

**EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE  
CAPITOL  
VOTER**

**MAY  
2025**

**IN THE MAY CAPITOL VOTER**

- President: *Unite and Rise 8.5, Protecting Democracy*
- Programs Aplenty
- Camilla Davis: Just the Ticket!
- Development Fundraising
- New Member Zoom
- Volunteers Needed for Candidate Forums
- June Book Discussion
- Education Committee: The Impacts of School Vouchers
- Save the World--Plant a Tree
- One Thing

**LWVLA CALENDAR**

**Saturday, June 14 -- Kick Out the Clowns / NO KINGS protest at the State Capitol**

**Wednesday, June 18** – League Luncheon, 11:30 am at MSUFCU, “The Refugee Issue Comes Home,” program on local refugees, featuring speakers from the Refugee Development Center and Samaritas. Stay tuned.

**Thursday, June 19 --** Book Discussion Group, 10 am at Hooked.

*See articles below for more information.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kathy Ruby Petroni



What a busy month it has been! On May 13 we held our 84<sup>th</sup> annual meeting and dinner of the LWV Lansing Area. Over one-quarter of our membership attended. Professor Matt Grossman, who serves as the Director of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at MSU, gave a very engaging and informative talk about the current political environment in our country. During the business meeting, we voted on the budget for 2025-26 as well as the slate of officers and some bylaw changes. We also had a silent auction that raised \$220. We are grateful to Elaine Fischhoff for taking the lead on organizing the event.

Over the third weekend in May, eight League board members and two LWVLA members attended the LWVMI Biennial Convention in Grand Rapids as voting delegates. We learned a great deal about league advocacy and did some valuable networking with delegates from across the state. We handed out 200 of our pro-democracy buttons and they were a hit! At the convention, four of our league members—Barb Bidigare, Ellen Link, Donna Mullins, and Joanne Winkelman—were recognized for their outstanding commitment to our mission with Belle Ringer Awards. During the meeting, a position backed by the Lansing League in support of Medically Assisted Aid in Dying (MAID) was adopted by the LWVMI. We will be hosting the next Biennial LWVMI Convention in East Lansing in 2027.

On May 20 we had an outstanding “Lunch and Learn,” organized by our Education Committee, with over 50 in attendance, most of them members. The speaker, Dr. Josh Cowen, is a professor of education policy at MSU and, for the 2024-25 academic year, a Senior Fellow at the Education Law Center. He has been studying vouchers and other school choice programs since 2005. His talk focused on voucher research that has consistently demonstrated the harmful effects of vouchers.

Each year the Board prepares an annual report on our activities. Traditionally, it is prepared in time for the annual meeting, where it has been distributed. This year, we prepared the report in time for the meeting but decided to distribute it more widely via the Capitol Voter. You can find the report [HERE](#). In the future, we will prepare the report at the end of the fiscal year, so it will include all activities for each fiscal year.

Most importantly, the struggle to protect our democracy is ongoing. LWVUS has launched a powerful new initiative, [Unite and Rise 8.5](#), which aims to engage and mobilize 8.5 million voters to fight the anti-democratic actions of the current administration. The Lansing Area League will be actively doing our part in this initiative. A good example is our pro-democracy billboard campaign. Our two billboards will stay up at least through July. I encourage you to help us turn up the heat on elected officials.

Personally, I look forward to participating in the June 14 ["Kick Out the Clowns / NO KINGS"](#) protest at the State Capitol, not as a representative of the League but as a

concerned citizen. I hope to see many of you there.

Democracy must win,

**Kathy**

*Kathy and her husband, Tom, enjoying the Kentucky Derby.*



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## **PROGRAMS APLENTY AND THEN, A SHORT REST**

Lisa Moore and Donna Mullins, Program Committee Co-chairs

May we talk about May? It began on April 29 (close enough), with a [Zoom meeting](#) to prepare people to attend Dr. Josh Cowen's May 20 luncheon presentation on "The Privatization of Public Education." The Education Committee put together two informative forums to alert us to this encroaching problem.

