



Bulletin

League of Women Voters® of Dane County, Inc.

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APRIL 2020

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All in person League events for April have been canceled or postponed until further notice.

Watch for updates in weekly emails and direct communications from event organizers. Contact event organizers or the office at office@lwvdanecounty.org with any questions.

Vote by Mailed Ballot for our 2020-2021 LWVDC Board Candidates, Budget and Program!

Watch for your League Annual Meeting Packet and Ballot in mid-April. **Return your ballot by May 15!**

President's Message

Aileen Nettleton, president@lwvdanecounty.org

Adapting. Flexibility. Creativity. Change. These certainly describe our new world living with the coronavirus pandemic. They also represent the resilience of our League of Women Voters of Dane County as we continue to address our purpose: “to promote informed and active participation of citizens in government at all levels.”

At our LWVDC board meeting on March 11, held just after the announcement that the UW was closing classes early before spring break to slow down the coronavirus pandemic, the new reality hit us. We decided (wisely, in retrospect) to postpone our March 28 Centennial Celebration and two April public forums, *The Revenge of the Marshes* and *Women's Rights in America and the Fight over the ERA*. Our office administrator Cindy Lindquist, webmaster, and e-news producer Brook Soltvedt, and Publicity Director Donna Van Bogaert

immediately sent out emails and announcements to members and the public to postpone the events. The Centennial Planning Committee and Program Committee notified speakers, locations, volunteers, and others to pause all their planning. Watch for notices when conditions merit rescheduling these events.

Our Voter Service team stepped into high gear to deal with the new challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic to our April 7 Election. Registration events were canceled for the protection of the public and our volunteers. Attention turned to urge voters to cast absentee ballots. Individuals from the Voter Service team are advising seniors and others about how to cast absentee ballots. Some are volunteering, alongside city clerk Voter Education Ambassadors, with the Madison City Clerk's office to get new high volumes of absentee ballots into the mail.

The last issue of the Isthmus (March 19) included our highly-regarded *Candidates' Answers*; however, what should we do with the additional copies we print for each election intended for distribution in county libraries and senior centers, now closed? The Voter Service team is creatively finding new locations that are still accessible to the public for distribution. Fortunately, *Candidates' Answers* was already posted on our website, and is also included in the new League Vote411.org website, thanks to the Voter Service volunteers! Thank you to our Voter Service Steering Committee: Paul Lindquist, Marian Mathews, Shirley Haidinger, Kathy Fullin, Paul Malischke, Brook Soltvedt, Sue Fulk, Gail Bliss, Mary Anglim, Ingrid Rothe and Bonnie Chang.

Planning is underway for "virtual" volunteer training for our League's informative *Everything you wanted to know about helping voters but were afraid to ask*. The virtual training will allow more volunteers to train during this crisis, in preparation for assisting with registration before the fall election.

Watch your LWV Dane County weekly e-news and the Annual Meeting mailing to learn how we will adapt our Annual Meeting to elect our 2020-2021 board members, pass our annual budget, and approve the proposed programs for the upcoming year.

Why I Give

Linda Dietrich

"Why I Give" is an ongoing series of donor profiles developed by the League of Women Voters of Dane County's Fundraising Committee, showcasing members who have chosen to fund projects that are meaningful to them. This month we are featuring an interview with Jean Espenshade, who joined the League of Women Voters of Dane County in 2013; she has been active in League initiatives and is a long-term donor.

Jean's introduction to the League of Women Voters of Dane County came through the *Candidates' Answers* publication. In 1968, as an undergraduate at UW-Madison, Jean became eligible to vote. An out-of-state student, she had to find her way through several extra steps before she could register and eventually vote.

Faced with a newspaper-sized ballot from Cook County, loaded with unfamiliar names and issues, she voted for what she knew and decided there had to be a better way. A friend directed her to *Candidates' Answers*; she vowed to never again not know what was on a ballot and how she wanted to vote.

