

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF BROOKHAVEN

THE VOTER

MARCH 2020

HOW CIVIL IS OUR DISCOURSE?

WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE IT?

presented by

TIM BISHOP

Distinguished Professor of Civic Engagement

and Public Service

at St. Joseph's College

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 1:30 PM

AT MIDDLE COUNTRY LIBRARY

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PRESIDENT’S PAGE

We have long complained that turnout at primary elections is very low—and puzzle over ways to increase it. The turnout for this election has been amazing—so high that people waited on lines past the closing times of the polling places, even in places where early voters had already cast their votes. While we may see this is a good thing, Common Cause has pointed out that it happened because some states, such as Texas, reduced the number of sites. One of our goals in electoral reform is making voting easier for all. In New York, Democrats will vote on April 28, and will again be able to vote early. We are asking our state legislators to support more funding for early voting, making it possible, for instance, to add polling sites to large towns like Brookhaven.

On February 12 we are looking forward to hearing Tim Bishop speak about civil discourse, and some of the reasons it no longer takes place in our conversations. Mr. Bishop was the Congressman from District 1 from 2003 to 2015. He is currently Visiting Distinguished Professor of Civic Engagement and Public Service at St. Joseph’s College in Patchogue. He has thoughts about the changes that have taken place in recent years to influence the political scene, and some possible ways to make it better, based on his years in Washington DC representing Suffolk County. Plan to attend on Thursday, March 12, at 1:30 at the Middle Country Library on Eastwood Boulevard in Centereach.

On Friday, February 28, we met with NYS Assemblyman Joe DeStefano from District 3, which covers parts of Shirley and Mastic, all of Bellport and most of Patchogue, north to cover Yaphank, part of Coram, Farmingville, and part of Fire Island. He spoke of the importance of voting to respond to the needs and wishes of his constituents rather than party loyalty. He voted for the early voting law, and, like us, believes that it should not be an unfunded mandate, costing the counties so much money to work properly. In answer to a question about decriminalizing marijuana, he said that he didn’t believe that users would choose to buy from licensed sellers when they could get it more easily and cheaply from neighborhood dealers. Like most legislators, he is concerned about high taxes, and hoping to find ways to reduce the burden on people in his district. He supported the new annex to the Patchogue-Medford Library being built in Medford. He seems to be enjoying his new role as an Assemblyman and finding it challenging.

ABOUT BOOKS AND READING

On weekend evenings, CSPAN2 BOOKTV has hourlong programs about books. For each book, the author discusses his (or her) book with other guests. The schedule is online and includes a variety of subjects, with interesting discussions about them. .

Our book group has not yet met to discuss *White Fragility* by Robin D’Angelo. We will be meeting at Betsy Gaidry’s on April 2 to talk about it. Call Betsy at 631 846-1778 if you would like to learn more.

CAPITOL STEPS

CAPITOL STEPS will be shown at Ward Melville High School (on Old Town Road in East Setauket) on March 29 at 7 pm. The Capitol Steps began as a group of Senate staffers who set out to satirize the very people and places that employed them. From the headlines of the day, they create song parodies and skits which convey a special brand of satirical humor. (“*They put the mock in democracy.*”) The program is sponsored by the North Shore Jewish Center in East Setauket. Tickets can be purchased for \$70 at the VIP level or \$45 for general admission. Buy your tickets now by clicking on the following link: Bit.ly/capstepstickets. If you have any questions, please call Marcie at 631-928-3737 or email Paul at paul.gold@nsjc.org.

NEW PROPOSALS TO REFORM HEALTH CARE—AN OVERVIEW

The Hamptons League, which has been expanded to include Shelter Island and Southold, will be holding a meeting to give an overview of the various proposals for improving health care on a national level. Many of the presidential candidates have proposed changes—some radical and some more moderate. Attend the meeting on April 13, 7 pm, to find out more from the Hampton League’s Health Committee. We will add more details as we have them.

SUFFOLK COUNTY LWV BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, March 18, Riverhead Library, 10 am—our monthly county LWV Board meeting. There are seats open on the Suffolk County LWV Board. We meet once a month on the third Wednesday at 10 in Riverhead, and discuss the issues that face the county, such as the implementation of the Campaign Finance board. This board will be making the ground rules for making public financing available to candidates running for county office, who will be able to receive matching funds for donations up to \$250 and are willing to limit their campaign expenditures. Lisa Scott is one of the three members on the committee. Other issues that have been on the county agenda are Board of Elections and early voting, clean water, and our Directory of Public Officials.

Lisa hopes that more local league members will feel connected to the county board, and has suggested that at least one local member attend the county meeting each time (it could be a different person each time). **Would you be willing to attend a meeting to represent our League?**

STUDENTS INSIDE ALBANY

We are pleased to announce that Sophie Fischetti will represent our league in Albany this year. She is a senior from Patchogue-Medford High School, and was a member of the Generation Citizen-Civics class. In her words, “I decided to enroll in Generation Citizen this year in order to make my voice heard as the point of the class is to allow students to participate in civic engagement on a local and more tangible scale.” Because she saw that there was a lack of communication between faculty and the students, she worked with others to create a student council for the school, bringing the proposal to the superintendent of the district, local officials, and the Board of Education. We will meet her at our Annual Meeting in June.



