

THE BULLETIN

League of Women Voters Kalamazoo Area

February 2016 • Vol. 61 № 6

President's Column

By Denise Hartsough

Focus for Impact: Democracy Agenda

The year 2015 saw alarming—and successful—attacks on voting rights. The Supreme Court terminated the oversight provision of the federal Voting Rights Act, and several states promptly enacted restrictions on voting. Here in Michigan, our elected leaders recently prohibited straight-ticket voting and dissemination of election information from public officials 60 days before an election—the “gag rule.” A less publicized part of the same bill is the removal of safeguards on close relationships between candidates and SuperPACs (political action committees), exacerbating the role of dark money in politics.

How can the League of Women Voters effectively pursue change in this environment? Our national organization, the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS), is responding by taking a new approach to gathering of input from local Leagues regarding issues for focused energy from the League. Traditionally, local Leagues every other year identify issues for study or update at the national level. Those proposals then are voted on at the national convention.

This year, the LWVUS proposes Making Democracy Work as the agenda, and proposes action instead of studies. The Democracy Agenda includes: voting rights and voter protection at the national, state and local levels; money in politics; redistricting.

“How can the League of Women Voters effectively pursue change in this environment?”

If delegates to the national convention adopt the Democracy Agenda, the LWVUS will issue principles to guide plans and action at the state and local levels.

At our local Program Planning meeting on January 9th, members recommended adoption of the Democracy Agenda to the LWVKA board. The board will consider the recommendation at its February 2nd meeting. The board of the League of Women Voters of Michigan has already endorsed the Democracy Agenda.

It appears likely that 2016 will see Leagues at all levels mobilized to Make Democracy Work. I urge you to join the mobilization!

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK!

Calendar

FEBRUARY 2016

- 1 Consensus reports to LWVUS for Money & Politics**
- 2 LWVKA Board Meeting**
The Park Club, 219 W. South St.
5:30 pm Food available for purchase
6:00 pm Meeting
269-599-1801 and denise.hartsough@gmail.com
- 13 Founder's Day Brunch**
Henderson Castle, Kalamazoo
10am to noon
- 25 School Safety Consensus Meeting**
Home of Janet Jones
7pm

MARCH 2016

- 1 LWVKA Board Meeting**
The Park Club, 219 W. South St.
5:30 pm Food available for purchase
6:00 pm Meeting
269-599-1801 and denise.hartsough@gmail.com
Program Planning submission deadline
- 22 Green Water Presentation**
Kalamazoo Public Library 6:30pm
(see article on page 5)

APRIL 2016

- 5 LWVKA Board Meeting**
The Park Club, 219 W. South St.
5:30 pm Food available for purchase
6:00 pm Meeting
269-599-1801 and denise.hartsough@gmail.com
- 15 LWVKA Meet & Greet**
“One Well Brewing”
4213 Portage Rd., Kalamazoo
5:30-6:30pm

Note: Board meets on 1st Tuesday. Members are welcome to attend all Board Meetings.

★ Voter Outreach & Education ★

Michigan Worst State for Integrity

By Ruth Caputo

According to a recently released report by The Center for Public Integrity, Michigan comes in dead last among US states for integrity. The State Integrity Investigation is an ongoing comprehensive assessment of state government accountability and transparency. Michigan received an F in 10 of the 13 categories of government operations that were examined, including public access to information, political financing, executive accountability, legislative accountability, judicial accountability, and lobbying disclosure. To see more information, go to a summary of the report at <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/11/09/18427/michigan-gets-f-grade-2015-state-integrity-investigation>.

A reporter for the Center for Public Integrity received the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting

2015 Voter Guide & Upcoming Presidential Primary

by Terry Hluchyj

Thanks to those who distributed Voter Guides with information about the Kalamazoo and Portage city elections to 133+ locations. We couldn't do it without them!

