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Sunshine Corner Update

We've decided to move reports of our Observer Corps to our website, so they can both be published in a timelier manner and organized to make it easier to follow a particular body. Soon recent reports will be posted here: <u>https://www.lwv-rma.org/be_informed.php</u>

There are many other bodies we'd like to have covered by the Observer Corps. If you're curious about your town government's doings, or a city or county body not currently covered, please contact Elaine Schmidt (<u>eschmidt88e@gmail.com</u>) about joining the Observer Corps. These days many meetings are held via Zoom, so you can work from the comfort of your own home.



President's Corner

Suburban School Board Elections to be featured on Vote411

It takes work to be a well-informed voter in school district elections, and local elections can be hard to research, since the media usually don't cover them well. This probably accounts for how low the turnout generally is for local elections. Last year the LWV-RMA offered Vote411 info for the Gates-Chili district, and this year we are working with some partners to expand that to other suburban districts.

School board elections are conducted on a nonpartisan basis. Party labels are often relied upon by voters to shortcut the research process, but for school boards, you must research each individual. Last year there was more than one school district which hit the local news when rowdy, disruptive, highly polarized crowds disrupted school board meetings, and nationwide we read that some of those disrupters were running for and sometimes winning seats on school boards. The stakes have never been higher for us to be informed voters.

I don't have any kids in school and I've moved from the district where I once did, so I was starting from zero as a school board voter last year. I turned to my school district website to learn about the nine candidates for three seats, and all I was able to learn was where people work. I couldn't tell which candidates' motivation might be to abolish anti-racist curricula or purge the school library of books I think are great, or to cut the budget to eliminate services like nurses, psychologists and librarians. There was no information that let me feel I knew who I wanted to vote for.

The LWV has a great tool we can bring to bear in such information- deficient situations in the form of Vote411. It's not a cure-all. It's a lot of work to chase down the candidates and it can be hard to get them to reply. Judy Weinstein and I have been working together with the Greater Rochester Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), a longtime partner of ours on city school board elections, and ROC the Future to make sure we are ready to bring local school board elections to Vote411 in 2023.

Last month we participated in a half-day meeting where interested parents learned about the role of school boards from a presentation by the Executive Director of the Monroe County School Boards Association. Then we worked in small groups to articulate what we want to know from candidates, and we began drafting questions. It was a great process and listening to each other was very illuminating. PLTI and ROC the Future are connected to parent groups throughout Monroe County, and we have hopes of being able to be on top of things and connect with school board candidates quickly enough to be useful in next year's cycle.

If you are interested in helping us assemble rosters of candidates complete with email addresses, formulate questions, or follow up to see that candidates respond, now is a terrific time to get involved. It's a great step to empowering voters in Monroe County. Even just working in your own School Board Elections Matter VOTE 411 villebet

town would be extremely helpful. Contact Judy Weinstein at vote411@lwv-rma.org if you'd like to be involved.

Barbara Grosh, LWV-RMA President president@lwv-rma.org



LWV-RMA January Membership Meeting on Advocacy Priorities & Program

SATURDAY JANUARY 14, 10:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. & 1 P.M. - 2 P.M. VIA ZOOM

The LWV does advocacy at national, state and local levels. At each level, the LWV begins by studying an issue carefully, considering all sides, and then preparing a statement of principles that the LWV uses to guide advocacy work. The policy statements are considered every two years at the national and state level in alternating years. This year, we will review state positions to give our input.

REVIEW OF LWVNYS PROGRAM & PRIORITIES

The LWVNYS asks us each year to rank our top priorities for state-level advocacy work. In conventions years, we can also recommend that current positions be dropped or updated and/or new ones adopted. Each local league is asked to hold a membership meeting in January to evaluate state positions and give feedback to the state board which will then present proposals for program changes to the state convention, to be held June 2-4.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE THE LWV TO WORK ON STATEWIDE?

There is one proposed suggestion coming from a member of our League for the state to take up for study: adoption of an all-parties primary process, possibly to be combined with ranked-choice voting.

