

***EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY***



**THE  
CAPITOL  
VOTER**

***NOVEMBER  
2021***

***IN THE NOVEMBER CAPITOL VOTER***

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Working for a More  
Perfect Union**
- **Redistricting Update**
- **Voter Services  
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Training on Michigan  
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## LWVLA CALENDAR

**November** is Native American Heritage Month, or as it is commonly referred to, American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month.

**Tuesday, December 14, 10 am**, Book Discussion Group via Zoom. Contact [Donna Mullins](#) for info or to participate.

**Tuesday, December 28, 2021**, MICRC Commissioners will choose final maps.

**Tuesday, January 11 at noon**, Presentation on *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Michigan Schools* via Zoom by Education Committee.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT Donna Mullins

This will be the last *Capitol Voter* of the year. Our editors Ellen Link and Vicki Potter deserve a holiday! You'll hear from us again in January.

The beginning of the year held such promise! We thought vaccinations would mean that life would return to normal and it sort of has...except the vaccinated can still get COVID (although they are unlikely to get a serious case). New variants have popped up which continue to vex public health officials. In Michigan, 54 percent of the population is vaccinated, and the virus is beginning to infect the young at previously unheard-of rates. Things are better. And things are worse.



What a year it has been! For the first time in our nation's history the losing candidate for President refused to concede and even inspired an attack on the Capital that resulted in five deaths. Congress is just beginning to investigate what happened on January 6 by what is just barely a bipartisan committee.

We are very proud of the Observer Corps that kicked off in March and got to work in April. We have learned so much about local government from sharing our observations. It's already connecting us to the community in ways we never imagined. Many members

worked on this effort but none more key than Val Lafferty. She is the keystone; her leadership made it happen.

The newly formed Michigan Independent Citizens Commission has been busy taking testimony from the people of Michigan and catching more than a little heat because few are entirely pleased with the maps they have drawn. Our latest [redistricting forum](#) covered a little background on the commission. Matt Grossman, who may be the most qualified person in Michigan, was our featured speaker. One member, Jacqueline Stewart, observed and reported on nearly every meeting held by the MICRC. Our efforts were informed by her amazing work and, here's the thing: she thought it would be helpful to do so she offered to do it. (I honestly would never have thought that I could ask someone to take that on.)

Voter suppression shenanigans abound all over the country and Michigan is not exempt. A petition drive that is a thinly veiled effort to get around the Governor's veto is currently underway. The League has a plan to educate the public on the current voting laws and regulations which are safe and voter friendly.

We just had local elections and, even though local government has a great impact on daily life, only 20 percent of eligible voters came out to vote. We have our work cut out for us in the coming election year. We'll have congressional elections and be voting for Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State and several other state level positions. The League needs to work creatively to bring out the vote. We need to shed a light on issues. We cannot rest. To help us organize the next year we have developed a survey to get an idea how you might like to participate in the League this coming year. Knowing what and how you would like to contribute will help us immensely as we plan for the future. Please take the time to complete this [survey](#).

We are busy making community connections, spreading our message as far as we can send it, doing what local Leagues do but with panache. And we are having fun working for a more perfect union

Together,  
**Donna**

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## REDISTRICTING IN MICHIGAN: WHERE IT STANDS

Donna Mullins



A good way to get an overview of what the Redistricting Commission has done over the last year is to watch our [October webinar](#). At that time, the Commission had prepared draft maps for public discussion. Matt Grossman, Director of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University, discussed the Institute's [report](#) which analyzes the draft maps.

Mapping is not easy to do but it is easy to criticize. That is why the original maps are drafts and why public hearings were held after the

maps were drawn. The independent citizens who entered the arena to draw the maps have gone beyond the mandates of the law to hear from the public. They have demonstrated their willingness to compromise over and over again. We want to address some of the latest controversies being reported in the news. (Most of the following has been lightly edited from member Jacqueline Stewart's reports.)

