



THE VOTER

December 2025

Empowering Voters - Defending Democracy

In This Issue

President's Message	Page 1
LWV in Action	Page 2
Calendar of Events	Page 3
Interest Groups (our newest)	Page 4
Interest Groups continued	Page 5
Voter Services/Observer Corps	Page 6
Christmas Tree Lane	Page 7
Senior Senate and Area 21	Page 8
Help Wanted/Info Sharing	Page 9
LWVML Board Decisions	Page 10

Part 2 of our Message on Democracy

— *Maria Benech, Jare Braga, and Leonides Russell*

"A republic, if you can keep it," was Benjamin Franklin's famous response to a question about the form of government created at the 1787 Constitutional Convention, specifically, a democratic republic. Democracy is not self-sustaining; it requires the active involvement and vigilance of its citizens.

We are living in a moment in history that calls for the involvement and vigilance of citizens to protect and defend our democracy. The "No

Kings" rallies of 2025 were part of the political movement to defend our democracy against authoritarianism. What makes an effective and successful political movement?

Researchers have found that people-powered movements are more successful when they can strategically build a broad tent across the political spectrum, avoid violence, and maintain the focus and discipline to stay on message. When 3.5% of the population, or 12 million Americans, participate in protests, the message is difficult to ignore. When they participate in civil disobedience and non-cooperation, their actions disrupt the system and force governmental changes.

An authoritarian government will try to counter these actions by controlling the flow of information, criminalizing protests, and hardening security and police forces. Much of this has already been seen in our communities. The movement needs to adapt to these measures.

The 3.5% is a motivational yardstick. Five million citizens participated in the June "No Kings" protests, and that number increased to 7 million in October. The movement is growing. What else can we do? We can communicate with our congresspersons and senators. We can make note of the impact of detrimental policies on our communities. We can boycott businesses that do not support basic democratic principles of equality and justice.

We have seen the Defend Democracy movement grow in 2025. Let us look ahead to continuing our work in the New Year. 2026 is an election year. We can send a message. We can protect and preserve our democracy.

We wish you a peaceful and joyful holiday season.

Maria, Jare, and Leonides



Holiday Social

Saturday December 13th, 10 am to Noon at the Sonora Main Library

Join us for a finger food potluck. Bring your favorite dish to share (and a plate and utensils to save on waste). Drinks provided. We are collecting NEW twin sheet sets for the Navigation Center in Soulsbyville and canned food. This will be a purely social event so come and enjoy yourself and have some fun together before the busy holidays.



December and January Meetings

Monday December 1st, 11:30 am to 2:30 pm

LWVML Board Meeting

Sonora Senior Center

Wednesday December 3rd, 7:30 am

Christmas Tree Lane at Courthouse Square in Sonora

Help us put up our League themed tree. This is potentially a fundraiser too (see page 7 for how to vote for our tree).

Friday December 5th, 1:30 pm

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead
Round Table Pizza in Angels Camp

Tuesday December 9th, 4 pm

Fire Interest Group—Maria Benech, Lead
Karen Caldwell's Home

Wednesday December 10th, 1 pm to 2 pm

Membership Committee — Patricia Horsthius, Chair
Sonora Senior Center (Room B)

Tuesday December 16th, 5 pm to 8 pm

Sonora Chamber of Commerce Holiday Gathering (Christmas Tree Lane Awards)

The Opera Hall in Sonora

Friday December 19th, 12:45 pm

Pop Hudson Memorial Christmas Sing

We need all of our singers (and non-singers too) to join us for this annual event in downtown Sonora. We don't know which carol we'll lead yet, but join us!

