League of Women Voters
Of the Oneonta Area ~ Bulletin
PO Box 434, Oneonta NY 13820 ~ (607) 436-4050 ~ www.lwvoneonta.org

April 2007

Oneonta’s Comprehensive Plan

What might it mean for Oneonta?

Will it mean anything for the entire Oneonta area?

Barry Warren, co-chair of the steering committee

April 24 – 7:30 P.M.
First United Methodist Church
66 Chestnut St.

Save the Date
Annual Dinner and Meeting May 27

President’s Message

As I write this letter, the Common Council has yet to vote on the Comprehensive Plan. The city has been working on this project since last January with Steering Committee meetings, focus groups, a large invited group and two public meetings or hearings. I participated in several of these meetings and found my suggestions included in the plan. Although as I write this, I have several reservations about the plan, it will provide a basis for government and community consideration as our city and the entire area move forward. I am sure Barry Warren will have much to tell us about the significance of this plan. Join us April 24 at 7:30 at the First United Methodist Church.

The Immigration Study is underway! Lorrie Wolverton provided a tremendous amount of information and food for thought at our February meeting. Thank you, Lorrie. See Anne Payne’s report about the meeting on page 2. The study committee now has five members but would welcome you on the committee. Our primary job will be to learn as much as we can so that we can provide good information when it comes time for consensus next fall.

Continued inside

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President’s Message continued

AAUW provided a delightful luncheon at BOCES and Al Getler’s power point showed us new directions for The Daily Star.

Be sure to put May 22 on your calendar for our Annual Dinner and meeting. The Founder’s Award committee will announce the first recipient. Be sure to be there to congratulate her. That is also the time we elect the board for next year, adopt a budget and the program for next year. A new study item has been recommended: A Study of the City Charter with emphasis on the relationship between the Common Council and the Mayor. The program will be a continuation of our Immigration Study.

Kay

Diversity Policy

The League of Women Voters of the Oneonta Area, in both its values and practices, is committed to diversity and pluralism. There shall be no barriers to participation in the League. The League of Women Voters of the Oneonta Area recognizes that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision-making.

Immigration Meeting Update

Lorrie Wolverton, a local immigration specialist with national experience, who directs the Oneonta Migrant program as well as the Early Childhood and Migrant Parent Involvement Program for New York State, presented an engaging discussion on “Immigration in Upstate New York” for an audience of approximately 25 local league members and nonmembers at the Elm Park Methodist Church on February 24. The discussion had three distinct focal areas.

II. MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Second, Ms. Wolverton addressed what she referred to as many of the myths and misconceptions surrounding immigrants, largely centering on those with an anti-immigration perspective.

With regard to the “myth or misconception” that immigrants don’t pay taxes, she stated that estimates conclude that undocumented immigrants pay between $0-$140 billion in income, property, and sales taxes annually. The IRS allows the undocumented to file income tax returns, although any refunds as “suspended” during such person’s status. The Social Security Administration also collects 6-7 billion in Social Security payroll withholding from undocumented immigrants who are then unable to collect such funds.

The next “myth” was that undocumented immigrants enter the United States to collect welfare. To this she replied that the undocumented produce $240 million in earnings annually. Their children are eligible to attend public school, for free and reduced lunches, and for free child-health plus participation. Migrant programs require participants to work as a condition of participation. Undocumented adults are not eligible for free medical care except in cases of emergency.
The third “myth” Ms. Wolverton explored was that the undocumented take jobs away from American citizens. To this she stated that the US has its lowest unemployment rate in years, and that this is a period of great economic growth. The undocumented are taking jobs that US citizens do not want or cannot fill. As to reasons that the immigrants doing the work are undocumented, she cited the time-consuming paperwork involved in the guest-worker program, and that she favors an immigration work program for farming. She also discussed a number of personal experiences in which US employers found that the immigrants were more conscientious than their American counterparts about showing up and working hard at particular farm-related jobs.

The fourth “myth” Ms. Wolverton explored was that immigrants don’t want to learn English. She stated that 75% of immigrants learn English within 10 years, and that it takes at least 3 years to learn conversational English and 3-10 years to learn scientific English. Her personal experience was that parents do want to learn English.

III. LAWS AND LEGISLATION

The third major area of Ms. Wolverton’s discussion involved pending and current legislation and immigration reform legislation. She gave some background on border enforcement through the fencing of the Mexico/US border, and the huge increase in federal raids (which she said often had a negative impact on US employers, whose crops then remained unpicked in fields, and the like). She noted some states have legislation to penalize employers who hire undocumented aliens, and that due process has been reduced for the undocumented, while bureaucratic traps are often built into systems to catch or penalize the undocumented. Additionally, she noted the rise of hatred against immigrants. With respect to specific laws, she noted the “Real ID Act” which goes into effect shortly in most states which will require states to change their processes for issuance of drivers licenses and for verification of status; the law also changes requirements for asylum, increases quotas for immigrants in certain professions, and shields the astute from court review by stripping courts of jurisdiction over particular actions.