"Every election since then, I've read Candidates' Answers."

After a long career in health care, Jean retired and volunteers to work at polls during elections as a voter education ambassador, helping with student registration during bus pass distribution on the UW-Madison campus and during in-person absentee “early” voting. She has also been able to contribute to the funding of *Candidates’ Answers*. “Donating money is also a way of supporting League work that I can’t do myself, such as legal representation. I especially like contributing matching funds and hope they inspire others to join in funding League activities.”

“League members are a shining example of what I think citizenship is at its best—positive, active, creative, inclusive, non-partisan. They are dogged in pursuit of making democracy work.

“They include, share, and encourage me to be a better person and citizen. This is an organization where people work together, both within the organization and with others who share their goals.

“They are inclusive, not divisive in this increasingly polarized and exclusive world; non-partisan, in an increasingly partisan world.

“If I read a League letter or witness a League member offering public testimony, I can see myself learning to contribute to some of these activities. I feel like a member of the team.

“It is a good example of how things should work. It gives me hope—you can see how good it can be.”

Getting Out the Vote in Native America

Karen Gunderson, Photos by Ingrid Rothe

On Wednesday night, March 4, about 70 audience members gathered in the recently-renovated Grand Hall at Capitol Lakes in downtown Madison to learn about voting challenges for Native Americans.

This forum was also featured on [Madison365](#).

Our main speaker, Denise (Dee) Sweet, was articulate, engaging, and knowledgeable. She has been active in fighting for Native American rights for decades and briefly discussed several issues that are important to Native Americans, including obstacles to voting.

Some of the current issues that face Native Americans are the opioid epidemic, lack of access to good health care, the environment, high rates of poverty, lack of support for their veterans, and the murder and disappearance of thousands of young Native American women.

She provided a brief history of Native Americans, explaining that they had self-governing structures in place when the first Europeans landed in North America. Benjamin Franklin was so impressed with the governance model of the federation of Native American tribes on the east coast that he suggested ideas from that model for the Constitution of the United States.

Native Americans do not consider themselves an ethnic minority. They are political entities, sovereign nations whose status is defined in treaties with the United States.

The focus of her talk was on the barriers to voting for Native Americans. There are physical barriers, such as long distances to polling places and limited transportation options. In some states, tribal identification cards

are not considered sufficient proof of identity for voting. Many Native Americans do not have access to broadband internet, making it difficult for them to find voting information and to register online. Some Native Americans don't live where there are official street names and house numbers, leading to difficulties with proof of address when registering to vote. Also, some Native Americans find it difficult to vote when voting information and ballots are not in their native language.

Native Americans often don't trust that the candidates running for office understand the needs of Native people, leading to the perception that their vote does not matter.

Ms. Sweet referred to the work that Greta Thunberg is doing on climate change and pointed out that young Native Americans, like Autumn Peltier, are also doing important environmental work. Ms. Peltier is known internationally for her work on clean water, yet she receives much less attention and remains relatively unknown. Indeed, Native Americans have often taken the lead on environmental issues.

Ms. Sweet is passionate about getting young people engaged in the political process – registering people, knocking on doors, encouraging people to vote, and making sure they vote themselves. She finds it challenging, rewarding, and fun to work with these young people.

Our second speaker, Anjali Bhasin, Civic Engagement Director for Wisconsin Conservation Voices, briefly introduced us to what her organization is doing to encourage people of color, including Native Americans, to register and vote in Wisconsin. They work in collaboration with other organizations, including the Native Vote project. They have focused on improving voting access by supporting an increase in early voting locations and hours, by working with local clerks, and by encouraging tribes to mail voting registration information to their members. Wisconsin Conservation Voices' goal is to register 15,000 people of color as new voters for this year's elections.

Audience members had a wide range of questions, which our presenters addressed very capably. Topics included access to broadband, tribal IDs, civics training in high schools, and how League members can get involved in addressing some of these voting issues. Dee strongly encouraged us to collaborate with Native Americans in addressing these voting issues.

