



Mid-Hudson Region *Commentator* September, 2006

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The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy

The LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region covers the Mid-Ulster County area and the Dutchess County area. We belong to the LWV of New York State and the LWV of the US.

CALENDAR
AUGUST
9, 16, 23 9:30 to 11:30 Yard sale pricing at Elizabeth Askue's
22 10 to 12 Charter School study meeting at Emily Johnson's
SEPTEMBER
5 7:15 to 9:15 Board meeting at Gloria Plasker's
19 7:00 to 9:00PM Ulster County Charter informational meeting at Temple Emanuel, Albany Avenue, Kingston
OCTOBER
3 7:15 to 9:15 Board Meeting at Gloria Plasker's
17 7:00 to 9:00PM Consensus on Education Financing, Conference Room 1, Kingston City Hall

Non-Partisan Statement

The League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region is a nonpartisan organization which does not support or oppose candidates for public office but does encourage its members as individuals to participate actively in the political process. The League acts on those issues the membership chooses for study and action.

Board members will use discretion in any political activity and determine in advance from the local and/or state board that such activity will not compromise the nonpartisan political policy of the League of Women Voters.

In this issue:

Table with 2 columns: Page, Content. Includes entries for Prez Sez, Online Website for Voting, Meet Jean McGarry, Charter Update, Financing Education Update, Pricing for the yard sale, Observer Corps update, and Membership forms.

Prez Sez...

Greetings,

As a new president, brimming with enthusiasm, energy, and extra time on my hands during these summer months, I have often pondered, "How can the league be more responsive to its membership?" Our program committee did an outstanding job last year offering numerous worthwhile programs to our members and the community. Our Commentator staff works extremely hard to provide the membership with articles of local, state and national interest. Our new website also provides members with up to date information as well as useful links to many government sites. Hmm. Maybe I am asking the wrong question. Maybe it should be, "How can we get our members to be more responsive to the league?"

Sharing some of my thoughts with our new board at our annual planning meeting I carefully outlined some of my ideas. Why carefully? Because I realized that giving up what is familiar and comfortable can be difficult and that most board members have a longer history and more league expertise than I.

Shame on me for having any doubts about these "old timers." What ensued was a lively discussion that ended with the general consensus, "Let's bring the League of Women Voters of the Mid-Hudson Region into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.' Toward that end, we are in the beginning stages of rewriting our bylaws and rethinking our board structure to allow more possibilities for member input and participation. It is an exciting time for our league.

How can we get you to be more responsive to your league? I look forward to hearing from you.

Jean

Online Website for Voting

The League of the United States will be launching a new one-stop election Web site - *VOTE411* - in September 2006. Also in September, we will have new "5 Things You Need to Know on Election Day" cards available for the 2006 elections.

We're Really Going Online

To cut costs and to save paper, a lot of material is going on the website for members to read or print. Starting with the October issue, people for whom we have e-mail addresses, and who did not respond or did not tell us they want hardcopy, will receive e-mail notices of material such as the *Commentator* when it is posted online.

You will also be able to request that the printable newsletter be e-mailed to you.



The Yard Sale is August 26 and 27<sup>th</sup>. Don't forget to come and buy!

## Meet the Prez: Jean McGarry

Jean McGarry, Golf Champ? When I asked Jean what she likes to do for fun she reeled off a number of things (which I'll reveal later), but apparently after thinking it over she sent an e-mail with a confession: "I love to play golf but don't seem to get to the course very often." (What League president does?) She continues "My long range goal is to be a 'decent golfer'" which she defines as someone who plays "consistently well." You can almost hear the sigh—"Maybe in retirement."

Jean is one of the rare creatures among us "immigrants" who was born in Kingston. She attended the local schools and in 9<sup>th</sup> grade met Jim McGarry (now her husband) while attending choir and voice classes. She no longer participates in vocal activities, but Jim is a member of the Mendelssohn society.

History was Jean's passion in school; she subsequently majored in history at New Paltz and minored in political science. After receiving a master's degree in history from New Paltz she and Jim moved to Albany so he could attend Albany Law School. During their residence in Albany Jean took a job with the Department of Mental Hygiene and completed a second master's degree in special education at Russell Sage College. Shortly after her degree was conferred, she was hired by Schalmont Schools and spent a year teaching there.

After Jim received his law degree the McGarrys decided to return to Kingston where the school district offered Jean a position teaching special education at Kingston High School. Ten years ago Jean switched to her first love and transferred to

the Department of Social Studies. This year she will begin her 29<sup>th</sup> year at the high school. She mostly teaches History, Government, Participation in Government, Advance Placement Government and Politics. Jean has found that her teaching experiences and her league experience "complement each other very nicely."

She works the New York Times crossword puzzle every day and has an interest in politics which in the distant past even led to a brief period when she became actively involved with a political party. She enjoys working with the mock elections at the high school and finds pleasure in reading historical novels.

On the personal side, the McGarrys have two sons, Conor who resides and works outside Poughkeepsie, and Peter who is married and a father. Jean and Jim claim membership in the "Doting Grandparents' Society" as they gush over their beautiful one-year-old grand-daughter Ashlyn Grace. As a matter of fact, Jean and Jim are very much involved with their extended family and find much happiness and "busyness" in it.

