President’s Message

Barb Feeney (she/they)
president@lwvdanecounty.org

When the League of Women Voters U.S. came up with the slogan “Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy,” I’m not sure they were expecting that in the mid-term election of 2022, the “defending democracy” part was actually going to be on the
ballot in multiple states, in the form of candidates who were “election deniers”—those who do not accept the results of the 2020 election. And these candidates were running for positions in which they could actually influence the integrity of election results in a big way: attorney general, secretary of state, and governor. When most of those candidates lost, there was a communal sigh of relief coming from those who follow election integrity issues.

Of course, we are not in a safe zone yet. The LWV will continue to provide candidates with venues to tell us where they stand on issues, including issues of election integrity. League members will also work tirelessly to help voters become informed on issues, act as advocates on the issues they care about, and do that most basic thing: vote!

In this issue, you can read the stories and see pictures of our own defenders of democracy in Dane County. Every LWVDC member can wear that label proudly, whether you staff a voting registration station, develop materials for the outstanding informational programs LWVDC offers, train citizens on how to be advocates, staff the Voter Helpline, track our financials, or donate money. The list of ways volunteers make this organization effective is very long. In 2023, you will see more stories about some of our volunteers, so watch this space.

At this time of year, our mailboxes are stuffed with requests for donations for a host of good causes. I hope a corner of your giving budget is reserved for “defending democracy.” If you have not given for our fall campaign, there is still time to help us meet our goal. And speaking of “defenders of democracy,” a huge thanks to the individuals who contributed so generously to create our match fund for the fall campaign. If you have not yet done so, please consider matching their generosity with an end-of-year gift.

LWV Dane County Governance Update
Dr. Mara Eisch, Vice President eisch.mara@gmail.com

It has been a busy start to the year getting acquainted with other Board Members and the work that needs to be done at the League. One of my goals this year is to develop the Governance Domain, building on the work that was started last year. We are fortunate to have the assistance of McKenzie Zdrale, a graduate student from the Nonprofit Board Leadership course, in the Masters of Arts Business: Arts and Creative Enterprise Leadership Program at UW–Madison. McKenzie received her undergraduate degree from UW–Madison and brings over 20 years of experience working in nonprofits. She is currently working at the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association as Managing Director, Enrichment Programs. McKenzie and I are spending this fall semester developing a project to be implemented in the spring. I look forward to working with McKenzie and to her contributions to the development of our Governance Domain.
LWVDC Kicks Off Strategic Planning Process

Wendy Hathaway (she/her), wendy@lwvdanecounty.org

What’s next for the League of Women Voters of Dane County? What’s your vision for the next five years, from member engagement to community outreach? Where should we focus our resources and the expertise and enthusiasm of our many dedicated members?

To help answer these questions, LWV Dane County will undergo a formal strategic planning process over the next several months. The Board voted in September to approve funding of no more than $10,000 to contract with two organizations to facilitate internal and external research and our internal planning process.

A workgroup made up of Vice President Mara Eisch, Treasurer Jean Jacobson, Program Director Sue Jennik, and me as Executive Director is doing the behind-the-scenes work of identifying stakeholders for surveys and focus groups, sharing input on the design of the strategic planning process, and more.

For strategic planning, we contracted with a Community Development Educator from Dane County Community Development (a division of UW–Extension) who worked with the Board in February 2021 on planning specific to staffing and communications, and there was much positive feedback about her leadership in this area. (We also appreciate that the Wisconsin Idea allows us access to such expertise at a lower cost.)

The research process is underway as you’re reading this! Our UW–Extension facilitator collaborated with LWVDC Leadership Development Fellow Kimmy Rooney and me to develop surveys sent to all members. Approximately 50 members were invited to participate in a series of small focus groups in early December. Topics include member and volunteer engagement, the public-facing work and focus of the League, internal structure, and culture.

Whether you’re a new member or have been around for a while, whether you’re a busy volunteer, a current or past leader, or support us financially, your perspective is crucial to this process and to the strength of our organization! If you haven’t filled out your survey, please do so ASAP. (Can’t find the link in your email inbox? Email wendy@lwvdanecounty.org for help.)

