

**EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE  
CAPITOL  
VOTER**

**JANUARY  
2023**

**IN THE JANUARY CAPITOL VOTER**

- President: Staying Vigilant
- Community Action Network Volunteers Needed
- Board Vacancies
- Book Discussion on Inequality and Democracy
- Thinking About Threats to Our Democracy
- "Green Burials" and "Sexy Soil" Programs
- PHS Gathering Info on Gun Sense Legislation
- Time to Renew Your Membership
- One Thing: Become a Flexitarian

**LWVLA CALENDAR**

**Tuesday, January 24, 7-8:30 pm.** "Green Burials" program at the Haslett High School Viking Room. See EAG article below.

**Tuesday, February 14, 10 am.** Book Discussion Group reviews *The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It*, by Robert B. Reich. See below for more info and Zoom link.

**February 15, 7 pm.** "Soil is Sexy" program at the Fenner Nature Center, with Naturalist, Laura Rogers. See EAG article below for info.

**Monday, February 27.** LWVLA lunch with speaker Dr. Christian Houle, Department of Political Science, MSU. See "Thinking About Threats to Our Democracy" below for info.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Donna Mullins

It's a nonelection year, so it's time to relax! Not a chance! Patriots never rest. The last month's news gives us plenty of motivation to maintain our vigilance! We have plans to bring back at least monthly opportunities to meet face to face. Whenever possible, programs will be offered both in person and streamed on Zoom. Jacqueline Stewart is moving so fast in creating programs that she's a blur. Among other things, we have to update information on all of our venues because so many changes have occurred over the last three years. Of course, the League's advocacy groups are coming through as always with ideas for luncheons and evening programs. Be sure to read more about it in today's Voter.



The Spartan League is just as exciting now as it was when created last year. It turns out that a nonpartisan student organization is not an easy sell. But we seem to be gaining, with the relentless, creative efforts of President Hannah Richardson and the support of MSUVote and the Center for Community Engagement. LWVLA has a mentorship relationship with the Spartan LWV. Later this month, students will join with Judy Karandjeff, Bob Kleine, Jacqueline Stewart and myself to discuss democracy at risk, initially focusing on civility and inequality. Students really appreciate getting to know experienced professionals in an informal setting where they can hear stories, one adult to another. If you would like to share with students in the future, [let me know](#).

The Nominating Committee will be looking to replace some board members this year. Be SURE to read the want ad for positions in the newsletter. If you think you might be interested in becoming more active with the League, please let us know. It makes it so much easier to call people if we know they are interested in serving in a larger capacity. Positions on the board can be shared; so, two people could share the duties of any position (Including president). Saying that you might consider becoming more active is not a commitment, it just tells us that you may be interested. There are task positions that don't demand attending monthly board meetings. (Although, since we have an action agenda, our discussions are often stimulating!)

Proposal 2 easily passed in November (thank you!). Once the new rules come out, we'll be working hand in hand with local clerks to ensure that the public is aware of how voting in Michigan will change. We will definitely be calling on members to help spread the information around town. If you are comfortable speaking to groups, we'll be looking for volunteers later this year.

The LWVMI convention is being held at the Kellogg Center May 19-21. That makes us the host League! Hosts plan extracurricular events, ushering, and such. We will be leading a breakout session on Campus Units since the concept originated with us. [Contact me](#) if you are interested in participating in a LWVLA hosting committee. We should begin

meeting in the next couple of weeks.

We will also be using the “lull” of a slow year to get our organization ready to roll for the 2024 presidential election. There is updating to do on venues, caterers and publicity connections. It would be helpful to have a deeper bench for our audio/video needs. We have a never-ending to-do list. If your employer offers you paid time for volunteering, you may want to consider using it for League activities. It is indeed true that many hands make light work. We’re always at our best when we do things

Together,  
*Donna*

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## COMMUNITY ACTION VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Ingham County Health Department is looking for people interested in serving with the Community Action Network for Strong Start | Healthy Start, Community Action Team for the Fetal Infant Mortality Review, and the Community Advisory Board for Nurse Family Partnerships. The first meeting will be held via Zoom on February 3 at 10:30 am. Contact [Aurora Seelye](#) to receive a link to the meeting or for more information.