Another piece of existing legislation is the “Secure Fence Act” to fund the building of a fence at the US southern border, and to create vehicle barriers, place and monitor cameras, maintain satellites, begin unmanned border surveillance fly-overs, and increase the number of immigration agents and detention center beds. She characterized the Act as costly, not likely to be a deterrent, and under funded.

Among the legislation which is pending before Congress, she noted the “Agricultural Jobs Opportunity Benefit and Security Act” under which farm workers could get temporary and then permanent status. She also noted the “DREAM Act,” which would allow undocumented minors who have grown up in the US and stayed out of trouble to apply for conditional status to attend college or enter the military, and restoring to states the ability to determine eligibility for college and tuition assistance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ms. Wolverton urged that, in addressing immigration issues, it is important to” (1) look for balanced information; (2) check statements for the accuracy of the “facts” therein; (3) examine legislation to determine the impact on current citizens as well as immigrants or undocumented persons; and (4) not to close the doors to immigrants under the justification of anti-terrorism actions.

Ms. Wolverton also supplied a number of handouts expanding on the above topics. If you would like a copy or the name of a website from which information can be located, please call Anne Payne (432-7351).

A Mental Health Court for Otsego County?

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Otsego County is sponsoring a forum on this interesting question May 2, at Morris Hall on the SUNY campus at 7:00 P.M. A large proportion of incarcerated individuals have been diagnosed with mental illness. Come learn about the experience of such courts in other counties.

Officers

President ....... Kay Stulgross 432-6974
Vice President ...Cathy LaFontaine 431-1125
Secretary ....... Alice Collins
Treasurer ....... Sandee Fleisher 432-3783
Bulletin Editor .. Vivien Anderson 432-1224
Unfogging Government -- A New Program

The Board of Directors has approved a new local program, entitled “Unfogging Government,” which is the original idea of board member Alice Collins. Scheduled to occur in the early fall, the program will consist of 4 evening talks by local experts on the basics of the Constitution and its role in shaping government, as well as each of the 3 branches of government (legislative, judiciary, and executive). The program is designed to appeal to adults, and to provide a “refresher” overview of the functions of government, at the state, local and federal levels.

The 4 part discussion series will be videotaped, with the intent to offer repeat performances to local groups as well as for broadcast on local media.

The committee working on Unfogging Government consists of Alice Collins, Karen Geasey, and Anne Payne. The committee is actively seeking volunteers to assist in planning and presentation—please contact Alice (ampcollins@yahoo.com) or Anne at (432-7351) for details about the next meeting, or about your interests.

New Member Welcome Meeting – Are you new to the League? Have you been a member for a while but have questions about what we do, how we make decisions and what we have done in the past year? Join us at 10 a.m. at Kay’s house, 10 Walnut St. on April 28 for an informal discussion about the whys and wherefores of our organization. All members are welcome and encouraged to bring a guest. Anyone interested in the League is invited.

Please Welcome New Members:

Dorothy V. Dutro
117 Sillman Cover Rd. #935
Maryland, NY 12116
432-4769

Phillip Hill
58 West Broadway
Oneonta, NY 13820
433-8873
philliphill21@hotmail.com

Spring Fling – Highway Clean Up

Thursday, April 26th. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Denny’s parking lot for about a 2-hour treasure hunt along I-88. Bring a friend.
Makeover for LWVNY

The League of Women Voters of New York State has undergone a virtual makeover! We have a brand new website. Please take some time to browse the new website. You will see a new and less complicated homepage that is more esthetically pleasing. The purpose in revamping was to create a site that was easier to use for League members as well as visitors. We found that the old site, particularly the homepage, was too League-centric and was loaded with acronyms. It was neither welcoming to non-League visitors nor helpful in providing an immediate synopsis of the LWVNY. Additionally, from a technical perspective, it was cumbersome and difficult to maintain. The new site will be technically easier to maintain. We thank our Web Mistress, Debra Drake, for all of her work. She put in many, many hours of design time beyond what she the hours for which she was paid. Thank you, Deb!