At the same time, researchers at Co-Create—a project within UW–Madison’s Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies at the School of Human Ecology—have conducted an external stakeholder survey with dozens of community leaders and partner organizations to measure perception and where others see the League providing the most service to our community in the democracy and civic engagement space, now and in the future.

After the surveys and focus groups in December, the Board and others will meet three times January through March 2023 for more lengthy retreats to discuss the results of this feedback, the vision and focus for the next 3-5 years of the League, potential challenges, and action steps.

Watch future issues of Bulletin for updates and please feel free to contact me any time with questions.

December Office Hours

Mark your calendars; the LWVDC office will be closed:
- Dec. 13–15
- Dec. 23–Jan. 2
LWVDC Pilots Voter Registration Drive at DMV Centers

Laura Gottlieb, lglauragottlieb@gmail.com, and Peter Gottlieb, pgpetergottlieb@gmail.com

This fall, LWVDC piloted a voter registration drive at the two DMV service centers in Madison. Inspired by a similar drive in Milwaukee, LWVDC members Laura and Peter Gottlieb visited the Madison DMVs and noticed that although each DMV had a MyVote computer kiosk, DMV clients were not regularly using them to register to vote. The Gottliebs proposed that LWVDC staff volunteers at the centers to help people register at the kiosks and offer voting information before the November election.

Would enough volunteers sign up to fill 105 shifts of 2-3 hours each during the three-week registration drive? Would enough people register to vote at the DMVs to justify all these volunteer hours? Would DMV clients resent volunteers approaching them about something other than DMV business? Would DMV staff find the registration drive intrusive?

We would have to find out. With the help of veteran LWV members Kathy Fullin, Barbara Feeney, and Sue Fulks, the Gottliebs obtained permission from the state head of the DMV to conduct the registration drives. Peter met with the service center managers, explaining how the drive would work and assuring them that volunteers would remain nonpartisan and not interfere with the DMV workflow. Deciding on the need for two volunteers for each shift—a greeter and a person familiar with the MyVote website—Laura and Deb Hanrahan worked out the schedule of shifts and online signup method. Peter and Laura collected supplies and wrote up procedures for the volunteers.

In the end, the registration drive exceeded all expectations. From Sept. 27–Oct. 19:

- 661 people registered to vote at the DMV
- Hundreds more were given voting information and referred to the MyVote website
- 58 volunteers stepped forward

MyVote “experts” included both experienced LWVDC members and voter education activists from other organizations. Greeters included those people, as well as friends, neighbors, and spouses who wanted to help potential voters. They not only signed up for multiple shifts, showed up on time at the centers, and did their work in the nonpartisan, professional way the League requires, but enjoyed the experience of greeting potential voters and helping them to register.

The surprise and gratitude shown by DMV customers who discovered that they could register to vote after doing their DMV business made the experience a positive one for voters and volunteers alike. Commending the ease and productivity of registering often difficult-to-reach voters who had up-to-date voter registration documents in hand, many volunteers expressed an eagerness to participate in similar projects in the future.

The pilot project demonstrated that the DMV is an ideal location for helping people register to vote online. So, in November, the LWVDC and the DMV supervisors authorized a continuation of this project for future elections. Peter and Laura will be organizing DMV voter registration drives before both spring 2023 elections, and look forward to working again with such dedicated volunteers.
Rotary Club Honors LWVDC Member Gail Bliss

On November 9, Rotary Club of Madison honored long-time LWVDC member Gail Bliss with the 41st Annual Manfred E. Swarsensky Humanitarian Service Award. This award was established in 1982 and identifies individuals who have, through their voluntary efforts, made a particularly outstanding contribution to the humanitarian service in the greater Madison community, in the tradition so well exemplified by the life of Rabbi Swarsensky.

Gail was nominated by League members/Rotary Club members Joy Cardin and Andrea Kaminski.

Read the tribute paid to Gail at the luncheon:

Gail Bliss, whether professional or volunteer, has been singularly dedicated to making life better for others, and for these efforts, she has been selected to receive our 2022 Manfred E. Swarsensky Humanitarian Service Award.