Several states have adopted this and apparently it has reduced the selection of polarized candidates at the primaries. It's also a way of enfranchising more voters in jurisdictions where the primary selection of one party may be the only candidate on the ballot at the general election. What do you think of this idea? Come and discuss. Should we forward it for state consideration? *What other ideas do you have?*

REVIEW OF PROPOSED LWV-RMA POLICY ON LAND USE

In 2021, we did a deep review of our local positions. The members voted to drop some positions because they were now part of LWVNYS or LWVUS positions or are now obsolete. The members also voted to update some positions, including our policy on planning and zoning. Last year a committee of LWV-RMA members studied that. The committee rewrote the policy and forwarded it to the Board of Directors, which approved it.

The next step is for the membership to have a chance to discuss it. If those assembled at the January membership meeting approve it, it will be voted on by the full membership at the annual meeting in May or June. You can read the proposed position on page 4.

THE NEW LWV-RMA WEBSITE

We'll also use the membership meeting for a quick walk-through of the new website. We'll show where you can find various things, what you can see and do if you log in, and how to log in.

Register here: https://bit.ly/LWVJanmtg

Our Own YouTube Channel

The League of Women Voters of the Rochester Metropolitan Area proudly announces that we have our own YouTube channel where you can view our past forums.



To view our past forums go to <u>https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjC9NCupn9AhZpH2k83m5_g</u>.

If you wish to share news or recognize the activities of other members please send the information to micketeditor@gmail.com



Upcoming Webinar: Mental Health Crisis Response: How Has It Changed Since Daniel Prude?

MONDAY, JANUARY 23, 2023, 6:30PM

PANEL MEMBERS:

- Alia Henton-Williams, Manager of Crisis Intervention Services, City of Rochester
- A member of the Person In Crisis Team (PIC)
- Mary Lupien, Vice President of Rochester City Council
- Andy Carey, co-founder of MC Collaborative, which provides mental health support services



Lisa Kuhmann, Outreach and Engagement Team Lead, Person-Centered Housing Options

About half of calls to 911 involve mental health crises that don't involve a crime or a weapon. Police officers are not well trained to handle such calls, and sending them has been catastrophic on more than one occasion. In Rochester, the Person In Crisis Team was created to handle such episodes in the wake of Daniel Prude's death at the hands of the police.

We will hear from both insiders and knowledgeable outsiders to find out how PIC is working. Is it taking the mental health calls off the hands of the police as it was supposed to? Does it have enough resources to handle the calls that come in? Is it housed in the correct institutional home? Have things improved? Come and learn with us.

What we learn may drive our advocacy work.

Register here: <u>https://bit.ly/LWVJanforum</u>

LWV-RMA – Land Use Position Statement PROPOSED APRIL 25, 2022

If those assembled at the January 14, 2023 membership meeting approve the following position, it will be voted on by the full membership at the annual meeting in May or June. Refer to page 3 for more information on the meeting and the position process.

1. Community development should be based on comprehensive, professional planning and zoning at all levels of government through coordinated plan review among the County, City, Towns and Villages with sufficient opportunities for citizen participation and training for members of planning and zoning boards.

2. Comprehensive planning should promote integration based on social, economic, and environmental justice factors. This includes affirmatively furthering Fair Housing in low poverty areas, integration of persons with special needs, and enabling affordable housing with access to employment and educational opportunities through varying housing densities, sizes and tenancy (single family units on smaller lots sizes, 2 -4-unit rentals, multi-family rentals, accessory units, "tiny" homes).

3. Development should maintain stability of occupancy for long-term residents.

4. Measures to remediate, mitigate, and prevent the impacts of climate change should be required in land use decisions, especially to minimize the negative impact on lower income households. Such measures include but are not necessarily limited to:

- a. Preserving agricultural, unique, and environmentally critical areas, parkland, and open space.
- b. Promoting alternative forms of transportation (including EVs, mass transit, bikes, and walking) with the associated infrastructure and access, including EV charging stations on urban residential streets and in rural areas, and assisting with the process of transitioning to electrification of vehicles and buildings.
- c. Promoting and encouraging the placement of composting facilities and alternative energy sources such as solar and wind farms and geothermal installations where they will benefit landowners with the least disruption to the neighboring communities.