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## LWVLA BOARD HAS VACANCIES TO FILL

LWVLA’s bylaws stipulate we hold elections for the board every year. Positions are generally held for two years, and not all positions come up in the same year. In addition, sometimes positions are vacant because the person holding the position had to step back for personal reasons. The Nominating Committee creates a slate of candidates and presents this to the membership at the General Meeting, in April this year.

The list of positions which are either vacant or for which the terms will expire is as follows:

VP Programs

VP Observer Corps

Treasurer: for this position the person should have a basic understanding of revenues, expenses, assets, liabilities and budgets; the ability to use Excel spreadsheets and create reports; and an appreciation of procedures that ensure the League's finances are handled in the most effective, orderly and accurate manner (internal control).

Development/Fund Raising

Webmaster

Parliamentarian

Membership

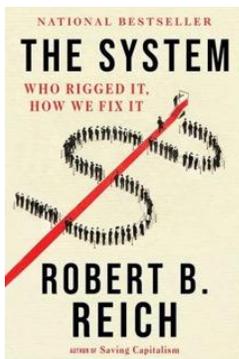
Voter Editor

If you are interested in volunteering for any of these positions or would like to nominate someone, please contact [Jacqueline Stewart](#).

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## BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Donna Mullins



To help kick off a year of delving into how inequality threatens democracy, we are reading ***The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It*** by Robert B. Reich (224pp). From the Amazon description: “There is a mounting sense that our political-economic system is no longer working, but what is the core problem and how do we remedy it? With the characteristic clarity and passion that have made him a central civil voice, bestselling author of *Saving Capitalism* and *The Common Good* Robert B. Reich shows how wealth and power have combined to install an oligarchy and undermine democracy. Reich

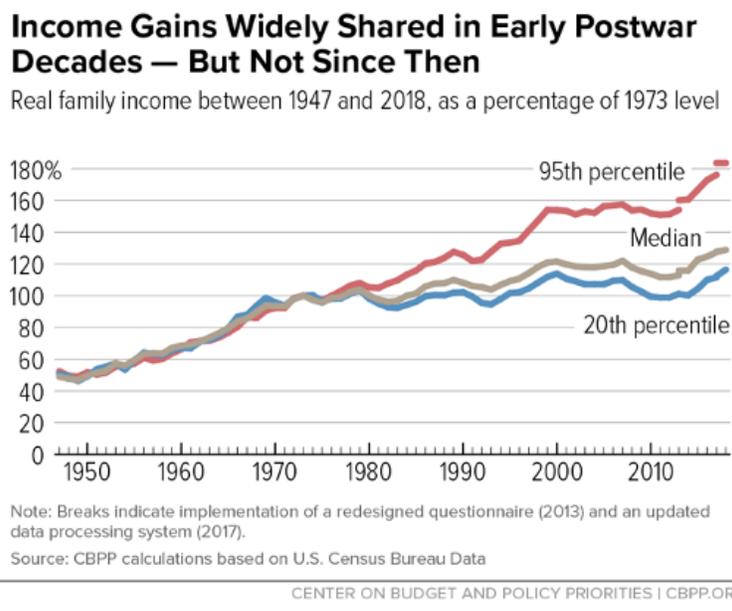
*exposes the myths of meritocracy, national competitiveness, corporate social responsibility, the ‘free market,’ and the political ‘center,’ all of which are used by those at the top to divert attention from their takeover of the system and to justify their accumulation of even more wealth and power. In demystifying the current system, Reich reveals where power actually lies and how it is wielded, and invites us to reclaim power and remake the system for all.”*

The Book Discussion Group will meet via [Zoom](#) at 10-11:30 am, Tuesday, February 14.

## THINKING ABOUT THREATS TO OUR DEMOCRACY

Jacqueline Stewart, Interim V.P. for Programs

I am concerned about our democracy. Before the midterm elections many people voiced that same concern. We know that voter suppression and misinformation are both threats to our democracy and, as a League, we addressed both. LWVMI and local Leagues worked hard to pass Proposal 2, giving voter access constitutional protection, and LWVLA organized a lunch lecture by Dr. Dustin Carnahan on the subject of Mis-/Dis-information. With the defeat of several election deniers, the concern seems to have died down. So why am I still concerned? In a word: inequality. I am concerned that the level of inequality we are seeing is dangerous for our democracy.



