

VOTER

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LWVJC | P. O. Box 5452 |
Coralville, IA 52241

February 2024

Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy

Artificial Intelligence and Elections

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been with us for a while, but has now reached levels of sophistication that make videos and voices very hard to identify as real or fake. Inexpensive apps (\$1.99) allow anyone to make videos of excellent quality.

AI will influence the 2024 elections around the globe; there are major elections in 78 countries. Individuals, organizations, and governments all participate in spreading false ideas. Putin pays people well to spread fake news. The tech sector in the U.S. has pushed back against regulations and has cut a significant number of jobs, which severely curtails facts.

Currently there are few laws in place in any country to govern AI. There are no norms, no common understanding of actions and effects, and no aligned vision nationally or internationally. There are many questions about social media and AI specifically.

We already know that people in the U.S. live in different realities. People have become more politically divided in the last several years, due in part to their preferred sources of information. News platforms, i.e., Facebook, Instagram, TV and blogs influence views of climate change, economics, politics and level of trust in the government. We tend to consume news that agrees with our established beliefs, feeding into a cycle of reinforcement. We may add fakes to our cycle because they align more with our beliefs than reality does.

Politicians and other high profile social media accounts are especially easy to mimic. Many Americans are concerned about the influence of AI on our elections and as a result may be less trusting of the results. When we do not trust our news sources and election outcomes, then doubt, divisiveness and distrust spread. AI could destabilize governments and further erode democracy around the world. We have already seen many democracies become illiberal democracies under the rule of autocrats.

Be informed before you vote. View candidates in person when possible. Check the sources of news you choose.

*Paula Vaughan and Miriam Timmer-Hackert
co-presidents*

The *Voter* is issued the last Friday of the month to provide members advance notice of activities.
The March Voter deadline is February 20.



Fundraising

Aiming to finish our Fundraising Campaign! Thanks to everyone who has already donated. We have reached about 80% of our goal for this year, so if you have not yet sent in your contribution, please consider doing so today to put us over the top.

As everyone knows, 2024 is an election year, so the LWVJC is engaged in a robust range of actions in voter registration, legislative forums, candidate forums, advocacy on critical issues, and voter education. These activities are the grassroots of democracy and the LWVJC's nonpartisan work for democratic government at local, state, and national levels is needed more than ever. Your donation makes this work possible by allowing the LWVJC to rent halls, pay for materials, bring in speakers, and more.

The LWVJC spends every dollar with care, stretching the budget to ensure that it can continue to meet all these demands. Membership fees in the League go primarily to state and national operations, so the LWVJC relies on your donations for its important work in Johnson County.

Many thanks to all our members who have already contributed so generously. Without your help, the LWVJC could not succeed in its critical activities of advocating for fair and transparent government, working for voter rights and education, and making democracy work in Johnson County.

Donations made by **check** can be mailed to: LWVJC, P. O. Box 5452, Coralville, IA, 52241

Donations can also be made **online** at the LWVJC web site: <https://lwwjc.org/donate/>

*Kathleen Kamerick
Fundraising Chair*



Advocacy Update

The new legislative session is always a busy time for Advocacy. That is especially so when each legislative session seems to begin with a new Big Idea that is, sadly, also a Bad Idea.

The biggest bad idea at this moment is Governor Reynold's move to cut back and defund the state's Area Education Agencies (AEAs), which provide a wide range of support to schools from substitute teacher authorization to disability services. This idea has generated so much blowback that the governor has already had to pare back her initial plan, at least rhetorically. More work will have to be done here, and we will be putting out resources and an alert to members soon.

Another bad idea is a bill from last year that would allow guns in school parking lots and force insurance companies to cover schools that arm teachers. LWVJC advocates have been alerted to this and are reaching out to Senate Judiciary Committee members where we hope it will stall.

Other work includes looking into a possible Freedom of Information request about feedback that was submitted to the governor's committee on restructuring state boards and commissions and considering how best to spread the information we received from Senator Quirmback on the funding situation for Iowa schools.

If you'd like to learn more or be involved, please reach out to Shannon Patrick or another member of the Advocacy Committee.

*Shannon Patrick
Advocacy Chair*

Voter Services Committee

The 2024 legislative forums will be held on January 27, February 24, and March 30 at the Iowa City Senior Center from 9:30-11:30 AM. The forums will also be livestreamed on the League's Facebook page. All legislators have been invited to participate.