No General Meeting in January

TBD

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead
TBD

Wednesday January 7th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps —Jane Braga, Team Leader
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday January 12th, 10:30 am

Fire Interest Group—Maria Benech, Lead
Sonora Senior Center

Tuesday January 13th, 4:30 pm

Fire Interest Group—Maria Benech, Lead
Karen Caldwell's Home

Wednesday January 14th, 1 pm to 2 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthius Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday January 19th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair
Jane Braga's Home

Wednesday January 28th, 11 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Sonora Senior Center

Monday January 26th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board

Sonora Senior Center



Democracy (in action) Interest Group (DIG)

We are happy to announce a new interest group! We hope you will DIG IT and want to join.

Members: Tia Andersen, Janis Ossa, Brenda McHenry, Trudy Craig, Irene Wetzel, Susan Medeiros, Karen Caldwell, Maria Benech, Jane Braga, Leonides Russell, Martha Rubin (Lead)

The purpose of the group is to identify, study, and share issues of concern regarding the democratic process and to take action when needed. A decision was made to prioritize topics based on the immediacy of need. The current needs we will focus on are:

- The SAVE Act - as this will be voted on in the spring, we feel this is most important. Information will be collected from a variety of sources: The Voter newsletters, the LWV and LWVC website, and President Brenda McHenry's Letter to the newspaper. At the next meeting, information will be discussed and consolidated.
- Glossary of Terms in Democracy. The glossary will be an ongoing project. We will collect, define, and share information. This action will be outlined at the next meeting.
- How to communicate: who is our target audience and how should we take action? The discussion about sharing and marketing with League members, our community, and encouraging contact with representatives and U.S. Senators continues.

We hope you will join us at the next meeting: Friday, December 5th at 1:30-2:30 at Round Table Pizza, Angels Camp (in the private room). For more information or to be added to the group email list, please contact Martha Rubin at 650-619-7136 or email rubinmartha@gmail.com

Fire Interest Group

Members: Karen Caldwell, Martha Rubin, Maureen Kelley, Stefani Reichle, Elsie Bruno, Deborah Rei, Patricia Dunlap, Lynn McCormick, and Maria Benech (Lead)

The FIGs continue to plan for the "Living with Fire Series" in partnership with the Tuolumne Fire Safe Council (TFSC). The series is planned for March 7th, 14th, and 21st. Each day will build on the story of Wildfire in our County and how we can learn to live with fire while reducing risk to life and property. Each day can also stand on its own. Plans are being finalized for films, discussions, speakers, and interactive exercises.

The group and some Board members gathered on November 2nd to preview two films proposed for the series. The group really liked both and decided to include them. The question is, which day of the series should they be presented. There is so much valuable information out there.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday, December 9th, at 4:30 pm at Karen Caldwell's home. Contact Maria Benech for directions at runmcb@gmail.com or 209-559-3504.



Homelessness Interest Group

Members: Ted Michaud, Patricia Horsthuis, Trudy Craig, and Leonides Russell (Lead)

Many things are happening with this revitalized group. We plan to send a representative to the Tuolumne County Homelessness Committee. We are also joining with the Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Committee to help serve breakfast once a month at Camp Justice.

Navigation Center Update

There are two units, one with a capacity of 22 for families. The second unit is for singles; it has 13 rooms. Two full-time live-in assistant residents are currently on site, and they are hoping to hire 1 part-time assistant resident. The family unit has a room designated for workshops such as life skills, healthy cooking, job training, etc Social Services provides on-site help. Residents have weekly meetings with their Social Workers. This is not a housing first situation. Residents are vetted before they are allowed to reside at the center. Residents must have no issues with previous landlords, no criminal records with sex crimes or crimes against children. The Center currently has a 6-month 75% success rate.

The Center is looking for donations of twin sheet sets. Please provide new ones only. Thank you.

Water Interest Group

Members: Patricia Horsthuis, Leonides Russell, Suzanne Hennessy, Jeff Hollis, Tom Parrington, and Jane Braga (Lead)

Our group is on hiatus until January. The WIG meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at Schnoogs, 11:00 am.