Our Youth: Our Future

Some of the participating Leagues have begun their LeaderSpark programs for 2007. Participating Leagues for 2007 include Albany County, Geneva, Saratoga County, Shelter Island, Schenectady County, and Smithtown. Buffalo/Niagara is fostering a potential program for the fall of 2007. LeaderSpark is a youth leadership development model based on “awareness, practice and application.” It serves to develop group leadership skills, enhance self-confidence and positive attitude, foster the opportunity to work effectively with diverse groups, position individuals for educational and employment success, and build a network of supporters and mentors. LeaderSpark was implemented in New York State ideally to serve as a preparatory program for garnering youth participation in Students Inside Albany.

The 2007 Students Inside Albany Youth Conference will be held April 22-25 at the Hampton Inn & Suites in Albany. As a result of participation in the conference, students will learn about the New York State Legislative process and the how public policy is developed, implemented and changed. Additionally, youth increase analytical and assessment skills as well as qualities and skills of leadership. SIA 2007 will feature a presentation on leadership skills by LeaderSpark graduates.

LWVNS Convention 2007:
To Westchester We Go

The 2007 Biennial Convention of the League of Women Voters of New York State, called “Reaching Out/Reaching In,” will be held May 18 - 20 at the Crowne Plaza in White Plains, New York. Convention is a time for camaraderie, rejuvenation and growth for members and for the League as a whole. Your participation is key to achieving those objectives. Look for registration kits to be mailed to local Leagues at the end of March.

Volunteer support is a key factor in holding a successful and effective Convention. If you are interested in volunteering during Convention, particularly if you live within commuting distance to White Plains, please contact Edna Vincenti at edna.vincenti@vincenti.com. If you have never been to Convention this may be a great introduction!

Another highlight of Convention, serving to recognize excellence, is the Awards Banquet held on Saturday evening during Convention. Take the time to bring recognition to your League’s outstanding accomplishments by submitting an award nomination form for the appropriate category. Nomination forms can be found in the January State Board Report available from the state League office or website at www.lwvny.org.

Convention 2007 will continue the tradition of holding a Silent Auction as part of the festivities. Please consider donating a new item or making a few phone calls in your area to request a donation from individuals or businesses. Popular auction items include merchandise, gift certificates, hospitality baskets, sports memorabilia/equipment, get-away weekends, and tickets to cultural and sporting events. An introductory cover letter to potential Silent Auction donors and an item submission form are on the state League website at www.lwvny.org under the link on the homepage for Convention News.

Hearts for LWVNY

The LWVNY appeal for 501(c)4 funds reached members the week of February 14. Valentine’s Day is the anniversary of the founding of the League of Women Voters. If you have not, please consider a gift as part of this appeal. A majority of the peripheral costs of the very effective advocacy work being done in Albany is financed with funds raised as part of the League annual appeal. The hard work of the last decade is showing signs of coming to fruition through various measures being proposed and implemented in Albany. We need to keep up the pressure in on our elected officials. This requires funds to support infrastructure and administrative support. Thank you for helping us keep the momentum going.

The Stakes Are High

The Big League Raffle is back as part of Convention 2007, Reaching Out/Reaching In. It is an opportunity to raise some funds for the state and local Leagues and for an individual to win some cash. This raffle is a partnership with local Leagues that provides all of the benefits to local Leagues of holding a raffle without the headaches. This is a win-win opportunity. Last year's raffle netted over $17,000 with over $6,487 given out in prizes, $3,045 rebated to local Leagues, and an additional $324 awarded to the League that sold the first prize ticket. Tickets are being printed and will be sent to local Leagues on April 1, 2007. Tickets and money must be returned to the state League by close of business, May 14, 2007.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF NEW YORK STATE

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GET INVOLVED!
ELECTING THE PRESIDENT BY NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

PART IV

NATIONWIDE POPULAR ELECTION WILL GIVE A VOICE TO SMALL STATES

It is sometimes asserted that the current system helps the nation's least populous states. It is also sometimes asserted that the small states confer a partisan advantage on one political party. In fact, neither statement is true.

Twelve of 13 smallest states are almost totally ignored in presidential elections because they are politically non-competitive. Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Alaska regularly go Republican, and Rhode Island, Delaware, Hawaii, Vermont, Maine, and DC regularly go Democratic. These 12 states together contain 11 million people. Because of the two electoral-vote bonus that each state receives, the 12 non-competitive small states have 40 electoral votes. However, the two-vote bonus is an entirely illusory advantage to the small states. Ohio has 11 million people and has "only" 20 electoral votes. As we all know, the 11 million people in Ohio are the center of attention in presidential campaigns, while the 11 million people in the 12 non-competitive small states are utterly irrelevant. Nationwide election of the President would make each of the voters in the 12 smallest states as important as an Ohio voter. In fact, the vote of every person in the United States would become equally important under the proposed compact.