Recently there has been a lot of news about alleged lack of transparency by the MICRC. Jacqueline Stewart has observed and reported on nearly every meeting of the Commission. Their reports have been shared with our Community of Interest/Redistricting Committee and informed our two webinars and updates. The Commission took criticism in Detroit and Lansing for drawing districts that were 45% Black as opposed to 90% Black. The new districts were created, not as an attempt to crack the Black vote, but to unpack it in order to create MORE districts where African Americans would have an opportunity to elect their candidates of choice. Based on the last 10 years of election data, a 45% Black Voting Age population in the relevant precincts would be enough because of crossover and coalition voting. Some people did not understand this new method so they spoke against the 45% goal. "Keep Detroit together" became the slogan. But keeping Detroit packed creates districts where 95% of the vote goes to one candidate, creating a lot of wasted votes. (One measure of fairness is "lopsided margins": in the past, candidates have won in Detroit by enormous margins, resulting in more votes for Democrats but fewer seats overall.)

The commissioners were shaken by the passionate criticism and asked for legal guidance from their team of lawyers and other consultants to confirm that what they had done was based on rational use of the data and would withstand legal challenges. The memos referred to in a [Bridge article](#) are the documents produced by their team of consultants.

We are not convinced that it's fair to accuse the Commission with "ongoing secrecy" as the memos have nothing to do with a single line drawn on any of the collaborative maps. Those were all drawn in public, with accompanying justifications recorded. The League supports transparency in government that is as full as reasonably possible. It's not up to us to determine if this specific issue does not comply with the Open Meetings Act. Our positions would support looking at this seriously. However, assuming devious motivations on the part of a citizen's commission isn't something that would encourage well-meaning citizens to participate in government. It is possible to hold actions accountable without rancor. Our committee, which has followed this extremely difficult process, has been impressed by its transparency and efforts at compromise. We will continue to be involved and share our observations with you.

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## LATEST ACTIVITIES FROM VOTER SERVICES

### Joanne Winkelman, Director

#### **Souls to the Polls Drive-Through Trunk or Treat**

The "Souls to the Polls Drive-Through Trunk or Treat" event was a great success for the Lansing City Clerk's Office and participating organizations. The League of Women Voters of the Lansing Area gave out to children more than 400 pieces of candy in donated Michigan State Federal Credit Union trick-or-treat bags. The adults were given a LWVLA

pen and [Vote411.org](http://Vote411.org) bookmark and encouraged to go inside where they could register and vote early.

In addition, the City Clerk offered an opportunity for children to vote on their favorite Halloween characters and favorite candy on official looking ballots that they could put through the tabulator. The children's ballot results were available on the Lansing City Clerk's website at the end of the day. The "ballot proposal" on the children's ballot to limit the number of pieces of candy they could receive on Halloween went down in defeat. Thanks to Donna Mullins, Susan Chalgian and Bettie Menchik, who braved the drizzle and cool weather to make this a fun event.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Ward Neighborhood Resource Summit**

Donna Mullins and Joanne Winkelman attended the **3<sup>rd</sup> Ward Resource Summit** at the Woodcreek Montessori School on Thursday, November 4, from 6-8:00 p.m. The event was sponsored by the City of Lansing on behalf of Mayor Andy Schor. The Summit is an opportunity to connect neighborhood residents with city services, community organizations, and local businesses in their respective neighborhoods. There was a steady stream of residents throughout the evening. The LWVLA not only connected with the residents but also was able to network with many of the other resource organizations for future partnerships. Donna donated a lovely gift bag of goodies for the raffle.

***Future neighborhood Resource Summits are being planned, so if you wish to volunteer please contact [Joanne Winkelman](mailto:Joanne.Winkelman@lansingmi.gov) and I'll let you know when the next summit is announced.***

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## **VOTING RIGHTS, VOTING BILLS, AND PETITIONS: AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY TO ACT**

**Joanne Winkelman, Voter Service Director**

We know that many of you have been waiting to hear what League members can do to address efforts to restrict voting rights in Michigan. As part of the [Make Democracy Work Grant](#), local leagues have been asked to present a PowerPoint created by the LWVMI to League members, partner organizations, and the general public to educate people on Michigan's current voting laws. The purpose of the grant is to ensure the public has a better understanding of what currently exists in law as well as the changes that are being proposed through legislation and a petition initiative.



**MAKING  
DEMOCRACY WORK®**

In December (we're still working out the date and time), the LWVLA will present the material via Zoom for those who are interested in simply learning the information and for those who are might be willing to share the information with others. The webinar can be used to "train-the trainers." In other words, people who watch the webinar (live or taped) should be prepared to use the PowerPoint with local organizations, neighborhood groups, or family members who would like to better understand Michigan's current laws regarding voting and some of the changes that are proposed. Members who are interested in

educating the public should view the webinar and contact Joanne Winkelman, Voter Services Director, [Joanne Winkelman](#) for a copy of the PowerPoint and the “Know Your Rights” handout. You will also be sent a form to record the day, time, place and number of participants you contact so the LWVLA can fulfill the required metrics for the grant.

