



# League of Women Voters of NYS **STATE VOTER**

April 2020

*Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.*

## **President's Message**



Greeting from a stay-at-home-Leaguer,

Can't think about how long I have been home or how long I will be here. What I am thinking about is that telephone tree we are all utilizing to keep everyone in our community up to date with the latest election information. Remember, we all need a little human contact now and it is a good time to pick up the phone and reach out to your book clubs, congregations, community volunteer groups, business partners and clients, everyone in your network. Let them know that they can find the information they need for 2020 elections on the [LWVNY website](#), [Facebook](#) page or our new TEXTING SERVICE- Text: VoteNY to sign up at 474747. There is a lot of confusion brewing out there about absentee ballot applications versus ballots, politicians talking about vote by mail and changes to election dates. Please use these LWVNYS resources to get good information out there.

There is a lot of anxiety during many the election and voting rights conversations these days. LWVUS has a great set of tools and talking points for navigating election during the pandemic. You can access those resources at: <https://www.lwv.org/covidguidance>.

Council approaches and you will be hearing more about our meeting June 11, 7PM which will be a video conference that also has audio only capabilities. Along with passing a budget, which is required at this meeting, we will take a brief look forward at how we are going to achieve our mission during challenging times. Please stay safe and healthy.

Suzanne Stassevitch, President  
League of Women Voters of NYS  
[smstass@mac.com](mailto:smstass@mac.com); Tel: 518-465-4162  
Facebook: League of Women Voters of NYS  
Twitter: @LWVNYS

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## **LWVUS Convention**

A decision by the LWVUS Board of Directors has been made to conduct the Convention as a virtual meeting. It will be held June 25-27, 2020. See more information here:

<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/council-convention/update-convention-2020>

## **State Council Meeting, June 11**

The state League's Council meeting will be held on **Thursday, June 11, at 7:00 pm on Zoom**. The required action is to approve the 2020-2021 League Budget but there will also be presentations on the plans for the upcoming year by some of our Board and others.

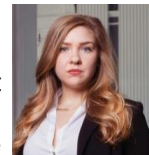
## **Issues and Advocacy**

**Sally Robinson, [sally.s.robinson@gmail.com](mailto:sally.s.robinson@gmail.com), and Jennifer Wilson, [jennifer@lwvny.org](mailto:jennifer@lwvny.org)**



### **State Budget**

The Legislature returned to pass the 2020-2021 budget which did not include any additional funding for early voting or other voting reforms and underfunded the State Board of Elections by nearly \$1.6 million. The Legislature also passed a campaign finance bill mirroring the recommendations of the Public Campaign Financing Commission from last year (which became law



automatically) that were successfully challenged in court on the basis that the Legislature had unlawfully delegated its law-making to an unelected entity. The bill allows candidates for statewide office and the Legislature to opt into a system of public financing that incentivizes small dollar donations by matching them with public funds. Candidates for statewide office can now raise a maximum of \$18,000 in a four-year election cycle from an individual contributor, down from about \$70,000; state Senate candidates can raise \$10,000, down from \$19,300; and state Assembly candidates can raise \$6,000, down from \$9,400. Unfortunately, limits on contributions to political parties and those doing business with the state were left untouched.

The new law also put back in place the Commission's controversial changes to party thresholds and ballot access requirements. Statewide candidates now have to get 45,000 signatures from voters to get on the ballot, up from 15,000. For an automatic ballot line, a party must receive at least 130,000 votes or 2% of the vote, whichever is higher, every two years in a gubernatorial or presidential election, up from 50,000 votes every four years in a gubernatorial election.

### **Federal Funding for Elections**

The federal CARES Act stimulus package includes \$400 million in new Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds for states to utilize to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus for the 2020 election cycle. States can use these funds to purchase cleaning supplies, protective masks for staff and poll workers, resources to meet the increased demand for mail ballots due to self-isolation and quarantine in response to COVID-19, and temporary staff to process the increased absentee ballot demand. New York State qualified for \$20 million through the CARES Act and is required to commit \$4 million in matching funds.

This funding was influx until the end of April because the state had not included the necessary legislative language in our state budget to allow the State Board of Elections to spend these funds. The League send a letter to [legislative leaders](#) and the [Governor](#) urging them to amend the budget so these funds could be received. The League also sent a letter to the [New York Congressional delegation](#) urging them to amend the CARES Act to remove the 20% state match so that states could receive election assistance without the burden of a match.