Gail believes in the dignity of all people and the right of all U.S. citizens to have a voice in our government.

A very active member of the League of Women Voters of Dane County, Gail has been a stalwart presence through the heat and humidity of the summer at the Dane County Farmers Market on the Capitol Square, where she helps people register to vote. Gail is also a frequent, friendly and trusted presence for the League at food pantries sponsored by The Beacon, YWCA, The Salvation Army and St. Vincent’s de Paul.

In 2020, the COVID pandemic hit the homeless community hard, and Gail worked with Dane County and City of Madison social service providers to move people into safety. She went out into the community—under bridges, across frozen ponds, and in hidden spots where those who have the least need the most—all with the goal of providing vulnerable people with safety and dignity in a difficult time.

In the spirit of Rabbi Swarsensky, Gail does not work alone. She trained and led other volunteers to serve as “chaperones” to help people to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and obtain IDs. She continues to reach out to social workers at local hospitals, to ensure that staff understand the rules for hospitalized voters. She has also worked with medical students to publicize the opportunity to vote for patients at UW hospitals.

In addition to her work with the League of Women Voters of Dane County, Gail volunteered through her church to feed homeless men at Grace Episcopal Church. She also spent eight years, before COVID, volunteering weekly at the Salvation Army’s Women and Family shelter.

Gail Bliss meets vulnerable people where they are and helps them gain access to the tools they need to get connected with many important aspects of life in the greater Madison area. Gail’s tireless efforts on behalf of the homeless have been key in leveling the playing field so that more Madison residents have a chance to participate and contribute in our community.

Congratulations to Gail on receiving this recognition! We are also incredibly appreciative that Gail selected League of Women Voters of Dane County to receive the $2,500 grant presented to award honorees by the Madison Rotary Foundation.
Town Halls Introduce Immigrants to Local Government

Barb Feeney (she/they), president@lwvdanecounty.org

Many of us know the story of an ancestor who immigrated to the United States perhaps a century ago or perhaps in the not-so-distant past. Some of us immigrated to the U.S. ourselves. It is not hard to imagine how daunting the transition can be. There’s so much to do, and quickly: learn a new language, find a job, figure out how to get from here to there in a strange city, and navigate a complex health care system. Learning about local government might not be at the top of the priorities list.

Nevertheless, about 70 of our immigrant neighbors came out on two Sunday afternoons in October to meet local elected officials, to learn a bit about what they do and how government impacts all our lives, and to share some of their own stories.

These “Immigrant Town Halls” were a partnership project with Jewish Social Services, Catholic Multicultural Center, Literacy Network, Dane County Office of Immigration Affairs, and LWVDC. This outreach effort was a result of a New Citizens grant LWVDC received from LWVUS, meant to encourage local leagues to reach out to immigrants who have become naturalized citizens or are on the journey. LWVUS encourages local leagues to attend naturalization ceremonies to register new citizens on the spot after the ceremonies are completed. For LWVDC, that was not an option because naturalization ceremonies are not being held in Dane County at this time. Our focus instead turned toward partnering with agencies and organizations that provide services to immigrants and doing voter outreach in neighborhoods that have high numbers of immigrants.

It was understood from the beginning that many guests at the town hall events were not yet citizens. The expectation was to help immigrants take the first step in citizenship: finding out how government works and why, someday, they will want to vote. LWVDC voter registration volunteers were on hand for guests who wanted to register to vote or wanted information about registering in the future.

Local elected officials from Madison, Fitchburg, the Madison School Board, and the Dane County Board met with immigrants in groups of about 10-12 to talk about their jobs as elected officials, answer questions, and hear from the immigrant guests. Interpretation in four languages for immigrants from Africa and the Middle East was available at one of the town halls; at the second, Spanish interpretation was provided. The event included a meal and time for socializing.
Here are just a few of the comments from some of the attendees:

“I was amazed to hear from authorities in their range of work, Dane County, City of Madison, to be with and greet the mayor. We were happy to meet with her and hear from her.”

“Learned about local government and what the roles are, learned about some housing resources.”