Focus areas for each of the forums have been identified. In January our focus will be Education, Healthcare in February and Public Safety in March. Related legislative issues as well as the impact of ongoing tax cuts on these areas will be brought forward.

The following organizations have been invited to the January Education forum as partners who are encouraged to invite people from their organizations and identify an individual to ask a question if they choose.

- Iowa City Community School District
- Iowa City Education Association
- American Association of University Professors
- University of Iowa Public Policy Center's Social & Education Research Program
- Grant Wood Area Education Agency
- Iowa Association of School Librarians
- Iowa 4 Cs

Partner organizations for the February Healthcare forum are:

- UIHC Outreach
- Aging Services of Johnson County
- Community & Family Resources
- Iowa City Hospice/VNA
- Free Medical Clinic
- Healthy Kids
- United Action for Youth
- Oaknoll, representing Senior Housing
- NAMI
- Johnson County Public Health

We hope you will attend.

Jeanne Bancroft
Voter Services Chair

Making Connections

All members are invited to our next **Making Connections** gathering at the home of Jeanne Bancroft on Thursday, February 15, from 5:30-7 p.m. at 2190 Port Talbot Place, Coralville. Light refreshments will be served. The subject of our gathering will be *Bringing Economic Justice to the Justice System*. Since last September, a group of LWVJC members has been studying the request from the LWVIA to review its report on this issue, which focuses on the economic impact of the legal system on poor people. We have interviewed several people in Johnson County who work with Iowa's legal system in order to understand how a wide range of its elements – from bail to daily jail fees to the need to pay for legal aid -- affect poor and indigent people, often with long term consequences.

Members of our study group will discuss its findings at this gathering. In February the LWVJC will ask all members to vote on concurrence with the LWVIA's proposed positions. This **Making Connections** offers members an opportunity to learn about the issues, and about our study group's recommendations before this vote. Please join us.

Kathleen Kamerick

FilmScene Community Collaboration

FilmScene at the Hotel Chauncey (Iowa City, Iowa) is showing the documentary film *I, Too* on March 25, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. in its Community Collaborations series. Community Collaborations is an ongoing series of engaging cinematic events in partnership with nonprofits, advocacy groups, passionate individuals, and community organizations to generate conversation and action inspired by film.

The film *I, Too*, features Dr. Carol Anderson, New York Times bestseller author and Chair of African American Studies at Emory University.

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I, Too explores the connection between America's history (through the lens of little-known episodes from the past), and the current challenges to American democracy. It examines the question "Who could believe this could happen here?" regarding the January 6, 2021, insurrection.

Join LWVJC, LWV of Iowa and the Bertelsmann Foundation for this screening and discussion event exploring the impact of history and accountability in strengthening democracy. The *I, Too* screening will be at FilmScene at the Hotel Chauncey, 404 E College Street, Iowa City. Attached ramp parking at The Chauncey is free after 6 p.m.

Polly Horton
League of Women Voters of Iowa

Local Writers Address *Iowa's Path to Sustainability*

Water pollution, flooding and drought, soil erosion, and extreme weather events are grabbing increasing attention across Iowa. What's going on – and what can we do about it?

These and other Iowa environmental problems – and their solutions – will be the focus of Project GREEN (Grow to Reach Environmental Excellence Now) and the Iowa City Public Library's Second Sunday Garden Forum 2024, on Sunday, February 11, from 2 -4 p.m. The forum, which is free and open to the public, will also stream live on Iowa City Public Library's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/thelibrarychannel>

The forum's discussions will be based on the book *Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future* (University of Iowa Press, 2022), which includes chapters by 28 Iowa premier scientists and environmental activists. Book editor Connie Mutel will lead a panel with five authors who contributed chapters on soil, water, climate and biodiversity problems. Ample time will be allowed for audience participation and questions.

Cindy Parsons, co-president of Project GREEN, said she is pleased Connie will return to present her newest book with colleagues and fellow writers. "Connie is Iowa's Aldo Leopold. She combines her passion and knowledge of the environment with excellent writing and editing skills to remind all of us of our moral responsibility to care for Iowa's land."

Tending Iowa's Land synthesizes the details of today's interacting environmental dilemmas. This hopeful and action-oriented book proposes that Iowans can foster the state's native resilience by nurturing elements of tallgrass prairies – the complex plant communities that dominated our state into the early 1800s. *Tending Iowa's Land* received the 2023 Midwest Book Award for Nonfiction – Nature.