The graph above shows how incomes grew at about the same rate for all economic levels

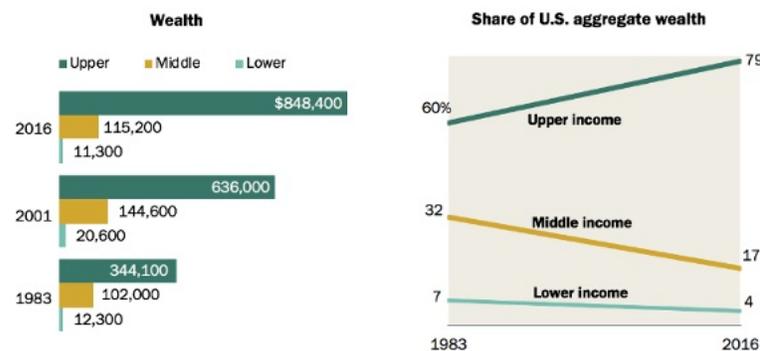
of society from 1950 – 1973. Since then, the top 5% income earners have seen increases in their income every year (relative to whatever they earned in 1973), while the middle- and lower-income groups have seen their incomes stagnate. This means more opportunities for some families and disappointment for the rest.

(Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Report on Poverty and Inequality, Jan 13, 2020.)

The graph below shows that accumulated wealth is concentrated in few hands and that the gap between them and the rest of us is growing. Those in the upper income-level group have accumulated 79% of all the wealth in USA, while those in middle- and lower-income groups have seen their share of accumulated wealth fall, despite representing many more people. This translates into loss of hope for the next generation for a great many families. (Pew Research Center, Jan 9, 2020)

**The gaps in wealth between upper-income and middle- and lower-income families are rising, and the share held by middle-income families is falling**

*Median family wealth, in 2018 dollars, and share of U.S. aggregate family wealth, by income tier*



Note: Families are assigned to income tiers based on their size-adjusted income.  
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Survey of Consumer Finances.  
\*Most Americans Say There Is Too Much Economic Inequality in the U.S., but Fewer Than Half Call It a Top Priority\*

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

Even during the pandemic the rich got richer. “According to the [Bloomberg Billionaires Index](#), 131 billionaires more than doubled their net worth during the pandemic. The world’s richest person, Louis Vuitton chief [Bernard Arnault](#), was worth \$159 billion on December 27, 2022, up by around \$60 billion compared with early 2020. Elon Musk, the planet’s second-wealthiest man, boasted a \$139 billion fortune — it was less than \$50 billion before the pandemic.” (Al Jazeera, Dec 20, 2022)

So, is this inequality simply part and parcel of capitalism? Do we just have to live with it? I am doing fine, so can I turn a benign eye on those who are not and just raise my charitable donations? I suspect that this level of inequality is a toxin in our social fabric. It consigns large numbers of families to the disappointment of not believing their children can prosper. I suspect it causes inchoate anger that bursts out in political violence. But I could be wrong. You might completely disagree with my interpretation of the data. Or you might agree and have further insights.

Either way, **please mark your calendar for a lunch at the Community Room of MSUCU on Farm Lane, noon on Feb 27<sup>th</sup>, when Dr. Christian Houle, Department of Political Science, Michigan State University, will bring his expertise to bear on the issue. More details about registration will follow closer to the date.**

# GET DOWN WITH THE ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY GROUP

Laura Rogers, EAG Member

## “GREEN BURIALS”

***Don't miss this!*** Join the Environmental Advocacy Group and their speaker, Gabriele Mayer, on **Tuesday, Jan. 24**, 7-8:30 p.m. in the Haslett High School (5450 Marsh Rd.) Viking Room to learn about “**Green Burials**”—environmentally friendly ways to address the last event of one's life. Wanda Bloomquist will discuss green burial options in Williamston.

Since 2015, cremation has surpassed traditional burials in the U.S. Traditional burials usually require that the body be embalmed, and cemeteries require cement or metal vaults that surround the casket, none of which is good for the environment. Although cremations have a smaller impact on the environment, the process still requires considerable energy usage. But cremation and traditional burials are not the only choices available to consumers, so additional options such as human composting, natural burial and “Aquamation” (cremation using water) are gaining in popularity.