The League is continuing to advocate for the removal of the state match and for an increase in overall federal funds for election assistance during the coronavirus outbreak. A packet of materials to lobby Congress is available at: <https://bit.ly/3cECVwu> and we encourage local Leagues to share this info with their members to take action on this issue. A member-wide meeting was held by Zoom on April 28 to present these materials and answer any questions. The Powerpoint presentation from this meeting will be shared and posted soon.

### **Voting Updates**

In April Governor Cuomo introduced several important Executive Orders related to voting during the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19. The Governor expanded absentee voting to allow any voter to vote via absentee ballot in the June primary due by selecting "temporary illness" and to mandate that all active and inactive voters who are eligible to vote in the June primary receive a pre-paid absentee ballot application in the mail from their county board of elections.

The order also lifted the signature requirement on the absentee application form to allow voters to apply to vote absentee electronically. Voters can contact their county board of elections offices for more information on applying to vote absentee electronically or by mail.

Later this month, the Governor announced that all voters will be mailed an absentee ballot application and postage paid return envelope to facilitate all to vote by absentee ballot.

The League has created several educational documents on the changes that have been made. The League released an FAQ page on voting via absentee in New York State that has been translated into Spanish, Bengali, Korean, and Chinese. We are also working on an educational video on how to apply for an absentee ballot and a webpage with information about applying for an absentee ballot in all 62 counties in New York.

## Voter Services

Judie Gorenstein, [judieL728@aol.com](mailto:judieL728@aol.com)



How do we educate voters at a time when so much is changing? How do we register, hold candidate events and GOTV (get out the vote) while we are isolated in our homes? These are the questions we have wrestled with during the past month. We can and we will continue to educate voters in a timely manner.

Over the past month through the Governor's Executive Orders, voters enrolled in a party holding a primary in June will be allowed to vote by absentee ballot and with last week's Order, absentee ballot applications will be mailed to voters. Governor Cuomo also cancelled the special elections to fill state Assembly and Senate seats that were vacant; those seats will be filled in the general election in November. The State Board of Elections also cancelled the presidential primary for June 23 although this was a party decision and only the Democratic Commissioners voted as required. Questions still remain around in-person voting during early voting and on June 23<sup>rd</sup> as to whether the number of sites will be reduced or if in-person voting will still be available at all. The League believes strongly that in-person voting must exist to provide accessibility for individuals with disabilities and individuals for whom English is not their first language.

The state League is sending out email blasts whenever these changes take place and updating our webpage, Facebook page and twitter. We also are using a recently purchased app for texting updates to those who sign up by **texting VoteNY to 474747**. We ask that all local Leagues, ILOs and MALS continue to update their own webpages, and work with their County BOEs in making certain they have updated information. Please also promote the new texting service and **Vote411** with the public to access up-to-date information on the elections.

We have instructions on how to vote by absentee ballot posted on the website, in five languages. Share these links with those in your communities (click on the language to view the page):

- [FAQ English](#)
- [FAQ Spanish](#)
- [FAQ Korean](#)
- [FAQ Traditional Chinese](#)
- [FAQ Bengali](#)

These and more information are also available from the homepage of the state website ([www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org)). We are also creating a short Youtube video for voting by absentee ballot.

We can and we will register votes, hold candidate forums and GOTV while isolated in our homes. We created an addendum to our toolkits "[Registering, Educating and GOTV While Social Distancing](#)" which has already been emailed to all voter chairs and presidents. Click on the title to view a copy.

We can and we will continue to work together to meet our challenges. Watch for more information on the state League website, Facebook page, Twitter or the new texting service!

## Empowering Individuals with Disabilities to Vote

The state League is planning with the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council for a joint project to assist in educating individuals with disabilities on voting procedures and process. Local Leagues will be able to receive stipends to participate in this project. One of the major goals of the project is to coordinate with the county Boards of Elections to arrange for a demonstration of the Ballot Marking Devices (BMDs) for individual with disabilities.

In the next month, voter service chairs and committees will be invited to join a webinar hosted by the Disability Rights NY organization on best practices for interacting and working with people with disabilities. Watch for the date of this webinar and the availability to participate in this new project!

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Regina Tillman, [rmt370@gmail.com](mailto:rmt370@gmail.com)



Yes, indeed! Much has changed since March 2020, and it all impacts us in the League as well! In this unique time of COVID-19, with alternatives to face-to-face meetings and gatherings having emerged now as routine, there is also a call to use this time to reach out to others even without the usual face-to-face contacts. It is a call, even stronger than before, to have us see what we do, what we write about, and what actions we take, through a "DEI" (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) lens. There is a call to action to perform the business of the League with the clear "intentionality" of fostering a change.

