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# LWV of Albany County

April 2009

Educate

Participate

Advocate

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## Senator Breslin's Hopes for Legislative Action Souper Supper April 28, 5:30 pm Bethlehem Public Library, Delmar

According to newspaper reports, at his swearing-in ceremony this year, beginning his 13th year as a state senator, and his first in the majority party, Senator Neil Breslin quoted from Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey: "It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped." The senator reminded his colleagues of the importance of not only balancing New York's budget, but of protecting the state's most vulnerable citizens, especially when it comes to health care and education. Breslin said the state must help poorer school districts, and demand sacrifice and responsibility on the part of all of the state's more fortunate citizens. Breslin also spoke of his high hopes that the change in power would lead to "a much higher degree of fairness" in the Legislature's upper house, from staffing levels to the disbursement of funding for member items, of his hopes for a higher degree of congeniality during the upcoming session in bipartisan deliberation over legislation.

Neil David Breslin, Democrat, represents the 46th District, which consists entirely of Albany County. Born as one of six children on June 9, 1942, Neil is a lifelong resident of Albany. On academic scholarship, Neil attended Fordham College from which he graduated in 1964 with a BS degree in Political Science. While in law school at the University of Toledo, he was named the editor-in-chief of the Law Review and was also selected as outstanding student in his class. Upon graduation from law school, Neil became an associate in the firm of Garry Cahill & Edmunds and two years later became a partner in a new firm entitled Garry, Cahill, Edmunds & Breslin. In 1981, Neil formed a partnership with his two brothers, Michael (currently Albany County Executive) and Thomas (currently Albany County Court Judge). Currently, Neil practices law as "of counsel" to the firm of Hiscock & Barclay.

Neil now serves as a member of the Executive Committee and is the former Chair of the State/Federal Relations Committee of the National Conference of Insurance Legislators (NCOIL). In recognition of his dedication and commitment, Senator Breslin has received awards from numerous organizations including Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood, Caregivers Respite Services of Catholic Charities, University at Albany's Presidential Honors Society, New York State Bar Association, American Civil Liberties Union, KidsPeace National Centers, Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy ("Distinguished Public Service Award") and Robert F. Kennedy Democratic Club ("Profiles in Courage Award").

*Please call Gael Vecchio (459-9958) to volunteer to bring soup or side dishes. Please try to remember to label the contents of your dish, and to bring your own bowl/plate and utensils.*

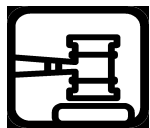
**League of Women Voters of Albany County**

**Website: [www.lwvalbany.org](http://www.lwvalbany.org) Email: [lwwac@crisny.org](mailto:lwwac@crisny.org)**

**Lori Keegan-Brady and Maggie Moehringer, Co-Presidents**

**Carol Webster (439-1491) and Martha Kennedy (439-4559), Membership Co-Chairs**

**Laura Ladd Bierman, Newsletter Editor**



## From the Co-Presidents

This year as just flown by! It's spring and time for us to think about the League's State Convention (May 15-17 in Syracuse) and our Annual Meeting and Dinner (May 26<sup>th</sup>). The League membership is asked to review our budget and nominations slate (there are no by-laws changes this year) before the annual meeting, and those two documents are included in this issue. The annual meeting is going to be VERY interesting: Blair Horner of NYPIRG and Roman Hedges of the NYS Assembly are going to present differing views of the apportionment process to us in preparation for our weighing in on the coming redistricting in 2010, following the census. The apportionment process is basic to how democracy works – or doesn't – in this state. Don't miss it! There will be an article in next month's bulletin about the League's position on the process. Study up!

As for convention, it's within a relatively easy day's drive from Albany, so those of you who would like to travel out for the day are encouraged to do so. See the information in this bulletin about how to do register. There is nothing like a League convention for firing us up to do great things, and a good time is had by all. And speaking of convention (it's kind of a secret but we just can't WAIT) LWV of Albany County is getting an AWARD! Our self-nominated Souper Suppers have caught the eye of those evaluating "Membership Development" efforts as a terrific way to get members and others energized about the League.

