

### **363 High School Seniors Registered/Preregistered to Vote**

Most high school seniors are on the verge of another milestone besides graduation: the first time they'll be able to vote! The Huntington League visited 4 high schools in March and April—Walt Whitman, North Babylon, Deer Park and Central Islip--to help the students fill out registration forms, and 402 are now ready to vote when they turn 18.

In New York, 16- and 17-year-olds can pre-register to vote, meaning they are automatically registered voters when they turn 18, encouraging more students to participate in future elections.

To make the registration process more fun, the senior class at Walt Whitman High School was invited to the school's annual Voter Registration Breakfast. By the end of the event, 127 students had registered.

Meanwhile, at North Babylon High School one of 87 students who registered or pre-registered won a \$100 gift card, and one student of 83 at Central Islip lucked out with a gift card.

At Deer Park, one social studies teacher brought down 4 classes. In four hours, 86 students registered or pre-registered, and one of them won the \$100 raffle.

After helping themselves to bagels and juice, the Walt Whitman students filled out registration forms, with school administrators and representatives from the League of Women Voters answer any questions and quickly resolving any issues the students had with the forms.

"It's important that you have a voice," principal John Murphy told students. "It's important that you use that voice, and one of the biggest ways to use that is to vote." South Huntington Board of Education President Nicholas Ciappetta explained to students that voting is their "civic responsibility" and reminded them that their first opportunity to exercise that right - if they've turned 18 by then - will be on May 21st when the school board elections and school budget vote are held. "Don't just vote in presidential elections. Your local elections are just as important. Your town election, your school board, your fire department. Vote in every opportunity that you can because the right to vote is essential," said Mr. Ciappetta.

That sentiment was echoed by Huntington Town Supervisor Ed Smyth who was invited to speak with students. He also explained how choosing a political party affiliation when registering allows someone to vote in a primary. He had one more bit of advice aimed at getting more voters to the polls. "Never vote alone on election day," suggested Mr. Smyth. "Gather your friends, go to the polls. Vote early and vote often. The right way is to show up with your friends at the polling place and vote together."

The lowest voter turnout in the United States is typically the youth vote, ages 18-29. Senior Jaren Smullian, who turns 18 in April, is already planning to cast his ballot in next month's school budget vote and believes that events like this breakfast will get more young people to the polls. "I think people my age are very tempted not to vote because they see what goes on in the news. They hear what their parents talk about. And I feel like the mindset these days is out of

sight, out of mind. And they just don't register. And people don't get enough education on how our political system works," said Jaren.

Deborah Coshier, Vice President of the League of Women Voters of Huntington and co-chair of the Voter Services and Youth Committee would like to see more civics lessons taught in school, and at a much younger age and consistently throughout the grades. "I think they need to be made aware," explained Ms. Coshier. "What does it mean to you? What's your passion? What's your ambition? What is it you want to see different in your community? Start from there. So by the time they're 18, they don't say, 'What am I voting for?'"

For answers about voter registration or voting in general, log onto <https://www.vote411.org>.