A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE NYS SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX CAP BILL

For a timely “back to school” program, the League of Women Voters of the Hamptons is hosting a community forum on Monday, September 8, at 7:00 p.m. at the Bridgehampton Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse. League and community members are encouraged to attend this important meeting to hear our prominent panelists speak on how the NYS School Property Tax Cap Bill will affect our taxes, our schools, and our school budget voting process.

To provide background for the meeting, this article reviews the bill’s origin and purpose, its major features, and various pro and con positions.

The Background

On June 3, 2008, the NYS Commission on Property Tax Relief, headed by Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi, issued a preliminary report calling for a school property tax cap to stem the growth of property taxes in New York State.

In response, the new Governor David A. Paterson (D) submitted Program Bill #62, and the new Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos (R) convened a special session of the State Senate on August 8 to vote on a similar Senate bill, S.8736. Both bills contain many of the recommendations of the NYS Commission.

The bill passed the State Senate on August 8 by a vote of 38-20. Two companion bills were also passed.

Major Features of S.8736, Which Passed the Senate on August 8

1. The bill caps a school district’s property tax increase at 4%, or 120% of the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), whichever is less. The cap excludes the taxes needed for capital expenditures.

2. It applies to all school districts in New York State except the “Big Five” cities of New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers.

3. It provides that a school district can override this cap if 55% of voters approve the budget. The percentage of voters needed to approve a budget over the 4% cap rises to 60% if a school district receives an increase in state funding of 5% or more.

4. It allows voters to place a proposal on the ballot to underride the 4% tax levy cap or have no increase at all. This proposition would be initiated by a petition signed by at least 10% of registered voters in the district and would be voted on at a special district meeting on the first Tuesday in May, before the regular school district budget vote on the third Tuesday in May.

5. School districts with a tax increase lower than the cap can “bank” the funds, up to an additional 1.5% tax increase in a future year.

continued on page 6

What’s Inside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s Inside</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President’s Message</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Exciting Program for High School Girls</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Town Government</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Needed for East Hampton Town Seniors</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk County Board of Elections Needs YOU!</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September General Membership Meeting Information</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter Services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Transportation Alternatives” Forum</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome, New Members</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk County Voter</td>
<td>16-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Committee Report</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of August Board Meeting</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

NYS SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX CAP BILL: How Will It Affect Our Taxes? Our Schools?

PANEL DISCUSSION

Monday, September 8, 2008
7:00 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse
977 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Turnpike
Bridgehampton

See page 4 for details.
President’s Message

Advertising is only evil when it advertises evil things.

David Ogilvy

This is a blatant and shameless plea to our members to frequent our sponsors and to identify themselves as members of the League of Women Voters of the Hamptons when you do so. Why? Because we need their support, and without evidence that the advertising is effective, the advertisers will take their dollars elsewhere.

Here’s the math. Our dues are now $55.00 for a single membership. Of that, $28.00 must be sent to the national LWV; $18.00 is due to the New York State League; and $1.50 is due to the Suffolk County league. That leaves us with a mere $7.50 per member with which to run our meetings, sponsor our debates, hold our voter registration drives, pay for publications such as the “Directory of Public Officials” and the “Voter Guides,” publish and disseminate our Voter, communicate with our members, attend workshops and conventions, and do all of the other things which make our League an interesting, active, and educational organization. Clearly, we cannot do any of that work, much less all of that work, without other sources of income.

Much of our supplemental income comes from contributions from our members, for which we are extremely grateful. Fundraising is another source of income, and we, from time to time, ask you to support those efforts. Advertisements in The Voter are a third essential funding source. The willingness of our advertisers to give us financial support has enabled us to keep our dues at the same level, despite rises in the amount that national requires of us. We need to repay the favor.

We are so fortunate to have LWVH members who are willing to go out into the community to find local businesses to support us. Their success is such that The Voter is self-sufficient, affording us the resources to pursue the other activities that service the community and keep us going. Their task has been made much more difficult because of the economic times—a good portion of the advertisers in the past have been real estate companies, which, as you know are not doing well on the East End this year.

It is difficult to convince a business that advertising in our Voter is worthwhile without proof that the money is well spent. The bottom line is that we need our advertisers to continue to support us, and they need to know that we are their customers. So, please, look at the ads: see which of the local business owners are already among those you frequent. Take special note of the businesses and services that have now joined our roster of advertisers: psychotherapy (Beth Barth); law (Farrell Fritz PC); design (Jane Scudi Dell; The Nordic Loft); garden center (Marders); and auto repair (Joe’s Garage, Inc). When you have finished here, you can get something wonderful to eat (Schmidt’s Markets), and then relax with a good book (Rogers Memorial Library).