And speaking of Souper Suppers (April 28<sup>th</sup>), we are honored this month to have Neil Breslin, our State Senator, who is beginning his 13th year as a state senator, and his first in the majority party. Senator Breslin will tell us of his high hopes for the senate under the new leadership, and talk with us about legislative reform. Join us at 5:30 at the Bethlehem Public Library.

See you soon!

Yours in League,  
Maggie Moehringer and Lori Keegan-Brady  
Co-Presidents



## New LWVNYS Website Design

There's a new design on the homepage of the state League website - take a look and see what you think ([www.levny.org](http://www.levny.org))!

The page is wider and brighter – hopefully easier to read. We also have more space in the middle which will be updated frequently with new legislative action, events and press releases.

Some new features include the "search" box in which you can type a word or phrase and it will provide you with options of links to that subject. This will work throughout the website, so if you're looking for our position on greenhouse emissions or how to run a candidate debate, this will make your search much easier.

We have changed some of the links on the left and added new ones on the right side of the home page. We have attempted to make the page more friendly to the public as our research has shown that the public is looking to our website for information on elections, voting registration, League positions and more. The traditional League resources are still there – a big button on the right side will link you to the resources needed to manage the local League. And, the League positions are still available on the link on the left side under "Advocacy Areas" – more changes will be coming on the Advocacy page as we plan to have a separate page for each subject area with background info, positions and recent action in each area.

So, take a stroll through the home page – acquaint yourself with what is on our website. Watch for more changes coming on the other pages.

## New Members

**Robin Gibbons - Glenmont**    **Prof. John Spalek - Albany**  
**Mary Perrin Scott - Delmar**    **Paula Rosenberg - Albany**  
**Aimee McKane - Latham**

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan citizen organization that promotes the informed and active participation of citizens in government, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any person of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

This newsletter is published by the League of Women Voters of Albany County, 12 Coventry Road, Glenmont, New York 12077 and mailed to League members. The frequency of publication is as follows: one mid-summer issue followed by nine monthly issues from September to May.



## League in Profile

Judi Campbell

I joined the Albany League in 2006 shortly after moving to Delmar from Northern Virginia. I saw a notice for a Souper Supper on Charter Schools. After hearing Betsy Swan's presentation and meeting some of the members I decided this was a great way for me to get involved in my new community. Then someone told me about the Great Decisions group and I was really hooked.

I don't even remember when I first heard about the League of Women Voters. I did not actually join until I lived in Loudoun County Virginia where I got involved in politics but the local LWV didn't do much and I was busy with my consulting business, the Loudoun County Commission on Women, Women in Technology, ZONTA, the Board of Visitors for the iSchool at Syracuse, and a variety of other 'volunteer' activities.

During my career and child rearing years there was not much time for volunteer activities. After college & grad school at Barnard/Columbia I taught school in Teaneck, NJ and then joined IBM, I was in the second co-ed training class for sales and systems engineers. When my husband joined the Air Force it was off to Laredo, Tx where there were no computers yet so I taught school again and my daughter Sharon was born. Then we went to RAF Alconbury in England, worked for Pyle Telecommunications and my son Mark was born.

Returning to the US I got divorced, went back to work for IBM. After getting married again we moved to Ithaca where my husband was in graduate school and I ended up working for Cornell. Next it was Rochester where we stayed for 22 years and I worked for Xerox Corporation. Once the kids were off to college my jobs required a fair amount of travel. In 1996 Xerox offered me a job in Northern Virginia, heading up a small software business. It looked like a great opportunity and the plan was to stay in the DC area and eventually retire there. Xerox had significant problems before the tech bubble burst and I took a package and retired in 1999. A variety of life events led us to sell the house in Ashburn, Va., luckily at the height of the market, and I decided to move nearer to my kids.

When my son first suggested Albany I said 'you've got to be kidding' but it has turned out to be a great choice, despite this winter, and the League has been a big part of why this now is home.