I encourage you to watch the video on our Facebook page if you missed this forum. The discussion was wide-ranging, and this article only touches on a few of the topics covered.



Dee Sweet



Anjali Bhasin

Update from our UW Interns

Marian Matthews

Last fall, we introduced you to our UW-Madison interns, Angela Maloney and Makayla Pesch. We caught up with Angela and Makayla recently to find out what they've been doing to promote voting on campus.

In February and March, Angela and Makayla helped to arrange twelve voter registration events across campus at locations such as the School of Education Building, Gordon Dining and Event Center, and College Library. Community volunteers partnered with Angela and Makayla at these events, registering over 60 students and providing many others with information about getting ready to vote.

Angela and Makayla have also focused on building partnerships with other student groups. The Associated Students of Madison (ASM) organized Voterpalooza, a large campus-wide voter outreach event, on March 6. Angela and Makayla provided training to ASM members who wanted to help with registration.

They also presented one of the education sessions for the Morgridge Center's *Badgers Volunteer* program. The topic for their presentation on March 10 was *The Student Vote at UW-Madison: How the Voting System Works and the Impact of the Student Vote*.

Angela and Makayla believe their greatest success has been laying the foundation with schools, departments, and libraries across campus to promote voting among students this fall. As a first effort this spring, Angela and Makayla connected with Chemistry Professor Randall Goldsmith, who proposed a week-long registration drive at three Department of Chemistry classroom locations. Angela and Makayla trained chemistry student volunteers, and Paul Lindquist, Voter Service Team Co-Chair, organized and recruited volunteers from the community. This was an important initial step to try to address the low turnout among STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students during the 2018 election.

When asked what they have learned about themselves during their time as LWVDC interns, Makayla said the experience reinforced her desire to convince students of the importance of voting to create change in society. Angela, whose goals have always included grassroots organizing, is more committed than ever to this career path. And both interns reported that the intern experience increased their confidence in their ability to communicate with other students, professors, and community members.

We want to thank Angela and Makayla for a job well-done as the first LWVDC UW-Madison interns!



UW Interns Angela Maloney (top) and Makayla Pesch (right)



Some Tonics for Democracy

Mary Anglim, program@lwvdanecounty.org

Before the COVID-19 emergency hit, I agreed to write an introduction to our April Community Seminar, a discussion of the history of Women's Rights and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The seminar was designed to demonstrate the "case study method" of teaching history and government, based on Professor David A. Moss's book, America, A Case Study.¹ Our event has now been postponed, and the related article about it will appear at a later date.

In the meantime, it is useful to review the author's reflections on the current state and the future of American democracy. How worried should we be that partisanship, inequality, and the power of money have substantially eroded Americans' confidence in democratic government? Has the nation become fragmented, distracted by narrow policy goals, and less invested in a shared commitment to "democratic processes, solutions, and objectives"? How much has changed in the five years or so since the book was completed?

Moss outlines four possible causes for the loss of faith in democracy, and offers suggestions to restore it:

- Election Day has become boring. Before secret ballots were mandated at the end of the 19th century, elections were raucous, carnivalesque, and often crooked. But they were fun and often generated some loud public debates. Voter turnout (men only, of course) declined after the reforms. Other causes for the decline, Moss notes, could be that the secret ballot coincided with new requirements that voters register in advance, in addition to the imposition of literacy tests, and woman suffrage (women's turnout was initially lower than men's).

Remedy: Make Election Day a public holiday and a day of celebration: "[C]reate an exciting, social environment around voting." The result could be a renewed appreciation for our democratic values, in which intense partisan activity is tempered by a common agreement that we are all in this together.

Today, we would be grateful for a boring and orderly election. The League and responsible government agencies are struggling with how to get information out, how to find safe polling places and adequate staffing, how to ensure timely provision and receipt of absentee ballots, and how to defeat the disinformation, fear, and distraction that could prevent people from voting. Celebrating Election Day seems like a small thing to mitigate these dangers, but perhaps we should redouble our efforts to plan for our Gala if only to remind ourselves how important and fragile a privilege voting is.