The rest of the month was swamped, including LWVLA's annual meeting and LWVMI's biannual convention (and the book Discussion Group and the monthly board meeting). May's calendar was red, white and blue. June will calm down a bit. A second training session on Extremism, originally planned for June 5, has had to be rescheduled (the new date will be communicated by email). This one, which will be presented by the [CARE](#) staff from American University and the Southern Poverty Law Center, will deal with more down-to-earth issues than the first, presenting practical ways to prevent extremism. More information to come soon!

On June 18 we will have a luncheon focusing on how local refugees and the agencies serving them are faring in these difficult times. Featuring speakers from the Refugee Development Center and Samaritas, we will turn the headlines into stories happening right in our own community. Non-members will be invited to this luncheon. Watch your email for registration information.

Though our committee will do a little planning in July, we will also be enjoying the summer and maybe even *napping*. But we have some great ideas buzzing around for autumn, both educational and social, so stay tuned.

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## **CAMILLA DAVIS: JUST THE TICKET!**



When Camilla Davis unequivocally let us know that she would retire from the board to enjoy a retirement that has been spent in service to the League as well as other local organizations, it seemed like the League should recognize all she has done for LWVLA and LWVMI. It took nine months to hatch this plot!

We stealthily learned a bit more about Camilla's work in the League. Thinking it might be a great landing place for her when she retired from teaching, Camilla joined the Kalamazoo League in 2003. Not long after she joined, she

became secretary and somehow stumbled into serving on the Nominating Committee for LWVMI for about four years. Camilla was the individual most responsible for beginning the use of Constant Contact for group messaging.

Camilla and her husband Gary moved to DeWitt after their retirement. She immediately became active in the Lansing Area League. As Publicity Director in 2013, Camilla developed the Capitol Voter into an excellent newsletter. Her talents were clear right away, which led to Camilla and Beth Moore becoming co-presidents from 2014-2018. The chapter grew larger, as did the number of people who were active board members.

As busy as she was, Camilla continued her work at the state level. She served as a mentor to the newly formed Jackson League. In 2019 she began a term as the state Membership Director. She also served as the chair of the state Nominating Committee. For one year, while performing *two* time-consuming duties for the state, Camilla pitched in for our local League as Membership Chair.

Many of us lean on Camilla and none of us has ever felt that we might be imposing. That was especially true this year as the local Leagues transitioned to using a centralized platform for members to join or renew. As Membership Chair, Camilla became the expert on ChapterSpot, attended LWVUS meetings about the transition, helped us get the roster in shape for the move, and took care of every problem that occurred during the rollout. When there were problems, Camilla sent in a “ticket” to national to get it fixed—the inspiration for giving her the “Just the Ticket Award.” As noted in the certificate of appreciation awarded to her at the annual meeting, Camilla sent in more tickets “than Dalmatians have spots”!

We know that Camilla will still be there for our League. (She’s chairing the Nominating Committee next year.) We also know that she and Gary will enjoy traveling together and spending time with their family. For all of us at LWVLA, Camilla has been just the ticket.

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## DEVELOPMENT

Dorothy Engelman, Chair

So Many Thank-YOUs!

The League is grateful to all who made our Book Days at Schuler’s Books a success with a whopping \$260.68 being raised. Thank you for supporting the LWVLA and this local business.

Our thanks go out as well to [\*That New Place\*](#), [\*EagleMonk Brewery & Pub\*](#), and local artists Lucy Synk, Lisa Wilson, Dorothy Engelman and Susan Smith for items donated for the LWVLA Annual Meeting Silent Auction. The bidding was active, with the funds benefiting the LWVLA General Fund. Congratulations to those with winning bids.

A Development Committee is being formed to guide the League in fundraising and outreach projects. Please [contact me](#) if you'd like to add your talents to this committee.

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# MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Camilla Davis, Membership Director

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Diane Aitken, East Lansing  
Rosemary Adams, Holt  
Jean Friend, East Lansing  
Sierra Harns, Lansing (correction)  
Iris Lagrou, East Lansing

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## NEW MEMBER ZOOM

New LWVLA members were invited to participate in an April 29 Zoom meeting covering the basics of League membership and the many opportunities to get involved in League activities. Board members also joined the Zoom and shared information about their responsibilities and other aspects of League involvement.