Mutel is the author or editor of 14 books. Seven of these focus on Iowa's natural environment. Her books, as well as other writings and educational efforts across the state, have established her as a devoted advocate for nature in Iowa. Before retiring, she was a Senior Science Writer at IHR-Hydroscience & Engineering in the UI College of Engineering.

Ecologist Pauline Drobney guided the initial restoration of Iowa's 8,654-acre Neil Smith National Wildlife Refuge on former farmland. Until her retirement, she directed Midwestern prairie and savanna research for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She will describe the prairie's amazing abilities to create a self-sustaining landscape, and the benefits and techniques of re-introducing diverse native plantings throughout our agricultural landscape. Pauline wrote the chapter on the tallgrass prairie.

Iowa State Geologist Keith Schilling serves as Director of the Iowa Geological Survey at the UI. His broad and prolific research on soil- and water-related issues is reflected in his chapters on soil erosion and water pollution (with Christopher Jones). Schilling will discuss soil erosion and regenerative agriculture techniques that address this problem as well as problems with soil degradation, water pollution, carbon emissions, and biodiversity loss.

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Jerald Schnoor, UI Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, former department chair, and the winner of numerous awards, has for decades focused his teaching and research on water quality and environmental health. His publications and students have advanced climate change efforts and water sustainability around the world. With his passion and creativity, Schnoor was the perfect author for the final book chapter “Regenerating Our Future: A Call to Action,” which he will discuss.

Award-winning organic dairy farmer Francis Thicke considers greenhouse gas emissions with every farming decision he makes, from how and what he feeds his cows to where he sells milk products. Thicke earned his doctorate in soil science and previously worked as a USDA Soil Science Program Leader for the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. Both his academic and farming experiences fed into his chapter on using agriculture to help control climate change, which he will talk about.

As the UI IHR-Hydroscience & Engineering Director, Professor Larry Weber has created multiple Iowa initiatives to examine flooding, water pollution and landscape sustainability. Through his efforts with the Iowa Flood Center and Iowa Watershed Approach (IWA), Weber has developed a broad understanding of our state’s complex water issues and their solutions, which form a basis for his chapter and description of “Water-Centered Land Management.”

Project GREEN launched in 1968. The nonprofit supports efforts to educate citizens about the importance of conservation practices and preserving the natural environment. The organization celebrated 55 years of service to the community last year.

Linda Schreiber



UMRR-ILO

The League of Women Voters Upper Mississippi River Region InterLeague Organization is very happy to announce we received grant money from the Mississippi River Network. Our Chair Mary Ellen Miller worked tirelessly on making sure the t’s were crossed and the i’s were dotted! Chair Mary Ellen had shoulder surgery in late December and the grant was due January 10. She got it done, and this miracle woman is one we are happy and proud to have at the helm of the LWV UMRR-ILO!

You will be able to see the results of this grant as it includes a large visual that explains much about the Mississippi River. This educational visual will be displayed in the five states belonging to UMRR.

A recent survey of Iowa residents showed that only 10-20% of the people interviewed knew that Iowa was in the watershed/basin of the Mississippi River. First, I want to iterate that “basin” is a more accurate term for all the water that flows from 31 states into the Mississippi River. These are states whose water runs from their state into the Mississippi River. Because “watershed” is actually what the states are, both terms are generally used. Until people get the definition of both, I’m going to use watershed/basin in talking about the runoff from each and all the states. Please visit the link that goes to the study that groups Iowa in the 10-20% category in terms of people knowing we are a big part of the watershed that contributes to the Mississippi River basin:

<https://investigatamidwest.org/2023/10/31/study-finds-mississippi-river-basin-residents-concerned-about-environment-but-largely-unaware-they-live-in-the-watershed/>

Below are the first three paragraphs from the study. Note Maisah Khan is used as a resource. She is on our leadership team of the Mississippi River Network. I work with her on advocacy.

“New research gives a rare look at climate attitudes of Mississippi River basin residents and the relationship they have — or don’t have — with one of the world’s most important rivers.

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The study, released Oct. 23, was conducted by a team of researchers led by assistant professor Kate Rose at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, also home to the Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk. They surveyed more than 2,300 adult residents from the 10 states that

border the Mississippi River, seeking to better understand what people know about environmental issues in the basin.

Only about half of those surveyed were aware their state was in the basin. In Kentucky just 7.5% of respondents thought they lived in the basin, even though it includes the entire state.”

This map shows how many respondents in each mainstem Mississippi River state answered correctly as to whether they lived in the river’s watershed.

