



League of Women Voters of Cortland County NEWSLETTER

Jan/Feb 2009

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CALENDAR

January 6 7:00 pm General Meeting at SUNY Downtown (Beard Building), 9 Main St. at to discuss the National Popular Vote initiative, and view a DVD on the subject.

January 15 8:00 AM Board Meeting at the Community Restaurant

January 19 Noon—Martin Luther King Day program at the YWCA Dr. Seth Asumah on Obama's election and MLK legacy

February 3 (Tentative date) General Meeting at 7:00 PM at 9 Main St. to discuss Health Care under the new administration

February 19 8:00 AM Board Meeting at the Community Restaurant

President's Message:

Best Wishes for the New Year to all!!

The Holiday Luncheon at Gilda's in December was delicious and enlightening; Bernie Thoma provided interesting insights into the Comprehensive Planning process as it has been operating in both Homer and Cortland. While Homer's plan is almost complete and will be presented early in '09, Cortland's will require several more months of work to reach the point of community evaluation. Stay tuned; the details of the plans, along with their respective impacts on the local environment, housing, and other issues should prove quite interesting.

Many thanks to Nancy Hansen and Sharon Stevans for making the arrangements and reservations. We welcomed several guests : Judy Hope-Klessig, a former league member in MA, Lisa Levithan, Karen Knauerhase, and Vivian Garvey, and hope (key word) that they will join us again in '09.

The January meeting will focus on the National Popular Vote, a national study item this year that originated with the Saratoga, NY LWV. A DVD of Christopher Pearson of National Popular Vote (organization) speaking on the mechanics of the NPV compact on a public access TV program in Schenectady in September will be shown, followed by discussion. For more information, visit www.lwv.org for background information (pros and cons) and a list of the consensus questions.

In February, we plan to take a look at health care, as the Obama administration and Tom Daschle redefine the government's role in providing a more equitable, affordable system for the country, with the assistance of a speaker from Ithaca. —*Linda Eberly*

Newsletter Changes

Sharon Stevens is retiring as editor after several years of service and Mary Beilby has agreed to be editor. Thanks Sharon for all you've done over the years to inform the League. We will still depend on Sharon to tape the League programs for Cable Access Channel 2 viewing. Cable broadcasts greatly expand the League's ability to inform local citizens of issues and candidate positions.

This is the first Cortland League Newsletter that will be distributed electronically. Only those without reliable e-mail service will receive the newsletter by mail unless you request it. This will save money and time for the League and will permit members to print out only the portions they need.

National Popular Vote

Our Jan. 6th . 2009 Meeting will address this issue. The national League is asking each local to develop a consensus on what the League's position will be on the National Popular Vote. We will view a DVD and hold a discussion on the pros and cons. Additional information can be found at: The NYS League site <http://lwvny.org/npv.html> and Fair Vote: <http://www.fairvote.org/?page=773>

Our Chapter Needs Support and Members—Encourage Others to Join!

League of Women Voters Membership Application-Cortland County Chapter

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

Membership dues: \$45 per year

Please send with check payable to Cortland County Chapter, League of Women Voters

To: Lenore Schwager, Treasurer 42 Pearl St. Cortland, NY 13045

Note: If Cortland schools are closed due to weather, we will cancel our meeting also, and will also notify by email. If in doubt, call a board member!

Smart Growth Bill Vetoed by Governor Paterson

A reminder: Our state position on land use and sprawl is *In order to conserve natural resources and improve the quality of life for its residents, New York State should take a proactive role in regional land use planning, enhancing urban neighborhoods, containing urban sprawl, and protecting agricultural land, open space, watersheds and other sensitive areas.*

The Governor's recent veto of the State Smart Growth Principles Act A-7335A was a disappointment to smart growth advocates. The bill, the "first smart growth bill ever to pass Assembly and Senate," was hailed as a victory even though it was a pale shadow of the original A7335 proposed by Assemblyman Sam Hoyt. The State Smart Growth Infrastructure Policy Act, the bill originally sponsored by Assemblymember Sam Hoyt and passed by the Assembly, would "require certain state agencies ...to fund infrastructure in a manner consistent with smart growth principles. These agencies would give funding priority to existing infrastructure and projects that are consistent with local governments' plans for development." The revised version, proposed by Senator Marcellino as S.8612 and passed by both houses, directs state agencies to "*consider* smart growth principles in the implementation of state policies and programs." (italics added)

The purpose of the original bill was "to provide for state funding of infrastructure in a manner that is consistent with smart growth principles." In contrast, the purpose of the revised bill is "to outline state smart growth principles and to direct state infrastructure agencies to implement these principles in funding future policies and programs." The original bill's intent was to establish criteria for state infrastructure funding decisions. It states: "state infrastructure funding decisions have supported a pattern of settlement and land use which necessitates expansive and expensive infrastructure resulting in new roadways, water supplies, sewer treatment facilities, utilities and other public facilities at great cost to the taxpayer and the ratepayer.... New York State needs to focus on smart spending that supports existing infrastructure and development in areas where it makes economic and environmental sense."

