



September 2024

President's Message: The Empty Chair

Some of you may recall that at the 2012 Republican Convention, the actor Clint Eastwood made a controversial speech to an empty chair, which he said represented President Barack Obama. Then and now, the idea of candidates in competitive races addressing opponents who cannot respond is meme-worthy no matter where your personal politics lead you.

The issue of whether or not to hold an “empty chair forum”—when only one candidate in a contested election is present—is a complex one for the League. Any local League must take into account League guidance or directives, restrictions on political action by nonprofits, IRS rules, and of course the League’s all-important nonpartisan policy. Our local League’s policy for many years has been, and remains, that *in competitive races, if only one candidate agrees to attend, he or she cannot speak because the opposition is literally an “empty chair.”* This is in line with advice from both LWVUS and LWVC leadership. To have only one candidate for an office on a stage, for whatever reason, may give the appearance that the League is offering support to that candidate. Also, the no empty-chair policy reflects the League’s nonpartisan mission to empower voters and defend democracy by ensuring that the public is able to hear from all candidates for any office.

Over the years, candidates have declined, or been unable, to participate in League forums for a variety of reasons, ranging from schedule conflicts to illness to concern about the truly “nonpartisan” mission of the League. In the last few years, the problem has become more difficult due to the increase in the number of districts, and therefore races, as local city councils and school boards have moved from at-large voting to district voting. As a result, a number of Leagues, including our own, have opted to offer candidate “speed-dating” at programs that give folks a chance to get to know their candidates. In a speed-dating

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session, members of the community sit at round tables with 8 to 10 other folks, and the candidates visit each table for a period of 10 to 15 minutes. That way people can meet each candidate, ask questions, and express concerns in a more personal setting than a formal debate permits. In this setting, we invite all candidates, and whoever shows up participates, without regard to whether their opponents are present as well. Because the League does not present the candidates to the public nor control the questions asked, this format is felt to present less danger of perceived favoritism or bias than the empty-chair forum.

We decide which format to use based on various considerations. But whichever format is used, our goal is *always* to have all candidates participate, as this is clearly the best result for the voters and for our democracy.

Because our commitment to nonpartisan voter education is paramount, we encourage League members to reach out to incumbents and challengers in competitive races and encourage them to participate in your League's candidate forums and speed-dating events.

According to Wikipedia, Clint Eastwood later said that the skit was made up on the spot right before he gave it, and that if he could, he would say something different if he could have a do-over: "My only message was [that] I wanted people to take the idolizing factor out of every contestant out there. Just look at the work, look at the background, and then make a judgment on that."

That's exactly what the League would say as well, and exactly why (like Mr. Eastwood), we would prefer to have every candidate present when we offer them opportunities to meet with voters.

Janet Rechtman & Satsie Veith, Co-Presidents

LWVUS President's Statement on Protecting Democracy

WASHINGTON—The League of Women Voters of the US president, **Dianna Wynn**, issued the following statement about the state of American democracy ahead of the 2024 general election:

"For more than a century, the League of Women Voters has stood as a trusted, nonpartisan source of election information for voters across this nation. Since our founding, our organization has been dedicated to preparing voters to cast their ballot in each election and to exercise their right to participate in democracy.

"We stand firmly against policies and actions that threaten the integrity and inclusiveness of the democratic process. White nationalism and efforts to move our government toward authoritarianism threatens the very foundation of our democracy. The League will use our power and resources to combat any attempt to undercut the values of free and fair elections, and our democracy of, by, and for the people. Through protests and advocacy we will challenge any policies, laws, and regulations that propose restrictive measures that undermine our nation's progress toward ensuring every citizen's right to vote.

"Our country is at an existential crossroads, and voters must make a critical decision about the direction of our nation. The League remains committed to providing nonpartisan election information for voters at [VOTE411.org](https://www.vote411.org) and empowering voters to send a clear message about the future we want. We urge American voters to turn up and turn out in November to ensure our democracy reflects the will of the people."