Next time you are in the store, or the salon, or the office of any of our advertisers (new or old), make mention of the fact that you are a League member. If you are looking for a service or store, check out our advertisers and use them. If you do, please, again, remember to identify yourself to the proprietor as a League member and express your thanks for their support.

Carol Mellor, President  537-6998
Several of our members are embarking on a study of Town Government, with a view to suggesting to our towns ways in which the administration of our towns could be improved. Among the issues being considered for study are terms, term limits, full-time or part-time council members, functions and advisability of a town manager, and other issues of town government functions. If you are interested in finding out more, please call Barbara Jordan at (631) 324-6144.

AN EXCITING PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

At the National Convention in June, I attended a workshop run jointly by the LWVs of Camden, NJ, and Tuscon, AZ, called “Running and Winning,” which knocked my socks off (had I been wearing any). This program’s aim is to encourage more women to run for and win public office— one of the messages that was given to us so strongly by Judith Hope, the keynote speaker at our June luncheon for political women.

“Running and Winning” brings high school girls together with elected women officials for a day where the girls get to meet and interview the officials (in small, rotating groups) and then run a campaign by selecting candidates, writing and delivering speeches, doing posters, etc. In Camden, where they have been doing this program since March 2000, they have from 35 to 70 girls attend each session and have had wonderful responses from their public officials as well. They have also found the program to be an excellent collaborative tool and have worked with organizations such as the AAUW (American Association of University Women) and their local Chamber of Commerce as partners. Funds have also been forthcoming from companies and local government.

At the August Board meeting, I showed the CD of the program and the Board decided that we would “run” with “Running and Winning” with the aim of doing a program in May or June in a local school. To commit to the program, we need many volunteers and I was delighted that Board members Arlene Makl, Anne Marshall, Sue Avedon, Terri Levin-Davgin, Afton DiSunno, Ursula Lynch, and Gladys Remler all volunteered to be on the Running and Winning team. We need more! Please consider volunteering for this exciting new League venture. We will start meeting in September and there are many tasks to carry out—from contacting schools to contacting legislators, to tons of follow-up by e-mail and phone, to arranging calendars, and so on.

If you’re interested, please e-mail me at rothhandj@yahoo.com or call at (631) 283-0759.

Written by Judi Roth

STUDY OF TOWN GOVERNMENT

For those of you who attended the July Transportation meeting, you may recall that Susan Ecker, Coordinator of Volunteer Programs for the Town of East Hampton, spoke about the transportation needs of senior citizens for shopping, getting to doctors, etc. In a letter to Carol Mellor, she tells us that there are many volunteer drivers, but that “our quest for a vehicle remains elusive.” So we are helping to spread the word.

Do you have a car, or know someone who has one, to donate to East Hampton Town? This car should be not more than seven years old and should have mileage not exceeding 75,000. Obviously, this would be a good tax deduction for someone, and the cause is certainly local and very worthy.

If you have any vehicles that fit this bill or any ideas on how the town might obtain such a vehicle, you may reach Susan at 324-4947.

CAR NEEDED FOR EAST HAMPTON TOWN SENIORS

At the National Convention in June, I attended a workshop run jointly by the LWVs of Camden, NJ, and Tuscon, AZ, called “Running and Winning,” which knocked my socks off (had I been wearing any). This program’s aim is to encourage more women to run for and win public office— one of the messages that was given to us so strongly by Judith Hope, the keynote speaker at our June luncheon for political women.

“Running and Winning” brings high school girls together with elected women officials for a day where the girls get to meet and interview the officials (in small, rotating groups) and then run a campaign by selecting candidates, writing and delivering speeches, doing posters, etc. In Camden, where they have been doing this program since March 2000, they have from 35 to 70 girls attend each session and have had wonderful responses from their public officials as well. They have also found the program to be an excellent collaborative tool and have worked with organizations such as the AAUW (American Association of University Women) and their local Chamber of Commerce as partners. Funds have also been forthcoming from companies and local government.

At the August Board meeting, I showed the CD of the program and the Board decided that we would “run” with “Running and Winning” with the aim of doing a program in May or June in a local school. To commit to the program, we need many volunteers and I was delighted that Board members Arlene Makl, Anne Marshall, Sue Avedon, Terri Levin-Davgin, Afton DiSunno, Ursula Lynch, and Gladys Remler all volunteered to be on the Running and Winning team. We need more! Please consider volunteering for this exciting new League venture. We will start meeting in September and there are many tasks to carry out—from contacting schools to contacting legislators, to tons of follow-up by e-mail and phone, to arranging calendars, and so on.

If you’re interested, please e-mail me at rothhandj@yahoo.com or call at (631) 283-0759.

Written by Judi Roth

STUDY OF TOWN GOVERNMENT

Several of our members are embarking on a study of Town Government, with a view to suggesting to our towns ways in which the administration of our towns could be improved. Among the issues being considered for study are terms, term limits, full-time or part-time council members, functions and advisability of a town manager, and other issues of town government functions. If you are interested in finding out more, please call Barbara Jordan at (631) 324-6144.

