

President's Column

by MerriKay Oleen-Burkey

Current Voter Suppression: What does it look like?

At our October forum on *Public Advocacy for Voter Protection*, **Judy Karand-jeff** talked about many forms of voter suppression that currently exist.

Attendees were invited to address postcards to their elected officials asking them to support bills that would allow for early voting, same day voter registration and online voter registration, all of which would expand voting rights in Michigan.

While Michigan's voter ID law has a provision that allows any registered voter to cast a ballot even without an ID when they sign an affidavit, many states have more stringent voter ID laws. In Wisconsin, for example, a voter must present a current driver's license, passport or state or military ID to cast a ballot. The 2016 election was the first to require the voter ID there, and

“More than one million votes were lost because people ran into things like ID laws, long lines at the polls and difficulty registering.”

voter turnout saw a sharp decline. Almost 41,000 fewer people voted in Wisconsin in 2016 than in 2012; more than half of this decline occurred in Milwaukee where nearly two-thirds of the state's African Americans live. When surveyed about why they didn't cast a ballot, 11% of registered voters cited the voter ID law and said they didn't have an acceptable ID. Blacks were about 50 percent more likely than whites to lack the IDs because they were less likely to drive or to be able to afford the documents required to get a current ID, and more likely to have moved from out of state.

According to MIT political scientist Charles Stewart, an estimated 16 million people (12% of all voters) encountered at least one problem voting in 2016. More than one million votes were lost because people ran into things like ID laws, long lines at the polls and difficulty registering. The rollback of voting protections was aided by the Supreme Court, which in 2013 gutted the Voting Rights Act. States, cities and counties with long histories of voting discrimination no longer had to clear new election rules with the federal government. As a result, North Carolina passed a sweeping rewrite of its election laws, requiring voter IDs, cutting early voting, and eliminating same-day registration, among other changes, before the law was struck down in a federal court for targeting black voters. Ohio repealed the first week of early voting, when African Americans were five times more likely than whites to cast a ballot. Florida barred ex-felons from becoming eligible to vote after serving their time, preventing 1 in 5 black voting-age residents from voting in 2016.

The voter ID laws, reductions in early voting and other voter suppression tactics were designed to stop voter fraud but, in fact, lead to real incidents of disenfranchisement which undermines confidence in elections, especially in minority communities. For more of the story about voter suppression, read the Ari Berman article, "Rigged" in the November/December 2017 issue of Mother Jones.

Calendar

DECEMBER 2017

- 4 Grand Rapids Unit Meeting**
Grand Traverse Pie Co, 28th St
7pm
- 11 LWVKA Board Meeting**
Walden Woods Condominium Clubhouse
5:30 pm Dine
6:00 pm Meeting

JANUARY 2018

- 8 LWVKA Board Meeting**
Walden Woods Condominium Clubhouse
5:30 pm Dine
6:00 pm Meeting
- Voter Registration**
KVCC Texas Township
- 15 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**
- 20 LWVKA Program Planning**
Local and National Programs
Parchment Library, 1-3 pm

FEBRUARY 2018

- 12 LWVKA Board Meeting**
Walden Woods Condominium Clubhouse
5:30 pm Dine
6:00 pm Meeting
- 17 LWV's 98th birthday Founders' Day Brunch**
Friendship Village
- 19 Presidents' Day**

Note: Board meets on 2nd Monday. Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings. Contact (269) 270-3302 and moburkey30@gmail.com



Find upcoming events, alerts and other announcements!

GR Unit Updates



Setting a Date for Our Planning Session

We'd like to take a longer look at what to do next year, and all the steps needed to make whatever activities we commit to happen. If you'd like to join in, please take this Doodle poll: <https://doodle.com/poll/2xb5ut8555wsdrtz> to let us know what January date(s) work for you.

The Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo Relationship

"The Grand Rapids Unit of the League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area" is quite a mouthful - and we know it can be confusing, too. It's important for new people we meet to know that we are a small group that lives and gathers in Grand Rapids (and surrounding communities). We are able to do so under the oversight and mentorship of the League in Kalamazoo. Please feel free to let us know if you have any questions!