“Well welcomed and presentation, I felt comfortable socializing with local authorities and the humbleness of the authorities.”

“They explained the insurance process which is hard to understand.”

“Restart life with new milestones. Stepping out of your old comfort zone to get the best out of it. Working hard to achieve our dreams.”

The multi-agency planning team is already looking ahead to 2023 and hopes to host similar events featuring state and federal local officials.

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**February Book Discussion: On the Line by Daisy Pitkin**

*Louise Robbins, louise.s.robbins@gmail.com*

This memoir was a Wisconsin Book Festival book, and the League of Women Voters will be discussing it in February. The author is a young labor organizer who is learning the ropes on the fly; the second woman is the commercial laundry worker who risks her health going to work and her job for helping organize. Needless to say, one has a bigger stake in the process than the other, but the women—so far as I have gotten—manage to maintain a relationship. How will it end? I don’t know yet. But it is worth finding out.

Join us in discussing *On the Line* via Zoom:

- **Saturday, Feb. 11**, from 10–11:30 a.m.
- **Tuesday, Feb. 16**, from 10–11:30 a.m.

Sign up and indicate your session preference by emailing books@lwvdanecounty.org and let us know if you are interested in leading one or both of the discussions.

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**There is a lot going on with LWVDC these days!**

*Want to stay on top of the most current happenings?*

Look for our weekly Enews in your email every Tuesday morning, or subscribe here, if you don't receive it.
Get Involved! Advocacy Ahead of the Supreme Court Election

Joan I. Schwarz

This spring’s race for Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice provides an opportunity to highlight Judicial Integrity and Campaign Finance Reform, one of the five timely issues that are a core focus of the LWVDC Advocacy Corps. The primary is scheduled for February 21, 2023, and the general election is on April 4, 2023. The Wisconsin State Journal article Here’s Why the Supreme Court Race Matters explains what is at stake in the Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice race.

The Advocacy Corps is emphasizing three main points for this focus area.

First, the court has established deficient recusal rules, allowing each justice to decide whether to remove themselves from a pending case, even if the litigant and their attorney have contributed to the justice’s election.

Second, monetary contributions pour into Wisconsin’s Supreme Court election, including undisclosed money from outside of Wisconsin, and these are increasing with each election. In 2018, candidates raised $2.3 million and outside groups spent more than $2.8 million on the race. In 2019, candidates raised $3.7 million while outside groups spent approximately $4.5 million. And in the 2020 race, candidates spent $4.9 million while outside groups spent about $5 million. It is predicted that the 2023 election will surpass these amounts, especially from undisclosed money outside of the state.

Third, the Wisconsin Supreme Court has allowed original jurisdiction for cases where there are factual disputes that should have been begun with an evidentiary trial in circuit court. Original jurisdiction means that the Wisconsin Supreme Court was the first court to hear the case, instead of allowing the case to be first heard by a lower court. Prominently, the court accepted original jurisdiction for the 10-year redistricting case. Because there was no circuit court trial with discovery, expert testimony, and cross-examination to produce an evidentiary record, many disputed facts were left unresolved when the Wisconsin Supreme Court made its decision on this case. The public needs to know about this “barrage of petitions to commence original action” as acknowledged by Chief Justice Patience Roggensack herself. It is a practice that must not be abused.

It’s critical that the Wisconsin Supreme Court is transparent and nonpartisan. LWVDC’s Judicial Integrity and Campaign Finance Working Group has prepared research and talking points to inform the public of these pressing issues at the court in light of the upcoming election. We welcome everyone to participate in this extremely important advocacy work. Turnout is highest when people perceive the stakes are high and the stakes for the 2023 Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice election could not be higher. Letters to the editor (LTEs) are critical over the next few months.

We invite anyone and everyone to participate in this extremely important advocacy work! Get started by emailing advocacy@lwvdanecounty.org.
The elections are over, and we can all take a breath as we head into the holidays . . . or can we? The results of the election and “all things political” may still be on many people’s minds as we get together with friends and family to celebrate the holidays. So, how would you respond if someone brings up politics at the dinner table, particularly considering the increased polarization and division in political perspectives? One thing most of us would agree on is that we want to maintain our relationships with family and friends, despite our political differences.

