

THE VOTER

March 2026

Empowering Voters - Defending Democracy

In This Issue

President’s Message	P 1
LWVUS Statement	P 2
Calendar of Events	P 3
Voter Services & Membership	P 4
Observer Corps	P 5
Interest Groups	P 6
Interest Groups	P 7
Op Ed on the SAVE Act	P 8
SAVE Act Stories (2 pages)	P 9
Assemblyman Tangipa Interview	P 11
Program & Party (Feb. GM)	P 12
The Program Conundrum	P 13
February Board Decisions	P 14

A Message from LWVML Presidential Triad

“The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization ...”
 This statement begins both the National and State League mission statements. We often talk about what it means to be nonpartisan—but what does it truly mean to be grassroots?
 Here in the Mother Lode, how do we empower voters and defend democracy?
 Voting is a fundamental right—and a shared responsibility—in a democracy.
 Throughout the year, our Voter Registration team shows up: at League activities, community events, and our local college, registering voters and providing essential education. We recently visited both the Tuolumne and Calaveras Detention Centers

to register eligible voters and ensure that incarcerated individuals understood their voting rights.

An informed voter is an empowered voter. Our Candidate Forums create space for voters to hear directly from candidates and learn where they stand on the issues that shape our community. Our Pros and Cons presentations help voters approach ballot propositions with clarity and confidence.

Transparency in government is essential to a healthy democracy. Our Observer Corps members attend and monitor meetings of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, the Sonora City Council, and the Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD). Their observations and concerns are shared with our members and the broader community, helping shine a light on how local government works—and how it can work better. Democracy does not end on Election Day. Elected officials must be held accountable.

Periodically, we publish opinion pieces in local newspapers addressing concerns raised by our Observer Corps, as well as issues related to voting rights and library services. Our League has also spoken directly at Board of Supervisors and City Council meetings, advocating for League positions—particularly on homelessness and library services—because civic engagement means showing up, again and again.

In partnership with our National and State Leagues, we encourage our members to take part in efforts to defend democracy and push back against authoritarianism. In an age of “alternate facts,” we work diligently to educate, including through our handout, “The Do’s and Don’ts of Election Disinformation.”

Our Fire, Water, Homelessness, and Democracy interest groups extend this work even further, engaging actively in our community as trusted educators and advocates.

All of this happens right here, in our Mother Lode foothills. And we are not alone. Across all 50 states, in 800 state and local Leagues, with more than one million members and supporters, these same acts of civic commitment are taking place every day.

This is the power of a grassroots organization. This is the strength of the League—rooted in local action, sustained by dedicated members, and guided by democratic values.

If any of these activities speak to you, we invite you to join us. Together, we can make a difference. We do make a difference. Together, we will defend democracy.

*Maria Benech,
 Jane Braga, and
 Leonides Russell*

Statement from the League of Women Voters on Reported Elections Executive Order

February 26, 2026

WASHINGTON, DC—The League of Women Voters of the United States issued the following statement on reports that the President is preparing an executive order to impose federal control over American elections.

Reports that the President is preparing a sweeping executive order to seize federal control over American elections are not only alarming, they are also dangerous.

This is another power grab from this Administration. This possible EO is not about election security. It is about political power and attempts to make it harder for eligible Americans to register, cast a ballot, and have their voices heard.

Court after court has already affirmed what the Constitution makes clear. The President's authority over the administration of elections is minimal to nonexistent. The power to run elections rests with Congress and the states, not the White House.

The League of Women Voters has successfully challenged unlawful executive overreach before. In case after case, and through multistate injunctions issued by federal courts nationwide, judges have blocked efforts to interfere in election administration, restrict voter access, and unlawfully expand presidential power.

Any effort to mandate restrictive voter ID requirements, limit mail-in voting, or impose national voting rules through executive action would be a direct attack on voters and an abuse of power that will not withstand legal scrutiny.

The conduct of our elections is not for any president to decide. And it must never be manipulated to serve a political agenda.

