

***EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY***



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

**FEBRUARY
2021**

LWVLA CALENDAR

Monday, February 15 - Deadline for recommendation for Program Planning Positions. See the Program article below for more information.

Tuesday, February 23, 7 pm via Zoom - General Membership Meeting to approve positions for State Convention. See the Program article below for more information.

Tuesday, March 9, 10 to 11:30 am via Zoom - LWVLA Book Discussion Group

March 14 through 20 - Sunshine Week. See the Program article below for more information.

Thursday, March 25, 7 pm via Zoom - General Membership Meeting for Lame Duck Study Consensus. See the Program article below for more information.

Tuesday, March 30 - Deadline for recommendations for the LWVMI Convention Awards.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



It's an off election year, with most communities only holding local elections in August this year. The League, however, never rests. Among other things, this is the year LWVMI holds its state convention. It will be, of course, held virtually on May 21-22. An advantage is that it will be affordable to attend and non-voting attendees will be welcome. There are four items we need to address before the convention.

Item #1 Recommendations for program planning

As you know, national, state and local Leagues take positions after study. Program planning is informed by those positions. If our local League believes that any current state position is not adequate to meet local advocacy needs, and there is no national position that may be used, then you may propose: (1) an update of a current position; (2) a new study; or (3) adoption of a new position by concurrence. Information on positions [can be found here](#). This is not about wordsmithing, it's about bringing an issue to light that isn't currently addressed. For example, one of our members wants to suggest that the League support the abolition of sales tax for menstrual hygiene products.

Please send any recommendations regarding positions to me by February 15. We will have a membership meeting on Tuesday, February 23 to vote on which recommendations to send to the convention.

Item #2 Recommendations for award recipients

The state convention always takes the opportunity to celebrate our hard working volunteers. Nominations come from League members. Find information about making nominations [here](#). Since I want any award to be a surprise, please let me know if there is a member you wish to nominate. The state awards are generally for individuals who have had a statewide impact. "Bell Ringer" awards are given for local League service. I would like your suggestions by the end of March as we want to spend some quality time on writing up the nominations. If you give me a name please also let me know why that person deserves the award.

Item #3 Response to state League questions on the Lame Duck Study

At the last state convention the League was asked to study legislation passed during the lame duck period—the time between an election and when the newly elected members take office. A committee studied this issue and now we have an opportunity to respond to that study. We plan to do that on March 25 at a 7 pm Zoom meeting at which all members are welcome. The study along with the questions will be sent to members via a Constant Contact message and you can preview the study packet [here](#). At the meeting we will go through a PowerPoint that summarizes the study (you don't need to read the packet unless you want to). After the presentation we will use consensus to respond to the questions submitted by the state.

Item #4 Sunshine Week kickoff for new Observer Corps

Our local League is developing an Observer Corps to monitor and share the activities of local jurisdictions. We will keep in mind League positions as we observe committees, boards and councils. The kickoff for this new activity will be held mid-March to coincide with Sunshine Week. There is so much more to share—but you'll have to wait for it!

There's more going on but this list seems exhausting enough for an "off year"! It's an exciting time to be a member of an organization that promises a more perfect union. Stay healthy, wash your hands and wear a mask. We've got work to do!

Together, *Donna*

MORE ON WHAT'S HAPPENING! Dorothy Engelman, Program VP

After reading Donna's message, you know there's a lot going on in the next six weeks! Please be involved in as much as possible; it's how you **make your voice heard** and **determine what's important moving forward**.

Next month's **Book Discussion** is on March 9 at 10 am via Zoom. We will continue discussing Barack Obama's *The Promised Land*. It's available as an audiobook or in hardcover. You might also enjoy [this interview](#) with the author about the book. Please let Donna know if you'd like to be added to the Book Discussion email list. All are welcome; you don't even need to read the book!

The **Centennial Suffrage Committee**, which celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the 19th amendment last year, is reconvening to celebrate the **101st Anniversary!** Last year's celebrations were curtailed by the pandemic. We plan to do something to observe **Equality Day** on August 26. If you'd like to be involved, please send an **email**. The more the merrier, and there's already a great core committee to work with! Thanks!



