



Bulletin

League of Women Voters® of Dane County, Inc.

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Office hours: Monday–Thursday, 11–3

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President's Message

Christine Clements, president@lwvdanecounty.org

While many experience the winter doldrums and lose some energy at this time of year, there's a lot going on in LWVDC these days. Our Voter Service Committee has recently received a "New Citizens" grant to help register recent citizens and encourage them to vote. Voter Service is also utilizing feedback from the last few years to reconceptualize apartment outreach, developing a stronger focus on relationships and community building.

Wednesday, March 16

6–8:30 p.m.

Virtual Workshop for LWVDC Members

"Depolarizing Within"

Please join us for this important workshop presented by Braver Angels, which will help members foster skills to help us to lessen the effects of polarization when we encounter them in political conversations. We'll learn how to be more aware of our own "inner polarizer" and how to be critical without demonizing, dismissing, or stereotyping large swaths of the population. And we'll learn strategies for intervening constructively in social conversation. We hope you will join us in our effort to restore civility in our polarized nation.

**This free workshop is for
LWVDC members only.**

Register for this event [on our website](#).

In the Program Advocacy area, the Social and Racial Equity Subcommittee recently completed its forum on eviction and housing insecurity and is gearing up for its April forum (and likely the last forum of the year) on low-income housing. Program Advocacy has also prepared its annual program survey to determine the interests of membership for next year's forums. Please watch for and complete the survey so that next year's League programs can best reflect the needs and interests of our members.

Our Finance Committee, with Board approval, has employed eCIO as an investment advisor to manage our growing trust fund. eCIO specializes in managing the funds of nonprofit organizations and is currently working with a LWVDC committee on asset allocations. The Finance Committee is also in the midst of budget discussions with board members and committees. The budget to be voted on by members at our June 2 Annual Member Meeting requires board approval by late March to meet the timelines established by our bylaws.

The Fund Development Committee is working on wrapping up the Valentine's Day Appeal, a celebration of our League's 102nd birthday (and it isn't too late to give!). They are also preparing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to hire a grant consultant to support and expand our development efforts and are in the early stages of planning our May Challenge, the final appeal of the fiscal year. The next year will bring a stronger focus on sustained giving.

Finally, the Nominations Committee is actively seeking members interested in taking on leadership roles in our Dane County League. A broad range of skills, interests, and experiences are sought for these leadership opportunities. I joined the board as a relatively new member but with career experiences that were relevant to League leadership needs. I urge all of you to consider involvement at this level. It is critical and rewarding work. Our hearts and minds are always turned to empowering voters and defending democracy, but a leadership infrastructure is necessary to sustain League efforts through our current challenges and well into the future.

Save the Date!

LWVDC Annual Meeting will be held on
Thursday, June 2, 2022

While we had very much hoped to host our Annual Meeting in person this year, we will instead ask you to join us online the evening of June 2.

We understand this may feel disappointing. Ongoing uncertainties around COVID-19 and the complexities of planning a hybrid format with both in-person and live streaming options ultimately led us to this difficult decision.

Many of you expressed looking forward to gathering again soon and several committees are hard at work considering how to make that happen safely later in the spring and summer.

Watch your email inboxes and mailboxes later this spring for more details about the event and annual meeting materials.

I've been thinking about "pivoting" these days, currently a popular term for shifting strategies to maintain effectiveness in an ever-changing environment. As I look at our League efforts today and over the past several years, I see an adaptable organization that has pivoted to address substantial membership growth, a pandemic, and many threats to our voting systems and democracy. Change can be difficult even when necessary, but as long as we are focused on our mission to be a vibrant, visible, respected advocate for sustaining our democratic society, LWVDC will continue to be a force for good in our community.

Sustaining Donations: The Most Effective Way to Give

Wendy Hathaway, wendy@lwvdanecounty.org

At the end of last year, we were excited to announce a new option for supporting the League financially. Anyone can now set up a sustaining donation through our [online giving form](#) and choose both the amount and the frequency (monthly, quarterly, or yearly).