- Universal suffrage has been achieved. Only a few small groups are excluded from the voting booth, and consequently, there is much less incentive to work on broadening access to civil rights.

Remedy: A nation-wide or state-wide campaign for reform of burdensome Voter ID laws and subtler forms of voter suppression might capture the imagination of enough people to stimulate interest in democratic values. It has happened before, when Thomas Dorr led a movement for universal male (white) suffrage, as well as during the Woman Suffrage movement and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

¹ The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2017). The views described can be found in the book's Conclusion, pp. 729-757.

Such campaigns are all around us today. Moss's observation, written just a few years ago, is startling now, as we have become more conscious of "the new Jim Crow" (the mass incarceration of African-Americans), voter suppression among many sectors of the population, the malfunctions of the Electoral College, the virtual repeal of the Voting Rights Act, and the disenfranchisement of currently and formerly incarcerated people. Let us hope that COVID-19 doesn't let us forget these causes or fail to talk about them with our fellow citizens.

- The federal government has become by far the most powerful of the three levels of government (local, state, and federal), yet it remains the least responsive to popular opinion. Citizens find it difficult to have a voice in federal decision-making. While local and state offices have become more likely to be filled by direct election, federal offices are still almost always appointed, sometimes subject to Congressional approval. State constitutions often provide for binding referenda and relatively easy amendment; the Federal constitution has no popular referendum provision and a difficult amendment process.

Remedies: Among other ideas, Moss suggests the "creation of new channels of popular influence over federal policy," for example, an advisory initiative-and-referendum or citizen advisory system that could offer opinions to Congress and attract press coverage. They could even be charged with making recommendations on heated topics, like redistricting boundaries. Such institutions could give voice to rarely-heard opinions and encourage citizens to take a more focused interest in the federal government. They could also shake up the powerful interests by changing the rules of the game now and then. It's not clear, of course, if such institutions would work better than the current system, where citizens can file comments on proposed rules and other federal decisions. But today's comment process does not feel effective for individuals and groups who are not represented by wealthy or influential interests.

These are attractive proposals, but they would have to be energetically fought for and given enough time to show that they can work. A local Madison example, the four-year-old Ad Hoc Committee on Madison Police Department Policies and Procedures, has its detractors. Recently, the COVID-19 emergency has resulted in less access to local government than we are used to, as local authorities struggle to invent new ways of communicating with elected representatives and staff. If it's hard to include the public in local decisions, imagine how hard it would be to give citizens a realistic and credible voice in federal policy. The status quo, however, is unsatisfactory.

- Failure to nurture a culture of democracy. Moss suggests that civic education is a relatively new development, a product of the need to teach new immigrants an American civil religion rather than "bible-based morality." It took until the 1960's for United States history to be taught in the majority of high schools. Civics courses declined in the '70s and may have come back into favor in the '90s. However, many critics deplore the state of civic education in the 21st century, as illustrated by the poor showing of students on civic education exams, the low level of voter turnout, and the declining engagement of adults in community and political affairs.

Remedies: Moss believes that history is best taught by a combination of factual knowledge and experiential learning that invites "simulations of governmental processes and decisions, or in-class debates about current events." The case study method puts students in the shoes of people who had to make decisions about the issues of their day without knowing how things turned out. It teaches some minute details and some great—not always accurate—generalizations that guided our predecessors. In doing so, Moss hopes that his book will "[stimulate] vigorous debate about the nature of American democracy—how it has functioned and changed over time, why it has lasted so long, and what we can

do to sustain and strengthen it going forward. . . The essence of democratic governance always comes back to the people, their conception of how collective decisions ought to be made, and to what end.”