Sunshine and March in Michigan don't usually go together, but this year the LWVLA is celebrating **Sunshine Week** with speakers from WKAR and the *City Pulse*. The new Observer Corps will also be introduced. The week, March 14-20, is "a national initiative spearheaded by the **American Society of News Editors** to educate the public about the importance of **open government** and the dangers of excessive and unnecessary **secrecy**. The purpose of the week is to highlight the fact that 'government functions best when it operates in the open.'" In many states, however, legislatures exempt themselves from public-records laws, claiming "legislative immunity." Please watch your email for more specifics in early March.

A quick reminder to mark your calendar for 7 pm on March 25 for another **General Membership Meeting** to learn about the completed **LWVMI Lane Duck Study**. We'll come together as a League to reach consensus on this prior to its approval in May. You'll get links for the background information and the Zoom link in March.

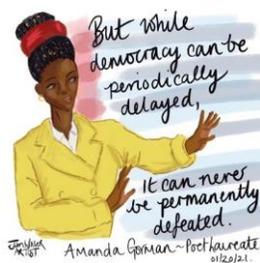
Being a member of the League of Women Voters is your opportunity to *Defend Democracy* and I hope we hear your voice! Please email, text or call me if you have questions.

Forward together....

Dorothy Engelman – VP, Programs
435.879.1558

"Be the change you wish to see in the world" ...Gandhi

BLACK HISTORY MONTH, VOTING DELAYED
Donna Mullins



America's All-star poet, Amanda Gorman, recited, "While democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated." I add, "Not while we're around!" However, in the spirit of Black History Month, I want to begin with some of the ways we periodically delayed democracy.

The struggle for women's suffrage took place over the decades that preceded the Civil War. It began when slavery was legal in many states and was tolerated by our Constitution. The soil that woman's suffrage grew from was contaminated by a poison that diminished the value of some people so that other people could acquire wealth. A visit to Detroit's Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History will demonstrate to you just how inhumane some people can be in order to make a buck. In a pre-union world workers were exploited and, most tragically, Black people were enslaved.

We are all inextricably entwined in the society we are raised in. Women's suffrage is no different. A willingness to let White women go first with a tacit promise that they would return for Blacks, Indians and Asians when the time was "right" was sadly acceptable a hundred years ago. (And the residue hasn't entirely been scrubbed away to this day.)

Women, including Black women, were given the vote 101 years ago. But White women were willing to turn a blind eye on how much more difficult it was for Black people to actually exercise their right to vote. It was 1957 before a voting rights act was passed and 1965 before it was explicitly against the law to deprive Black people of their right to vote. For this injustice to be addressed it was necessary to deal with it specifically: Black people were being kept from voting. A law had to be enacted that addressed that specific issue. Sound familiar? Black. Lives. Matter.

That is our past. The history of our country. The history of the movement that gave birth to the League of Women Voters. We have gotten closer to our ideals over the years. Still, our membership doesn't reflect our community. Our programs struggle to be representative of the community, even though I know there are often efforts to make it so. I'm confident we are going in the right direction but not sure when we will arrive.

Acknowledging our twisted past born of greed, hate and delusion is a form of atonement. Working actively toward a diverse, equitable and inclusive (DEI) organization is the way we prove our commitment. We can partner with diverse groups. We can invite friends with different backgrounds to try us out for a few months to see if LWVLA fits them. We can take a critical look at our programming to see if it is elitist or culturally biased. We can be open to our imperfections. We can listen with an open heart rather than defending our behavior with our "good intentions."

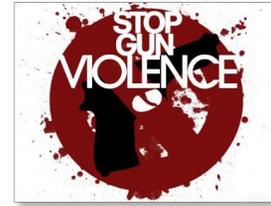
Do you have a suggestion on how this organization can become more reflective of our ideals? Let me know. Would you consider becoming a member of a DEI committee to make this dream a reality? Let me know.