The revised bill's justification states,"As development increases, shortsighted and poorly planned suburban and urban sprawl continue to threaten the well-being and quality of life of citizens of the State. A recent survey revealed that, while the population in upstate New York grew by 2.6% from 1982-1997, the amount of land developed in the same area increased by 30%. This bill recognizes the State's role in encouraging smart development by defining smart growth principles and requiring state agencies to recognize them when implementing new programs." Clearly the original bill had more teeth and was focused on redirecting funds spent by the state on infrastructure to areas where it already existed, thus saving money and saving open space. The revised version generally espoused smart growth principles, but avoided emphasis on funding or criteria for funding decisions. Governor Paterson's veto message criticizes the Smart Growth Principles Act saying, "This bill cannot be implemented.... The bill's smart growth definitions are extremely amorphous and in some instances are little more than aspiration...while these are certainly worthwhile goals, they do not provide the type of clear and objective standards that are necessary to guide implementation, prescribe agency discretion, and allow for a fair and effective assessment of compliance." He further stated, "Moreover, this bill is unnecessary." Governor Paterson has continued the executive order issued by his predecessor establishing a "Smart Growth Cabinet" consisting of high-level policy makers from state agencies that have an impact on development in the state.

"The Cabinet will (1) identify barriers and opportunities to the incorporation of "Smart growth" principles in State policies and decision-making, including state programs that provide technical and other assistance to local government; (2) consider how to align state grant and capital programs to foster "smart growth" development in appropriate regions of the State; and (3) make recommendations to the Governor on effective ways to promote smart growth initiatives. "The use of the Cabinet, in contrast to the bill's broad mandate, will allow a more deliberate consideration of what specific smart growth principles are most appropriately applied to a particular agency, program or policy; will result in recommendations for necessary changes to legislation and regulations to ensure that appropriate principles are properly and fully adopted; and will ensure that the incorporation of these principles does not conflict with other important State initiatives and priorities." Since the bill was so weak, it is hard to know whether the Governor's veto is to be regretted. His message seems to indicate that he would support a stronger bill with clear standards, exactly what the Senate bill was written to avoid. It appears that the Governor is aware of the State's role in influencing development and is placing considerable responsibility with the Smart Growth Cabinet. However, the Cabinet has as yet not produced any results. We will need to keep watching.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

We organized this in response to a LWV alert that the Obama Transition Team was seeking input between Dec. 15 and 31. Three Local League members, Linda, Lenore and Mary participated.

Seventeen individuals representing health care professionals, businesses and not for profit organizations, retirees, unions and faith-based organizations gathered at the YWCA of Cortland on Tues, Dec. 16 to discuss the Health care agenda. The group had a difficult time identifying with the provided goals and questions because we quickly determined that a much more radical reform is required than the “incremental” changes proposed. In spite of our diverse backgrounds, we found a surprising unity of opinion on the subject of health care reform.

We propose that the administration take the opportunity to use health care reform to solve many aspects of the economic crisis as well as give citizens a new reason to respect their government and their fellow citizens by making the health of citizens a shared civic responsibility. It is totally unacceptable that millions of people are unable to receive basic health care and that inappropriate use of emergency facilities is damaging the entire healthcare system.

Reject the failed employer-based health insurance model that is leaving unemployed people and their families un-insured and many employed people un-insured or under-insured. Uncontrolled health care costs are straining local and state governments, non-profits and businesses to the point of bankruptcy. Family coverage averages \$12,000/yr and is unaffordable for most employers and employees. One non-profit reported an anticipated increase of 34% for next year’s health insurance premiums. Increasing numbers of employees are unable to afford premiums and co-pays. Making health care a governmental program that can negotiate costs, include everyone, reduce administrative costs and improve quality would contribute to economic recovery.

The goals we identified are:

- Treat health care as a basic right for all citizens—pre-natal to grave.
- We need universal, single-payer, health care similar to Medicare/VA for everyone as in all other industrialized countries.
- Health care should be funded from a broad based, progressive source such as the income tax.
- We need an expansion of educational programs for all levels of care-givers along with subsidies, scholarships, debt-forgiveness and grants to enable qualified people to enter health care professions without excessive debt. More providers will be needed to provide adequate preventative and primary care to the millions of newly insured.
- Control healthcare costs by negotiating pharmaceutical and other costs, eliminating pharmaceutical advertising to consumers, and developing a system that provides universal coverage for this country by studying the success of other countries.
- Include all aspects of healthcare such as dental, mental, developmental, vision, long-term care that affect one’s ability to function and that affect the family’s welfare. Maintain individuals’ right to be a part of the community rather than institutionalized.