Renee Sachs

**Buy at the yard sale.  
We've got it all!  
August 26-27.**



## Charter Chatter II

Bringing the Ulster County Charter in its final form, starting in August 2004 when the Commission was first appointed, to August 2006 when the Efficiency and Reform Committee of the Legislature incorporated its changes (not of a substantive nature) and “tweaked” several items, could be compared to an elephant’s gestation period! As a matter of fact on the Friday night a few weeks ago when the last “t” was crossed and “l” was dotted, one of the reporters said to the Commission members who were in attendance “Don’t you feel as if you just gave birth?”

The League’s Charter Committee swung into action, almost immediately poring over this nascent document, analyzing it for strengths and weaknesses and combing it for “errors,” be they grammatical construction, typos, unclear language, etc. Our findings in the construction sphere were submitted to the County Attorney’s office.

In considering the content and intent of the charter, the study committee led by Cindy Bell came to the conclusion that essentially this was a very good document with possible imperfections that subjected itself to a “self-curing” process which was mandatory and prescribed for in the charter itself (the requirement for review within five years).

The league committee acted as a resource for the chapter Board and on August first presented what was felt were the pros and cons of the newly minted charter. In an act of concurrence, the Board voted to approve the recommendation of the study committee to

support the charter publicly on August 9<sup>th</sup> at the meeting of the County Legislature. One Board member abstained on the concurrence vote.

August 9<sup>th</sup> was the date on which the Legislature was scheduled to have the opportunity to vote on the Charter. However, in a last minute move the County Attorney’s office barred the vote because a public hearing was required to precede it.

The public hearing and the vote on the charter will be held on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, and it should be an exciting and historic occasion for Ulster County. If you like, join our league delegation as we hear our president, Jean McGarry, speak at the public hearing.

We also look forward to holding a program which will offer a discussion of the proposed Ulster County Charter for the league members and the public. This program will be held on September 19<sup>th</sup> at Temple Emanuel in Kingston at 7 PM.



## Financing Education Part II: Study of Charter Schools

Charter Schools are received and viewed differently in various parts of our state. The New York City Department of

Education is more supportive of charter schools than upstate school districts. The fact that students in charter schools represent a smaller fraction of the student body means that they do not pose the financial risk that they do in upstate areas.

The December 2003 Report to the Governor on the Educational Effectiveness of the Charter Schools Approach states that the average adjusted expense (AEP) for 2003-05 was \$8,554. Fiscal impact for New York City appeared to be negligible, while for some school districts like Albany City School District it was 4.40 percent of the District budget.

The report to the governor further states that the student population has remained fairly evenly balanced between boys and girls. The ethnic population is about two-thirds black and about one-sixth each Hispanic and white. The dominance of black students in the charter school population has remained steady at two-thirds over the past three years, while the proportions of Hispanic and white students have become more similar during that period.

“The ethnic distribution of students in charter schools contrasts with the student population in public schools statewide. Statewide, white students represent a majority (55 percent for the most recent year [for which] information is available), with black and Hispanic students representing 20 and 18 percent respectively. Thus, the Hispanic population in charter schools is similar to the general population, while blacks are over-represented and whites are under-represented.”

“There are many students in poverty attending charter schools. The majority of charter school students are eligible for free or reduced lunch (74 percent).”

It is interesting to note that the percentage of students with disabilities in charter schools is smaller compared to the percent of students with disabilities in the districts of location.

Student academic performance would appear to be mixed. It would seem that most of the charter schools fall below the state standards on grade 4 ELA, grade 8 ELA, and grade 8 math. Most of the charter schools, however, have improved. The largest improvement was seen in the grade 4 math results, consistent with the statewide pattern of results for all public schools.



In conclusion, this report states that the following can be said about the charter school approach thus far in New York State:

1. charter schools tend to attract higher percentages of minority students than is seen in the district of location;

2. charter schools tend to attract more students in poverty than is seen in the district of location, as determined by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch, or who report receiving public welfare
3. charter schools tend to serve fewer students with disabilities and English language learners than do the districts of location;
4. student results on state assessments tend to be very low in the first year;
5. student results on state assessments showed substantial increases by the 2002-2003 school year;
6. a higher percentage of charter schools met the state standard for the 2002-03 grade 8 ELA and math exams than did the districts of location;
7. a higher percentage of districts of location met the state standard for the 2002-03 grade 4 math exam than did charter schools;
8. the percentage of charter schools and districts of location meeting the state standard for the 2002-03 grade 4 ELA is comparable;
9. other standardized assessment data reported by the charter schools is nearly unusable when trying to ascertain if students are actually making academic progress; and
10. charter school authorizers take accountability seriously, as evidenced by the revocation of charters, the surrender of charters,

and placing charter schools on probation for violations of the charter and/or applicable law or regulation.

We are looking for more updated information and will bring it to you next month. Our consensus on this topic is scheduled for October.