LWVMI News

by Paula Manley

LWVMI opposes **SB B584, 585 and 586** which would allow guns in K-12 schools, college and university buildings, childcare centers, sports arenas, bars, churches, etc. The Michigan Senate recently passed these bills and they have gone to the House Judiciary Committee. If you have concerns about these proposed bills, contact your State Representative.

LWVMI remains concerned about the safety of **Line 5**. The final version of Line 5 Alternatives Analysis report is on the DEQ website. LWVMI is one of 21 members of the *Oil and Water Don't Mix* coalition which is dedicated to the protection of Michigan water, natural resources, public trust in these resources, the environment, communities and health safety and general welfare of citizens.

LWVMI is looking for volunteers for the *LWVMI Advocacy Network*. This group will be monitoring legislation online in any one of 16 policy issue areas under Government Group, National Resources Group and Social Policy Group. If you have an interest in learning more about this opportunity, contact Joan Hunalt LWVMI Advocacy Vice-President at jbhunalt@gmail.com.

For the latest LWVMI news, watch for League Links which is delivered to you via email each month.

LWVUS News

by Paula Manley

LWVUS recently updated the mission and vision statement:

Mission Statement—*Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy*

Vision Statement—*We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge, and the confidence to participate.*

Check out the recently redesigned LWVUS website at lwv.org. To keep abreast of LWVUS activities. To receive LWVUS news biweekly, register on the website for the League Update.

Countdown to Convention 2018! The LWV National Convention will be held **June 28 to July 1, 2018** in Chicago. Attending a national League convention is always a stimulating, educational experience and a great way to learn about League activities around the country. It is not often that the convention is held so close to Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, so consider attending and watch for more information in the coming months.

The League supports legislation to strengthen reporting to the National Background Check Database—**FIX NICS ACT**. A group of bipartisan Senators wants to improve and enforce reporting to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). This bill would make it easier to legally prevent individuals from buying firearms if they have previous felonies, indictments, and other crimes such as domestic violence.

The EPA is moving forward with a plan to repeal Clean Power Plant, which would regulate carbon pollution from existing power plants. The Public can submit comments via online rulemaking portal on regulations.gov through 1-16-18.

Save the Date!

By Frances Eckenrode

This year we will celebrate the League's 98th birthday at our annual Founders Day Brunch planned for February 17, 2018 at Friendship Village. Please plan to attend and celebrate the occasion in the newly renovated Village.



“The Michigan Senate recently passed these bills and they have gone to the House Judiciary Committee. If you have concerns about these proposed bills, contact your State Representative.”

Protect the Vote

by Alison Parsons

Calling all Protectors of Rights! Are you someone who has engaged in the fight for the rights of citizens to vote in this country? Have you made efforts at increasing diversity in our candidates? Have you worked tirelessly to inform voters about the issues on the ballots or about the candidates who are running? Have you registered new voters or helped get people to the polls? Have you worked as a poll monitor or worked as a volunteer at the polls? Have you lobbied state and federal officials around rules and laws, which impede votes?

If you say yes to any of these questions, you are needed now!

As you may know, there is an effort afoot in this country to undermine your hard work and to create barriers for voting. Individuals who have enjoyed the right to vote are showing up at polling sites to find out their voter registration has been purged from the system or that their Identification is no longer valid. The number of polling stations in some communities has been limited, resulting in long lines which prevent individuals from casting their ballot. Efforts to increase absentee voting, early voting or mail in voting have been stymied. All these are efforts to create barriers and suppress the vote of minorities in this country.

On October 16, 2017 LWVKA hosted a forum, **Protect the Vote** in conjunction with ISAAC and the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Individuals who attended the event indicated interest in continuing to spread the message. We are looking for a cadre of individuals to take this presentation into the community starting in January, similar to our efforts with gerrymandering. If you have any interest in joining these efforts, please contact Alison Parsons at alisonparsonsmi@gmail.com or at (808) 457-6661.