The League of Women Voters stands ready to return to court if necessary. We will challenge any executive action that suppresses voters, undermines free and fair elections, or violates the constitutional framework that protects our democracy.



Join us for a FREE special event series.

LIVING WITH FIRE

Learn to live with fire and reduce potential losses from wildfires.

Films, speakers, panel discussions, and audience participation activities!



Living with Fire

Our March “General Meeting” is this workshop we are co-sponsoring at **Columbia College**. There will be no business meeting, and hopefully lots of other people will be there too.

March and April Meetings/Events

Monday March 9th, 10:30 am

Homelessness Interest Group—Leonides Russell, Lead
Senior Center in Sonora

Tuesday March 10th, 4 pm

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

Wednesday March 11th, 1 pm to 2 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthuis Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Saturday March 14th (and 21st) 9 am to 1pm

Living with Fire Series—Co-Sponsored by the FIGs
Black Oak Casino Resort Conference Room

Monday March 16th, 1 pm to 3 pm

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

Wednesday March 18th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Schnoogs

Friday March 20th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

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

Monday March 23rd, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board
Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday March 25th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps —Jane Braga, Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Saturday March 28th, noon to 3 pm

No Kings Rally—Courthouse Park in Sonora

Saturday April 4th, 10 am to noon

General Meeting—Topic is Homelessness
Library in Sonora

Wednesday April 8th, 1 pm to 2 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthuis Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday April 13th, 10:30 am

Homelessness Interest Group—Leonides Russell, Lead
Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday April 15th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Schnoogs

Monday April 20th, 1 pm to 3 pm

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

Friday April 17th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

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

Wednesday April 22nd, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps —Jane Braga, Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday April 27th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board
Senior Center in Sonora

The Week of April 27th

Candidate Forums

Fire Interest Group—Maria Benech, Lead
On hiatus after the Living with Fire Series in March.

Committees and Interest Groups, ~~WHERE THE REAL WORK HAPPENS!~~

Voter Services Committee:

Committee Members: Leonides Russell, Pam Vlach, Maria Benech, Cris Barsanti, Jane Braga, and Susan Medeiros (Chair)

- We are preparing for the Primary Elections on June 2nd. We are ordering copies of the Easy Voter Guide (English and Spanish) to distribute. Watch for information about the upcoming Candidates' Forum. **We will need volunteers for this event!**
- Voter Services is working with the Democracy Interest Group (DIG) to help publicize our concerns regarding the SAVE Act. If passed, this bill would negatively impact eligible voters, especially women.
- The Voter Services Committee is looking forward to sharing information at the upcoming New Members Orientation. We need many League volunteers to help with election activities.
- On Thursday, February 26th, Pam Vlach and Leonides Russell provided a presentation on voting to 20 inmates at the Calaveras County Jail. Topics included the Bill of Rights and the spread of disinformation.
- The Volunteer Faire will be held on April 23rd this year at the Tuolumne County Fairgrounds. We will provide a table with League information, which will include voter information.
- Voter Services plans to have a voter registration/information table at the No Kings Rally on March 28th. LWV is a national partner for this event and is encouraging members to attend their local events.
- Brenda McHenry attended a training for Vote 411, an online candidate information service for voters sponsored by the League.

Our next Voter Services Committee meeting will be on Monday, March 16th, at 1:30 at the Senior Center in Sonora next to the Tuolumne County Library. All are welcome to attend.

New Member Orientation

Our New Member Orientation was postponed due to the snowstorm and damage that occurred in mid-February. It has been rescheduled to **Saturday, April 4th at the Sonora Library from noon to 2 pm**, immediately following the General Meeting. **Lunch will be provided. Please RSVP to Patricia Horsthus at phorsthuis@yahoo.com if you plan to attend.**

We have not put one of these on since before COVID, so the definition of “new member” is broad. Even if you’ve been with us for years, but have not attended one of these sessions, we encourage you to join us.

Several Board members will present information on our local League as well as the national and state organizations. This is a great opportunity to ask questions and learn about all that LWV, LWVC, and LWVML have to offer. We will be discussing how the League works as a non-partisan political organization and the many issues we work on. You will also get to meet other League members. We will be providing lots of information, with reference materials, about how to learn more if you are interested.