Further information will be sent via Constant Contact. Please consider being a presenter to share accurate information with Michigan voters. Any questions can be directed to [Joanne Winkelman](#).

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## OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE LEAGUE Donna Mullins

One thing that’s keeping us busy is a robust connection with the community built on the many connections we’ve made over the years. This helps fulfill our mission but it’s also a heck of a lot of fun.

LWVLA co-sponsored a reception for Dr. Isabel Montemayor, who was recently appointed Executive Director of the Hispanic Latino Commission of Michigan. Dr Montemayor is bookended by community leader Maria Starr von Core and Donna Mullins.



The League passed out candy, pens and voting information to about 400 people at a Trunk or Treat event sponsored by the Lansing City Clerk’s office. Here are the chilly but smiling Joanne Winkelman and Bettie Menchik. (Donna’s Tesla photo bombed the picture!)

As one thing leads to another, LWVLA was invited to the neighborhood gathering of Lansing's 3<sup>rd</sup> Precinct. These are held quarterly in different precincts. We look forward to having a table at each of them!



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### **OBSERVER CORPS** **Valery Lafferty, Chair**

Observer Corps members met in person for the monthly debrief on Wednesday, October 27 at the pavilion near Meridian Township Hall. Following are the members who attended and the governmental bodies each covers: Jill Messer (a new member), East Lansing City Council; Bob Miller, Clinton County Commission; Howard Pizzo, Grand Ledge School Board; Vicki Potter, Williamstown Township Board; and Joanne Winkelman, Eaton County Commission. Donna Mullins and Cele Friestater attended ex-officio. You can read a summary of their reports [here](#).

It was clear from the discussion that, as observers regularly follow a government body, they become attuned to the dynamic and rhythm of that body, understand the issues more, and gain acceptance for their presence. Please consider joining the LWVLA's Observer Corps!

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### **REMEMBERING JUDY CULHAM** **Donna Mullins**



Our League family lost a treasure when Judy Culham passed away this past weekend. Judy was not the face of the League, which is why she was the first member spotlighted in our newsletter. Judy and her husband Barry, worked tirelessly to keep our website up to date. That's a background job that when done right is taken for granted. Judy is not a person who should be taken for granted.

When she became ill this spring we developed temporary ways to keep the website updated because we had hope, even in the face of pancreatic cancer. We had hope because our affection toward Judy could not bear the thought that her life could end. Judy's involvement with the League started when she left GM and became office manager of the LWV Michigan in 2005. Part of those duties included administering the LWVMI website. Local League President Kathy Esselman wondered if Judy would be interested in running our website as well. Thus it began, and continued after Judy left her position with the State League.

Just a few weeks ago, Judy called me from the hospital to tell me that it was likely that she had no longer than 6-12 months to live. She was concerned more for her family and her very dear friend Pat Donath than for herself—so very much Judy. I thought she would be alive through the holidays, so we were planning to get a number of members together to video attempts at caroling in an effort to cheer her through the season. The night fell silent on November 19<sup>th</sup>.

I saw Judy as innocent, and by that I mean that she did not respond to the vicissitudes of life with cynicism. There was a faith that, beyond the unfathomable, there was hope. Judy's tender soul made ours the softer and she will be deeply missed. Her memory will inspire us to forgive and love one another as we serve a cause a bit larger than ourselves. May she sleep in heavenly peace.

Judy's husband Barry and daughters Cari and Jessica lovingly supported her always, but especially this last year. You can send condolences to her husband Barry at 12932 Beardslee Road, Perry MI 48872.

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## DECEMBER BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Donna Mullins

On Tuesday, December 14, the LWVLA book discussion group will meet via Zoom to talk about Lisa Napoli's book, *susan, linda, nina & cokie, The Extraordinary Story of the Founding Mothers of NPR*. Goodreads describes the book as "a group biography of four beloved women who fought sexism, covered decades of American news, and whose voices defined NPR." For more information or to receive the Zoom link and join the discussion, contact [Donna Mullins](#).

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## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN MICHIGAN SCHOOLS

Bettie Menchik, Education Committee Chair





Please mark your calendars for a timely program offered by the Education Committee on Tuesday, January 11 at noon on Zoom.