Members of the LWVDC Advocacy domain compiled this handy **Tips on Talking Politics with Family and Friends guide** about how to engage in a conversation about politics and avoid damaging significant relationships. First and foremost, it’s important to reflect on our reasons for starting or joining a political conversation, especially as we contemplate the various political perspectives around the dinner table. It can also be helpful to provide some structure to the conversation by suggesting some basic ground rules. But ultimately, the key elements to any meaningful conversation are listening and asking questions in order to understand others’ perspectives and finding common ground.

These suggestions are based on several resources (referenced in the link) if you want to learn more. In the meantime, if you can’t avoid “the elephants (and donkeys) in the room,” perhaps our tips can at least help keep everyone’s holiday dinner on their plates!
SCOTUS Hears Independent State Legislature Theory

Joan I. Schwarz

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on Moore v. Harper on December 7. This case originated after the North Carolina Supreme Court redrew the gerrymandered legislature’s maps. The Legislature appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court to test the validity of the Independent State Legislature (ISL) theory.

At issue in the appeal is the Election Clause in the U.S. Constitution, which states “The Times, Place and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives shall be prescribed at each State by the Legislature thereof.” (Article I, Section 4, Clause 1). The question is whether this provision nullifies state constitutional restraints imposed on state legislatures. In other words, is judicial review from a state’s highest court nullified because a state legislature has unilateral power over congressional elections?

North Carolina argued that the U.S. Constitution does not give state courts authority to rule on congressional maps and thus the authority of state elections comes from the federal government, such that all rulings about such elections belong in federal courts. North Carolina’s argument contradicts a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision which refused to rule on partisan gerrymandering. Justice Roberts wrote “Provisions in state statutes and state constitutions can provide standards and guidance for state courts to apply.” Rucho v. Common Cause, 139 S. Ct. 2484, 2507 (2019).

Those opposed to the ISL theory argued that for 234 years, the federal government has not interpreted the Elections Clause as giving unilateral authority to state legislatures and further, that this power is contrary to what the founding fathers believed. In a letter (8 Apr 1787) to Edmund Randolph, governor of Virginia, James Madison said that “an individual independence of the states is utterly irresponsible with the idea of an aggregate sovereignty” and that the structure of the republic would provide “a due supremacy of the national authority and leave in force the local authorities so far as they can be subordinately useful.”

The framers, they argued, provided a Congressional remedy about any state policies regarding congressional elections with which it disagrees by giving Congress the power to override those policies. Often overlooked is the second part of Clause 1 in the Elections Clause which states: “but Congress may by law at any time make or alter such Regulation, except as to the Places of choosing Senators.” The normal constitutional procedure is that state Constitutions give the legislature its authority as well as providing regulatory roles to many non-legislative actors (gubernatorial vetoes, state court decisions, and state agency rules) to provide review against legislative actions. If Congress needs to override legislation, any dispute would then be between the legislature and federal law which would trump a state legislature’s preferences.

If upheld, the ISL theory would have a significant and destructive impact on future elections in the U.S. This law would invalidate all 50 state Constitutions and would end the sovereignty of each state. State legislatures would have nearly unchecked power to control federal elections, gerrymander its maps, rule on all voter restrictions, control the calculation of election results and the certification of elections without any checks and balances from the state constitution or the state Supreme Court. In effect, the ISL theory, if upheld, would become lawful nationwide and would be a dangerous threat to the checks and balances of our constitutional order.
Contributions
Thank you to these supporters who donated in October 2022.

General Donations

Julie Allen
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Suzanne & Paul Buckner
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In honor of Joann Elder
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Judy Fowler
In honor of Elaine Rattunde
Anne Hocksted
John Mooney
Mary Lou Taylor
In honor of Connie Threinen
Ronnie Hess
Community & Corporate Donations
Alpha Delta Kappa Delta Chapter

Boulder’s Climbing Gym
(October Climb for a Cause promotion)

The Civil Engineers & Magic Conch
(Celebration of Democracy benefit concert)

Urban League of Greater Madison

New Members
We welcome these new members who joined us in October 2022. An updated member directory is available on our website. NOTE: The password for the directory page was changed on April 26, 2022. If you need the new password, contact the webmaster for help.