Aedin Clements, Betty Ongley, Charlotte Russell, Cheryl Lyon-Jenness, Connie and Steve Ferguson, Diane Worden, Janet and Keith Jones, Karen and Stu Eddy, Ken Manley, Mabel and Jochanan Stenesh, Martha Cohen, Michele McGowen, Norma Clack, Paula Manley, Paula Presler, Ruth Caputo, Sara Wick, Sue Nelmes, Tanya Potter and Yolanda Mitts.

In addition, Tamara Carpenter earned our respect again for her great work on the layout.

Adams Outdoor advertising supported our efforts again by posting the Vote411.org display on its digital board. There were 795 views in the Kalamazoo area on Vote411 in 2015, almost four times the number in 2013. There were 21,679 in Michigan overall, more than double the views in 2013.

Looking ahead to the upcoming 2016 Presidential primary elections/caucuses, LWVUS will do Voter Guides on VOTE411 for each state to reflect candidates applicable to that state. Races will be published at least two weeks before each state's election. Michigan will have its Presidential Primary on March 8th.

Microbeads Banned

By Ruth Caputo

My thanks to LWVKA members who stopped using personal care products containing plastic microbeads. The following was released by NBC News and the Associated Press on December 30, 2015.

President Barack Obama has signed bipartisan legislation that will phase out the use of plastic "microbeads" in soaps, body washes and other personal-care products to protect U.S. waterways.

Obama signed the bill Monday that prohibits the manufacture of products containing plastic microbeads as of July 1, 2017, and phases out sales of such products over the next two years.

Congress passed the bill this month to protect fish and wildlife that are ingesting the tiny beads after they are rinsed down the drain and discharged into lakes and rivers.

“ And so we shall have to do more than register and more than vote; we shall have to create leaders who embody virtues we can respect, who have moral and ethical principles we can applaud with enthusiasm. ”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Call To LWVUS National Convention

By Paula Manley

Are you interested in representing LWVKA at the 52nd LWVUS National Convention in Washington D.C. June 16-19, 2016? If so, contact President Denise Hartsough at denise.hartsough@gmail.com. This is an opportunity to network with Leaguers from around the country and hear nationally recognized speakers and League leaders discuss a variety of issues. The convention will be held at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. It officially begins on the evening of June 16th. However, there is an opportunity to participate in a Lobby Day on the Hill Thursday June 16th for those who wish to arrive early. LWVKA is allowed three delegates. Our League will pay the registration fee of \$395 which includes a banquet.

Delegates are responsible for all other expenses. Former attendees have found the experience to be stimulating and a great way to learn firsthand about issues which affect us all.

★ Issue Study & Advocacy ★

School Safety: Addition to our Position

By Janet Jones

At the 2015 LWVKA Annual Meeting, we appointed a committee to consider adding a statement about Safety to our Education Position.

The Committee has met and devised language for that statement. Please come to a **Consensus Meeting on Thursday, February 25 at 7:00 p.m.** at Janet Jones' house, 1923 Indiana (Hillcrest neighborhood). If you are unable to attend, you may express your opinion to Janet at 269.383-4436 or janetmjones848@gmail.com.

Here is the proposal:

RATIONALE:

- *It is the responsibility of institutions and the community to ensure the safety of every resident and especially important to provide safe environments for children.*
- *LWV local, state and national positions do not include safety in schools. LWV does not have direction for pursuing school safety advocacy.*
- *We believe that opportunities exist today to apply the best of school safety research and practices to the vision of safe schools for all.*

DRAFT LANGUAGE FOR SCHOOL SAFETY:

Safety: The League of Women Voters of the Kalamazoo Area supports adoption of policies and procedures that ensure the safety of children and adults in the school environments. This includes:

1. Establish disciplinary policies that use restorative practices to determine consequences for aggressive verbal or physical behavior of adults or students.
2. Ensure that all adults who provide services within school environments have background check histories free from violence.
3. Develop and use clear processes for handling grievances of students and adults.
4. Provide public reporting of policies and aggregated outcomes of disputes.

Program Planning Report

Fran Eckenrode

Saturday, January 9, 2016: Thanks to Leaguers who gathered at The Disability Network Kalamazoo Office to review Program Planning and Public Policy Positions for National and Local levels. Participating were **Ruth Caputo, Aedin Clements, Fran Eckenrode, Connie Ferguson, Denise Hartsough, Chris Kuthe, Michelle McGowan, KC Miller, and Janet Scarrow.** Lively discussions resulted in consensus on several topics.