The Suffolk County Board of Elections NEEDS YOU!

How would you like to help protect democracy and be paid at the same time? You can—by working at the polls this year!

Remember the 2000 Presidential Election — the mass confusion, turmoil, and contested vote totals that arose from a confusing ballot design, hanging chads and flawed election administration? Watch out! This year’s anticipated massive turnout at the polls, coupled with the availability of new voting systems, threatens that sort of chaos here in New York.

After reading this, who would be masochistic enough to volunteer?

County boards throughout the state are in great need of election inspectors and poll workers, especially since the technology supporting the voting process is going to change. To qualify, you must be a registered voter in Suffolk County, be enrolled in either the Democratic or Republican party, and be able to speak, read, and write the English language.

You will be trained by the Board of Elections, and it’s a paying job! This is a great way to serve the voters of New York State. Call your Suffolk County Board of Elections at 852-4500 to find out more!
Several LWVH members have been busy this summer registering voters, handing out absentee ballot applications and, in general, doing the good work the League is known for. Some of these members and friends—including Mary Wynn Kuhl, Mireille Lister, Heidi Mack, Arlene Makl, Elinor McDade, Carol Lee Nespole, and Gladys Remler — have reported back “from the field” with their experiences, which follow.

Submitted by Gladys Remler:
Carol Lee Nespole of the Membership Committee and I set out for the Farmers Market in Westhampton on Saturday, July 12, to register voters, hand out absentee ballots, and answer questions. We had the most successful day. We handed out about a dozen or more absentee ballots to people who wanted them for relatives as far away as Germany, and also for college kids who might be away. Change of address was another reason for people requesting forms. We even had a new voter who needed a form, as well as one who wanted to change her party affiliation. We answered many questions and had a great time. People were friendly and applauded us for being there. A worthwhile Saturday morning. We plan to do it again.

Submitted by Arlene Makl:
Mireille Lister and I had another good experience registering voters. On July 29, we set up shop outside the East Hampton Post Office. We had a small table, two chairs (which we never used), registration forms, LWV brochures, applications and a LWVH banner. We were prepared and ready! Almost as soon as we arrived, people walking in and out of the post office were giving us “thumbs up.” Some stopped and expressed appreciation for the League and what we do. This is not unusual. We now seem to get this reception whenever we do voter registration. Three individuals registered to vote, we gave out nine applications for absentee ballots and supplied four shopping bags filled with LWVH brochures and applications to interested prospective members.

The day was successful, and we achieved visibility and unsolicited comments of appreciation.

Submitted by Heidi Mack:
Saturday, August 2: A couple with a baby, stroller, and toddler in tow answered our routine question, “Would you like to register to vote?” with a quiet “we’re registered,” and kept on going past us up the street. Perhaps a half-hour later, they returned and just as quietly placed two bottles of water down on the ledge we were perched on and simply said, “thank you for doing what you’re doing.”

Heidi Mack and Elinor McDade helping people register to vote on Main Street in Sag Harbor.

The NYS School Property Tax Cap Bill:
How Will It Affect Our Taxes? Our Schools?

Hear the pros and cons of the legislation.
Bring your questions for the distinguished panel:

State Senator Kenneth LaValle, Senate Education Committee
State Assemblyman Fred Thiele, Assembly Education Committee
Gary Bixhorn, C.O.O., Eastern Suffolk BOCES
Richard Iannuzzi, President, NYS United Teachers

Monday, September 8, 2008, 7:00 p.m.
Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse
977 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton
For further information, call the LWVH at (631) 283-0759.
### September 2008

**Note:** Meeting dates and times are subject to change. Please confirm with committee chairperson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>September 2</strong></td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Natural Resources Committee meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **September 3**  | Wednesday | 7:00-9:00 p.m. | LWVH Board Meeting  
Hampton Library at temporary site, 2539 Montauk Highway (Marders building), Bridgehampton. Contact Sue Avedon at 329-1830. |
| **September 8**  | Monday   | 6:00 p.m.  | New-Member Dinner  
Hosted by Board of Directors and Membership Committee. Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse, 977 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton. |
| **September 8**  | Monday   | 7:00 p.m.  | General Membership Meeting  
Topic: The NYS School Property Tax Cap Bill. Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse, as above. See page 4 for complete details. |
| **September 10** | Wednesday | 11:00 a.m. | Membership Committee meeting  
Hampton Library at temporary site, 2539 Montauk Highway (Marders building), Bridgehampton. Contact Arlene Makl at 324-8662. |
| **September 10** | Wednesday | 12:00 noon | Voter Services Committee meeting  
Hampton Library at temporary site, 2539 Montauk Highway (Marders building), Bridgehampton. Contact Anne Marshall at 537-3257. |
| **September 10** | Wednesday | 12:30 p.m. | Nominating Committee meeting  
Introductory meeting. Hampton Library at temporary site, 2539 Montauk Highway (Marders building), Bridgehampton. Contact Mireille Lister at 324-7271. |
| **September 11** | Thursday | 6:30 p.m.  | Town Government Committee meeting  
Home of Barbara Jordan, 52 Manor Lane N., East Hampton. Call Barbara at 324-6144 for more information. |
| **September 15** | Monday   |            | Deadline for October issue of *The Voter*.                                                                                                    |
| **September 17** | Wednesday | 10:00 a.m. | LWVSC Board meeting  
Riverhead Library.                                                                                                                        |
| **September 17** | Wednesday | 2:00 p.m.  | Special Events Committee meeting  
Starbucks, Main Street, Bridgehampton. Contact Susan Wilson at 283-6549.                                                                 |