Sonora City Council

First and Third Mondays of each month, 5 pm to 6:30 pm, at 94 N. Washington Street, Sonora

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

First and Third Tuesdays of each month, 9 am to 5 pm. at 2 South Green Street, 4th Floor, Sonora. The Board is also having a meeting on the second Tuesday of each month if needed.

Tuolumne Utilities District

Second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, 9 am to noon, at 18885 Nugget Blvd, Sonora.



Committees, WHERE THE REAL WORK OF THE LEAGUE HAPPENS!

We encourage all our members to join a committee and/or Interest Group (or the Board!). This is where the real work of the League happens, and it is the best way to get involved with the League and your community.

Voter Services Committee:

Interested in knowing what Voter Services is about? Go to the new website's Committees section. Voter Services information is described there.

Voter Services provided an information table at the Calaveras Firewise event held at the Calaveras County Fairgrounds on November 1st. There was lots of public interest regarding our League, the voting process, and redistricting.

Regarding the November 4th Special Election, 60% of registered voters in Tuolumne County and 62% of registered voters in Calaveras County submitted ballots. The California Secretary of State's Office will certify the final election results on December 12th. Go to the California Secretary of States website ([click here](#)) for details.

Special thanks to Jane Braga and Leonides Russell for their support activities with the Tuolumne County Elections Office.

Interested in helping out at the Vote Centers in either Calaveras or Tuolumne County in the upcoming election? Check in with your county's Elections Office to sign up for training.

We will need your help with planning and carrying out election-related activities leading up to the June 2026 Primaries: Candidate Forums, Pros and Cons, Vote 411, and Voter Registration / Information. More information to follow in the upcoming issue of The Voter.

We welcome new members to the Voter Services Committee. Interested? Please contact the Voter Services Committee Chair, Susan Medeiros, at susancmedeiros@gmail.com or 209-840-2066.

Observer Corps:

The OC Committee did not meet in November (and won't meet in December either). Our next meeting is January 7th at 1:30 pm at the Senior Center in Sonora. Although we aren't meeting, we are attending all meetings and observing local activities of our Boards and Council. All are welcome to attend our meetings and join in on the fun. Contact Jane Braga at jbraga49@gmail.com or 209-768-3842 for more information.

Christmas Tree Lane At Courthouse Square in Sonora

We are participating again this year in this event put on by the Sonora Chamber of Commerce. Local non-profits compete for cash prizes, so it is potentially a fundraiser for our League, too. We encourage you to tell your friends and family to vote for our tree. [This link](#) will get them to the website where you can vote from December 4th through December 15th. You can only vote once and must submit your name and email address. You can also join us at the Sonora Chamber of Commerce Holiday Gathering at the Opera Hall in Sonora on December 16th at 5 pm. They will be giving out the Christmas Tree Lane Awards that night.

Our committee had a lot of fun deciding on a theme (red, white, and blue), selecting and hanging poinsettia ornaments, lights, and garland. We really like the simplicity of the tree and how much it stands out with the solid colors. It really shines in the sun. We will put it up in Courthouse Park on December 3rd at 7:30 am if you want to come by and help us put on the finishing touches!





LWVML November General Meeting

Presentation by Marion Coahran, California Senior Legislator

If you missed the November General Membership meeting, you missed a good one. Our presenter was interesting and informative. Here's a recap of that presentation.



Do you know about Area 12 Agency on Aging? How about the Senior Legislature here in California? Most of us at our November General Meeting had heard of and/or received services from Area 12, but no one had heard of the Senior Legislature. Our delightful speaker enlightened us on both.

Marion Coahran is Area 12's Senior Senator. She represents Tuolumne, Calaveras, Alpine, Amador, and Mariposa counties. The Senior Senate meets once a year at the Capitol in Sacramento. Marion said she wants to know about our complaints, and what we need or want to see changed. Also, our area is currently looking for an Assembly Representative, so if you are interested, contact Area 12.

The California Senior Legislature is a volunteer body whose primary mission is to gather ideas for legislation at the state and federal levels, craft the ideas into formal proposals, prioritize the proposals, present them to members of the Legislature or Congress, and advocate for laws implementing the ideas.