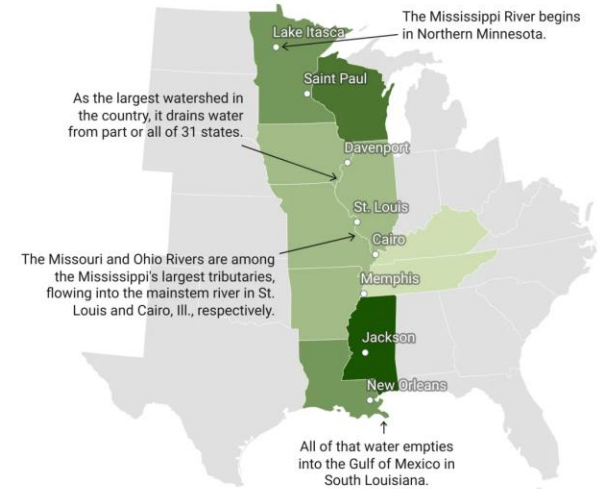
Maisah Khan, policy director for the Mississippi River Network, said she starts every presentation by showing a map of the basin — pointing out the headwaters and the Gulf, explaining the expansiveness of the tributaries that pour in. If people don’t know that they’re in

the basin, she said, they can’t grasp that what happens on their stretch of river will affect what happens downstream.

Do people know if they live in the Mississippi River basin?

This map shows the percentage of survey respondents who were aware of whether they lived in the Mississippi River basin, in each of the 10 “mainstem” states that lie directly along the river.

Correct answers about whether respondent lives in the basin
< 10% 10 - 20% 20 - 30% 30 - 40% > 40%



Adjacent states are shown in gray and were not included in the survey. This map includes data from fig. 33 of “Public research in the Mississippi River Basin: Environmental perspective and identity.” Correct or incorrect determinations were made by comparing a respondent’s location data to their response when asked whether they thought they lived in the basin. “Not sure” responses were marked as incorrect.
Map: Annie Ropeik • Source: University of Missouri / Ag & Water Desk • Created with Datawrapper

Nancy Porter
LWV Representative to the Mississippi River Network

More FYI

The Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics at Iowa State University is pleased to announce that Dr. Deborah Turner, president of the League of Women Voters of the United States, will be the 2024 Mary Louise Smith Chair in Women and Politics. Dr. Turner will present *Visionary Activism: How To Get From Here to There* on Tuesday February 13, 2024, at 7 p.m. in the Great Hall of the Memorial Union at Iowa State University. A reception will follow her presentation. Both events are free and open to the public.

LWV of Iowa co-presidents Terese Grant and Holly Oppelt penned a guest opinion about gun safety that appeared recently in the Storm Lake Times Pilot. Check it out here:
<https://www.stormlake.com/articles/gun-safety-is-a-priority-for-iowans/>

LWVJC is currently at 146 members. Think about bringing a friend to one of the many events coming up over the next few weeks – maybe they would like to join us!



★ ★ ★ ★ ★
JOIN US FOR THE JANUARY LEGISLATIVE FORUM



SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 2024

9:30 - 11:30 AM

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

IOWA CITY SENIOR CENTER ASSEMBLY ROOM
28 S. LINN ST., IOWA CITY

In-person and live streamed to LWVJC Facebook page



★ ★ ★ ★ ★
JOIN US FOR THE FEBRUARY LEGISLATIVE FORUM



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2024

9:30 - 11:30 AM

FOCUS ON HEALTHCARE

IOWA CITY SENIOR CENTER ASSEMBLY ROOM
28 S. LINN ST., IOWA CITY

In-person and live streamed to LWVJC Facebook page



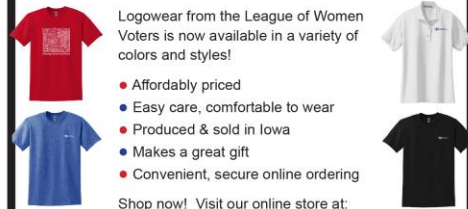
*Making
Connections*

**Economic Justice in the
Criminal Justice System**

FEBRUARY 15, 2024, 5:30-7PM
JEANNE BANCROFT'S HOME
2190 PORT TALBOT PLACE
CORALVILLE
LIGHT REFRESHMENTS



Show Your Colors!



Logowear from the League of Women Voters is now available in a variety of colors and styles!