### LOOKING AHEAD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **October 1**  | Wednesday | 7:00-9:00 p.m. | LWVH Board Meeting  
Bridgehampton National Bank, Montauk Highway, Bridgehampton. Members and guests welcome.                                             |
| **October 16** | Thursday | 7:00 p.m.  | Congressional Debate  
Co-sponsored by LWVH and Southampton Press. Southampton Senior Services Center, Ponquogue Avenue, Hampton Bays.            |

### OTHER MEETINGS OF INTEREST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **September 13 and 14** | Saturday and Sunday |  | Sag Harbor Fair  
Voter registration. Long Wharf at end of Main Street, Sag Harbor.  |
| **September 14**  | Sunday   | 1:00-6:00 p.m. | East End Picnic  
Red Creek Park, Hampton Bays. LWVH members will be registering voters at 1:00 p.m. For driving instructions, call Thelma Harris at Southampton Town Hall, 702-1918. |

[www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org/Hamptons.htm](http://www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org/Hamptons.htm)
would eliminate the current provisions in state education law which allow for a budget re-vote on the third Tuesday in June, if the budget fails, and for the adoption of a contingency budget.

Will the State Assembly Vote on August 19?

The bill now goes to the State Assembly, where there is expected to be considerable opposition. As of press time of this newsletter, it was not known whether the bill came to a vote in the Assembly when the legislature was called back into session on August 19 to deal with the state budget crisis.

Proponents of the Bill Say:

1. Property taxes are impeding the state’s ability to retain young families, seniors, and businesses.
2. Outside of New York City, school taxes make up 62% of property taxes.
3. Nassau, Suffolk, Rockland, and Westchester Counties are among the top 10 counties in the nation in percentage of household income spent on property taxes.
4. Property tax levies are increasing more than twice the rate of inflation and rise in salaries.

Opponents of the Bill Say:

1. The override provisions of the bill will discriminate against middle-class districts, since wealthy districts are more likely to pass budgets above the 4% cap with a yes vote of over 55%, and poorer districts already receive a larger percentage of state aid to offset the cap.
2. The bill will weaken local control of schools.
3. If state aid is not maintained or increased, there will be a tremendous decrease in school funding, leading to a rise in class sizes and cuts in school programs.
4. The tax cap does not take into account high increases in health care premiums, special education, heating costs and other expenses not controlled by local school districts.
5. A better solution would be a “circuit breaker,” which would provide property tax relief to seniors and families, based on income. Eighteen states currently use a type of circuit breaker.

Come to the meeting to hear the experts explain their positions, to learn more about the pros and cons, and to ask your questions about this highly important legislation!

GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING TAX BILL
continued from page 1

Companion Bills That Passed the Senate on August 8

To help reduce school district costs in light of the 4% cap, the State Senate also passed companion bills to S.8736. They would:

1. Cap school district pension cost increases at 4%, with the State providing $100 million in the 2009-10 state budget to offset pension cost increases above 4%.
2. Increase state aid for energy conservation. Each school building would be required to have an energy audit. School districts would be reimbursed for 65% of the costs of implementing energy-saving plans and could receive incentives for building “green” schools and using alternative energy sources.
3. Provide flexibility in renewing transportation contracts, in response to rising fuel costs.
4. Allow school districts to contract with BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) for certain maintenance services.
5. Provide incentives to school districts to consolidate services and, for those districts with fewer than 1,000 students, to share a superintendent of schools.
6. Ban unfunded state mandates which cost over $1 million; delay the effective date of a new state regulation with budgetary implications until the following school year’s budget; eliminate some presently-required state reports; appoint an 11-member state commission to study the real costs of state mandates and report to the Governor and Legislature by March 31, 2009.