Last month, I wrote about the importance of transparency in our fund development efforts. This month, I'm going to explain the benefits of sustaining donations—also called recurring giving or recurring donations—for both donors and for our organization.

Regular, reliable donations make it easier for League leadership to budget and plan activities and programs throughout the year. Defending democracy requires ongoing action, and recurring gifts help us stay nimble and ready to respond with voter education materials, advocacy actions, and more. Recurring donations also reduce administrative work involved with processing one-time gifts and redirect volunteer energy spent on fundraising appeals toward work with our community.

For donors, sustaining donations are easy, flexible, and often more affordable. By giving monthly, donors are making a difference by investing in a cause they care about and making a long-term impact. They have the freedom to choose an amount that works for their budget and support the League all year long. Plus, sustaining donations are convenient and hassle-free: no more writing a check and buying a stamp or re-entering payment details each time they make a gift online. And if something changes, donors can change or cancel the gift with a quick phone call or email to the office.

Ongoing support is an investment in the League and a great way to help LWVDC advocate for and protect the freedom to vote.

Valentine's Day Fundraising

**In February, we asked:
What do you love about the League of
Women Voters of Dane County?**

Here are just a few of the responses!

"I love that the LWVDC is tirelessly working for fair maps and to ensure that people are registered and voting!"

"LWVDC has tenacity in their hearts ... for freedom to vote without obstacles!"

"I love what you are doing to try to keep our country a democracy in troubling times!"

"You keep LWV strong and active in the community."

"I love feeling that my membership is helping to make a positive difference!"

**Thanks to the generous support of our members,
we raised \$2,993 in our Valentine's Day campaign.**

There's still time to give; donate online at
<https://www.lwvdanecounty.org/valentines-donation>
or mail a check to LWVDC at 720 Hill St, Ste 200
Madison, WI 53705-3539.

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.

Meet Kerry Helmer, Our New Office Administrator!

Where are you originally from/what brought you to Wisconsin? What do you like most about the Madison area so far?

I moved to Wisconsin from San Diego, CA, in 2014. I've spent most of my adult life in San Diego but also lived in Seattle for several years.

I moved to Madison because of someone I met on Facebook. We shared a couple of mutual Facebook friends and one day one of them posted a funny story prompting me to make a silly comment that he happened to see. He found my comment amusing enough to initiate a conversation and soon we were chatting online regularly, then video chats, and then a three-day first date in Reno, NV, to see a band we both liked. Then he flew me to Madison the following weekend. I was hooked! When he asked if I had any interest in moving to the Midwest, I thought, why not? There wasn't anything keeping me in San Diego and this person just might be worth it. (He is!)



Kerry Helmer

While on occasion I miss the palm trees and beaches of San Diego, walking through a prairie or the woods is every bit as therapeutic as a walk on the beach. Even if that walk sometimes requires a pair of snowshoes!

What do you do when you're not at work?

When I am not at work you might find me at Inner Fire Yoga teaching or practicing a Hot/Bikram-style class. If I'm not at yoga, I can be found in my home lab working on formulating products for the natural skincare line I am developing. And the rest of the time I am rearranging the furniture, working on one of the many home improvement projects/repairs on the house my partner and I recently bought, or shopping thrift stores, yard sales, and Facebook Marketplace for unique finds to upcycle.

What are you looking forward to in the next year?

I am looking forward to lots of home improvement projects, planting a garden, launching one or two products in my skincare line, learning to kayak, and most importantly, getting to know the members of the League of Women Voters, so I can best support the League's efforts to make democracy work.

Reminder: Updated Office Hours

Our office is open Monday through Thursday
from 11 a.m.–3 p.m.

Advocacy Opportunities for LWVDC Members

There are many ways to get involved and contribute on an individual level to an organized effort to keep our democracy strong. The LWVDC is committed to “making democracy work.” Engagement in the League’s advocacy movement is important, and we are looking for members to join in one of the following ways.