Vote411 Gets Recognition!

The League is not alone in promoting Vote411. Among many others, Target, Tech & Learning, The Lockport Union-Sun and Journal, Ithaca College Intercom, John Oliver, and the United Way recommended voters use Vote411 to research candidates.

All these promotions resulted in more voters visiting Vote411.

In Monroe County, plus some neighboring communities, the approximate usage numbers were: 12,000 total users, 11,000 new users, 1,000 returning users and 14,000 sessions.

In New York State, there were 285,359 total users; 262,494 new users; 22,865 returning users and 339,163 sessions.

Nationally, 4.7 million people came to Vote411 with 6 million sessions and 21 million page views. 52,000 candidates participated. 55% of the users were 18 – 44 and 54% of users were female.

And voters love Vote411! Here are just two of the many "love notes" Vote411 has received:

"I want to thank the LWV for creating and distributing your individualized voter guide for the 2022 midterm elections. It is amazingly well done, efficient and helpful. I'll look forward to using your guides to inform myself about future elections."

"I really liked the ability to research the candidates and making my decision prior to going to the polls."

Judy Weinstein, Vote411 Coordinator

Naturalization Ceremonies

Two Naturalization ceremonies were held during November. On November 9, at the Eastman Museum, Judge Paul Warren swore in 150 new citizens. JoAnn Kane DeMott, Tamara Minter and Margret Roberts helped the candidates register and learn about voting.

On Nov 29, Judge J. Scott Odorisi officiated at the ceremony at the Monroe County Courthouse and Margaret Supinski from the League helped 52 candidates from 25 countries register to vote.

Thank you to our League volunteers!

Sheila Abeling sheiler162007@gmail.com



TOP ROW: Seen at the November 9 naturalization ceremony are presiding Judge Paul Warren and some of the new citizens.

BOTTOM ROW: Seen after the November 29 naturalization service are presiding Judge J. Scott Odorisi and several of new citizens. At the right is County Clerk Jamie Romeo.

Overview of Recent Webinar

The LWV-RMA website is an easy way to obtain information on and register for Webinars put on by the National, State, or Local League as well as other groups. <u>https://www.lwv-rma.org/</u>

Among the offerings in November was: "Democracy on the (Down) Ballot - Unpacking the 2022 Midterms, Voting Rights, and Local Electoral Reforms". It was presented by the Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. The panelists discussed the results of various election related ballot initiatives in the midterm elections. Also discussed were various methods of ranked choice voting and how that process is being adopted by more and more localities. Ranked choice voting will be discussed at the January 14 membership meeting, so this webinar is very timely. A recording of the event is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGyEolsFvaw.

Mary Micket micketeditor@gmail.com

Get Out the Vote Activities

RocACTS, the the League of Women Voters of the Rochester Metro Area and the Delta Sigma Theta Rochester Alumnae Chapter partnered to reach out to the low voter turnout districts in the city of Rochester. Leveraging established Trunk or Treat events at 4 churches plus a neighborhood sponsored event, volunteers reached over 2,000 community members with information promoting the November 2022 general election.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS" ROCHESTER METRO AREA

Dressed in costumes and armed with candy, volunteers distributed sweet treats to children while providing informative election materials to parents and guardians. We thank the Trunk or Treat sponsors for welcoming us to be participants in their events which enabled us to reach community members with encouragement to stop by a polling location.

Where could you find our teams?

- First Genesis Baptist Church, 292 Hudson Ave.
- Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park
- Aenon Missionary Baptist Church, 175 Genesee St.
- Tops Parking Lot, 450 West Ave.
- Baber A.M.E Church, 550 Meigs St.