The bill would take effect on February 1, 2009, for the May school district vote for the 2009-10 school year budget. It

Submitted by Arlene Hinkemeyer
The LWVH’s monthly program meeting in July was devoted to an issue that is on the lips of anyone who attempts to or is interested in traveling around the South Fork and beyond using modes of transportation other than automobiles. The subject was addressed through a forum held at the Student Center of Stony Brook University, Southampton, and was organized by Judi Roth and her committee. Entitled Transportation Alternatives, the forum consisted of five panel members who first provided relevant information in connection with their respective roles and then responded to questions. Panel members were: Suffolk County Representative Jay Schneiderman, wearing the hat that evening of the legislature’s chairman of the environment committee; Thomas Neely, Southampton Town Public Transportation and Safety Director; Kathy Cunningham Faraone, President, Five Town Rural Transit; Robert Shinnick, Director of Operations, Suffolk County Transit; and Pam Buford, Director of Strategic Investments for the Long Island Railroad. LWVH member Barbara Adams read the prepared questions, and Judi Roth moderated.

Legislator Schneiderman said that more buses should be added to the county bus system, especially a Sunday service. He noted that because the buses don’t operate on Sunday, many workers are hard-pressed to find a way to get to work on that day. Kathy Cunningham Faraone stated that the population of the East End is different—here there are 400 people per square mile while there are 2500 in the same size area in western Suffolk County—and, to much applause, she said that there is obvious need for a more coordinated bus-rail type of service. Thomas Neely said that a “bus-rapid transit” concept is being considered. Robert Shinnick noted that the county system is privately operated, with 161 buses serving 50 bus lines, seven of which are in the Hamptons and run Monday through Saturday. LIRR spokesperson Buford said that the “Eagle Branch” of the railroad represents 14 percent of its service. She also noted that the special program run while County Road 39 was undergoing construction offered modified fares and, therefore, cost $40,000 a month to operate. It was well received, but there was a “tremendous drop-off in ridership” during the last month of its operation. LIRR makes its decisions on when and what size trains to operate based on demand, satisfaction, and cost.

A number of questions focused on the relevance of the current LIRR schedule. Audience members noted that there are no seats for some scheduled trains while others are nearly empty. Others said that the bus company should offer a more flexible route—more in response to local needs where the “last half mile” is the issue: People are reluctant to walk that distance to public transportation for a variety of reasons.

What can/should be done? As with a number of other forums that the LWVH has sponsored, panel members who don’t ordinarily talk to each other face-to-face agreed that there is a need to continue this type of dialogue. Robert Shinnick mentioned that his company would be holding public meetings in the fall to explore the issue. And Pam Buford made a definite statement at the close of the session: “Elect people who support public transportation.”

Written by Anne Marshall

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

Sally Pope
P.O. Box 225, Remsenburg, NY 11960
(631) 325-8788

Sally lives year-round in the Remsenburg house purchased as a second home 25 years ago. An attorney with extensive experience in mediation, she has worked on Wall Street and in private practice. Becoming convinced of the value of mediation prompted a shift to teaching and lecturing on conflict resolution at law schools in the U.S. and beyond. More recently, she helped found an institute for the study of conflict transformation. She is presently running for the Southampton Town Council seat vacated by Linda Kabot. “I’ve always admired the League’s work,” she said, “and look forward to becoming more involved.”

Myrna and Paul Davis
P.O. Box 630, Sag Harbor, NY 11963
(646) 872-7459

Myrna and Paul were inspired to join LWVH after attending our June luncheon honoring women in political office. “It’s a good organization. We should have joined long ago, but never got around to it,” said Myrna. Long-time residents of Sag Harbor, she is a good friend as well as supporter of Judith Hope. In the past, Myrna was involved with the Hampton Day School and helped establish the Sag Harbor Preservation Commission. The couple divide their time between Sag Harbor and a residence in New York. Paul is a noted artist and graphic designer, Myrna a writer and editorial consultant. “Right now, we’re just working part-time and enjoying life,” the couple said.
The Voter - September 2008

Suffolk County Voter

www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org
Box 1440, Stony Brook, NY 11790-1440 Phone 631-862-6860

CHECK THE DATE Wed. Sept. 17 LWVSC Board Meeting—Riverhead Library 10:00am-12noon

Did You Know The Homeless Can Vote?

Yes, that is right! The homeless have the right to vote! Katherine Hoak (LWVSC Co-President) and Judie Gorenstein (Voter Service Chair) helped 18 homeless people register to vote at "Stand Up for the Homeless" at Sts. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church in Deer Park on June 26th.

I first became aware that other leagues across the United States were registering the homeless when I attended a voter service workshop at the LWVUS Convention in Oregon in mid-June. Since election law varies from state to state, I did not assume that this could be done in New York. I searched to find out the voting rights of the homeless in New York State, confirmed this right with the NYS BOE the night before the June 26 event, and then quickly arranged to provide this much needed service.