Get Ready for the Election:

Links to the Latest League Events and Voting Information

- [The Latest on League Election Events](#) [HERE](#)
- [The Latest Voting Info on the League website](#) [HERE](#)
- [CA Sec of State Important Election & Registration Dates](#) [HERE](#)
- [Accessible Voting Information](#) [HERE](#)
- [Language Assistance](#) [HERE](#)
- [Ballot Drop Box & Voter Assistance Center Locations & Hours](#) [HERE](#)

Fall Coffee

Our speaker at the September 14 Fall Coffee was Nolan Higdon, author and university lecturer on history and media studies. He has authored several books and articles, including *The Anatomy of Fake News: Critical News Literacy Education* (2020). He spoke to a large crowd of League members and guests and got some local media attention (see below).

[Media Literacy Expert](#): Identify Fake News by Looking at Sources, Yucheng Tang, Chico Sol, Sept. 15, 2024.

[Speaker Preaches Media Literacy](#), Jennie Blevins, Chico E-R, Sept. 16, 2014

See also: [Nolans' Substack](#): A Brief Guide to Fake News and the 2024 Election



Nolan Higdon

An Evening with Meteorologist Patrick Wright

On June 20, local Action News Now meteorologist Patrick Wright was the guest speaker at a League meeting planned by the Natural Resources Committee. There was a large audience of League members and guests who learned a good deal about forecasting the weather but also about the local media and how the weather fits into the daily broadcasting programming. As with the weather itself, there are often unpredictable events that effect the station and personnel. It was certainly an interesting insight into what can be going on behind the camera.

Mr. Wright also talked about changes that will be forthcoming as there is more consolidation of media. He encouraged everyone to pay attention and look for reliable sources for weather information.

He was available after the presentation to take questions and many in the audience availed themselves of that opportunity.

Many thanks to Mr. Wright for this very enlightening evening.

The slides from his presentation are available on the League website. (Thank you, Helen)

—Toni Reid, Natural Resources Director



Meteorologist Patrick White

It's a Small (League) World after All!

Last month while on a small boat cruise of Alaska's Inside Passage, I had the privilege of meeting AnnaMaria Abernathy, former President of the LWV of Newton, Mass. Among her many honors, AnnaMaria received her League's Jane Leighton Award for volunteer service. At the ripe young age of 94, AnnaMaria continues to be involved in her League's Land Use and Transportation committee and is an advocate for environmental issues in her community. When not watching out for whales and puffins, AnnaMaria and I couldn't resist opportunities to brag up the League with others on our voyage. WE may even have recruited a member or two.



Janet Rechtman and AnnaMaria Abernathy

LWVUS 2024 Convention, Part I: Voter Outreach Workshops

Corky LeTellier, our Voter Registration Director, virtually attended some of the LWVUS Convention in late June. Here are her observations:

I was happy to attend, via Zoom, several of the workshops as part of the LWVUS convention. These workshops are very helpful for our League to expand voting and voter registration among the youth in Butte County. Please add to any of these ideas or volunteer to implement those that you are interested in expanding. Thanks, Corky

A brief summary of each is as follows:

Strategies for Getting Out the Vote

Mailings, door hangers, email. Suggested collecting information for follow-up. Partnering with CHAT, JobCorps, County Clerk, Chamber of Commerce, AAUW, etc.

Having a Regional Organizer and having Vote by Mail in senior living spaces. In California, since everyone registered receives a ballot by mail, many of these suggestions do not apply, but we do push to make sure everyone turns in their ballot.

Creating a Culture of Voting on Campus

Missouri State has a program that is student driven with student driven ideas. Gen Z—Do they care? Information from social media suggests that they feel anxious about voting.

Solutions—offer nonpartisan resources in freshman packet, Voting Fair with voting machines, local election voter guide, student government courses and councils. Credit for voting? How their voice relates to the world around them.

Engaging Young Voters, New Americans, and Formerly and Currently Incarcerated People

Since 2020, the US has naturalized 3.5 million citizens. Talk about the importance of voting, information on the League, registration forms, Vote411 information, pens, etc. (mostly in St. Paul).

LWVMN has a Young Voter Registration Program

where students get a stipend for completing a voter services project. The State has mandated schools to help with Voter Registration. New Jersey League emphasized visibility and going into vocational schools and has an initiative to register returning citizens. They also have a National Grant for a flyer on your rights to vote in New Jersey, partnering with faith-based nonprofits and social justice organizations.

Voter Girl!

A program started in Kent, Ohio, with Girl Scouts. It is a one-day program in which girls, from Daisy to Ambassadors, learn about democracy and earn their citizenship badge. Counting ballots, campaign finance, how to experience loss, and reminders of the importance of voting. One vote pushed through the 19th Amendment!