### “Aging in the Community? The Future of Long Term Care”

For the more than 130 League and community members who attended the March 20<sup>th</sup> health care forum at Albany Public Library, the answer to the question was a guarded “yes!” During the presentations by state agency heads and policy experts, those who were fortunate to be in the audience

learned that there are a number of planning and demonstration activities underway to ensure that those who want to live in their communities throughout the aging process may, in fact, be able to do so. The panel, moderated by Channel News Ten Anchor Elisa Streeter, covered the breadth and scope of NYS programs for the aging, their relative costs and availability, plans for expanding the federally-supported home and community based care Medicaid waiver options to allow for more in-home and personalized care, and demonstration projects aimed to both improve nursing home quality and to experiment with “greenhouse” style extended care facilities where people live in small scale residences but receive full nursing home care.

The program, second in the series on health care reform, was co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters in New York State and local leagues in Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady counties. It featured presentations by Courtney Burke, Albany League member and Director of the New York State Health Policy Research Center at the Rockefeller Institute of Government, Michael Burgess, Director of New York State's Department for the Aging and Mark Kissinger, Deputy Commissioner for Long Term Care, New York State Department of Health. The program was videotaped and an airing of it will be available through the League's website ([www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org)). For more information on this and upcoming activities in health care reform, contact Donna Mahoney, LWVNYS Health Care Specialist at 518-221-1904.

# Save the Date

## *LWV of Albany County Annual Dinner and Meeting May 26 at Normanside Country Club, Delmar*

### LWV of Albany County Proposed Budget 2009-2010

<b>EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>BUDGET 08 - 09</b>	<b>ACTUAL / PROJECTED</b>	<b>PROPOSED 09 - 10</b>
<b>A. OPERATING COSTS</b>			
1. General Supplies/Rental	\$100	\$100	\$200
2. Postage	\$250	\$218	\$200
3. Misc. Expenses	\$100	\$100	\$100
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$450</b>	<b>\$418</b>	<b>\$500</b>
<b>B. BOARD &amp; ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES</b>			
1. President	\$50	\$50	\$50
2. Administrative Committees			
a. Publicity/website	\$300	\$280	\$300
b. Finance Drive/Development	\$200	\$175	\$200
c. Membership	\$400	\$393	\$400
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$950</b>	<b>\$898</b>	<b>\$950</b>
<b>C. DELEGATES, TRAVEL &amp; AFFILIATIONS</b>			
1. State Convention	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$0
2. National Convention	\$0	\$3,000	\$3,000
3. Annual Meeting	\$2,000	\$1,295	\$2,000
4a. Potluck	\$300	\$410	\$400
4b. Luncheon	\$1,200	\$1,025	\$1,200
5. Affiliations	\$1,100	\$1,100	\$1,125
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$7,600</b>	<b>\$9,830</b>	<b>\$7,725</b>
<b>D. FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE LEAGUE</b>			
1. State PMP (\$18 per member)	\$3,640	\$3,640	\$3,465
2. National PMP (\$29 per member)	\$5,660	\$5,451	\$5,439
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$9,300</b>	<b>\$9,091</b>	<b>\$8,904</b>
<b>E. BULLETIN</b>			
1. Supplies	\$1,400	\$900	\$1,000
2. Postage	\$300	\$270	\$300
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,700</b>	<b>\$1,170</b>	<b>\$1,300</b>
<b>F. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES</b>			
1. Program Study	\$200	\$157	\$200
2. Voters Service			
a. Facts for Voters	\$300	\$300	\$300
b. Candidate Meetings	\$100	\$70	\$100
c. Voters Guide	\$300	\$540	\$400
3. Student Sponsor	\$300	\$300	\$300
4. Special Projects/Programs	\$100	\$0	\$100
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,300</b>	<b>\$1,367</b>	<b>\$1,400</b>
<b>G. PROGRAM / ACTION</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$300</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$71</b>
<b>EXPENDITURES TOTAL</b>	<b>\$21,600</b>	<b>\$22,774</b>	<b>\$20,850</b>

(continued on page 5)