It is important on the voter registration form that both #4 (address where you live) and #5 (address where you get your mail) are completed. "Where does a homeless person live if he/she does not have a home?" you might ask. If the person lives in his car which is parked every night in a lot, that person would write on the form,

(more on page 2)

Suffolk County BOE makes many efforts to ensure a smoothly-run 2008 Election Day

With voter registration at an all-time high and a new ballot marking devices that will be accessible for the handicapped voters in each polling place, there has been some concern whether voters will have trouble casting ballots on Election Day. We in Suffolk County are very fortunate that our BOE has been working diligently to make sure that everything will run smoothly on Election Day. The County had received all 370 of the ballot markers that have been ordered. These were tested in Albany and also here. There were only modest problems on a few machines that have the now been corrected. These ballot markers are complicated and it is important that staff be ready on Election Day to help the voters who will be using them for the first time.

(more on page 3)

Preliminary Report - Riverhead Resorts Project

LWV of the Hamptons’ Natural Resources Committee has begun research into the recreational project in Riverhead which will be the subject of an educational forum sponsored by the LWVH on November 10, 2008 at 7:00 PM at the Senior Center in Hampton Bays.

Developers have contracted with the Town of Riverhead to purchase approximately 750 acres of land, part of a much larger site which had been used by the US Navy and Northrop Grumman Corp for assembly and testing of military aircraft and which was deeded by the US to the Town of Riverhead in the late 1990’s for purposes of economic development.

The proposed project envisions eight themed resorts, convention and family entertainment center, a year-round 350-foot indoor ski mountain and an indoor waterpark, 1,150 hotel rooms and 500 timeshare units. At the present time, the developers are conducting feasibility studies; they hope to begin construction in 2010 and open for the winter holidays in 2012.

There is no question that the effect of the project will be profound. The Town of Riverhead and the project developers think that the effect will be good, bringing economic benefits to the region. Environmentalists and some surrounding towns think that the project will be harmful to the environment, bringing traffic, undermining critical habitat and endangering sources of drinking water.

Members of the committee have spoken to representatives of the Coalition for Open Space at EP-CAL, and the Town of Riverhead. In addition, we have reviewed many relevant documents. What follows is a summary of the information we have obtained so far; it is not, a final report on a completed study.

Position of the Town of Riverhead:

This development is being planned pursuant a 1996 “Comprehensive Reuse Strategy” report, which recommended that the property contain an industrial business park, a theme part and a sports park and that approximately one-third of the property be open space. The property is now zoned for industrial use (approximately 500 acres); light industrial (approximately 300 acres) and recreational use (approximately 750 acres). Present plans call for, and relevant statutes require, that approximately 1000 acres will remain undeveloped.

(more on page 2)
Homeless Can Vote, continued  “Car parked at …”  and then the address of the lot. If most of the person’s time is on a park bench, that park bench, the name of the park, a description of where in the park, and street adjacent to the park would be given. The poll site where the person will vote will be determined by this address. However, it is necessary that a mailing address also be furnished so that the BOE can send the information about where to vote. This mailing address can be a shelter, post office box, relative, etc. and does not need to be in the person’s voting district.

With this knowledge and voter registration forms, Katherine and I set up a voter registration table on June 26. Even the volunteers and personnel from the agencies were surprised to discover that the homeless could vote. The homeless themselves were delighted to know that being without a home did not leave them without a vote! With assistance, they carefully completed their voter registration forms. As they did, many revealed some sad stories about their present situation, but also their hope for the future. One woman had moved from another state to get away from an abusive relationship and was living in a shelter. She thought she had lost her right to vote this year, and she was thrilled she would be able to vote in the November election. Another couple’s eyes filled with tears as they realized they were visible, their voice could be heard, their vote could be cast. Each person who filled out the forms did so meticulously. Some had to look up their address as they had recently been moved to a different shelter. Some struggled to remember the last year they voted and where they had lived. They all were able to put in some identification, either a driver’s license or the last four digits of their Social Security number. They all were told that, if they moved, they would need to submit a change of address form and to bring some form of identification with them on Election Day. They also were advised that when they went to the polls, if for some reason they were not on the roster, they were to ask for a provisional (affidavit) ballot. They listened attentively to what they needed to do. One woman wrote down “provisional ballot” in her notebook so she wouldn’t forget its name. Her right to vote was very important to her.

New York’s law is clear. The homeless are entitled to vote. This year, when so many are faced with economic woes, when foreclosures are at an all time high, let us make sure that those without homes are registered and have the opportunity to cast their votes. Remember, you do not need a home to vote. The only criteria are you need to be eighteen years old, a citizen, and if a convicted felon, you must have completed parole. A home is definitely not a requirement for active citizenship.