The Zoom is designed for new members but is also good for members who want to review how and why the League operates as it does. The Zoom recording can be accessed [here](#).

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## VOTER SERVICES

Joanne Winkelman, Chair

### Candidate Forums - Help Needed!

The LWVLA will be holding two live and two Zoom forums in June. The live forums will be held, tentatively, on **June 24** for City of Lansing mayoral candidates and **June 26** for the candidates running for the Lansing City Council. Candidates for Lansing Wards 2 and 4 will be recorded and distributed to the Lansing community.

If you are interested in assisting with any or all of the forums as a moderator, timekeeper, greeter, question sorter or usher, please let me know. If you are new and want to shadow someone in any of these roles, please [email me](#). Let me know if you are interested in helping with the live or Zoom forum and which role (e.g., timekeeper) you would like. I will have the exact dates shortly; we are just waiting for the city to approve our application for the Foster Center.

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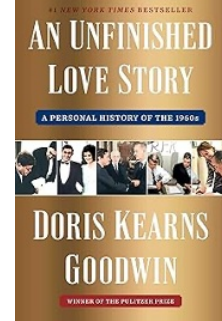
## BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Donna Mullins

June's book is *An Unfinished Love Story: A Personal History of the 1960s* by Doris Kearns Goodwin. The book began as a project to write a history of the 1960s culled from over 300 boxes of letters, diaries, documents and memorabilia saved by Dick Goodwin. It's a little like learning history from a well-educated fly on the wall. It's personal and yet objective. If you didn't live through those years, you will learn what it was like to have been there. If you did, you will find it both familiar and

illuminating.

Bill Gate's review states, "Doris's personal experiences, and her retelling of Dick's, make the history feel more real. She's not just reporting on what happened—she can tell you what it was like to be there, using intimate personal details to bring the era to life in a way I hadn't seen before."



Beyond the history is the relationship between Doris and Dick—loving, with a few differences of opinion and temperament. The book is 480 pages, longer than most of our choices but as great to listen to as to read. (I'm doing both and getting a lot of chores done as I am riveted by the audio book.)

We'll meet June 19, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month, at 10 am. This month we are meeting at Hooked because we love it when the students are gone! (Parking is available!) To be placed on the book group list contact [Donna Mullins](#). You'll get a couple of emails a month that will include links to videos to assist those who just didn't have time to read the book but want to join the discussion.

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## EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Bettie Landauer-Menchik, Chair

The Education Committee hosted two programs this month. The first, offered on Zoom, was an introduction to privatizing public education. It covered the different types of funding strategies adopted by the 34 states which now allow public dollars to be used for private schools. In case you missed it, it is available at this [website](#) ("Video Links" at bottom of home page) or via [this url](#).

Our second program, attended by 50 League members, featured Professor Josh Cowen. Josh is nationally recognized for his research on the impact of using public funds for private education. In his talk, he highlighted the choices that are being made by the current administration—paying for private education while not paying for housing vouchers for low income families, Headstart, Medicaid or environmental protections. When asked what's to be done, he recommended:

- Investments from pre-K to adulthood
- Funding public schools works!
- Teacher pipeline, pre- and in-service training
- Supports like high-dose tutoring
- Universal Pre-K and universal school meals
- HVAC investments
- CTE and college access
- Literacy and STEM improvements
- Don't be afraid of workplace language
- Better school community communication

Josh's book is entitled *The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold Vouchers*. A [video link](#) to Josh's presentation will soon be available. Following are additional resources on using taxpayer dollars for private education.