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MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

Building inclusive communities

BY NANCY MARR

When Newsday published its account of racial discrimination in housing last December, people were sad to read it but most said it was not a surprise.

By documenting it with the results of 25 testers we are forced to look for explanations and then for solutions. Racial attitudes from the past were carried over by the federal government; it advocated racially restrictive covenants on deeds to prevent homes from being occupied by African Americans, Jews and other minorities.

The Federal Housing Administration's manual in 1936 stated that deed restrictions should prohibit occupancy of homes "except by the race for which they are intended" lest "incompatible racial elements" would cause housing values to fall. In 1947, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race-restrictive covenants were not enforceable, but the practice remained. The 1968 Fair Housing Act signed by President Johnson finally made racial discrimination illegal.

Blatant discrimination began to give way to steering; black house hunters were shown homes only in minority or integrated areas while whites were shown houses in overwhelmingly white areas. As people of color began to buy homes in mostly white areas, block busting by real estate brokers took advantage of the situation by scaring white homeowners into selling their homes at lowered prices.

The U.S. Justice Department ruled racial steering illegal under the Fair Housing Act and both state and federal governments launched efforts to investigate and curtail steering and block busting. Local agencies like the Human Rights Commission and Suffolk Housing Services have been able to bring cases of discrimination and steering to court with some success.

And yet the testers in the current study showed that significant proportions of homebuyers of color were not shown homes in areas with better schools or primarily white populations, but African Americans, Latinos, and Asians were shown homes in areas that the testers told white homebuyers they would not want to live in.

It is significant that the salespeople chose to match their prospective buyers with the schools in the districts they were shown. They knew that white buyers would want to live in the areas with the best schools that they could afford. They showed the buyers of color homes in areas with poorer schools, even though they too wanted to live in the areas with the best schools they could afford.

The Newsday article was followed by County Executive Bellone's announcement that a testing program will be launched by Suffolk County. New York State has already started trainings for the real estate industry with strict enforcement of the rules that should guide them.



Stock photo

But can the solution rest with enforcement of civil rights laws? At the LIVE Newsday event, panels of experts discussed the article on discrimination and filled in some of the spaces. The method of funding schools in New York State, if not changed, will continue to create competition for funds between "good" areas and "bad" ones. Deep seated public prejudices and fear of changes that might affect home values often influence real estate brokers, who can play a role in re-educating the public about housing discrimination but who are not insensitive to the attitudes of their clients.

How can we, as the community, change our attitudes? Can community planners in towns and villages find ways to include all segments of the community to find solutions? The Village of Patchogue worked with the Long Island Housing Partnership to build workforce housing priced for families with lower incomes, chosen by a lottery. Located near the railroad station, it has brought together a diverse group of younger families and stimulated the building of other housing downtown. The entrepreneurship of Latinos in Patchogue has supported the growth of the business district.

Other sustainable developments throughout Suffolk County are redeveloping vacant malls and stores to build affordable and workforce housing, overcoming the shortage of available land and finding ways around the need for sewers. The L. I. Housing Partnership has formed a land trust to acquire and own the land that it leases to homeowners, reducing the cost of homeownership. Vision Long Island's website VisionLongIsland.org gives examples of development projects that address issues of diversity.

Make your voice heard. Let your county, town and village representatives know that you want all neighborhoods to welcome housing for a diversity of people in thriving communities.

Nancy Marr is first vice president of the League of Women Voters of Suffolk County, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. For more information, visit www.lwv-suffolkcounty.org or call 631-862-6860.

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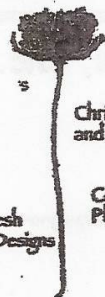
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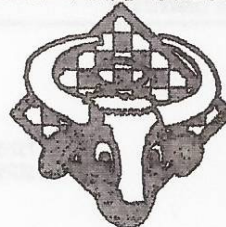
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MARCH

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|-----------|----------|--|
| Saturday | March 7 | LWV NYS Regional Training, NYC, 9:30 to 3:00 |
| Thursday | March 12 | HOW CIVIL IS OUR DISCOURSE? Prof. Tim Bishop
1:30 at Middle Country Library |
| Wednesday | March 18 | Suffolk County LWV Board Meeting, Riverhead Library, 10 am |

APRIL

- | | | |
|----------|----------|--|
| Thursday | April 2 | Book Group, 1:00 pm at Betsy's |
| Monday | April 6 | LWV Brookhaven Board meeting, 10 am, Betsy Gaidry's |
| | April 13 | Current Proposals for Health Care. LWV of Hamptons, 7 pm, PTBA |
| Saturday | April 18 | ANNUAL LUNCHEON, Place to be determined |

Directions to Middle Country Library:

From Nicolls Road on Route 25., continue 6/10 mile to Eastwood Boulevard. Turn right at light and continue 4/10 mile to MCPL-Centereach on the left.. From North Shore, take Nicolls Road to Hawkins, which will take you to Eastwood. Blvd.