This year the LWVUS Board asked local and state leagues to consider not recommending new studies or position updates but instead focus on an action-based agenda for the "Making Democracy Work" campaign. The proposed "Making Democracy Work" program

includes taking action on democracy issues including money in politics, voting rights and redistricting. The reasons for the change are twofold:

Our democracy is under attack in many parts of our country. We have limited resources and we need to use them to work for campaign finance reform, protection of voting rights, and redistricting reform.

In keeping with the suggestion, our group unanimously supported this action-based agenda. This and other recommended outcomes will be presented to the Board for approval prior to sending on to LWVUS by the March 1 deadline.

Flint Water Crisis

By Ruth Caputo

The Flint Water Advisory Task Force appointed by Governor Snyder issued a letter on December 29, 2015. The entire letter can be viewed at <http://environmentalcouncil.org/mecReports/FWATF-Snyder-Letter12-29-15.pdf>.

The letter said, in part:

We believe the primary responsibility for what happened in Flint rests with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). Although many individuals and entities at state and local levels contributed to creating and prolonging the problem, MDEQ is the government agency whose responsibility it is to ensure safe drinking water in Michigan. It failed in that responsibility and must be held accountable for that failure.

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) places responsibility for compliance with its requirements on the public water system. The role of the MDEQ is to ensure compliance with the SDWA through its regulatory oversight as the primary agency having enforcement responsibility for the Flint water system. The MDEQ failed in three fundamental ways.

(1) Regulatory Failure

We believe that in the Office of Drinking Water and Municipal Assistance (ODWMA) at MDEQ, a culture exists in which "technical compliance" is considered sufficient to ensure safe drinking water in Michigan. This approach to regulatory and oversight responsibility is unacceptable and insufficient to the task of public protection. It led to MDEQ's failure to recognize a number of indications that the water source in Flint would—and did—compromise both water safety and quality. The MDEQ made decisions that were, and continue to be, justified on the basis that federal rules "allowed" such decisions to be made. The ODWMA must not adopt this compliance approach, but rather determine what needs to be done to assure drinking water safety.

A culture change must occur within ODWMA that is aspirational to the role of the MDEQ to ensure the safety and quality of Michigan's drinking water. We believe, and expressed to MDEQ Director Dan Wyant, that as a Great Lakes State, Michigan should aspire to have the safest drinking water in the nation not based on technical compliance with regulatory requirements.

(2) Failure in Substance and Tone of MDEQ Response to the Public

The public raised concerns in 2015 while independent studies and testing were conducted. These results were brought to the attention of MDEQ and the agency's response was often aggressive dismissal, belittlement with attempts to discredit these efforts and individuals involved. We find the tone and substance of many MDEQ public statements completely unacceptable. In a real way, the MDEQ represents the public, including those individuals it treated dismissively and disrespectfully. We recognize that the agency might disagree with the opinions of others, but what is disturbing about MDEQ's

Continued on page 4

MDEQ Letter, continued

responses is their persistent tone of scorn and derision. In fact, the MDEQ seems to have been more determined to discredit the work of others—who ultimately proved to be right—than to pursue its own oversight responsibility.

(3) Failure in MDEQ Interpretation of the Lead and Copper Rule

The federal Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) is central to what happened in Flint. That rule, theoretically, is designed to prevent lead and copper contamination of drinking water. The federal LCR calls for “optimized corrosion control treatment,” which the MDEQ did not require in the switch to the Flint River. The MDEQ staff instructed City of Flint water treatment staff that corrosion control treatment (CCT) was not necessary until two six-month monitoring periods had been conducted. The decision not to require CCT, made at the direction of MDEQ, led directly to the contamination of the Flint water system.

The MDEQ has taken different positions on whether it followed the LCR in the Flint situation. It first maintained that it followed the LCR, then stated that it did not, and most recently claimed that a federal memorandum issued by the US EPA in early November 2015 suggests that the original MDEQ interpretation was possibly correct.