The Observers Corp is the “eyes and ears” of the League, monitoring a city or county organization about proceedings and actions taken. The coordinator of the Observer Corps is Laurie Egge; contact her at observercorpsteam@lwvdanecounty.org.

The Advocacy Corps responds to critical activities and events by involving members to take action in the community on a timely basis on election and judicial issues and campaign finance.

The Speakers Bureau is comprised of members who are well-versed about democratic issues in Dane County and Wisconsin and are willing to speak at community events.

We welcome more members to be engaged in our advocacy efforts. If you are interested in the Advocacy Corp or the Speakers Bureau, please contact Joan Schwarz, Advocacy Director, at advocacy@lwvdanecounty.org or call her at (608) 345-5973.

New Initiative to Pilot Neighborhood Team Concept For Voter Outreach

Barb Feeney, barb.feeney@lwvdanecounty.org

A new approach to voter outreach is under development by the Voter Service Steering Committee (VSSC) that will test a team-based approach to reaching voters in geographically bounded areas. The neighborhood initiative is being prompted by the rapid growth in multi-family housing buildings and the need to develop flexible and creative ways of reaching voters. At least two neighborhood teams will be set up as pilots in 2022. The nonpartisan reputation of the LWV is a significant benefit, taking volunteers places that other groups may not be able to go.

The pilot neighborhood teams will be set up based on ward lines and then ‘let loose’ to think of creative ways to reach voters within those boundaries. The teams will tap the local knowledge of groups and community leaders already working within the neighborhoods and collaborate with them to find multiple ways to meet up with voters and potential voters to encourage voter registration and, ultimately, voting. Other key collaborators will be LWVDC volunteers who are already matched with apartment buildings, senior facilities, and libraries within the neighborhood boundaries. The neighborhood teams will be self-directed while operating under the guidance of the VSSC.



A neighborhood team is being formed for the City of Fitchburg and will be co- led by Executive Director Wendy Hathaway and another League member who is yet to be named. For a possible second pilot, VSSC will be looking at low turnout wards in the City of Madison and choosing one area to test out the

new approach. Formation of teams in other areas is possible, as volunteers and team leaders emerge.

VSSC is looking for volunteers who have a passion for voter outreach and would enjoy working in a team setting. It is not necessary to be an expert in voter registration regulations. Chief qualifications include valuing the expertise and knowledge of others (team members and neighborhood leaders), the temperament to work in a collaborative team environment with a variety of personalities, and interest in thinking “outside the box.” *Does that describe you?*

**To learn more, please contact Barb Feeney at (608) 843-2272
or barb.feeney@lwvdanecounty.org.**

Forum Review: Three Speakers Address Causes and Consequences of Eviction

Nancy Scherr, nancyscherr@gmail.com

“Moving from Eviction to Housing Stability” was the first in a series of two forums addressing social and racial equity in housing. We were fortunate to hear speakers with experience in Dane County explain current local needs and services at the February 1 forum.

According to UW researcher Dr. Revel Sims, court-ordered rental evictions and non-renewal leases should not be looked at as a singular event. Rather, displacement from a distressed yet stable neighborhood occurs over time as new luxury condos, apartments, and businesses emerge to serve the affluent, educated as new residents. This development occurs within neighborhoods where more vulnerable groups—people of color, seniors, disabled and low-waged workers—often reside. One of the most vulnerable groups are single Black mothers who have experienced housing discrimination. With unexpected rising rents and late rent fees, long-time renters may increase debt. Eventually residents seek cheaper rent only to find an insufficient supply of affordable housing. Family adjustments have to be made and children lose friends with relocation and a new school.

Presenter Erica Lopez works for the Eviction Defense Clinic, based in the UW Law School’s Institute for Justice. She explained how the clinic offers free legal help, especially for those whose rent is 80% of their income. Often these clients are not aware of their rights or what rent assistance may be available. When faced with eviction, renters are given a five-day notice to pay back rent or to go to eviction court, which is not much time to find a lawyer and free legal service.