<i>INCOME</i>	<b>BUDGET</b> <i>08 - 09</i>	<b>ACTUAL /</b> <b>PROJECTED</b>	<b>PROPOSED</b> <i>09 - 10</i>
<b>AA. MEMBERSHIP DUES</b>	\$10,100	\$9,625	\$10,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$10,100	\$9,625	\$10,000
<b>BB. CONTRIBUTIONS</b>			
1. Member	\$1,500	\$580	\$500
2. Fund Drive	\$4,500	\$5,100	\$4,650
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$6,000	\$5,680	\$5,150
<b>CC. OTHER FUNDRAISING</b>			
1 Annual Meeting	\$1,800	\$1,625	\$1,700
2 Potluck	\$100	\$100	\$150
3 Luncheon	\$1,000	\$1,040	\$1,000
4 Events	\$0	\$0	\$0
Subtotal	\$2,900	\$2,765	\$2,850
<b>EE. OTHER INCOME</b>			
2. Poll Reporting	\$2,200	\$2,342	\$2,500
3. Speakers Bureau	\$50	\$0	\$0
4. Misc. Income/Grants/Raffle		\$235	\$250
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$2,250	\$2,577	\$2,750
<b>FF. BANK INTEREST</b>	\$350	\$63	\$100
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$350	\$63	\$100
<b>INCOME TOTAL</b>	<b>\$21,600</b>	<b>\$20,710</b>	<b>\$20,850</b>
(TO) FROM RESERVES	\$0	\$2,064	\$0
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$21,600</b>	<b>\$22,774</b>	<b>\$20,850</b>

### League of Women Voters of Albany County NOMINATIONS SLATE 2009-10

**Officers**

President	Ann Brandon	2009-10
VP Program	Marian Schwager	2009-11
VP Action	TBD	2008-10
VP Admin	Lois Griffin	2009-11
Secretary	Linda Brown	2009-11
Treasurer	Mary Berry	2008-10
Ass't Treasurer*	Margaret Sawyer	2009-10

**Directors (On Board)**

Voter Service	Mary Ann Lettau	2009-11
Membership	Carol Webster	2008-10
Development	Betsey Swan	2009-11
State & Local Gov't	Judi Campbell	2008-10
Public Relations	Margaret Sawyer	2008-10
National Program	Loretta Simon	2009-11
At-large	Julie Elson	2008-10

**Directors (Off Board)**

National Government	Edith Allen	2008-10
Membership	Martha Kissinger	2009-11
Website administrator	Jessica McMullan	2009-11
Information Specialist	Don Kennedy	2009-11
Bulletin Editor	Laura Bierman	2009-11
Bulletin Distribution	Annette Argyros	
Budget Director	Maggie Moehringer	2009-11
Nominations	Lori Keegan-Brady	2009-11
Poll Reporting	Marggie Skinner	2008-10



## ‘Fair, Vibrant and Strong’ 2009 Statewide Convention



<http://www.lwvny.org/resources/registrationKit2009.pdf>

*Dear Local League Leader,*

*At this end of a very busy League year, I am delighted to extend an invitation to you to share in the ultimate league energizing experience - our biannual statewide Convention. You have worked hard for this wonderful organization and this is your chance to enjoy some “face time” with others and share the highs and lows of those League experiences. Do not miss this opportunity to reward yourself and others in your local League with the chance to spend an exciting weekend with League friends, past, present, and future.*

*With appreciation for all you do for League,*

*Martha Kennedy, President, LWNYS*

**To: Local League Presidents**

**From: Martha C. Kennedy, President**

*This is the official call to attend the 53rd Convention of the League of Women Voters of New York State.*

The convention will be held May 15-17, 2009 at the Doubletree Hotel in Syracuse, NY. The opening plenary session will convene at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 16, 2009. Convention is the time when delegates representing the grassroots of our organization come together to make the important decisions that will guide us through the next biennium including the election of officers and directors, adoption of a budget and bylaws amendments, and the adoption of our state program for 2009-2011.