The Trunk or Treat events were engaging and interactive. Parents and guardians appreciated receiving the information we provided, which included the following:



Thevore

- A door hanger that showed the locations and hours for each early voting location, information on how to verify your voter registration status and your polling location for election day (Nov. 8), and how to preview the races on your ballot and obtain information on the positions held by the candidates through the VOTE411 website.
- A card describing the Clean Water proposition on the ballot. (Many people appreciated this information as they were not aware that this was on ballot nor did they know the scope of the proposition.)
- A pamphlet describing the NY state voting rights as they pertain to people who were previously incarcerated.

While the Trunk or Treat events were well attended, there was more outreach in preparation for the election:

- 3 teams of young men (with adult partners) distributed door hangers to FIGHT Village, Chatham Gardens, and the Holland Townhouses. Delta Sigma Theta sorority organized and led this distribution. They also had a learning event with the young men explaining why it is important to vote as well as a tutorial on all the information contained on the door hangers. What a great example of engaging young people in our democracy!
- A team of 8 volunteers from LWV-RMA, RocACTS, and Sacred Heart Cathedral distributed 500 door hangers to 5 different election districts in the neighborhood. We could have done more! We weren't sure how many volunteers would show up and how many door hangers a volunteer could distribute, but we learned that a pair of volunteers can do more than 100 in a session of walking without getting too worn out. Next time we'll know.

These activities were a first step to begin a Rochester version of "Souls to the Polls". With the General Election consistently falling in early November, there is a sustainable option to continue leveraging Trunk or Treat events to reach families in the Rochester community. The LWV-RMA and RocActs Voting Rights Task Force (chaired by yours truly) is thankful for the many donations of candy that were made to fund the Trunk or Treat events, for the volunteers who decorated their cars and for those who helped to distribute the voting information.

Did our work make a difference? We were received warmly as we encouraged citizens to vote. As an election inspector at the Boys and Girls Club on Genesee St., I did witness a voter who came into the polling location holding one of our door hangers! Our message was out there.... But our work is not done! Please consider joining our team as begin to discuss additional actions to Get Out the Vote in 2023! Have some fun...touch the community...contact Kim Byers to be added to the Voting Rights Task Force distribution list.

Kimberly Byers kimbyers512@gmail.com



Halloween at the Public Market

LWV-RMA participated in the Halloween at the Public Market event again this year. Attendance has grown every year. We were told to expect 3500-4000 children! Due to candy donations from many members, we were able to hand out candy almost until the very end of the event. Packets of voter information were provided for the adults. It's a fun event for volunteers since we get to wear costumes and enjoy the many different costumes of the children who arrive looking for candy!

Elaine Schmidt eschmidt88e@gmail.com



Having fun at Trunk and Treats



Members Deb Gordon, Laurie Kash, and Elaine Schmidt interacting with visitors to the LWV-RMA booth at the Rochester Public Market on October 30.



Packing Voting Materials: Joan Smith, Elaine Schmidt, Katherine Smith



LWV-RMA Meets to Analyze Election Outcomes

On November 28, LWV-RMA members met with Dr. Timothy Kneeland, Professor and Chair of History, Politics, and Law at Nazareth College, to analyze 2022 election outcomes and their effects on federal, state, and local governments. Seen are LWV-RMA President Barbara Grosh who moderated the discussion, Dr. Timothy Kneeland who provided the analysis, and other participants who included LWV-RMA members and students of Dr. Kneeland.

The presentation can be found here <u>https://youtu.be/oKSLFo-qCeo</u>



Supreme Court Case: Moore v Harper

On Dec 7th, the United States Supreme Court held hearings on the Moore v. Harper case. Many voting rights organizations, including the League, believe the case could have major implications for future federal elections. The case revolves around the issue of how much authority a state court has over laws passed by the state legislature or part of the state constitution related to federal elections. The specific wording in the US Constitution (Article 4 Section 1) is:

"The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof..."

"Legislatures thereof" has historically been interpreted to include the entire state governing system: legislatures, governors and courts. Over the last few years, groups have promoted the "independent state legislature theory" (ISLT). Under this theory, the state courts would not have the authority to rule on the legality of laws related to federal elections passed by the state legislature. The state court would continue to have authority over state elections. Federal courts could determine state laws violated federal laws, but federal laws do not cover redistricting or procedural issues related to voting.