Supporting Youth Leaders—Youth Councils

Panel with kids from Alaska, Maine, and Oregon. Ideas: get involved through internships (some paid by LWV), do podcasts, run mock elections, engage with state legislators and panels on locally important issues. Independent thought: do not have to align with LWV policies. It is important to have great communication. Start with Student Advisory Boards from all middle and high schools. Oregon Youth Council started with four people.

LWVUS 2024 Convention, Part II: Local News and the Decline of Democracy—A New LWVUS Position

“The LWVUS believes it is the responsibility of the government to provide support for conditions under which credible local journalism can survive and thrive.”

So reads the main statement of a new LWVUS position, which was [adopted by concurrence with a LWV of Washington State position](#). With this position in place, any state or local League may advocate for policies they believe will support local journalists in their communities and states.

Local Journalism Is Essential to Democracy

Supporters of the position emphasized that citizens rely on local news outlets to know what is happening

on the city council, the school board, other local agencies, and to find out who is running for local office and what their positions are. As local journalism declines, people become disengaged from civic life, the sense of community begins to fail, political polarization and corruption increase.

The Spread of “News Deserts”

Position advocates presented a frightening set of facts:

- Since 2005, the county has lost more than a third of its newspapers (3000), especially in rural and suburban areas.
- At the same time, we have lost almost two-thirds of journalists employed by newspapers (43,000).
- Two hundred and four counties currently have no local news outlet, and more than half have only one local news source—i.e., they have become “news deserts.”
- As this has happened, mis- and disinformation have increased, voter participation in elections has dropped, and fewer people are seeking public office.

The good news is that policies to support local journalism are receiving bipartisan support across the country. And now Leagues can advocate for them if desired. Some examples:

- ▶ In San Francisco, the Board of Supervisors recently unanimously adopted a [resolution encouraging city departments](#) to spend at least half their advertising and outreach funds in locally owned media outlets (similar to policies in New York and Chicago).
- ▶ Washington D.C. and Seattle have adopted tax-funded coupons or vouchers that residents can use to support local newsrooms of their choice.
- ▶ The Illinois legislature has [passed a tax incentive plan](#) to support local journalists. Another Illinois law allows for a 120-day waiting period before an outside source can purchase a local news outlet.
- ▶ See [LWVW’s presentation on their concurrence](#) for more details and many more examples of policies in support of local journalism.
- ▶ More on [News Deserts](#), including an interactive map.
- ▶ NPR’s 1A Broadcast: [Local News Is Dying: What’s Killing It?](#)

Dear LWVBC Members,

We hope you were able to attend the Fall Coffee on September 14 (see reporting in this newsletter). It was a very successful event, and there is much more activity underway and about to take place: candidate forums, voter registration, pro’s and con’s presentations are getting in full gear.

DUES REMINDER: Along with these activities is the very important fact that 2025 dues are payable as of September 1. Amounts are unchanged: \$75 for an individual and \$125 for a household. Remember, if you joined the League as a new member after May of this year, you are paid up through 2025!

Here’s How to Pay Dues:

Online: Go to <https://my.lwv.org/california/butte-county/join>

Mail a check made out to LWV OF BUTTE COUNTY to:

League of Women Voters of Butte County
P.O. Box 965
Chico, CA 95927

Get it out of the way!

Questions? Please respond to this email.

—Marcia Moore, Membership VP





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<https://my.lwv.org/california/butte-county/donate>

- ★ **Renew Your Membership**
- ★ **Donate**
- ★ **Recruit New Members**
- ★ **Volunteer for Board Positions**

2023–24 LWVBC Board Members

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Lisa Cooperman	Director Assistant Voter Service
<i>Vacant</i>	Director Government
Corky LeTellier	Director Voter Registration

League of Women Voters of Butte County’s Mission and Board Meetings

Founded in 1920, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the public to take an informed and active role in government. At the local, state, and national levels, the League works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Any person, regardless of gender, age, or citizenship status, may become a League member; you must be at least 16 to vote on League issues.

LWVBC Board meetings are typically on the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30 pm on Zoom. All League members are welcome to attend. The Zoom link is posted on the Calendar page of the LWVBC website prior to the meeting.

To contact a Board member, please send an email to lwvbutte@gmail.com. Your message will be forwarded to the appropriate board member as needed.