In addition to fulfilling these critical requirements, convention provides an opportunity for local League members to network with other Leaguers and participate in workshops to enhance League effectiveness both in local communities and statewide. As part of our celebration, we will have speakers and entertainment, present awards, share our local League highlights with Moments in the Sun, shop at our Silent Auction Room, and enjoy the camaraderie of our fellow Leaguers.

**As an added bonus this time, we are including a pre-convention session beginning with lunch on Friday afternoon.** We will address issues to strengthen League leadership including such things as planning the league year, board nominations process, lobbying and dealing with media, and the ever-complex issues involving non-partisanship as a practice and a perception in our communities. There will be no charge for delegates and up to two additional participants from each League. Leagues wishing to send more participants to this special session are asked to pay \$20 for each attendee joining us for lunch.

Delegates are uninstructed and are expected to use their own judgment in reaching decisions based on convention discussion. Delegates are committing their local Leagues to program study and action as well as financial obligation. Your League should be well represented!!

*Every League member is encouraged to attend as a visitor.*

### **Support LWNYS Silent Auction and Big League Raffle**

There will be a limited live auction for which we are soliciting big-ticket items, such as weekends or weeks at destination locations, tickets to television shows and performances in New York City, frequent flyer miles for plane tickets, cars, and boats. These items will also be offered on-line, and long-distance bids will be taken. Watch for the state *Voter* for more information on how to bid!

And, of course, what would convention be without The Big League Raffle? This is a major state League fundraiser and the last one before the end of the fiscal year. We will distribute tickets in early April, so there will plenty of time to spring into action. Please support the state league.

## Alan Chartok: Smith Has Golden Opportunity to Reform the Senate

*Reprinted with permission, Legislative Gazette, 3/9/08*

You may remember that the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU issued a report in which it declared that New York had the most dysfunctional legislature in the country. Of course, they're just plain wrong. I asked them if they had ever been to Mississippi, Louisiana or Florida. It really doesn't matter. There are enough bad legislatures in the country that we shouldn't have to squabble about who has the worst. But it is indisputable that the New York Legislature has long had its traditions of self-seeking, self-promoting, self-protecting actions designed to help themselves while often confusing citizens who might just want to know what was going on. It gets worse. For years, the state Senate, under the control of the Republicans, has treated its Democratic members in a high-handed and despotic manner. To his credit, the new Democratic Majority Leader, Malcolm Smith, has already made good on some of the promises that the Democrats made before they took over the Senate. The question now is whether or not the new Democratic majority will go forward and extend these reforms so that everyone, Republican or Democrat, is treated the same way.

There are both ethical and political reasons for Smith to be more generous to the Republicans than the Republicans had been to the Democrats. Each senator represents about the same number of citizens as any other senator. So every senator should have the same resources, from staff members down to copying machines. It's just fair. With that said, I am thoroughly enjoying the hypocritical screams and protestations of the Republicans that the Democrats are not treating them fairly when the fact is, the minority has more now than at any time previously.

Then there is the political issue. Democrat Malcolm Smith has to know that since the Senate is only controlled by the Democrats by a few votes, he has a potentially bad situation on his hands. David Paterson, his governor, is committed to re-election. While last time out the Senate rode the Obama coattails, Paterson is no Barack Obama. This time it might just go the other way and the majority could flip again. The Democrats, running with Paterson may just lose control of the Senate which would be disastrous since the next election will mark the beginning of the reapportionment process. If the Republicans are in control of the Senate, they will do what they have always done — use the process to make sure that they draw districts where they have a better chance of winning. As every high school civics student knows, this process of screwing the minority is known as gerrymandering. So we have Smith faced with the possibility that a) his party may well lose the next time out; b) control might revert to the Republicans and c) through the gerrymandering process, these same Republicans might end up controlling the Senate for some time to come. It stands to reason, therefore, that Smith and his colleagues might consider making the State Senate more democratic and fair by treating the Republicans well. They might just understand that sooner or later they might be the minority once again and it will be very hard for the Republicans to go back to their old ways of treating the Democrats with contempt. What's more, Smith has the possibility of being treated very well in the history books as the senator who brought Democracy to the Senate. He has already said that he is not a career politician and that his time in the Senate will be limited. It is a golden opportunity for him.