All our programs are offered for both members and the public. The presentation will also be available on Zoom; register [here](#). For more information, contact [Elaine Fischhoff](#).

## “SOIL IS SEXY”

When you hear the word “soil”, what comes to mind? Perhaps “sexy” isn't at the top of the list, but if you long to uncover the exciting, alluring world that humbly resides just below our feet, join us for this fun, informative, family-friendly workshop!

**Laura Rogers**, Naturalist at the Fenner Nature Center, will dig right in with a fun, interactive introduction about the “soil recipe”: what are the ingredients, and how long does it take to create? How can we nurture the soil that nurtures us? Are there things we should be avoiding so we don't harm it? We'll get our hands a bit dirty and conduct an experiment to reveal the layers of your yard's soil, then finish with a fascinating discussion on the importance of healthy soil to our food supply, our fellow flora and fauna, and the environment itself.

Remember, if possible, to bring in a sample (about 2 cups) of your property's soil, preferably in a clear container (Mason jars are recommended). And dress to get “soil”-y!

When and where, you ask? Wednesday, **February 15, 7:00 pm at the Fenner Nature Center, [2020 E. Mt. Hope, Lansing](#)**. This program will be jointly sponsored by Wild Ones Red Cedar Chapter and the Greater Lansing League of Women Voters Environmental Advocacy Group.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Linda Melarogni, Committee Member

Gun violence prevention work has been frustrating and discouraging. The Giffords Law Center has given Michigan a ‘C’

grade on our gun sense legislation. We have seen mass shootings in the state. It was clear that nothing would change until Congress and our legislature change.



The Public Health and Safety Committee spent the fall phone-banking, registering new voters, and serving as election officials for the primary and general elections. The results, flipping the State House and Senate, mean there is a new set of priorities going forward. Governor Whitmer has identified gun sense legislation as one of her top priorities. We are hopeful that we will make progress in passing legislation that makes Michigan a safer place for its citizens.

The Public Health and Safety Committee will meet with Rep. Julie Brixie to gather information and to request that she share her information about gun sense legislation with the League membership at a later date. We hope to report back to the membership and keep you apprised of progress on gun sense legislation. *The New York Times* said that for the first time in years Congress is more afraid of voters than they are of the NRA. We will keep League members up to date on what you can do to help.

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## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

### Camilla Davis, Membership Chair

#### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Ramona Kime, East Lansing  
Elisabeth Taggart, Charlotte

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## DID YOU FORGET TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP?



If you joined LWVLA before January 31, 2022, it's time to renew your membership. Those who have not renewed by January 31, 2023, will be dropped from LWVLA's membership list and will not receive communications from LWVLA, LWVMI, or LWVUS. To avoid interruption in communication, please send your renewal ASAP.

The total annual dues for 2023 are \$65.00. \$32.00 of that goes to LWV-US, \$23.00 to LWV-MI, and \$10.00 stays with LWV-LA. If another member lives in the same household, the dues for the household are \$97.50. There is no cost for a student to join our local League. If you choose to pay by credit card, please be aware that they charge a fee that comes out of the \$10 that goes to our local League. If you can afford it, please consider adding a convenience "tip." We suggest adding \$2.50 to a single membership (for a total of \$67.50) and \$3 to a family membership (for a total of \$100.50). Thank you!

There are two ways to renew your membership or join:

1. Pay your dues online using your credit card or PayPal account on the [Lansing Area website](#): Scroll down to "How Do I Join?" Choose the type of membership from the drop-down menu; supply a second name if you choose household. Click the "Pay Now" button below.

2. You can [download this form](#), fill it out, and send a check for the correct amount to:  
League of Women Voters - Lansing Area, P.O. Box 971, East Lansing, MI 48826.

If you have questions about paying your dues, contact [Camilla](#).

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## ONE THING

[Become a Flexitarian](#)—eat more vegetables and less meat (you can use it as a condiment). Pastured animals improve the soil, but most retail meat is commercially raised—and factory farms harm both the soil and the animals.

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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](#).

**PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE:** Contact [Martha Couretas](#) or [Melinda Frame](#).

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

League of Women Voters Lansing Area | PO Box 971, East Lansing, MI 48826

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