- Affordably priced
- Easy care, comfortable to wear
- Produced & sold in Iowa
- Makes a great gift
- Convenient, secure online ordering

Shop now! Visit our online store at:

stores.inksoft.com/league_of_women_voters



All net proceeds from sales go to the League of Women Voters of Iowa

★ VOTING

Promote equal access to voting and ensure all votes are counted. Adopt automatic voter registration. Enact ranked choice voting. Pass a constitutional amendment allowing Iowans with felony convictions to vote after time served.

🏛️ TRANSPARENCY & CITIZENSHIP

Demand government accountability and transparency by requiring all amendments and bills discussed in committee to be available to the public prior to a vote. Demand timely processing of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Encourage direct citizen participation by continuing virtual committee and subcommittee meetings. Preserve gender balance requirements for state boards and commissions.

🎓 EDUCATION

Increase oversight and track public funds being used for non-public schools. Require any non-public school receiving public funds to meet the same standards as public schools. Fully fund public schools. Continue to expand access to affordable childcare and four-year-old preschool.

👩‍⚕️ REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Guarantee access to the full range of women's reproductive health services. Make contraception available without prescription. Ensure Medicaid services are comprehensive and accessible. Support new moms with 12 months of postpartum Medicaid coverage. Set policies that attract maternal health professionals and address the state's OB/GYN deserts.

👤 HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Prevent human trafficking in all of its forms, support its victims, and enact "Safe Harbor" legislation to protect human trafficking survivors from criminal prosecution.

💧 ENVIRONMENT

Increase funding for environment and water quality initiatives, including REAP, and develop state climate change strategies.

🔫 GUN SAFETY

Enact comprehensive common sense gun safety legislation to address increasing gun violence in the state. Enact background checks on all gun sales, close gun show loopholes, require gun safety locks, repeal "stand your ground" law, and resist efforts that expand carrying in public spaces and schools.



League of Women Voters of Johnson County

OUR MISSION: *Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy.*

OUR VISION: We envision a democracy where every person has the desire, the right, the knowledge and the confidence to participate.

OUR VALUE: We believe in the power of women and men to create a more perfect democracy.

Photo Gallery



Above: L to R, Johnson County Auditor's Office Election Technician Alex Stanton and Poll Workers Rita Kenyon and Brian Whitehead answer questions following the screening of *No Time to Fail* at the Coralville Library on January 6.

Below Left: L to R, ICCSD Deputy Superintendent Chace Ramey with LWVJC Education Committee member Susan Enzle prior to the League Lecture Series event on Thursday, January 25. Below Right: Approximately 25 people were on hand to hear from Deputy Superintendent Ramey at the Iowa City Public Library.



Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Location	Program
Saturday, January 27	9:30-11:30 a.m.	Senior Center Assembly Room, Iowa City	Legislative Forum: Education
Sunday, February 11	2-4 p.m.	Iowa City Public Library	Second Sunday Garden Forum with Project GREEN
Monday, February 12	6:30-8 p.m.	virtual	Board meeting
Tuesday February 13	7 p.m.	Memorial Union, Iowa State University	<i>Visionary Activism: How to Get from Here to There</i> , Dr Deborah Turner, LWV President and Mary Louise Smith Chair in Women and Politics
Wednesday, February 14	10 a.m.	Poindexter Coffee, Graduate Hotel, Iowa City	Casual Coffee
Thursday, February 15	5:30-7 p.m.	Jeanne Bancroft's home, 2190 Port Talbot PL, Coralville	Making Connections: Bringing Economic Justice to the Criminal Justice System
Saturday, February 24	9:30-11:30 a.m.	Senior Center Assembly Room, Iowa City	Legislative Forum: Healthcare
Wednesday, March 13	10 a.m.	Poindexter Coffee, Graduate Hotel, Iowa City	Casual Coffee
Monday, March 25	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Filmscene at the Chauncey, 404 E. College St., Iowa City	<i>I, Too</i> film screening with discussion following
Saturday, March 30	9:30-11:30 a.m.	Senior Center Assembly Room, Iowa City	Legislative Forum: Public Safety
Wednesday, April 10	10 a.m.	Poindexter Coffee, Graduate Hotel, Iowa City	Casual Coffee
Thursday, April 11	4 - 7 p.m.	Jasper Winery, Des Moines	Annual LWVIA Defending Democracy event. Save the Date - Details soon
Wednesday, April 17	6:30 - 8 p.m.	Iowa City Public Library	Connie Mutel: <i>Iowa, the Beautiful Land: Envisioning an Action Agenda for Nature and Agriculture</i>
June 27-30		Washington DC + online	2024 LWVUS National Convention



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