The CSL was founded largely through the efforts of Senator Henry Mello, who in 1980 requested through ACR 129 that the California Commission on Aging call a session of the Silver-Haired Legislature, a forum through which older Californians could develop their legislative priorities. In 1982, this became the California Senior Legislature, and Senator Mello in SCR 44 asked that this be an annual event.

The 40 Senior Senators and 80 Senior Assembly Members are selected in elections supervised by the Advisory Councils in the 33 Planning and Services Areas (PSAs) in California, which were established by the federal Older Americans Act of 1965. The elections are in even-numbered years, and the terms of office are four years.

Area 12 on Aging offers Direct Services to seniors. Services include caregiver support, assessing home safety for elders, and fire safety work. Their goal is to keep seniors in their homes. They also provide support to our senior centers, offer wellness classes, and teach people how to support the aging population. Several of our members had used them regarding Medicare and taxes. We were informed that they had helped save many members substantial amounts of money.





LWV in Action

On November 18, 2025, LWV and five state and local Leagues [filed a lawsuit](#) against the federal government because of anti-voter actions.

The League is suing the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the US Department of Homeland Security, and other federal officials for enacting — without following the required process — a new rule that bars nonpartisan civic engagement groups from providing voter registration and civic engagement at administrative naturalization ceremonies. [Read the full statement here.](#)

"Purposely excluding groups like the League from administrative naturalization ceremonies is a deliberate move by this administration to exclude new citizens from the democratic process and attack the League's very mission to register and support new voters," said Celina Stewart, CEO of LWV. The newly enacted rule violates the First Amendment rights of the League and other civic groups. Also, it fails to adhere to provisions that require federal agencies to follow transparent procedures when adopting new policies.

On November 21, 2025, a federal district court in New Hampshire ruled in favor of plaintiffs in a case considered to be the first of its kind in the country, League of Women Voters of New Hampshire v. Kramer. The court entered a default judgment against defendant Steve Kramer, who orchestrated and paid for the dissemination of robocalls that used AI to deceive and intimidate voters before the New Hampshire 2024 presidential primary election. The order came in response to a lawsuit filed in March 2024 by the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire (LWVNH), the League of Women Voters (LWV), and three individual voters. The plaintiffs sought a default judgment against Kramer, who never appeared in court. Plaintiffs sued Kramer and three corporate defendants to protect voters from similarly deceptive and intimidating robocall campaigns in the future. The plaintiffs are represented by Free Speech For People (FSFP), Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, and Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau & Pachios, Chartered, LLP.

"This victory sends a clear message: the right to vote is sacred, and new technology will not be a shield for those who seek to suppress it," said Liz Tentarelli, president of the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire. "The court's decision affirms that deceptive, AI-generated robocalls designed to intimidate and confuse voters are a direct assault on our democracy and will not be tolerated. The League of Women Voters of New Hampshire is proud to protect our voters and secure a precedent to safeguard the integrity of elections across the nation."

"This ruling establishes a critical precedent against the weaponization of artificial intelligence in elections," said Caren Short, director of legal and research at the League of Women Voters. "By securing a nationwide injunction against Kramer for these illegal and deceptive AI-spoofed communications, the court has recognized the profound threat that deepfake technology poses to the electoral process. This landmark decision will help ensure the voice on the line is genuine, and voters can cast ballots free of intimidation and fraud."

[Read the full statement here.](#)



Check out our new and improved website. Information on all of our activities, upcoming events, information on how to get involved, and fun photos. Click [here](#).



Help Wanted

Hospitality (General Meeting Greeter)

We are looking for someone to check each person as they arrive and give them their name badges. This person will also welcome all guests and ensure they sign in to allow us to keep in contact with them. Contact Leonides Russell at leonidesrussell@gmail.com.

This position is not a Board Member and is not required to attend any other meetings.