In the last year, the League of Women Voters of the United States and the LWV of Dane County both made “Making Democracy Work” a central theme of their educational programs. It is clear from Moss’s book and our more recent experiences that this is no dry and dusty subject. As much as we can, in this frightening and chaotic moment, we must notice where democracy works and do our best to support it, and where democratic values are disregarded and try to restore them.

Know Your Candidates on Madison City Channel

Aileen Nettleton, president@lwvdanecounty.org

Did you know that LWV of Dane County volunteers develop the questions and conduct the candidate interviews you can access on Madison City Channel? You can view interviews with four MMSD School Board candidates for seats 6 and 7 and Dane County Board candidates for seats 5 and 25, recorded in early March. All candidates for positions within the city of Madison were invited to participate, but some were unable to arrange their schedules for the interviews. The interviews are informative and well-done and have become more critical now that public forums can no longer be held for this election. We encourage you to take time to watch them.

Our thanks to *Know Your Candidates* coordinator, Louise Robbins, and interviewers Joy Cardin, Marilyn Townsend, and Louise Robbins. These interviews are one of our many projects for outreach to educate voters through Voter Services.

View *Know Your Candidates* at:
[Madison City Channel](#).

Cooperation between the City of Madison and LWV of Dane County to produce and broadcast *Know Your Candidates* began in the 1990s, we found when researching our 100-year history. At that time, the interviews broadcasted on the Madison City Cable.

Letter to the Editor – Absentee Voting

This letter, written by Kathleen Fullin on behalf of the Voting Service Steering Committee, was published in the Wisconsin State Journal on March 18, 2020.

Some voters may have concerns about mingling with other people at the polls on Election Day, April 7.

It is easy in Wisconsin to vote by mail. You do not need an excuse to vote absentee. Contact your municipal clerk to request an absentee ballot. You can find contact information for your municipal clerk at: MyVote.wi.gov

Elderly and disabled voters can request a permanent absentee ballot, which will be mailed for every election. No ID is required to make that request. They should return a ballot for each election, or they may be removed from the permanent absentee list.

Other voters who have not already submitted a copy of their voter photo ID to their municipal clerk need to send a copy when they request an absentee ballot for a specific election.

To be counted, absentee ballots must be received by the municipal clerk no later than Election Day.

Information about voting absentee, links to the request forms, and information about registering to vote is available on the website of the League of Women Voters of Dane County: www.lwvdanecounty.org.

Aileen Nettleton, Madison, president, League of Women Voters of Dane County

Letter in Support of Grant for Literacy Network

This letter was sent to the City of Madison Community Development Division on Mar. 9, 2020 in support of a grant for the Literacy Network

March 9, 2020

To: City of Madison Community Development Division
To Whom It May Concern:

The League of Women Voters of Dane County is excited to work alongside Literacy Network as they embark on their Civic Engagement for New Citizens project. The goal of this project is to increase community and civic engagement through two key initiatives: (1) coaching citizens who have recently passed the naturalization test to become volunteer citizenship tutors, and (2) assisting new citizens with voting requirements as they participate in their first elections. Through these strategies, residents who have completed the naturalization process will be able to pass on their knowledge to aspiring citizens who want to follow their lead.

In 2018 the League of Women Voters of Dane County, through its sister organization the Dane County Voter ID Coalition, began a formal collaboration with Literacy Network to provide civics modules in their citizenship classes. From the start, our volunteers were delighted to work with these groups and provide hands-on practice and instruction. Since the partnership began, module topics have ranged from practicing filling out a voter registration form, to learning how to find a polling place online, to understanding the identification needed to vote on Election Day. Literacy Network's instructors often begin our sessions with a brief round of introductions, where students say their name and why they have decided to pursue citizenship. In every group, the majority say they want to vote. These civics modules are a vital service for immigrants preparing for naturalization and it's thrilling to observe the excitement of the students as they practice and learn citizenship skills. As our volunteers have worked alongside the instructors, they have been impressed by the instructors' ability to accommodate different learning needs within the same classroom due to the students' range of English language proficiency. Literacy Network instructors will serve as wonderful models for the new citizenship tutors employed in the civic engagement project.