It is possible that procedures related to required identification, absentee ballots, early voting, etc. could vary between state and federal elections within the same state and even on the same day. It is also possible voters across the country would have no judicial power to fight partisan gerrymandering. The League of Women Voters of the United States and League chapters from all 50 states and the District of Columbia filed an amicus brief in the case supporting the authority of state courts. More information on the brief can be found here: https://www.lwv.org/newsroom/press-releases/league-women-voters-files-amicus-brief-moore-v-harper.

The Supreme Court will not rule on the case until May or June. However the following quote from Adam Liptak in the NY Times provides a view of what the justices appear to be thinking:

"The justices' questioning over three hours of arguments suggested that they were roughly divided into three camps. The three most conservative justices appeared prepared to embrace an expansive version of the theory, while the three liberal justices were adamant that it should be rejected.

The remaining members of the court — Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justices Brett M. Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett — seemed to be searching for a compromise under which state supreme courts would generally have the last word on disputes over state laws governing federal elections but be subject to oversight from federal courts in rare cases."

The LWVNYS League offered a webinar on the case a recording of which can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPckY4iJAOU

One interesting question during the webinar was "is there anything that can be done between the hearing and the final ruling?" The suggestion was to continue to inform others about the case and to encourage discussion through meetings and letters to the editors in local papers.

Mary Micket mcmicket@gmail.com

Redistricting Team

MONROE COUNTY

The dispute over city legislative districts continues. The legislature passed a map, popularly known as the "Crescent Map," 17-12. It provided five Black majority districts. Most Democrats preferred six majority-minority districts, two or three of which would be Black majority. Adam Bello later vetoed the map in November.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] ROCHESTER METRO AREA

Thevorer

Crescent proponents unveiled a new map on November 30th with six Black Majority districts. The following day, Bello released his own map with six Black Majority districts. The key difference between the maps was whether the 6th Black district would be east or west of the river.

Two lawsuits have been filed in federal court challenging the process. It is unclear whether the issue will be resolved in court or among the office holders. In January, candidates need to start preparing for next fall's elections, so time is of the essence.

NY ASSEMBLY

The Independent Redistricting Commission was ordered to draw new Assembly districts, and they succeeded in creating one map. See their proposed map at <u>https://www.nyirc.gov/assembly-plan</u>.

The proposed map, if approved, would be a significant change for the Rochester area. One incumbent was drawn out of her district and others would find themselves competing for, and representing, voters in many new areas.

On January 5th the League will host a Zoom roundtable at 7 PM to look at the proposed map, answer questions, and host a discussion of the impacts. Visit <u>https://www.lwv-rma.org/</u> for registration information.

The Commission is traveling New York for a series of hearings on the proposal. The Rochester hearing will be Tuesday January 10th, 5PM, at REOC – 161 Chestnut Street. To sign up to speak, or submit written comments, go to <u>https://www.nyirc.gov/participate</u>.

Do you have questions about redistricting? Or know somebody with a concern? Contact the League's redistricting team at <u>redistricting@lwv-rma.org</u>

Member News

AWARDS

Congratulations to **Scott Forsyth** for receiving the Foundation of the Monroe County Bar Association's Humanitarian Award. The award recognizes individuals whose service to the Monroe County community exemplifies the purposes of the Foundation including: improving the administration of justice and encouraging better public understanding of the law, making legal institutions more responsive to the public interest, improving the delivery of legal services, encouraging legal services to the underserved and supporting legal education.

Scott has been an active member of the League since 2016 and has presented forums for the group as well as being active in voter registration efforts for the formerly-incarcerated community. He's been helping us follow up on FOIL requests we filed with the County over the activities of the District Revision Commission.

Congratulations Scott!