Program Planning

By Frances Eckenrode

The annual **Program Planning** meeting for LWVKA will be held Saturday, **January 20th**, 2018 at the Parchment Community Library from 1-3pm. This year we will review local and national positions. Positions can be found on the LWVKA and LWVUS websites. Please come and join the discussions and learn more about programs that the League supports. **No previous experience necessary.** If you are interested in leading or co-leading the discussion on one or more positions, please contact Fran Eckenrode (269-903-9372). Volunteers are very welcome!

Money in Our Elections

by Denise Hartsough

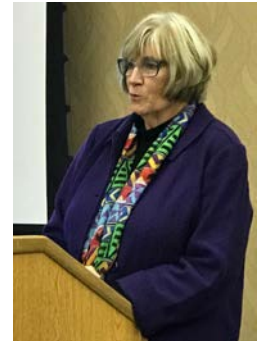
Remember the flood of postcards that filled your mailbox in 2014 regarding the 20th District State Senate race? Get ready for their return! The 20th District is one of the few competitive senate districts in Michigan, due to political gerrymandering that makes most districts “safe” for one major party or the other. Those who fund campaign messages can focus their resources on the few competitive districts. In 2014 over \$2 million was spent on the 20th District race— making it the most expensive for the Michigan Senate in history.

Just who funds campaign messages? At the **Money & Politics** forum at WMU on November 16th **Craig Mauger**, Executive Director of the Michigan Campaign Finance Network, explained that money comes from donors who give to candidates, from Super PACs (Political Action Committees) and from unknown sources (often 501c4 nonprofit organizations) that produce “issue ads” that actually support specific candidates.

Judy Karandjeff, President of the League of Women Voters of Michigan, traced the history of election finance reforms, most of which the government never enforced, or overturned. Why does this matter? It gives the wealthy undue influence, elected officials spend too much time raising money, and the average citizen is ignored.

How could we overcome the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision, which permits this “legalized bribery” by treating corporations, unions and Super PACs as people with free speech rights? **Ben Gubits** of American Promise pointed out that an amendment to the U.S. Constitution is the only way to overturn a Supreme Court decision, unless the court does so itself. American Promise advocates for a 28th Amendment to limit the influence of money in political campaigns.

For more on money and politics, please see www.mcfn.org, www.lwvmi.org, and www.americanpromise.net. For a detailed historical analysis, see Chapters 2-4 of *Daring Democracy* by Frances Moore Lappe and Adam Eichen (Beacon Press, 2017). Email photos of campaign mailings you receive during the 2018 20th District State Senate race to Craig Mauger at mcfn@mcfn.org.



Judy Karandjeff, President, LWVMI



Ben Gubits, Associate Director of American Promise

“ American Promise advocates for a 28th Amendment to limit the influence of money in political campaigns. ”



Paula Manley & Fran Eckenrode staff the registration table.

New Members & Updates

By Chris Kuthe

Please welcome new members to the LWVKA. These members have joined in the last month and are anxious to be involved. If you have a project that you need help with, call or email to invite them.

Lisa Pishevar
3104 Elmwood Beach Road
Middleville, MI 49333
630-453-1859
lisapishevar@gmail.com

Updates

Please make the following edits to your LWVKA member directory. If you have a change in home address, phone or email, please contact me at ckuthe57@yahoo.com or call 269-501-3305.

Mollie Clements has new contact information:
1700 Bronson Way Apt 127
Kalamazoo, MI 49009
269-598-8817
revmollieclements@gmail.com

Fran Eckenrode has a new address:
148 Bulkley
Kalamazoo, MI 49006

50 Year Members

By Chris Kuthe

Have you been a member of the League of Women Voters for 50 years or more? (This could be a member of any League not just LWVKA.) Did you join the League in 1967 or before? As a 50 year member you no longer have to pay dues and you will still be a voting member of the LWVKA. Please contact Chris Kuthe at 269-501-3305 or ckuthe57@yahoo.com to be recognized as a 50 year member of the League.