Yard Sale: August 26-27. Come one, come all. Bring and Buy! Bring your friends and family! It's the biggest fund-raiser of our League year.

We have all kinds of things for sale. We have a few that are a mystery to us, but may be just what you need.

## How Much For...

Anyone who has not participated in pricing for the yard sale has missed an interesting experience. Every week for weeks before the yard sale, a group of us gather to inspect the items that have been brought in and decide what price to put on them. This can be an interesting challenge... how much for a ferret cage, gently used (only one occupant)?

Elizabeth Askue's basement is large and well-lit, with a table the size of a ping-pong table covered with items that have been roughly sorted and are about to be priced. Elsewhere in the basement are tables of jewelry, toys, games, fabric, bedding, books, sports equipment, luggage, and mysterious things we wait for someone to identify.

Elizabeth does preliminary sorting as items come in during the week, to make it easier for pricers to work. As boxes get filled with priced items, sorted by type, she carries them upstairs and stacks them in her dining room and hall. Without Elizabeth the process would be much more difficult. She even takes things that are dusty or grubby and cleans them so that they look more enticing for the sale.

All electrical equipment is tested before it is put on sale (usually by Elizabeth or Tom Kadgen), so it is guaranteed to work.

Pricing is a very social occasion, with workers chatting as they work, holding up strange objects and saying "Does anyone know what this is?" or "How much do you think this is worth?"

or "Will someone else price this? It's something I brought."

Some of the faithful workers are Dorthy Schuler (who finds wonderful items other people have discarded), Renee Sachs, Gloria Plasker, Elizabeth herself, and Jean McGarry and Jacki Moriarty who are chairing the yard sale effort this year. Shirley Kobran comes despite her recuperating from surgery, and many others come for one or more sessions each year. Although their names are not given here, they should accept our thanks for their service. Everyone should be encouraged to come at least once for a unique experience.

Large things like furniture (and the ferret cage) are stored in Elizabeth's garage, and by the time of the sale there is not always room for her car as well as the chairs, tables, bicycles and other stuff. Many of these large things are picked up and brought to the garage by the Moriartys, who run a delivery service for people with bulky items. You can call 331-3418 to arrange for a pickup.



## Observing the Legislature

This has been an interesting season for attending legislative meetings. Various league members have attended the deliberations on the proposed Ulster County charter and have followed the changes that have resulted. The Efficiency and Reform Committee reviewed the charter provisions and listened to people with objections, in particular the County Planning Commission which wanted more control over selecting the director (to be appointed by the County executive and approved by the Legislature). This meeting was followed several days later by another meeting at which changes were adopted and the charter approved for submission to the full Legislature.

League members attended the two party caucuses to develop a sense of how the legislature would vote on the charter and whether there were serious impediments to its passage.

League members also attended the August 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the legislature, at which the charter was to be voted on. This did not happen, however, as the County Attorney determined that there had to be a public hearing prior to the vote. The hearing and the vote have been rescheduled for August 23<sup>rd</sup>. League members expect to attend that meeting as well.

A consensus on the charter was voted on at the last Board meeting, and the league stands behind the charter proposal. We hope that the meeting on August 23<sup>rd</sup> will put the charter on the ballot for the November election.

Although the emphasis on observing has been on the charter proposal and

negotiation, members have also been observing other issues. Tom Kadgen is chairman of the Criminal Justice Commission, under the care of the Efficiency and Reform Committee, and has been active on this. It seems that the commission has inspired the criminal justice agencies to start work on data bases that will be of common use to all and will allow better coordination among agencies.

The Observer Corps is looking for people who are willing to attend meetings at a local and a county level. You can choose which agency, committee, or governing body you are interested in, and how much of a commitment you are willing to make: once a week, once a month, or sporadically when particular issues come up. Whatever you are comfortable doing will be welcome.

Please get in touch with Gloria Plasker about your participation (338-8079). She is keeping track of what meetings are being covered and she has badges for people to wear to show they come from the LWV. We want to be active and to be seen to be active and interested.

If you can report to the *Commentator* on what you hear, email your report to [lwvlee@cs.com](mailto:lwvlee@cs.com). If possible, tape-record the meeting.

I/we wish to become members of the LWV of the Mid-Hudson Region through May 31, 2007

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (eve) \_\_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I/We enclose: Individual Membership (\$50) \_\_\_\_\_ Household Membership (\$65) \_\_\_\_\_

Additional gift to the LWV Education Fund (*tax deductible*.)

(Please send a separate check which MUST be payable to NYSLWV Ed Fund)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

If this is a Household Membership, please include the name and email address of additional member \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you prefer NOT to be contacted about local LWV meetings \_\_\_\_

Will read *Commentator* on website \_\_\_\_ or Please mail *Commentator* \_\_\_\_

**(Update the above form and return it to us with your check at  
PO Box 3564, Kingston, New York 12402)**

If you know someone who might like to know more about the League of Women Voters, please give us his or her name and address and send this slip to:

Shirley Kobran  
53 Schuler Lane,  
Lake Katrine, NY 12449.

We will send out information as soon as possible.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have any comments about the League or our programs? Shirley would like to hear them too.**