GUNS AT THE MICHIGAN STATE CAPITOL: A 2021 UPDATE
Martha Couretas & Melinda Frame, Gun Violence Prevention Committee

BACKGROUND

January 6, 2021 - **Insurrection at the US Capitol and implications for Michigan**

We can no longer say that it is not possible for our state Capitol to be subject to a violent invasion by domestic terrorists. Michigan's security is much weaker than at the US Capitol, leaving our own vulnerable as evidenced in April of 2020. First came the "Unlock Michigan" protest, when more than 1,000 cars drove around the Michigan State Capitol and demonstrators carried weapons on the lawn. Two weeks later, April 30, the dissent escalated as armed protesters rushed the state Capitol, demanding entry into the House of Representatives Chamber. Some entered the Senate Chamber and watched from above as elected officials did their work. At least two of the protesters were among 14 people later charged in a failed plot to kidnap Governor Whitmer and bomb the state Capitol.



May through December, 2020 - **Legislation and the Michigan Capitol Commission**

Following the "Unlock Michigan" protest, legislation was introduced to expand gun-free zones to include all buildings owned or leased by the State of Michigan. The introduced legislation was assigned to committee but did not receive a hearing within the committee.

In May 2020, the Michigan Capitol Commission met and voted to create a study group concerning the prohibition of firearms within the state Capitol. On the same day, State Attorney General Dana Nessel issued an opinion saying the Michigan Capitol Commission has the authority to prohibit firearms in the Capitol without need of legislation.

2021 - COMMISSION and LEGISLATIVE ACTION

January 11, 2021 – **Limited ban on open carry**

The Michigan Capitol Commission voted unanimously to support a limited ban on open carry of firearms inside the state Capitol building. The ban does not apply to the Capitol grounds or to individuals with concealed carry permits. Until this recent action, Michigan was one of only three states that did not impose restrictions on firearms at its capitol.

January 26, 2021 - **Restrictive legislation is introduced**

Representatives Tyrone Carter, Julie Brixie and 34 other state representatives introduced HB 4023 and 4024 to ban all persons from carrying firearms in the Capitol, on Capitol grounds, and in the House and Senate office buildings. Senators Rosemary Bayer and Dayna Polehanki introduced SB 0034 and 0035 to ban possession of firearms on the premises of the State Capitol. More information about these legislative actions will be forthcoming from LWVLA and LWVMI.

Oppositional arguments to restrictive weapons prohibitions and to the House and Senate bills include Second Amendment rights, expense of personnel and equipment to regulate compliance, and lack of Capitol Commission authority. Yet Governor Whitmer's budget includes five million dollars to reduce the risk of gun violence at the Capitol.

Communications from constituents can be a powerful influence over legislators. Learn where your legislators stand! Communicate with them! Encourage legislation that corresponds to outcomes of public health and safety. May we never call out in hindsight, "How could we not have known?"

Find your senator [here](#) and your representative [here](#).

THANK YOU, DR. GLADYS BECKWITH!

The LWV of the Lansing Area wants to recognize Dr. Gladys Beckwith, one of our longstanding members who recently passed. Gladys was an extraordinary leader for women in Lansing and throughout the state. She and some colleagues created the Women's Studies Program and the Michigan Women's Studies Association in 1973. With her tenacious ability and amazing network, she raised \$250,000 to preserve and renovate Cooley Haze House in downtown Lansing, in which the Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame opened in 1987. She was passionately active with many interests that made all of us better advocates. [Read](#) the inspiring obituary of this remarkable, trailblazing League member.

ACTION ALERT

INGHAM COUNTY'S CLIMATE RESOLUTION - THE NEXT STEP **Elaine Fischhoff, Environmental Advocacy Group**

On July 28, 2020, the Ingham County Board of Commissioners passed a [Climate Emergency Resolution](#) prompted by the advocacy of the LWVLA Environmental Advocacy Group. The LWVLA, like the Michigan and US Leagues, had already passed our own Climate Emergency Resolution. Over six months have passed, however, without any promised actions being taken by Ingham County.

