

The League Experience: Meeting Elected Officials By Frances Cerra Whittelsey

One of the privileges of being a reporter, as I was for Newsday and The New York Times, was the freedom to question elected officials about their policies, votes and actions. Now, as a member of the Huntington League's Issues and Advocacy Committee I have that privilege again. And this time, instead of trying my best to be neutral, I have the additional privilege of advocating for specific legislation and actions that are the result of consensus reached after study and discussion by the Huntington and New York State Leagues and national league.

Because the League never supports candidates, we are welcomed by our elected officials. There's no need to be shy, as I was before I took the leap to being a reporter. You are not just yourself in these meetings. You have the weight of the organization behind you. The officials expect us to come armed with questions and briefing information that we leave behind.

Recent meetings with NY State Senator Mario Mattera (R) and Assembly Member Keith Brown (R) were typical. Both men readily agreed to meet with me and other I&A representatives, greeted us warmly, spent an hour each listening to us and responding to our questions, and finished off with a group photo.

Our focus at these two meeting was the environment. For example, we advocated support for an expanded Bottle Bill that would raise the deposit from 5 to 10 cents and put deposits on bottled wine and tea for example, and others not now covered by the state's bottle law. The NY State League took a position in favor of the change. We also asked the legislators' help for the dredging of Northport Harbor, a local problem that the Huntington League studied itself.

We learned that both men are very conscious of the environmental problems we face. Brown is focused on the impact of the closing of the Brookhaven Landfill and is an expert on municipal waste. Mattera, who was a plumber, is deeply involved in water issues, including the need for new sewers and advanced septic systems on Long Island.

The I&A committee, chaired by Stephanie Quarles, will be arranging more meetings with elected officials. If you would like to have that experience, join the I&A committee. Contact Stephanie Quarles at 631 257-7001; or LWVHuntingtonNYI&A@gmail.com