We are not convinced. The MDEQ’s latest interpretation of the US EPA’s November memorandum is overly legalistic and misunderstands the intent of the LCR to minimize risks of lead and copper exposure.

We believe ODWMA’s single-minded legalistic focus is the heart of the problem, and is part of the “technical compliance” culture described above. ODWMA should not base its actions solely on a legally possible interpretation of the LCR. It should be focus on how to protect Michigan’s citizens from lead in drinking water.

We met with MDEQ Director Wyant on December 16, 2015, to discuss these issues, as well as many others. We note his

agreement with many of our conclusions, particularly the regulatory failure and the abysmal public response of his agency. We understand that he has drawn similar conclusions in his evaluation of the MDEQ’s role in the Flint water crisis. However, it was disappointing to hear his weak defense of the CCT decision based on EPA’s November 2015 memorandum.

We are not finished with our work. Others have made poor decisions, contributing to and prolonging the contamination of the drinking water supply in Flint. For example, we are concerned by recent revelations of MDHHS’s early knowledge of elevated blood lead levels detected among Flint’s children, yet remained silent. We also feel it important to review local government decision processes under emergency management. Our final report will highlight and discuss many concerns to provide some context to a comprehensive series of recommendations. As stated earlier in this letter, we believe that establishing responsibility is critical and urgent and should not wait for our final report in 2016.

The Task Force includes:

Matthew Davis, M.D., M.A.P.P., professor of pediatrics and internal medicine at the University of Michigan Health System and professor of public policy at the Gerald R. Ford School at the University of Michigan

Chris Kolb, president of the Michigan Environmental Council

Lawrence Reynolds, M.D., a Flint pediatrician who serves as president of the Mott Children’s Health Center

Eric Rothstein, a national water issues consultant and principal at the Galardi Rothstein Group

Ken Sikkema, a senior policy fellow at Public Sector Consultants, where he specializes in public finance, environment, and energy policy.

Why is the Water Green?

By Ruth Caputo



Credit: MERIS/ESA, processed by NOAA/NOS/NCCOS)

On Tuesday, March 22, Jeanette Neagu, a long-time board member of LWV Lake Michigan Region, will give a talk on “Why is the Water Green?” at the Kalamazoo Public Library at 6:30pm. Jeanette will explain how algal blooms impact water quality, where the problem is occurring, and what individuals and local leagues can do to help reduce nutrient overloads in Lake Michigan and its tributaries.

In August 2014, a toxic blue-green algae bloom of *Microcystis* which can produce microcystin, a liver toxin and skin irritant, settled over the water intake for Toledo, Ohio. For three days a community of 500,000 people was not able to use its tap water. These types of algae blooms have not only impacted Lake Erie but also Lake Michigan’s Grand Traverse Bay and Green Bay. Fur-

ther, an overgrowth of the *Cladophora* algae has been impacting Indiana and Wisconsin’s beaches. The algal blooms have been attributed to excessive nutrient overloads of phosphates and nitrates in waterways primarily coming from agricultural runoff. While the problem is well known, the solutions have been slow in being implemented. Ohio has introduced a bill to reduce the discharge of phosphorus to their waterways.

Jeanette Neagu was born in Chicago and has lived in northwest Indiana since. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago. She is currently Chair of the Natural Resources Committee of the League of Women Voters of Indiana. She has also served as President of Save the Dunes and LWVLMR. She continues as a board member of the LWVLMR as well as the League of Women Voters of Indiana. Recently she has focused on environmental threats to the Great Lakes including combined sewer overflows and spills from above-ground chemical storage tanks.

What Is The Lake Michigan Interleague?

Did you know that your League along with all the other Leagues in Michigan are members of the LWV Lake Michigan Region? This Inter-League organization is made up of 48 local Leagues within the Lake Michigan watershed and regional planning areas. In addition, the four state Leagues of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin pay dues, entitling all of their individual Leagues to receive information and to take part in LWVLMR events. Each state League also appoints two delegates and two alternates to serve on the LWVLMR Board that meets quarterly.