New Members

Welcome to the members who joined in 2022:

- Marsha Allen Mark Assini Roxanne Barrett Gregory Brumfield Vinessa Buckland Lori Calcagni Andrae Evans
- Karen Hagberg Cathy Harris Gayle Harrison Anita Hawkins Lourens Kapp Kristin Kirsch Marla Miller
- Lisa Moore Joanne Panzarella Katie Powell Marilyn Rosen Marianne Simmons Michael Slade Nicole Urban
- Charles Wadsworth Michael Wadsworth Elmira Washington Sue Weiner Janet Wyland Susan Zauderer





LWV-RMA Book Club Update



Book club members meeting via Zoom on November 17.

LWV-RMA book club members met on November 17 to discuss Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps that Explain Everything About the World by Tim Marshall. On December 15th, the book club met to discuss Fulfillment: Winning and Losing in One-Click America by Alec MacGillis. The book club meets at 4:30 P.M. on the third Thursday of the month via Zoom. A link will be sent to everyone who expresses an interest to Judy Weinstein. (vote411@lwv-rma.org)

Below are the books for the next 3 months. To see the books for future months, consult our website, lwv-rma.org, click on Get Involved and then LWV-RMA Book Club.

- January 19 The Night Watchman by Louise Erdrich – discussion led by Judy Weinstein
- February 16 How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith – discussion led by Chris Pryor
- March 16 Sensational: The Hidden History of America's 'Girl Stunt Reporters' by Kim Todd – discussion led Deb Gordon

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In addition, we will read Understanding and Combating Racism: My Path from Oblivious American to Evolving Activist by W.E. Wynne and attend one of his local presentations.

JANUARY







- 5 Webinar: Proposed NYS Assembly District Map review and discussion (via Zoom – see website for details)
- 6 First Friday (11:00 A.M. 1:00 P.M.) Bill Gray's Seabreeze, 4870 Culver Road
- 10 NYS Assembly Independent Redistricting Commission Hearing (5:00 P.M.) REOC, 161 Chestnut Street
- 11 LWV-RMA Board Meeting (6:30 P.M.- 8:30 P.M. via Zoom)
- 14 LWV-RMA Membership Meeting (via Zoom see page 3 for details)
- 19 LWV-RMA Book Group (4:30 P.M. via Zoom) *The Night Watchman* by Louise Erdrich
- 23 Webinar: Mental Health Crisis Response: How Has It Changed Since Daniel Prude? (via Zoom see page 4 for details)

Democracy is not a spectator sport. Tag! You're It!





February

- 3 First Friday (11:00 A.M. 1:00 P.M.) Bill Gray's Seabreeze, 4870 Culver Road
- 8 LWV-RMA Board Meeting (6:30 P.M.- 8:30 P.M. via Zoom)
- 16 LWV-RMA Book Group (4:30 P.M. via Zoom) -*How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith

See Updated Calendar information at:

https://members.lwv-rma.org/members/calendar4_ responsive.php?org_id=LWVR



Be sure to check your email and our website for other events as they are scheduled!

Join First Friday In Person for Informal Conversations!

Join First Friday in person for informal conversations— for a few minutes or for the full two hours, just for fun and to learn more about League activities:

January 6, 2023 February 3 March 3 April 7 May 5 June 2



First Friday happens every month.

photos by Mary Micket

Board of Directors meetings are currently via Zoom. Board meetings are open to all members. See calendar for dates and times and contact Barbara Grosh for link. Forums are open to the public. Calendar information is subject to change.

For more complete information, consult our website at www.LWV-RMA.org, call 262-3730 or e-mail us at info@lwv-rma.org



PO Box 10573 Rochester, NY 14610 585-262-3730 www.LWV-RMA.org

FEBRUARY VOTER DEADLINE IS JANUARY 15!

League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, political organization which encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

The League of Women Voters is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity and inclusion in principal and in practice.

League membership is open to any person who subscribes to the League's purposes and policies.

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.

Join the League Today!



A Monthly Publication of the League of Women Voters/Rochester Metropolitan Area

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COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Looking for info on a League committee or activity? Look no further!

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