The fact that the bonus of two electoral votes is an illusory benefit to the small states has been widely recognized by the small states for some time. In 1966, Delaware led a group of 12 predominantly low-population states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Kentucky, Florida, Pennsylvania) in suing New York in the U.S. Supreme Court, arguing that New York's use of the winner-take-all effectively disenfranchised voters in their states. The Court declined to hear the case (presumably because of the well-established constitutional provision that the manner of awarding electoral votes is exclusively a state decision). Ironically, defendant New York is no longer an influential battleground state (as it was in the 1960s). Today, New York suffers the very same disenfranchisement as the 12 non-competitive low-population states because it too has become politically non-competitive. A vote in New York is, today, equal to a vote in these small non-competitive states—all are equally worthless and irrelevant in presidential elections. In a 1979 Senate speech, Senator Henry Bellmon (R-Oklahoma) described how his views on the Electoral College had changed while he had served as Governor, Senator, National Campaign Director for Richard Nixon, and a member of the American Bar Association's commission studying electoral reform.

"While the consideration of the electoral college began--and I am a little embarrassed to admit this--I was convinced, as are many residents of smaller States, that the present system is a considerable advantage to less populous States such as Oklahoma ... [A]s the deliberations of the American Bar Association Commission proceeded and as more facts became known, I came to the realization that the present electoral system does not give an advantage to the voters from the less populous States. Rather, it works to the disadvantage of small State voters who are largely ignored in the general election for President."

A nationwide popular vote is the only way to make every vote equal throughout the United States. The current winner-take-all rule negates the influence of every voter (of both the winning and losing political party) in every non-competitive state (small, medium, or large).
ELECTING THE PRESIDENT BY NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

Part V

In a series on the plan to implement a national popular vote through having states enter an interstate compact called the "Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by Nationwide Popular Vote." Based on materials Barbara Thomas excerpted from National Popular Vote. Arguments against the plan will appear as a latter part of this series.

Part V

NATIONWIDE POPULAR ELECTION MEANS A 50-STATE CAMPAIGN

In a nationwide vote, presidential campaigns would become 50-state campaigns. Democrats could not afford to ignore the concerns and interests of voters in states such as Utah, Kansas, Texas, and Alabama, while Republicans could not afford to ignore voters in states such as California, Hawaii, Maryland, and Rhode Island. Every vote would matter in every state.

Although it is sometimes conjectured that a national popular election would focus only on big cities, it is clear that this would not be the case. Evidence as to how a nationwide presidential campaign would be run can be found by examining the way presidential candidates currently campaign inside battleground states. Inside Ohio, the state's big cities do not receive all the attention, and they certainly do not control the outcome. Because every vote is equal inside Ohio, presidential candidates avidly seek out voters in small, medium, and large towns. The itineraries of presidential candidates (and allocation of other campaign resources) in Ohio show what all candidates for statewide office in every state already know-namely that every vote matters in every part of the state.

Further evidence of the way a nationwide presidential campaign would be run comes from national advertisers who seek out customers in small, medium, and large towns of every small, medium, and large state. Every sale is important to them, regardless of where the customer is located.

Currently, two-thirds of the 450 campaign visits made by each presidential slate during the three-month campaign are concentrated in just five states, and 92% are concentrated in just 16 states. Under a nationwide vote, each presidential campaign would have to reallocate its limited campaigning resources and spread them over all the nation's 435 congressional districts. A small state such as Idaho with two congressional districts could reasonably expect two visits from both the Democratic and Republican candidates. Currently, of course, Idaho receives no attention from either party. Although Idaho would undoubtedly continue to deliver a majority to the Republican presidential candidate, every vote in Idaho would suddenly matter to both the Democrat and the Republican candidates. It would be folly for John Kerry to write off Idaho because his campaign would care if he lost by 227,000 or some smaller number. Similarly, it would be folly for George Bush to take Idaho for granted because his campaign would care if he won by 227,000 or some larger number. As the Idaho State Journal editorialized in 2004,

"As we enter the home stretch of the quadrennial horse race known as the presidential election, it's time to remember that this is an election for the president of the United States of America—all 50 states, not an election for the president of the Swing States of America."

Part VI, arguments against going the Compact Route, in the next Bulletin
May Banquet and Annual Meeting

Join together for the culmination of our 2006-2007 League year
Dinner at Neptune Diner at 6:00 P.M. May 22
$20.00 includes entree, gratuity and tax

Name __________________________

Address _________________________

Number of dinners @ $20 each (tax and gratuity included) ________
Individual Dues @ $45 ________
Household Dues (2 members) @ $67.50 ________
Contributions ________

Total ________

Please mail this form to: Shirley Fioravanti
12 Bugbee Rd.
Oneonta, NY 13820