What is the change being sought? It is whom in our communities our membership reflects while we continue to rally in the 100-year-old effort to fight for a more perfect union. It is to be inclusive of all the people in our community! This requires that we bring in - *and listen to* - some new membership which is reflective of demographic and other characteristics often not witnessed within the League. It means to partner with new organizations and to act as allies to others. Why? *Our membership ... who they are and the actions they take on behalf of the league's mission ... is **Mission Critical***. As the demographics of the nation changes, so must this organization in order to survive and continue to "do the work".

As planned since the later part of 2019, the Statewide DEI Task Force is still an immediate goal, albeit one that requires a few tweaks in the face of current concerns. A recently developed DEI planning document includes additional steps that will be taken shortly and that will require input from the local leagues. I urge local leadership to begin making final queries of their members in this time of a changeover of officers and local Boards, *and to send to me an email with the contact info of your selectee to the Task Force asap, or by **May 30th***. Look for an individual:

- That is in a leadership position in your League, or on the BOD, who is interested in DEI.
- Which can assist you with providing input to us from your BOD and your membership about DEI.
- And, who may be a nominee to the State's DEI Task Force.

I would like to thank the attendees of the LWVNYS Regional Training, conducted in NYC on March 7<sup>th</sup>, for their hospitality and for their enthusiasm relative to the topic of DEI! I will be reaching out shortly to all who volunteered themselves to work on the Statewide DEI Task Force.

In the meantime, I encourage continued work on an individual basis on DEI, and the honing of one's personal intent. To that effort, this month I recommend that you:

- **Read the one pager from the LWVUS:** Entitled "What To Ask When Examining Your Work Through a DEI Lens" : <https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/deilens.pdf>
- **Join LWV of Massachusetts at 7:00 p.m. (EST) on May 6th for a webinar:** Featuring Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins talking about her book "*The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters.*" Dr. Jefferson-Jenkins was the first and only African American woman to hold the position of President of LWVUS. Her book explores the ways women of color have been marginalized and recognizes how their contributions will positively influence the League as it moves into its next 100 years.
- Register here: [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_xu0ljiINSASphja-gBU\\_w](https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_xu0ljiINSASphja-gBU_w)
- LWV Coupon for book purchase here: <https://lwvma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Book-Coupon.pdf>

## Local League News

### North Country Matters Podcast: Elections in the CoronaVerse

In our second Conversation from the CoronaVerse, Kathleen Stein, president of the **League of Women Voters of St. Lawrence County**, was the guest on this edition of North Country Matters. She discussed the changes to the New York State election picture as a result of the Coronavirus with NCM host Donna Seymour. This podcast featured the changes in the NYS Primary election

picture and school board elections, the rules for expanded absentee voting, needed electoral reforms to keep voters and poll works safe in a public health emergency, and a discussion of mail-in voting as of the airing date. (Recorded April 17, 2010)

<http://slc-leaguewv.org/Elections.mp3>

The Mary Stierer Award of the **LWV of Rensselaer** is traditionally announced at the Annual Meeting. This year the Board chose Jill Nagy for "Making Democracy Work" in a variety of roles over many years in the League. They will complete the ceremonial honors during their rescheduled dinner hopefully later this year. Congratulations, Jill!



The **LWV of Broome and Tioga Counties** is proud to honor Sue Ruff as its 2020 Woman of Achievement! Sue joined the League in 2010 and quickly became involved. As second vice-president she organized the League's public education program and later, served four years as president. Congratulations, Sue!

On Friday March 13 (the day before the ban on gatherings went into effect) five members from the **League of Women Voters of Saratoga County** and students and faculty from grades 7-12 at Lake George Central School witnessed twenty immigrants become naturalized citizens by taking oaths of allegiance, swearing to abjure (that's the word) the old country's needs, promising loyalty to the new country.

Many of our local Leagues are working to educate the public on new voting procedures while staying safe at home. We greatly appreciate all that our volunteers can do right now. We wish everyone good health during these unprecedented times. Stay well.

League of Women Voters of New York State  
62 Grand Street, Albany, NY 12207  
Tel: 518-465-4162; FAX: 518-465-0812  
Website: [www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org)  
Email: [lwvny@lwvny.org](mailto:lwvny@lwvny.org)  
Facebook: League of Women Voters of NYS  
Twitter: @LWVNYS

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