While the reform commission that Smith wisely appointed with Democratic and Republican co-chairs is at it, they might just want to take a look at the way the lines are drawn. A panel of distinguished jurists, as balanced as possible between the two parties, might just be the right group to draw the lines. Otherwise, democracy will continue to be denied, despite the continual huffing and puffing of our politicians to the contrary.

The New York state Legislature is now an anathema to the people it purports to be governing. If the Senate passes reasonable rules, the Assembly can't be that far behind. So far, leader Smith seems to be doing an excellent job of getting out front on this issue, whether for the right or the wrong reasons. Either way, he is to be congratulated for doing the right thing.

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## Still Broken: New York State Legislative Reform: 2008 Update

By Andrew Stengel, Lawrence Norden, and Laura Seago

Reprinted with permission, *The Brennan Center for Justice* – 01/02/09 <http://www.brennancenter.org/>

“Dysfunctional” is the adjective ascribed to the New York State Legislature by two reports issued by the Brennan Center for Justice: *The New York State Legislative Process: An Evaluation and Blueprint for Reform* released in 2004 and the follow up, *Unfinished Business: New York State Legislative Reform 2006 Update*.

The legislative leadership largely dismissed the findings of the 2004 report. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver told the *New York Times*, “Nothing happens here in Albany, in the Assembly, without the input of the rank-and-file legislators.” Joe Bruno, who recently left the Senate after serving for 14 years as its Majority Leader, called the report “pure nonsense” and equated a more democratic process with that of a Third World country.

Yet when the Legislature came back into session in early 2005, the Leaders announced rules changes—the first time in a generation—accompanied by self-congratulatory fanfare. In press releases that described the reforms’ aspirational effect on the Legislature, the Assembly Speaker and Senate Majority Leader claimed that the new rules would usher in an era of openness, effectiveness, and accountability. The Senate even went so far as to claim that it addressed most of the recommendations made by the Brennan Center

*Unfinished Business: New York State Legislative Reform 2006 Update* concluded that the changes on the whole, while a good start, were by no means transformative. The Legislature failed to adopt a comprehensive set of new rules that incorporated the Brennan Center’s recommendations for making the legislative process more robust and democratic. Of the changes that the legislature did adopt, some, quite cynically, codified the status quo in new ways. The continued presence of these rules stifles rigorous deliberation and debate and hobbles the sincere efforts of a number of rank-and-file legislators to represent the best interests of their constituents and the state as a whole.

In 2006 and 2007, most standing committees met infrequently or not at all. There were almost no hearings on major legislation. Not a single major bill was the subject of a detailed committee report. Leadership maintained near total control over what bills reached the floor. And on the floor, there was little substantive debate; every bill brought to the floor for a vote in either chamber passed.

The good news is that, for the first time in years, there is reason to hope that at least one chamber will begin to make the structural changes that could remake the legislature. Come January, majority control of the Senate may shift to the Democrats. In 2007, likely incoming Senate President Pro Tempore Malcolm Smith introduced new rules in line with our previous recommendations (the one-house resolution failed along a party-line vote). During a Reform Day New York panel last year, Senator Smith reaffirmed his commitment to introducing the same package of rules reform “without question” if the Democrats regained the majority. He previously stated, “We cannot truly reform the legislative process in Albany until we have successfully reformed the rules that govern the Legislature.” More recently, Senator Smith told the *New York Times* that under his leadership, the Senate “would be more transparent, more participatory.” Smith reaffirmed that rules reform under a Democratic majority would include broader latitude for members to put bills on committee agendas or vote them out of committee and onto the floor, abolishment of secretive canvass of agreement votes and restrictions on discharge motions, and the enactment of new rules requiring committee members to be physically present to vote.

At a time when state revenues are shrinking—Governor Paterson forecast a \$47 billion budget deficit over the next four years—it has become all the more important for the legislature to be more creative and effective. The rules changes we recommend are a step toward this goal.