Voter Registration Lead

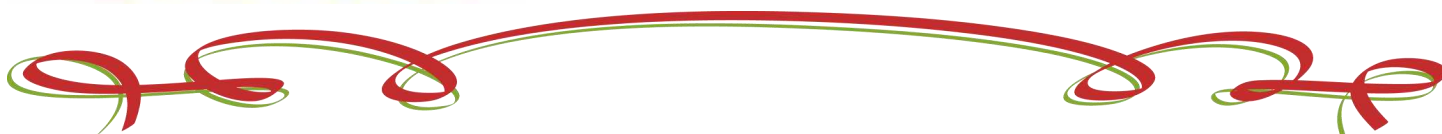
After many years of dedicated service, Pam Vlach is stepping down from this critical position. Thank you, Pam, for your leadership and hard work to make this such a successful part of our League's work.

If you are passionate about voter registration and ensuring voters are getting correct and non-biased information, this is the job for you. This position coordinates volunteers to ensure LWVML has a presence at numerous events and locations to provide this important service. You don't have to go to all the events yourself, but you would be overseeing the work and making sure those doing it are trained and comfortable with this important job. Please contact Susan Medeiros at 209-840-2066 if you are interested.



Are you keeping up with what's available online from LWVC and LWVUS.? If you don't have an account through MyLo, you should.

Go to my.lwv.org. Create an account, and you'll have access to both state and national information, including all the positions, legislation, changes, etc. The state League site is a little behind on some issues, but the Program Planning Kit is there, and the legislative advocacy report from 2024 is also there. If you have some time, explore them both.



December 1st LWVML Board Decisions

- The Board elected Deborah Rei and Maria Benech to the Nominating Committee for this year. They will join the three members elected by the membership in June.
- The Board agreed we should be sending out more emails, once a week (not more). We need to make sure they are timely and important, not redundant.
- We will not be participating in the Calaveras County Faire, too expensive at \$400 entry fee. We will be looking for more opportunities to be out in the Calaveras community.
- Board approved paying for our website name and location for 10 years when it renews in April. This gives us more security and commitment to our website and users. It is also less expensive in the long run.
- We will add a QR Code to our materials in the future. Maria will research them.
- We approved adding \$200 to our League budget for the Christmas Tree Lane materials for this year. In the past members have donated everything, but this is not sustainable or fair.
- Fundraising letter approved and being mailed out now.
- The LWVML Board will start meeting at 11 am in January (a change from 11:30 am). It will still be on the 4th Monday of the month.
- We want to have something that identifies us as League members when we are out in the community. Talked about bigger pins, name tags, vests. Karen is researching for us and we'll discuss in January.
- A New Member "Tea" will be held in February. Details to follow.



League Cheer

Do you know another member who is:

- Ill or suffered the loss of a loved one;
- Celebrating an important accomplishment?

Call or text Augusta Parrington at 209.770.0211 or email her at aparrington13@gmail.com to ask her to send out a Care Card.

LWVML 2025/2026 BOARD OFFICERS:

Presidential Triad — **Maria Benech, Jane Braga,**
Leonides Russell

Vice President - **Karen Caldwell**

Treasurer — **Suzanne Hennessy**

Recording Secretary — **Janis Ossa**

Program Director—**Brenda McHenry**

Action Director—**Leonides Russell**

Publicity Director - **Stefani Reichle**

The Voter Editor—**Maria Benech**

Membership Director - **Patricia Horsthuis**

Voter Services Director—**Susan Medeiros**

Observer Corp Director - **Jane Braga**

Fundraising Director—**Deborah Rei**

LWVML 2025/2026 Off Board Positions: Corresponding Secretary — **Dorene Hensler**; Nominating Committee Chair - **Leslie Klay**; Nominating Committee Members - **Maureen Kelley** and **Charlene Dambacher**; Historians - **Leslie and Jeff Klay**; Hospitality— **TBD**; Webmaster—**Dorene Hensler**