So now we've returned to the Ingham County Board to advocate for implementing the goals of the Resolution. And the Board has so far responded by assigning the issue to the Human Services Committee headed by Commissioner Todd Tennis, joined by Commissioner Chris Trubac and assisted by the Deputy Controller Jared Cypher. That committee will be meeting virtually on February 22 with the climate and sustainability issue on the [agenda](#). Trubac and Cypher have already expressed their interest in and willingness to find options for action.

One motivation for the county's interest is the repeated flooding of the Ingham County Fairgrounds. Flooding as a result of [extreme precipitation events](#) is one of the climate change impacts assaulting the Capital Area as well as other parts of Michigan, the US, and the rest of the world.

YOU CAN HELP. Here's the [link to an Action Alert](#) sample email that YOU can use to let the Ingham County Commissioners know that you support the County in acting on its Emergency Resolution. If you wish to address actions beyond those addressed in the sample email, you may do so in a separate message that does not mention your membership in the League. (Note: Any public comment mentioning your membership in the League at the Committee meeting, using the link above, must be restricted to the language of the sample email.) Help us, either way. Together we can create a more sustainable local environment for our children and our communities.

ONE THING

Get in the habit of allowing more time for driving errands so you're not in a hurry. Reducing your speed by 5 to 10 mph can improve fuel economy by 7%-14%.
([US Dept. of Energy](#))

REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Judith Andre

The Education Committee has been studying cyber schools – fully online charter schools. We presented two webinars on the topic, the first describing what such teaching is like (“What Are Online Schools?” January 13), the second presenting research on how well it works—not very well, in fact (“Online Learning: What Does Research Tell us?” February 10). Both are (or will be soon) available on the League’s [YouTube channel](#).



We plan to continue studying the issue, with a visit (probably virtual) to another cyber school this spring. But we also have several new members, bringing us new energy and possibly redirecting our focus; we would welcome still more.

Join us! Just contact [Judy](#) or [Bettie](#).

VOTER SERVICE

Joanne Winkelman, Voter Service Director



What's ahead for Voter Services? The LWVUS and LWVMI are both working with local Leagues to reflect on last year's election to determine the needs for voter education and registration. The election cycle begins again in May so the LWVLA will be ramping up activities to ensure all voters are registered and informed. In off-presidential election years voter participation diminishes, so one goal this year is to ensure that voters understand how important local elections are and how local officials affect your everyday life.

The pandemic kept us from face-to-face educational opportunities in schools and with other community organizations and limited voter registration drives. Hopefully, the vaccine and other mitigating actions will once again allow us to safely interact.

A tentative schedule of activities will be developed (all pandemic-dependent) and League members will be asked to volunteer. Please keep your eye on your email for more information on how to volunteer for a variety of activities. If you want to be added to the Voter Services list, need to update your email, or have suggestions for voter service activities, please contact [Joanne Winkelman](#).

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Camilla Davis, Membership Director

Since we can't gather for in-person events, LWVLA hosted a Zoom meeting for new members on Wednesday, January 27 at 7 pm. All those who joined in 2020 were invited. President Donna Mullins welcomed the new members, who then introduced themselves and shared why they joined the League.



Participants learned about opportunities for involvement in LWVLA committees: Voter Service from Joanne Winkelman, Preventing Gun Violence from Melinda Frame, Environmental Advocacy from Ellen Link, and Education from Melinda Frame and Joanne Winkelman. Dorothy Engelman highlighted some programs that LWVLA has offered during the past year. Using the chat box, advocacy group leaders shared contact information with participants, which resulted in new members connecting with these groups.

Thanks to all those who participated to make this an enjoyable and informative evening.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Sara Bartles, Lansing
Robert Root-Bernstein, East Lansing
Anna Colby, East Lansing
Kim Dana, East Lansing
Gary Lundquist, Laingsburg

OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

All committees are meeting virtually using Zoom. Contact the chair for more information.

VOTER SERVICE: Contact Joanne Winkelman jwinkelmanlwvla@gmail.com.

K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE: Contact Judy Andre judith.arlene59@gmail.com or Bettie Menchik menchikb@msu.edu.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE: Contact Marty Couretas couretam@comcast.net or Melinda Frame framem@msu.edu.

ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP: Contact Ellen Link elink767@gmail.com.