The last speaker, Robin Sereno, is the Executive Director of the Tenant Resource Center and works closely with the UW Eviction Defense Clinic. The Tenant Resource Center also partners with the nonprofits responsible for dispersing COVID-related CARE federal funds to renters and landlords for rental assistance. Urban Triage and the Community Action Council, teaming with the Tenant Resource Center, have enabled many renters to remain in their apartments who would otherwise face eviction.

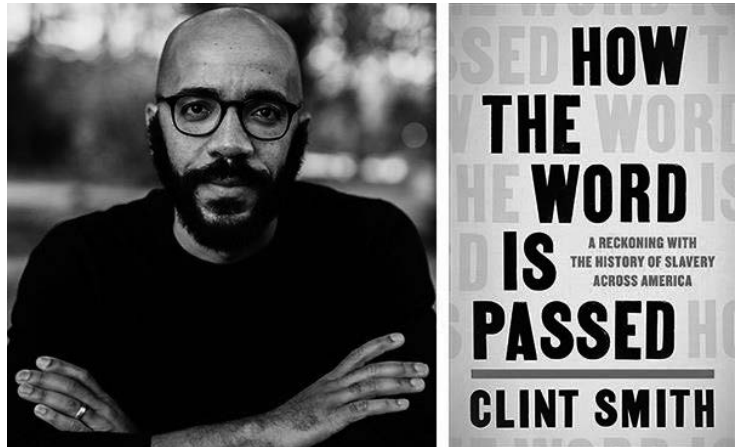
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January Book Discussion: “How the Word Is Passed”

Kelly Haslam, kellyhaslam@gmail.com

League members discussed “How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America,” by Clint Smith. Louise Robbins and Marjorie Schuett served as moderators for the discussions. If you are interested in joining a planned book discussion in the future, or if you have questions, please email books@lwvdanecounty.org.

This was a compelling, insightful, and powerful read. Smith takes the reader on a journey across various sites across the United States (and even abroad) that have connections to slavery. What was so riveting while also disconcerting was not just that Smith exposed these connections to slavery, but how he revealed disturbing (and often unacknowledged) facts or remnants that remain in plain sight.



The locations Smith visited included New Orleans (his birthplace), the Monticello plantation in Virginia, the Whitney plantation in Louisiana, the Angola Prison (Louisiana State Penitentiary), Blandford Cemetery in Virginia, Galveston Island in Texas, New York City, and Gorée Island in Senegal. He also shared poignant stories from his grandparents who expressed the impacts of slavery and racism in personal ways not directly known through history books.

Smith was very even-handed and fair in the presentation of his visited sites. He illustrated how some sites delivered full stories of history (and slavery) while others leaned on mythology and perpetuated harmful narratives. Even with sites that did better jobs with articulating history, he offered nuanced and discerning critiques. Smith also spent time talking about the importance of centering stories around enslaved persons rather than focusing on slaveowners or related structures (like plantation homes).

There were many moments where I learned new things while reading this book (not unlike the author himself). Some were stunning and unsettling. I was especially taken aback by the chapters written about the Angola prison and New York City. In addition, Smith very effectively demonstrated the continued resistance in the United States and abroad to examine slavery as evidenced through actual conversations he had with site staff or fellow visitors. These conversations really added an important flavor to the book.

I will remember this book and its message that we still have much to reckon with regarding slavery and its key role in our nation's history. It starts with the recognition that we have not been honest or forthcoming with all the sides of our country's story. We need to better inform ourselves and advocate for greater candor in how the word is passed.