Committees and Interest Groups continued:

Observer Corps (OC):

Committee Members: Leonides Russell, Susan Medeiros, Stefani Reichle, Maria Benech, Cris Barsanti, and Jane Braga (Chair)

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors (BOS)

February 10th. Board Chair Grier announced that the time allotted for Public Comment at the beginning of the meeting would be limited to 15 minutes, maintaining the 3 minutes per speaker rule. After much discussion, the board did not agree to the change.

- Board Reports will be moved to the beginning of the meeting rather than at the end. No time limits.
- The meeting went until 2:30 with no lunch break.
- Pinecrest Parking Fees/Fines. This discussion went on for over 2 hours. Topics were fines for only out-of-county residents, not locals; the amount of fees/fines; and legal issues. The topic was deferred to the March BOS retreat. Supervisor Brandon pointed out that this issue had not been identified as a priority at this point.
- Miners' Hotel. Habitat for Humanity was awarded the contract to manage the Miners' Hotel in Jamestown to provide housing services.
- No Parking. Adopted a resolution to restrict overnight parking at the TC Resiliency Center. The Sheriff's office will enforce with "No Overnight Parking" signs.

OC Comments. Given the amount of time this BOS has spent on pulling and discussing Consent Calendar items and the continuous 'grandstanding' by Supervisors, it seems to us that Supervisor Grier's attempt to limit Public Comment in the interest of 'saving time' was disingenuous. We would suggest that supervisors monitor themselves before they monitor the public. This board continues to struggle with civility among the supervisors. The 'sniping' sets an unpleasant, negative tone to the meetings.

Sonora City Council

February 2nd. District One Tuolumne County Board Supervisor, Mike Holland, commented that downtown Sonora store owners could do more to make a more "showy" Christmas event next year, with more lights and more music.

- Sonora Police Officers Lieutenant Jennifer Hannula and Officer Rodolfo Figueroa were honored for saving the lives of three individuals.
- Raelene Carter was sworn in as a new Sonora Police Dispatcher.

February 17th. Sonora Fire Chief Engineer Hayden Fleming was sworn in.

- Two fire engines, a Type 3 and a Type 6, were purchased with the Community Development Block Grant funds, as well as Exhaust Removal Systems. The grant was for \$1,045,976.46.

Tuolumne Utility District (TUD)

February 10th. Presentation on status of vacancies, recruitments, and retention efforts as outlined in AB 2561.

February 24th. The mid-year budget review was presented. It was very clear and concise. Budget projections show a net gain in both water and sewer revenue at this point.

- GM Perkins gave a brief, 3-page synopsis of the 44-page PG&E contract signed in 1983. The water system was purchased for \$900,000, consisting of 77 miles of flumes, ditches, and canals. PG&E kept the main canal, the hydroelectric systems, and the water rights.

All are welcome to attend our meetings and join in on the fun. Contact Jane Braga at 209-768-3842 or jbraga49@gmail.com for more information.

Homelessness Interest Group (HIG)

Members: Ted Michaud, Patricia Horsthuis, Trudy Craig, Suzanne Hennessy, Cindy Roberts, and Leonides Russell (Lead)

No Report from February's meeting. The HIGs are hosting the speaker at our April General Meeting. Tom Crosby, a long-time homelessness advocate and member of the Homelessness Task Force in Tuolumne County, will be speaking. Our next meeting is Monday, March 9th at the Senior Center in Sonora at 10:30.

Fire Interest Group (FIG)

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

Our three-day "**Living with Fire**" series is almost here! The series will run the first three Saturdays of March (the 7th, 14th, and 21st) and is free to all. We hope you'll join us for one or more of the dates. LWVML will not have a March General Meeting; we hope you will attend the March 7th session at Columbia College from 9 am to 1 pm.

