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Much Worth Celebrating as Morris County Leagues Provide Expert Non-Partisan Candidate Forums and Debates during the League of Women Voters' Centennial Year

Throughout this tumultuous 2020 year, the League of Women Voters has been celebrating our 100th anniversary while continuing to put our voters first by organizing and executing nonpartisan debates and forums throughout Morris County. These events were conducted virtually as local League members with years of experience in pulling together live debates and forums were able to successfully pivot to create highly informative and engaging online political events.

During this challenging election season, local Leagues have organized debates at the Congressional level such as the September event where 7th Congressional District candidates Tom Malinowski and Tom Kean, Jr. faced off. At the state legislative level, incumbent Anthony Bucco Jr. and challenger Rupande Mehta met in October to demonstrate their views to the voters of the 25th State District. State Assembly candidates Darcy Draeger and Aura Dunn met in a virtual League debate on that same evening. Local Council and Board of Education debates were executed in Chatham, Madison, Morristown, Mountain Lakes, and Warren Township by their respective local Leagues. And for the benefit of the voters, viewership was extended by posting these live events on League YouTube channels and websites, which gives the public access to the events after the fact.

In addition, voters were able to view many of the debates and read about their candidates at www.Vote411.org, the League of Women Voters voter guide website committed to ensuring voters have everything they need to participate in elections. Notably, Vote411.org saw early and record-breaking viewership this year compared to previous election cycles, demonstrating the growing faith of voters in the League's ability to provide non-biased, accurate voter information.

Even after overcoming the challenge of organizing and executing debates during a pandemic, Leagues all over the state had the added obstacle of bridging the intensified political divide of 2020. League rules state that there must be at least one more participant than open seats, usually indicating at least two parties are represented in a debate. Therefore, if one party declines, there can be no debate, thus robbing voters of the opportunity to see their candidates face to face as they discuss the issues. This practice of stonewalling opens up the possibility for one political party to control the narrative by refusing to participate and debate publicly with their opponents.

When this happens and a free and fair debate of the issues cannot be accomplished, the voters lose and democracy suffers.

The League of Women Voters has an excellent reputation for accomplishing debates of the highest standards throughout the years. This past September, during an interview conducted for the League of Women Voters of New Jersey's centennial gala, NJ State Governor Tom Kean stated that the League of Women Voters is "the trusted source for debates." He further lamented on the state of today's politics in general saying, "We're not talking to each other anymore and that's a terrible, terrible thing for our democracy. And if we don't learn to do that again, we're not going to solve any problems. As John F. Kennedy once said, these problems were created by people and they can only be solved by people... If we don't talk to each other, then we're going nowhere."

Talking to each other about important issues and educating voters about these issues is where the League excels. It is what democracy is about. We stand proud of what we were able to accomplish during this pandemic and this tumultuous election season, but it wasn't enough. The electorate deserves the opportunity to hear from ALL candidates in a nonpartisan forum where issues are addressed by individuals, not by a party slate.

The League will continue to seek to fulfill our mission of nonpartisan political engagement by promoting a well-educated electorate that can help bridge the gulf of this national political divide. We ask those running for office in the future to participate in this process. And for the next 100 years, the League of Women Voters will forge ahead with our mission of empowering voters and defending democracy.

League of Women Voters of the Morristown Area
League of Women Voters of Warren and West Morris
League of Women Voters of Mountain Lakes