Give a Gift

By Paula Manley

Need a gift idea this holiday season? Consider the gift of a LWVKA membership. Contact Chris Kuthe, membership chair at ckuthe57@yahoo.com or send a check with the gift recipient's information to LWVKA Treasurer P.O Box 2106 Kalamazoo, MI 49003.

Year End Donations

By Paula Manley

As you make your year end charitable donations, remember LWVKA. With your gift to LWVKA, you are helping to support our efforts to Make Democracy Work in our community. You may choose to donate to the General Fund, tax deductible Education Fund or tax-deductible Endowment Fund either online at lwvka.org or by sending a check to LWVKA Treasurer P.O. Box 2106 Kalamazoo, MI 49003.



Founders Day Brunch
Friendship Village • Kalamazoo, MI

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES: YWCA Citizen Court Monitoring Project

by MerriKay Oleen-Burkey

The YWCA is starting a county-wide, year-long initiative in January 2018, and they have asked the LWVKA to invite non-lawyer, local volunteers to observe court proceedings in our community. As a monitor you would observe proceedings in a particular court for a period of several months and complete forms designed to help you evaluate critical aspects of the courts performance, particularly management of cases where domestic violence has been alleged. The YWCA would provide 4-6 hours of training before you begin your observation assignment, and you would observe in pairs. Volunteers are asked to dedicate a minimum of four hours per month to the project.

Anecdotally, the YWCA is aware of a few instances where domestic abuse victims have represented themselves in court with less than optimal outcomes. This monitoring project will provide a broader look at domestic violence cases, and the findings and recommendations will be published by YWCA Kalamazoo and released to the primary stakeholders in the courts, to government lawmakers as well as to the public through the media.

If you are interested in participating in the YWCA Citizen Court Monitoring Project, send a message to MerriKay Oleen-Burkey (moburkey30@gmail.com) who will connect you to the director of the project at the YWCA.

“...YWCA is aware of a few instances where domestic abuse victims have represented themselves in court with less than optimal outcomes.”

Reinvigorating the LWVKA Observer Corps

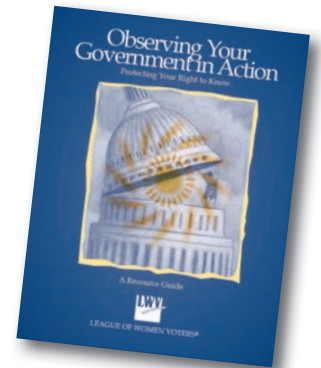
by Janet M. Jones

This fall Merrikay (Oleen-Burkey) and I took on the task of restarting an Observer Corps. The LWV Observer corps involves League members attending public governmental meetings to “check-up” on what is going on in our local elected and appointed organizations. After the meeting, Observers file a short feedback report with their observations and ideas about issues that match those identified by the national, state or local League. Observers may also make recommendations for further action.

Six Leaguers have expressed interest in participating in this activity and two have already attended meetings of their choice. There is no obligation to attend more than once but in the past many people have decided to become regularly involved with the agency, oversight board or appointed committee they have chosen.

More information about the background and structure of Observer Corps is here: <https://www.lwv.org/observing-your-government-action-guide>

If you are interested in participating in this activity, contact me and I will try to help you choose a group to observe in your area and/or to send you the response form: Janet M. Jones, 269.383-4436 or janetmjones848@gmail.com



Advertise in the Bulletin!

Are you or someone you know interested in reaching a discerning local audience with your advertising message? For only \$50, your business card-sized ad will appear in six issues of the Bulletin during the year. Not only will you reach over 150 highly engaged, community-oriented League members in the Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids area, your advertising dollars also help support the League’s important work!





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Kalamazoo Area

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MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK!

Year End Donations

Paula Manley

As you make your year end charitable donations, remember LWVKA. With your gift to LWVKA, you are helping to support our efforts to Make Democracy Work in our community. You may choose to donate to the General Fund, tax deductible Education Fund or tax-deductible Endowment Fund either online at lwwka.org or by sending at check to LWVKA Treasurer P.O. Box 2106 Kalamazoo, MI 49003.

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*The Bulletin is published monthly by the League of Women Voters
Kalamazoo Area*