The Electoral Count Modernization Act and the 2024 Presidential Election

Joan I. Schwarz, LWVDC Advocacy Chair (advocacy@lwvdanecounty.org)

In the 2020 presidential election, the Trump campaign exploited the ambiguity of the archaic Electoral Count Act of 1887 in seven battleground states, including Wisconsin. Robert F. Spindell, one of the commissioners on the Wisconsin Election Commission, was one of the fraudulent electors. In an ongoing challenge to the validity of the electors, Representatives Janel Brandtjen (R-Menomonee Falls) and Tim Ramthum (R-Campbellsport) spoke at a recent rally to recall the 10 electoral college votes cast by Wisconsin's legitimate electors.

In order to protect the 2024 presidential election, a bipartisan group of 12 lawmakers released a discussion draft of the Electoral Count Modernization Act (ECMA). While the ECMA is lengthy with many specific procedural changes, the most significant changes involve eliminating the loophole language of the 1887 Act, raising the threshold for Congress to consider objections to electors, and clarifying the role of the vice president on January 6 (the day Congress is required to be in session following the election to count the votes).

The ECMA eliminates the ambiguous language in the 1887 Act which states that where a "State has held an election for the purpose of choosing electors and has failed to make a choice on the day prescribed by law [December 14, the date the electors meet to vote], the electors may be appointed on a subsequent date in such manner as the legislature of such State may direct."

The ECMA seeks to eliminate the vague language of a failed election. It sets criteria that would permit a federal court to extend an election past Election Day **only** if a candidate for president or vice president demonstrates beyond a reasonable doubt in an action that a catastrophic event (i.e., a major disaster, act of terrorism, act of war, insurrection, power outage, arson or malicious destruction of property or cyber-attack) has occurred.

Second, the ECMA precludes state legislatures from directly appointing electors on any day other than Election Day and establishes December 20 (not December 14) as the deadline for a state's appointment of electors to allow time for recounts and litigation. Any slate of electors appointed in a manner that is contrary to the requirements of the Act is void and without legal effect. Third, the revision of the 1887 law raises the threshold for Congress to consider objections from "at least one Senator and one Member of the House of Representatives" to **one-third of the members in each chamber** to sign an objection before it can be heard and requires **three-fifths of the members of both chambers** to affirmatively vote to sustain an objection. Fourth, the ECMA clarifies the role of the vice president when presiding over the joint session in Congress, specifying that the vice president does **not** have the power to reject electors or resolve disputes over the list of electors, the validity of electors, or the validity of votes.

It is critical that we each push Congress to pass the ECMA to protect the 2024 presidential election.

What's the Deal with Populism?

Cami Spellman, cpspellman@wisc.edu

Populism is not a new political phenomenon. Platforms categorized as populist often utilize *us* versus *them* rhetoric to garner support and bolster claims of being a party for the people. It is interesting to note the anti-establishment nature of populism, despite its inherently participatory role in the

establishment as a party. In the past, platforms aligning with similar strategies were methods by the oligarchic leaders to consolidate nationalism. Thus, in its many occurrences, populism came to be known as a predecessor of inevitable authoritarianism and “democratic means toward undemocratic ends” (Seguin, 2016).

Left-wing populism, however, is a more unique phenomenon because of the promotion of egalitarianism in regard to welfare, minority, and immigration policy. Some examples of left-wing populism in modern politics include Bernie Sanders in the United States, Podemos in Spain, and Syriza in Greece. Core principles of these parties are simplified (perhaps overly so) as attempts to mitigate the effects of social, economic, and political stratification. Interestingly, many of these parties meet the qualifications of categorization of movement parties or “coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition” (Kitschelt, 2006). O’Connor (2017) also linked increasing economic inequality to a rise in populism because of the perceived “relative deprivation” that confirms *us* versus *them* rhetorical strategies.



