On Friday, January 15, the League of Women Voters of Huntington recognized the Town of Huntington for its ongoing support of the League in 2020, especially recognizing its efforts to celebrate the passage of the 19th Amendment ensuring the vote for women. LWV of Huntington President Lizbeth Thalheimer presented a plaque of recognition (virtually) to Supervisor Chad Lupinacci and Council Members Joan Cergol, Eugene, Mark Cuthbertson and Ed Smyth.

LWV of Utica-Rome invited NYS Senator Rachel May to provide an overview of pending NYS legislation on healthcare including the NY Health Act, followed by holding a consensus on the LWV NYS’s position update.

LWV of Saratoga was a co-sponsor of events on the weekend of Martin Luther King’s birthday. The theme/intention for the weekend was “Let’s talk, Saratoga” coupled with Dr. King’s statement “whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly”. MLK Saratoga intended to foster dialogue on key issues such as equity and inclusion, policing, homelessness and protest.

The four area leagues in the Capital Region joined to host a virtual meeting on state advocacy. Jennifer Wilson, State Legislative Director, helped all become familiar with the State Legislative Agenda and consider potential NYS legislation for the 2021 session, which will determine our advocacy. Topics explored included election legislation, redistricting, court reform, education financing, women’s issues, and environmental issues, and others.
LWV of Rochester has a book club meeting by zoom each month. Here are their recent and future books, in case anyone is looking for a good read:

- *The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters* by Carolyn Jefferson Jenkins
- *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom* by Keishan N. Blain
- *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present* by David Treuer, AND *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* by Dee Brown
- *Begin Again* by Eddie S. Glaude Jr.
- *How To Be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* by John Lewis
- *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

And Just for Fun!

From Times Union archive

100 YEARS AGO TODAY

**Governor's criticism stuns women**

Gov. Nathan Miller, echoing the recent attitude of the state Republican organization toward the League of Women Voters, told 250 members of that group at a dinner at the Ten Eyck Hotel in Albany that their league was a menace to American institutions. “When, without being organized as a political party, any organization seeks to exert political influence, to coerce officials either in the legislative or administrative positions to their particular views by intimidation or otherwise, by promises of support at the elections or by threats, open or covert, of opposition at election, such an organization in my judgment is a menace to free institutions and to representative government,” he said. He also railed against such LWV-endorsed proposals as an eight-hour work day and health insurance as “placing a premium on laziness and ill health” and “fanatical.” The audience sat stunned, their anger rising, during the governor’s remarks. He was followed by League of Women Voters founder Carrie Chapman Catt, who urged the women “not to worry about what anyone says,” and exhorted them not to bow to intimidation She said they should let their consciences be their guides rather than blindly ally themselves with any political party. The women in the audience broke out into applause at Catt’s words.

— Times Union, Jan. 28, 1921