“Stand Up for the Homeless” was a comprehensive outreach program initiated by CE Steve Levy and designed to bring the homeless population in touch with over 35 government agencies providing free services.

Judie Gorenstein

Riverhead Resorts, continued  Requests for proposals for the development of the recreational acres resulted in two viable plans: the Riverhead Resorts plan and a proposal for a racetrack. The Town Board voted in favor of the Riverhead Resorts plan.

Environmental Concerns

A coalition of environmental organizations objected to the proposed project, and seek to protect approximately 62% of the parcel from development. The Coalition points to the fact that the site provides water habitat for the eastern tiger salamander (a NYS Endangered Species) and to five other Species of Special Concern. In addition, the site contains the largest remaining grasslands habitat on Long Island, providing habitat for at least one Threatened Species and five Species of Special Concern. More recently, it has been discovered that short-eared owls, an endangered species, forage at the site.

In addition, there have been concerns expressed by the Coalition and the Town of Brookhaven that the project will result in a significant increase in traffic, potential groundwater and surface water quality impacts, and problems with energy use, sold waste generation and management.

The observance of short-eared owls and northern harriers prompted the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to assert jurisdiction over the parcel, and it requested that all development stop pending a comprehensive assessment of the site. The Town states that it is cooperating with the DEC on this assessment.

Response of Developers and Town to Environmental Concerns:

There does not seem to be any dispute that a new EIS will be required for the project a process which will be triggered by the filing of plans, which is expected in September.

The Town of Riverhead is seeking lead agency status in that process. The Coalition claims that this is a conflict of interest because of the town’s monetary stake in the project. The Town responds that lead agency status is usually awarded to the zoning agency, and that lead agency status does not confer approval power. In addition to SEQRA, the project is required to obtain a multitude of state, county and town permits.

Riverhead Resorts’ plans include a representation that it plans to seek LEED certification for the project. In addition, its website claims that attention will be paid to energy efficiency in construction, waste and water management heating and cooling; multi-modal transportation (including a link to the LIRR).

The Developers:

The project developers are a consortium of several companies. (The project website: www.riverheadresorts.com links to the websites of all members) The lead builder is a small Scottish company Baldragon Homes Ltd.; a second builder is the Bayrock Group LLC, which has more experience in large developments and hotel management and has developed at least three Trump properties. The websites of the other partners: LEDO International (planners, managers and/or operators of resort destinations); HOK (architects), EDAW Inc (landscape design) and Cameron Engineering all reflect concern about and attention to environmental concerns, with most reflecting corporate philosophies expressing dedication to the principles of sustainability and environmental integrity.

Economic Benefits:

According to the Riverhead Resorts website (to which we were referred by the Town representatives when we asked some of these questions) Town of Riverhead stands to gain large increases to its property tax base, thousands of construction and permanent full time jobs as well as the spill-over economic boom associated with the influx of many people.

Carol Mellor
Suffolk County BOE, continued  We have been assured that there will be two coordinators at each polling site who have had extensive training in operating these machines. Whereas the usual training for poll workers is one three-hour class, these coordinators have had two three-hour sessions on just this device and have had hands-on experience. Only voters who need ballot marker devices should be using these machines. In fact, since all other voters in Suffolk are being discouraged from using them, there should not be long lines. The rest of us will be using the familiar lever machines.

There has been an increase in voter registration during the past 7 months. On January 3 there were 832,843 registered voters in Suffolk County. As of Aug. 1, there were 853,405 registered voters an increase of just under 3%. This percentage should increase over the next two months with so many planned voter registration drives. With the increased interest in this presidential election, the percentage of registered voters actually voting should be higher than usual. However, unlike other counties where they are having a poll worker crisis and are desperate to sign up new workers, Suffolk County DOES have enough trained poll workers for this year's election.

What about the statewide voter registration database, NYSVoter, that is a requirement of HAVA and will be operational and in use for the first time this year? Again, we in Suffolk County are fortunate. Vijay Kumar at the Suffolk County BOE (who is responsible for their computer facilities) participated in the pilot effort to create the state database. In fact, Suffolk County has been connected to the network since May 10, 2007. At the BOE in Yaphank, a staff of about 30 people enters the data included in the voter registration form into a local database and the voter database in Albany (and to no other databases) The data entered is confirmed in seconds from the NYS BOE. The NYS BOE also has a direct connection to the NYS DMV, the Federal Social Security database, the NYS Department of Health and the Office of Court Administration. SC BOE does not have direct access to any of these four sources. However, SC Department of Health sends death records to NYS Dept. of Health and specific information is sent back to SC for validation at the BOE. The Office of Court Administration sends information of convicted felons who may not vote to NYS BOE and this information is sent to SC BOE who notifies the felons. Once they have served their parole, they need to reregister in order to vote.