At the opening of 2009 session, both houses will once again have the opportunity to modify their rules. We urge the new Senate Majority to honor its commitment to genuine rules reform. The Assembly, which retains a super-majority in favor of the Democrats, should follow suit.

While the world of legislative rules may seem arcane, our capitol’s dysfunction has received unprecedented attention over the period covered in this report thanks in part to the failure of New York City’s congestion pricing proposal. For far too long, the leadership has failed to enact the changes necessary to remake the Senate and Assembly. Today, pressure to change the culture of Albany may have finally intersected with a new opportunity for reform.

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(continued from page 8)

# Still Broken

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The quantitative analysis of the Legislature’s performance in 2006 and 2007 and qualitative information from interviews with lawmakers reveal that the problems outlined in the original report still plague both chambers. Our analysis of the legislature’s performance in 2006 and 2007 shows that the vast majority of problems identified in our previous two reports remain endemic in both chambers:

- In both chambers, but especially in the Assembly, leadership maintained a stranglehold on the flow of legislation at all stages of the legislative process.
- Committee meetings were infrequent in both chambers and sparsely attended in the Senate, where members can vote without being physically present.
- Most standing committees in both chambers failed to hold any hearings on major legislation.
- There were no detailed committee reports attached to major bills in the Senate, and the Assembly rules do not require substantive reports to accompany bills reported out of committee.
- Legislators introduced an extraordinary number of bills in both houses during each session, while only a small percentage received a floor vote.
- 100% of the bills that leadership allowed to reach the floor of either chamber for a vote passed with almost no debate.
- Senate records indicate that many of the bills that received a floor vote lacked critical and required information about their fiscal impact, usually passing the full chamber without any meaningful debate or dissent.
- The use of conference committees to reconcile similar bills in each chamber remained the exceedingly rare exception, rather than the rule.
- Member resources were distributed inequitably in both chambers on the basis of party, loyalty and seniority.
- Much of the legislative process remains opaque; records are difficult to obtain without burdensome “freedom of information” requests, and key records of deliberation—such as “no” votes on procedural motions in the Senate—are not maintained.

It is plain from this and other evidence explored in our latest update that New York’s legislative process remains broken. In January 2009, each chamber will again have the opportunity to change their operating rules and begin to fix this process. Such changes will not require agreement between the chambers or gubernatorial approval. At a minimum, they should meet the following five objectives:

- Strengthen standing committees by giving members authority to convene meetings and by requiring committee members to be present to vote.
- End the leadership stranglehold on bills coming to the floor by allowing rank-and-file members to discharge bills from committee and place them on the floor calendar by majority vote.
- Allow adequate opportunity for consideration of legislation by requiring adequate fiscal analysis and allowing ample time for full consideration of each bill on the floor before the close of session.
- Provide sufficient opportunity and resources for full consideration of legislation by making use of robust conference committees and distributing member funds equally.
- Make all records and products of the legislative process fully transparent and easily accessible to the public through the Internet.

### Join & Make a Difference -- Membership 2008-2009

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

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

- Individual Membership \$50/year
- Household Membership \$75/year
- Student Membership \$15/year
- Contribution in support of my local League
- Please send me more information

Mail to:

League of Women Voters of Albany County PO Box 611 Slingerlands, NY 12159  
Or Contact: Carol Webster (439-1491)

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## **League Calendar**

<u><b>WHEN</b></u>	<u><b>WHAT</b></u>	<u><b>WHERE</b></u>	<u><b>MORE INFO</b></u>
April 7, 6:00 pm	Board Meeting	Presbyterian Church, Delmar	
April 17	Deadline for May Bulletin	LBierman@nycap.rr.com	
April 28, 5:30 pm	Souper Supper: Senator Neil Breslin	Bethlehem Library	see page 1
May 5, 6:00 pm	Board Meeting	Presbyterian Church, Delmar	
May 15-17	LWVNYS Convention	Syracuse	see page 6
May 26	Annual Meeting	Normanside Country Club, Delmar	
	Redistricting: B. Horner and R. Hedges		