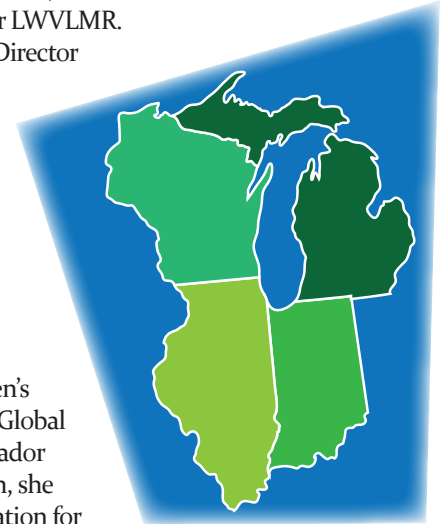
Who Represents Michigan On The LWVLMR Board?

RUTH CAPUTO, delegate from Kalamazoo, has a PhD in Physical Chemistry. She currently chairs the City of Portage’s Environmental Board and the Programs Committee for the Kalamazoo Area Wild Ones, a group that promotes the use of native plants. A Master Gardner, Ruth enjoys giving tours of her backyard which contains different types of gardens.

VINA MIKESELL, delegate from Leelanau County, joined the League in Crawfordsville, IN and served as its President and on the LWVIN Board. Vina was instrumental in forming a new League in Leelanau County. She is past president and current editor of the Leelanau VOTER. She is also president of ShareCare of Leelanau, an organization that keeps seniors in their own homes as long as possible.

SUZANNE DIXON, alternate from Holland, served as past Treasurer and Board member for LWVLMR. Currently in her third term as LWVMI Director of Natural Resources and a Board member, she also holds the same offices in the Holland League. Suzanne is a founding board member of the Allegan County Brownfield Authority and is president of a helping agency for the needy.

CHRIS ZILKE, alternate from Berrien and Cass Counties, lived outside of the country for 8 ½ years during her children’s early years. Chris participated in three “Global Volunteers” vacations in Viet Nam, Ecuador and Hawaii. Passionate about education, she served on the Bridgman Board of Education for 8 years, 2 of them as President. Currently Chris is President of the Berrien/Cass League.



LWV Lake Michigan Region is an integral part of and operates under the Natural Resources position of the LWVUS. The mission of LWVLMR is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government and acts on selected governmental issues affecting the Lake Michigan watershed. The group is happy to provide speakers on a variety of topics affecting Lake Michigan. Contact us at lwvlakemichigan@gmail.com and like us on facebook.

Volunteers!

By MerriKay Olean Burkey

Thank you to the Voter Registration Volunteers for January. The following six people were volunteers at KVCC for *Winter Welcome*: A big thank you to the following:

- ✦ Paula Aldridge
- ✦ Beth Amidon
- ✦ Martha Cohen
- ✦ Connie Micklin
- ✦ Charlotte Russell
- ✦ Norma Stancati



Mark your calendar!



Our next Meet & Greet will be April 15 at One Well Brewing on Portage St. from 5:30-6:30pm.

Please plan on joining us! It’s a fun way to meet new and prospective

League members or catch up with long-standing League friends. Hope to see you there this Spring!





LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®

Kalamazoo Area

P.O. Box 2106
Kalamazoo, MI 49003-2106

Returned Service Requested

Reminder: Founders' Day Brunch

This year's brunch will be February 13, 10 am to noon, at Henderson Castle in Kalamazoo. Members are encouraged to bring guests who might be interested in joining the League. There is no charge for potential members and for new members who joined the League in 2015. Please RSVP by January 29, 2016. Even if you do not pay in advance, please let Fran know by phone or email that you will be attending. Fran Eckenrode at feckenr@gmail.com or 269-903-9372.



LWVKA FOUNDERS' DAY BRUNCH

FEBRUARY 13, 2016 • 10AM-NOON

HENDERSON CASTLE, 100 MONROE ST., KALAMAZOO

LWVKA Board for 2015-2016

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