Vijay Kumar met with our LWVSC webmaster Adam Gaus on August 4 and not only explained how the database works, but also gave Adam the opportunity to view a typical screen for a voter. Adam reported that the software has been well designed and is easy to read and understand. The signature from the voter registration form has been scanned and entered into a field for comparison at the polling place. The voter's Election District is determined locally and stored in the database and will not change before 2012 when the results of the next census will be available.

The BOE's biggest problems in maintaining the voter database are moves and dual residences. No longer will people who have two residences in the state be able to vote at both. Before the database was created, it was difficult to find if a voter had two residences. Although now the voter may vote in one location one year and then change their address to vote at another location the following year, they will need to pay attention to the time when they change their address so as to not lose their right to vote. However, the database insure they will not be able to cast 2 votes in an election. ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE -- the way it should be.

Election Day, November 4, 2008 should run smoothly in Suffolk County. Special thanks to SC BOE Commissioners Anita Katz and Cathy Richter Geier; Vijay Kumar, and all the BOE staff, and thank you Adam for getting this pertinent information.

Judie Gorenstein

Membership

The Membership Committee is very busy. We are working with Voter Services registering voters; we formed a team of runners/walkers for Ellen’s Run (August 17); we are planning our New-Member Dinner; and we have contacted members who have joined in 2007 as well as in 2008 just to keep in touch. We are attempting to set up carpooling to and from LWVH meetings from the various areas of the Hamptons. This has not taken off yet as well as we planned. I would like to suggest if you can drive for carpooling or if you need a ride, please contact me at Arlene.Makl@Gmail.com, and we will match you up.

If you can, sign up to register voters. It is a short-term job, you will serve your community, and it is very rewarding to see and hear the praise expressed for the LWVH from the people passing by. We are very well thought of and needed. And about feeling good, remember to give your friends and neighbors the opportunity to join LWVH. We may take our League for granted but there are people out there who deserve the opportunity to belong to this organization.

May I remind the group of you who have forgotten to send in this year’s dues to send them in now? You can help us save postage if we don’t have to send out a reminder.

Arlene Makl, Chair 324-8662

NOMINATING COMMITTEE WORK BEGINS

The Nominating Committee of the League of Women Voters of the Hamptons invites League members to submit names to be considered for the 2009 slate of officers.

If you wish, you may propose yourself or put forward the names of members you feel would serve the League well.

Thank you for your input. Please contact Mireille Lister, Chair, at (631) 324-7271 or mireillelister@mac.com.
SUMMARY OF LWVH BOARD MEETING
August 6, 2008

Information Items
• Carol Mellor raised the question of whether our League should support the Restorative Justice program (one of many school mediation and conflict resolution programs). The board decided not to pursue the project.
• Board members were encouraged to participate in Ellen’s Run on August 17.
• It was decided that a second educational meeting on the National Popular Vote issue is not needed prior to a consensus meeting to be held probably next April. Instead, information will be provided in the Voter, with an article that includes pros and cons.
• Arlene Makl volunteered to lead a Membership Committee presence at the Sag Harbor Fair on September 13-14.
• Barbara Jordan is interested in working on a study of Town Government. Volunteers are welcome.

Committee Reports
• Annual Meeting 2009: Sue Wilson’s Special Events Committee will coordinate it. Dorothy Lichtenstein accepted our invitation as honoree; Long House Reserve is a possible venue.
• Special Events: The committee is working on a Trivia Challenge event in October, with the goals of increasing League visibility and membership, and having fun. Other organizations will be invited to participate and to compete to raise funds, with the proceeds going to a local charity.

• Membership: Membership totals 195, including 20 new members. The committee and the board will host the September 8 dinner for new members prior to the general meeting.
• Natural Resources: Plans are being made for the November 10 general meeting on the proposed entertainment complex in Riverhead. Details to come.
• Voter Services: The new “Voter’s Guide” is available with information on voting machines. It notes that New York State law requires employers to provide time for employees to vote.
• Education: The September 8 general meeting will consist of a panel discussing the impact of the proposed New York State property tax cap.
• Publicity: The transportation forum on July 14 was covered by local media. SEA-TV is running numerous League meeting videos.
• The Voter: Sixty-four ads have been sold with revenue of $9,315. League members are urged to patronize advertisers and to mention the ads when they do so.

Discussion Items
• LWVH Website: A proposal for a revamped website will be presented at the September board meeting.
• A video was shown describing a project called Running and Winning. The board voted to support this project with a target date of April or May 2009; it will be geared to high school juniors and seniors. Several board members volunteered for the project.
• Non-Partisan Policy: A revised draft proposal will be presented at the September board meeting.

Submitted by Judy Samuelson
The League of Women Voters

Making democracy work through voter education, issue advocacy, and civic participation.