Immigrants are one of the few groups in the US who aren't able to vote for the politicians who represent their community in local and national forums. It is imperative that our community provide high-quality civics instruction so that foreign-born residents can become naturalized citizens and participate fully in civic life as voters and community volunteers. As the League celebrates its 100th anniversary, we're proud to support Literacy Network's application, as the goals of their project align so well with the purpose of our organization to promote informed and active participation of citizens in government at all levels.

Sincerely,

Aileen Nettleton, President
League of Women Voters of Dane County

Carole Blemker
Voter Education Ambassador
League of Women Voters of Dane County

Marian Matthews
Co-Chair, Voter Service Committee
League of Women Voters of Dane County

Carol Kiemel
Volunteer Teacher Assistant
League of Women Voters of Dane County

New Members

We welcome these new members who joined us in February. An [updated member directory](#) is available on our website. If you have forgotten the password, there is a link to contact the webmaster for help.

Kimberly Bannigan-Shappell
Maria Barlow
Pablo Baxter
Terry Boehner
Peter Buress
Lisa Cappelli
Elisabeth Condon
Lili Crane
Mary Detert
Marie Drumm

Kris Eiring
Marian Fisher
Anthony Gray
Patricia Gundlach
Lois Harr
Molly Harris
Jan Langdon
Laurie Liebhart
Cara Lee Mahany
Pamela Moe
Ruby Mumm Fillian

Sonja Olson
Rick Orton
Jane Peterson
Kathryn Price
Kathleen Remington
Catherine Rotter
Megan Severson
Andrew Stevens
Gretchen Treu
Abby Wampfler
Heidi Wegleitner

Contributions

Financial contributions beyond membership dues support our work. Thank you to these members (bold) and nonmember supporters who donated in February.

Valentines / Centennial Donations

Anonymous
Barbara Beale Arnold
Cathy Berndt
JoAnn Boushon
Paul Buckner
Linda Chhath
Christine Clements
Cheryl Daniels
Marian Fisher
Julia Gilden
Sally Gleason
Laura & Peter Gottlieb
Karen Gunderson
Sharon Hamilton

Lois Harr
Barbara Henke
Jean Jacobson
Andrea Kaminski
Janet Kane
Carol Kiemel
Ann Lacy
Julie Marca
Debby McNeil
Katie Mulligan
Aileen Nettleton
Eileen Newcomer
Barbara Park
Sylvia Poppelbaum

Sara Richards
Louise Robbins
Ellen Rosborough
Kathy Shurts
Rose Sime
Deborah Speckmann
Marilyn Stephen
Christy Stewart
Ruth Sybers
Janet Van Vleck
Tom & Sandi Vandervest
Thelma Wells
Nan & Jim Youngerman

General or Other Donations

Lili Crane
Joyce Johnston

Cara Lee Mahany

Brook Soltvedt in Memorial to
Susan Byrns

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.

Thank You to Volunteers

Thank you to the following members who volunteered in the office in February.

Judi Dilks
Barb Henke
Georgianna Hernandez

Kathy Krusiec
Merilyn Kupferberg
Paul Lindquist

Robin Proud
Mary Ellen Schmit
Marilyn Stephen

Unit Meetings Schedule

Unit meetings are currently on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. Please wait for updates from your unit leader or the unit coordinator, Pat Kippert, pkippert@yahoo.com.

Upcoming Events

May 13 LWVDC Annual Meeting, Details TBD
Jun. 12-13 LVWWI Annual Meeting in Appleton, WI
Jun. 25-28 LWVUS 2020 Convention in Washington, D.C.

Upcoming events are subject to change due to the rapidly evolving implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020 Elections

Apr. 7 Spring Election and Presidential Preference Primary
Aug. 11 Partisan Primary
Nov. 3 General Election