Image from theconversation.com

As a so-called “zoomer,” or member of Generation Z, I have an inside perspective on the popularity of left-wing populism amongst young voters. The rise in support for left-wing populism platforms, such as that of Bernie, represents the dual sentiments of cynicism and optimism echoed by younger generations. Living in what has been deemed as unprecedented times and being handed off the problems neglected by generations before us is daunting. The populist strategy appeals to this cynicism because of its criticism of elites and the abstract concept of the institution. This ease in assigning culpability simplifies rampant inequalities and allows for younger generations to air their grievances. However, I choose to interpret the rise in populist platforms in a more positive light. Support for this rhetoric represents grit and willingness to tackle complex problems like impending climate disaster, the ethics of a super-rich class, and the implications of a global pandemic. The optimism that we, as a generation, are capable of a slow gravitation toward the aforementioned egalitarian principles touted by left-wing populism leaves me feeling hopeful.

I aim to not make assertions regarding the viability of populism as a political tactic or the durability of the left-wing model, but rather to highlight the larger implications of the phenomenon specifically in relation to young voters. I do believe, however, that the trajectory of left-wing populism will be something to watch as my generation assumes a greater position in civic society.

New Members

We welcome these new members who joined us in January 2022. 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.

Do you want to join the League?
[Sign up for a membership online.](#)

Serene Arena
Abigail Beneke
Sam Breidenbach
Bernadette Cassata

Jolene Esterline
Allison Gunn
Kelly Hauser
Laura Moon

Tami and Rick Severn
Lindsey Thomas

Contributions

Our work is supported by financial contributions beyond membership dues. Thank you to these supporters who donated in January 2022.

General Donations

Maureen Gerarden
Judith Lyons
Carol Carstensen
James Cory

Joan Schwarz
Kathleen Krusiec
Karen Gunderson
Sarah Crittenden

Rebecca Alwin
Katherine Peterson
Barbara Henke

Discussion Units

Many League members meet in one of five units to discuss the topic of each forum, using the resource/study materials provided by the program planners to guide the conversation. The discussion concludes with recommendations for further study or action. Units meet regularly at different times and locations, including via Zoom (all in-person meetings are in Madison unless otherwise noted). Find a unit meeting that's convenient for you and participate! Details below.

Currently, each discussion unit decides whether to meet virtually or in person. If you are planning to attend a meeting for the first time, please contact the unit leader ahead of time. [Consult the calendar](#) for the most up-to-date information about specific meetings. **Reminder:** No discussion units will be held during the months of December and January! Discussion Units will resume at the regular dates and times in February.

Unit: Prairie Ridge (*This group is open only to Prairie Ridge residents at this time.*)
Time: 3:30 p.m., third Monday of the month
Location: Perennial Learning Center, Oakwood Village Prairie Ridge, 5565 Tancho Dr.
Leaders: [Dorothy Wheeler](#) (608) 630-5163

Unit: West / Middleton
Time: 6:30 p.m., third Monday of the month
Location: Virtual, via Zoom
Leader: [Ralph Petersen](#) and [Helen Horn](#) (608) 231-1807 and [Gloria Meyer](#) (608) 288-8160

Unit: Central West**Time:** 12:45 p.m., third Tuesday of the month**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom**Leader:** Kathy Johnson (608) 238-1785**Unit: Northeast Side****Time:** 3:30 p.m., third Wednesday of the month**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom**Leaders:** Karen Gunderson (608) 729-4351**Unit: Downtown Dinner****Time:** 5:15 p.m., third Wednesday of the month**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom**Leader:** Ingrid Rothe (608) 556-3174

Upcoming Events

Mar. 9	LWVDC Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m.
Mar. 14	Voter Service Steering Committee, 10 a.m.
Mar. 15	Absentee ballots sent for spring election
Mar. 16	Virtual Members Workshop: Depolarizing from Within
Mar. 21	Membership Committee Meeting, 12 p.m.
Mar. 22	Early voting begins for spring election
Apr. 12	Lively Issues Forum on Low-Income Housing
June 2	LWVDC Annual Meeting (evening)

2022 Elections

Apr. 5	Spring Election
Aug. 9	Fall Partisan Primary
Nov. 8	Fall General election