K-12 education has become greatly politicized with the events of the past two years. Michigan teachers struggle to make curricula more accurate and relevant for their students. Classroom practice is an attempt to recognize and respect the racial, social, and cultural differences among students. At the same time, the state legislature and parents may have differing views about change. Change can be uncomfortable; discomfort can be manipulated and inflamed.

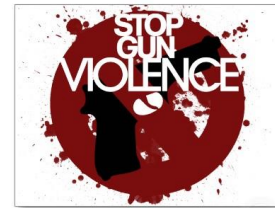
This presentation lowers the heat, offering a broader view of current challenges our schools are facing. Our speaker, Professor Dorinda Carter Andrews, chairs MSU's Department of Teacher Education and is also a professor of race, culture, and equity. Her research is broadly focused on racial justice and educational equity. She examines issues of racial justice in P-12 learning contexts and on college campuses, urban teacher preparation and identity development, and critical race praxis with K-12 educators. In short, this program promises to educate us all.

### **BREAKING NEWS!**

## **60 HANDGUNS STOLEN FROM DELTA TOWNSHIP GUN SHOP** **Martha Couretas, Public Health and Safety Committee Co-chair**

### **Does this theft matter?**

With more than 120 firearms in circulation for every 100 residents in the United States, our country is the most heavily armed democracy in the world. What difference can some stolen guns make? The repercussions of gun theft are significant. On average, [two guns are stolen every minute](#) of every day. Every illegal gun in the United States was once owned legally. Data from Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) shows that stolen weapons are most likely to be used in commission of violent crimes in the area from which they are stolen.



### **Does a heavily armed citizenry matter?**

[Gun death rates](#) per 100,000 people are: 10.6 in the United States; 2.1 in Canada; 2.7 in France; and 1.0 in Australia. Within the United States, those states with the strongest firearm regulations have the lowest rates of gun deaths and lowest rates of gun theft. One conclusion reached by *Reuters* staff is that Americans are not necessarily more violent than other cultures but their disputes are more likely to turn deadly due to the prevalence of guns. Also, suicides account for six of every 10 gun deaths and are largely due to the accessibility of guns. [The firearm policies of the U.S.](#) provide a clear and easy pathway to accessibility of firearms and are a clear threat to public safety.

### **How do stolen firearms pose a risk to public safety?**

According to [American Progress's report](#) on ATF data from 2012 to 2018, almost 15,000 guns that were recovered by police officers in connection with a criminal investigation were reported stolen or lost from gun stores. Thefts from individuals are estimated at 380,000 each year, two-thirds of those from the southern region of the United States. Common traits identify gun owners who are plagued by theft: those who own many guns, those who regularly carry outside the home, and those who do not practice safe storage practices. Most gun thefts are from guns stored in automobiles.

This website provides a state-by-state analysis of gun thefts and points out that 1) theft is one of the key ways in which guns are diverted from lawful sales. ATF describes burglaries of gun stores as "a significant source of firearms assuredly destined for criminal use in the immediate area of the theft"; and 2) stolen guns become untraceable. When a gun is lawfully purchased from a gun dealer, the paperwork identifies the first retail purchaser, which can lead to solving a violent crime.

### **What are the responsibilities of government, gun dealers and gun owners?**

ATF, with limited resources, and the National Shooting Sports Foundation offer guidance to firearm dealers that would reduce theft risk (cameras, alarms, locks, inventory checks). ATF does not have the authority to mandate any specific security measures. Nine states have enacted laws that would require dealers to implement security measures. Thefts from gun stores may be reduced by employing state-of-the-art security systems. Gun thefts vary from state to state, with the strength of state firearm laws a significant factor. Gun thefts were 24 times higher in Tennessee than in Massachusetts, a state with a similar population size. On average, states recovered 11 percent of stolen firearms.

Recommendations from police organizations to gun owners include: not storing guns in vehicles; keeping guns stored and locked in a gun safe, which prevents not only theft but also child access; and recording the make and serial number of all owned guns, which would help with an investigation should guns be stolen. Michigan does have [legislation](#) that requires reporting firearm theft.

### **Summary**

The United States has 4.4 percent of the world's population with 50 percent of the world's firearms in civilian hands. Gun owners and gun dealers have a citizen's responsibility to ensure that guns in their possession are not vulnerable to theft. We must also continue to work to ensure that we vote for gun-sense candidates, work to educate about gun violence prevention, and support legislation that mandates responsible gun ownership.