Katie Gunaratne
Kathryn Hurley
Mary Neuhaus

Joyce Schneiderman
Anastasia Soluna
Inger Stole

Megan Wincek
Debra Zillmer

Do you want to join the League?
Sign up for a membership online
Discussion Units

Many League members meet in one of five units to discuss the topic of each forum, using the resource/study materials provided by the program planners to guide the conversation. The discussion concludes with recommendations for further study or action. Units meet regularly at different times and locations, including via Zoom. All in-person meetings occur in Madison unless otherwise noted. Find a unit meeting that's convenient for you and participate! Details below.

In December, Units will meet via Zoom the second week (not the third as usual due to the holidays) to discuss materials presented at the December 6 Forum.

Please contact the Unit Discussion Leader if interested in participating in a Unit Discussion so that you will get a Zoom link.

**Unit: Prairie Ridge (For Prairie Ridge residents only)**  
**Time:** 3:30 p.m., usually third Monday of month  
**Winter Schedule:** December 12, January 16  
**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom through fall/winter  
**Leaders:** Dot Whiting

**Unit: West / Middleton**  
**Time:** 6:30 p.m., usually third Monday of month  
**Winter Schedule:** December 12, January 16  
**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom through fall/winter  
**Leader:** Ralph Petersen, Helen Horn (608) 231-1807

**New Unit for Members outside of Madison**  
**Time:** 6:30 p.m., usually third Thursday of month  
**Winter Schedule:** January 19  
(Will not meet in December!)  
**Location:** Virtual, Via Zoom  
**Leader:** Karen Michael (608) 284-9718  
Please contact Karen at: karanddic@gmail.com if you are interested in this Unit and are not on the email list.

**Unit: Central West**  
**Time:** 12:45 p.m., usually third Tuesday of month  
**Winter Schedule:** December 13, January 17  
**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom  
**Leader:** Kathy Johnson (608) 238–1785

**Unit: Northeast Side**  
**Time:** 3:30 p.m., usually third Wednesday of month  
**Winter Schedule:** December 14, January 18  
**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom  
**Leaders:** Karen Gunderson (608) 729–4351

**Unit: Downtown (Capitol Lakes)**  
**Time:** 5:30 p.m., usually third Wednesday of month  
**Winter Schedule:** December 14, January 18  
**Location:** Virtual, via Zoom  
**Leader:** Aileen Nettleton
Upcoming Events

Dec. 19  Membership Committee, noon
Dec. 23  Office Closed through Jan. 2
Jan. 3   Advocacy Corps, 5:30 p.m.
Jan. 9   Voter Service Steering Committee, noon
Jan. 9   LWVDC Virtual Forum, 6:30 p.m.
Jan. 11  LWVDC Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m.
Jan. 16  Membership Committee, noon
Jan. 23  Program/Advocacy Committee, 6 p.m.

The League in the News

West High School student group Sifting and Winnowing worked with LWVDC to register students to vote, and they used a grant from Madison Civics Club to present a panel of local elected officials to meet with the student body. Read more at Madison.com and The CapTimes.

The Norse Star, the Stoughton High School student newspaper, interviewed Voter Service Director Sue Fulks for their article Organizations Aim for Voter Participation.

LWVDC and Dane County Voter ID Coalition participated in Vote Early Day on Friday, October 28. See coverage of the event by Channel3000 and WKOW.com.

Did You Know?

In 2022:
- ✓ 235 League member volunteers participated in election-related activities for a total of 1,040 volunteer hours
- ✓ 6,647 voters contacted
- ✓ 2,744 people registered to vote
Thank you to our many volunteer photographers! Sam Breidenbach, Barb, Feeney, Sue Fulks, Aileen Grabow, Erin Horswill, Nina Moyer, Ingrid Rothe, Marjorie Schuett, Brook Soltvedt, Edie Swift, and others