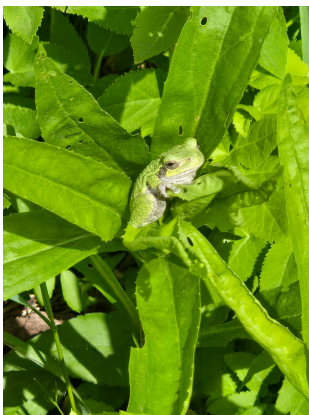
- [\*The ABCs of Education Choice\*, 2025,](#)
- *A Financial Analysis of Public Funds Invested via ESAs, Vouchers, and Tax Scholarship, FY2024-25* by Marguerite Roza, Maggie Cicco, and Ann Connolly-Sporing, [Edunomics Lab](#), Georgetown University,
- [“Arizona’s universal education savings account program has become a handout to wealthy”](#)
- [“In a State with School Vouchers for All, Low-Income Families Aren’t Choosing to Use Them”](#)
- [Grand Canyon Institute](#), “*Cost of the Universal ESA Vouchers, ESA Voucher Program FY2023: Where the Money Went*”
- “Another GOP attempt to sneak school vouchers into Michigan — this time, it may work.” [Opinion by Josh Cowen](#), March 10, 2025
- “How Can States Make School Voucher Systems More Accountable, Accessible, and Transparent?”, Joshua Cowen and Ryan Nowack, [National Education Policy Center](#).

The Education Committee will continue to analyze how upcoming legislation, both state and federal, will impact our schools, children and parents. We meet on Zoom most months and would love new members on our committee. To join us, email [Bettie Menchik](#).

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## SAVE THE WORLD--PLANT A TREE

Betty Seagull, EAG Member



Our earth has been greatly damaged by the actions of humans. To cite just a few examples: 35% of the world’s wetlands have disappeared in the last 50 years; we have lost more than 3 billion birds in the last 50 years; 40% of insect species are in decline (with a drop in abundance of butterflies in the US by 22% between 2000-2020); and a third of amphibian species are already extinct or threatened with extinction. And we have created climate change by burning fossil fuels and polluted our air and water.

Changes in public policy would do the most good to reverse this march toward doom, but in the absence of that there are individual actions we can take that, collectively, can make a real difference in providing habitat for disappearing creatures and saving us from despair. Looking at trees lowers stress and improves one’s mood. In short, trees make us happy. As Doug Tallamy notes in [Natures’ Best Hope](#): “In the past, we have asked one thing of our gardens: that they be pretty. Now they have to:

1. support life,
2. sequester carbon,
3. feed pollinators and
4. manage water.”

Planting one tree, as long as it is a tree native to the region, does all of these things. But which tree we choose matters. Keystone plants are the most beneficial. The National

Wildlife Federation has a list of [keystone species for our ecoregion](#), the Eastern Temperate Forest. Top for our region are *Quercus* (oaks), *Prunus* (plum, cherry) and *Betula* (birch).

Why does it matter if you choose a locally native tree from this group? Because insects co-evolved with plants in such a way that native trees support the greatest amount of bird food—caterpillars! Caterpillars are the reason birds fly here from southern climes in spring. It's not for the weather; it's for the food: 96% of land birds rear their young on insects. They need lots of nutrient-rich caterpillars (think inchworms) to feed their growing nestlings. And please don't poison them with insecticides!

Get a small tree and plant it yourself. It will cost less and have less transplant shock than a bigger tree. If you choose the right tree for your conditions (light and moisture), it will grow well and be big in no time. Protect it from hungry deer with a cage when it is small. Mulch the soil around it to conserve moisture and plant a shade garden under it—native plants like ferns, violets and wild ginger.

A tree will reward you with shade, cool the air, take CO<sub>2</sub> out of the air and give you oxygen in return, slow down the raindrops to reduce soil runoff, and give wild creatures a home. If you want a smaller flowering tree, choose chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), pagoda dogwood (*Swida/Cornus alternifolia*) or native pussy willow (*Salix discolor*).

**“The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago; the next best time is today.” ~Chinese proverb**

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## ONE THING

At long last, vacation season! Have you given any thought to “[Slow Travel](#)”? Consider: One passenger's share of emissions on a 2,500-mile flight melts [32 square feet](#) of Arctic summer sea ice. Now ponder: How well do you really know and appreciate Michigan, the U.S. and/or Canada?

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## OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

All committees would welcome new members. Contact the chairs for more information.

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

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

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



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