***The Public Health and Safety Committee/Gun Violence Prevention** group invites all LWVLA members to join those of us who are interested in educating and advocating for firearm safety. We carried on through the pandemic and Zoom months and are relieved to be able to get together in person on Saturday, January 15, 10:30 a.m. at the East Lansing Public Library. Join us! The community needs our work.*

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## **LEARNING THE LINGO OF CLIMATE CHANGE: RENEWABLE ENERGY CREDITS ("RECS")**

**Elaine Fischhoff, EAG Co-chair**



### **What is a Renewable Energy Credit — REC?**

A Renewable Energy Credit (REC) is produced when a renewable energy source generates one megaWatt hour (mWh) of electricity. For example, if an onshore solar power facility produces 5 mWh of electricity, that energy can be registered as 5 renewable energy credits or RECs. Each REC has a unique number and includes information about where it was generated, what type of renewable

source it came from, and the date it was generated. Also, the exchange of all RECs is tracked and recorded.

The utility that generates RECs has the option of offering its customers an opportunity to buy or get credit for one or more RECs or, instead, to sell the RECs to other utilities or companies. Some state laws designed to hasten the transition to renewable energy require that some percentage of the renewable energy to be generated or purchased by a utility or for a company to offset its greenhouse gas emissions must be acquired by buying RECs.

The Lansing Board of Water and Light offers RECs through its GreenWise Power Program. You can purchase 250 kWh blocks of energy for \$3.25, or 1.3 cents per kWh, which is added to your normal electric bill. If you subscribe to a number of blocks equal to or exceeding your annual usage, you can say you are powered with 100 percent renewable energy. Consumers Energy titles its similar arrangement as the Michigan Renewable Energy Credit Program. When you take part, your monthly energy use is matched with renewable energy credits from wind or solar energy generated right here in Michigan. You pay an additional \$0.014 per kWh or \$1.40 per 100 kWh block on your monthly bill to match your energy use with renewable energy credits. Consumers Energy works with Michigan wind and solar facilities to fulfill the renewable energy credits you have subscribed to.

### **How can you tell if your electricity came from a renewable source or not?**

Your utility's electricity usually comes from many different places and sources: some from renewable sources such as solar panels, hydroelectric, geothermal, biogas (usually methane generated by landfills), or wind turbines; some from burning climate-warming fossil fuels such as gasoline, oil, coal, natural gas, or propane; and some from radioactive fission in a nuclear plant. Click [here](#) for a look at BWL's and Consumers' energy profiles.

Most utilities generate some of the electricity provided to customers from their own assets—some combination of fossil-fueled plants, renewable sources, and nuclear plants. When the demand for electricity exceeds the amount produced by a utility's own assets, it will obtain additional electricity from the grid where the generating source is similarly unidentified but will likely come from some combination of fossil, renewable, or fusion sources. So there was, traditionally, no way to know exactly what energy source produced the electricity your utility is sending to your house until the Renewable Energy Credits, aka RECs, came along.

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**ONE THING**

This holiday season, instead of buying loved ones a *thing*, make a donation to an environmental organization in their name(s). The monthly newsletter or magazine they'll receive will provide a year-long gift that might change their life—and the world.

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**IT'S MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME!**  
**Camilla Davis, Membership Director**

It's time for members who joined the League of Women Voters before February 1, 2021, to renew their membership. If you haven't renewed yet, go to either the [LWVLA website](#) and pay electronically or [download the dues renewal form](#), write a check, and send it to the address on the form.

Your continuing support of the League of Women Voters is needed, especially since 2022 is a mid-term election year and the League is a trusted source of nonpartisan information. Please renew today! Questions? Contact Camilla at [cdavis.lwvmi@gmail.com](mailto:cdavis.lwvmi@gmail.com).

**WELCOME NEW MEMBER**  
Erin Middleton, Okemos

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**OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK**  
All committees would welcome new members. Contact the chairs for more information.

**VOTER SERVICE:** Contact [Joanne Winkelman](#).

**K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE:** Contact [Bettie Menchik](#).

**PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY/GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE:**  
Contact [Marty Couretas](#) or [Melinda Frame](#).

**ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP:** Contact [Ellen Link](#) or [Elaine Fischhoff](#).