The LWVML FIG has partnered with the Tuolumne Fire Safe Council (TFSC) to sponsor this event. The goal is to educate residents on the increasing risk of wildfires to homes, businesses, infrastructure, and natural resources. Each day will build on the story of Wildfire in our Counties and how we can learn to live with fire while reducing risk to life and property. Each session can also stand on its own. The event will feature films, speakers, panel discussions, and audience participation activities.

Our agenda is complete, and we have an exciting line-up. March 7th will begin with a short film showing Native American use and relationship with fire, called "Tending the Wild." This will be followed by "The West is Burning," a film that talks about how our forests got to their current condition and where we go from here. A panel discussion on Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities, Collaborative Forest Management, and Communities & Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), all themes of the film, will come next. Lastly, Dr. Tom Hofstra will take us on a tour of the Columbia College Campus to see the fuel reduction work his students have done over the past several years to create a more fire-resilient landscape. Get detailed information on each day [HERE](#).

To volunteer during the event, call Maria Benech at 209-559-3504. Thank you.

How You Can Renew/Join

Renew/join today online at LWVML.org. Your dues support national, state, and local League efforts. When you go to the website, you will see the "Join" button in the top right corner of your screen. Remember to identify our local league, League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode. This ensures you remain on our mailing list, or if you are a new member, you will receive our monthly newsletter and other important messages (not too many, though).

LWVML is a 501(c)3 organization, and all donations are tax-deductible—tax ID #873922182. LWVML receives only \$15 of the \$75 from National dues. This part is tax-deductible, but the remaining \$60 is not. LWV and LWVC activities include political lobbying and advocacy, which disqualifies donations from being considered as charitable donations.

Water Interest Group (WIG)

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

No meeting was held in February.

Update! WIG meeting times have changed from the fourth Wednesday to the THIRD Wednesday. Still at Schnoogs and still at 11:30.

Democracy (in action) Interest Group (DIG)

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

We had a very productive Zoom meeting on February 20th. We came away with a solid plan for moving forward quickly on the SAVE Act, and each member had follow-up tasks.

Voter suppression is a concern for all! We need to try to reach all parts of our community. In discussions with community members, many had assumptions that our election process is not secure. This reinforced the need to understand and disseminate accurate information about voting and elections.

We want to spread the word on why the SAVE Act 1) is unnecessary, as voting eligibility is currently secure, and 2) it impedes qualified citizens from voting access. We want to keep our arguments focused on the common concern about the negative impact of the SAVE Act if it becomes law.

We approved the series of individual vignettes that Tia wrote regarding voting challenges that citizens would face if the SAVE Act passed. See page 9.

Reaching the public about our concerns through publication: LWVML website and The Voter will emphasize this pressing issue to our members and beyond. Publish information in the Union Democrat and the Calaveras Enterprise. My Mother Lode is an online news resource, and it is widely read in both counties.

We discussed the sequence of disseminating information on this issue. Our League has a process and primary contacts in place for getting messages/information out. 1) LWVML Presidents (Jane, Leo, and Maria) will submit an op-ed in the Union Democrat and the Calaveras Enterprise re: the SAVE Act. This op ed will include a) SAVE Act voting limitations for qualified citizens and b) why the current system of voting is secure and what the current process is to ensure non-citizens are not voting in our federal elections. 2) This will be followed by a series of local community member vignettes collected and written by Tia. These have been reviewed and approved by DIG (and the LWVML Board). They provide personalized examples of the challenges that SAVE would create. 3) Finally, we will encourage League members to write their own Letters to the Editor (without stating their affiliation to the League, only our President can represent the League.)

Changes to the voting laws are currently under active consideration in Congress. The issue is pressing! It was felt that we should not wait for a month to hold the next meeting. The follow-up meeting date will be announced soon.

Meetings will be held on the 3rd Friday of the month, at Angels Camp Round Table Pizza at 1:30. The next meeting is on March 20th. For more information, contact Martha Rubin at 650-619-7136 or email rubinmartha@gmail.com

LWV of the Mother Lode's Op Ed

Submitted to the Union Democrat and Calaveras Enterprise

The SAVE Act

On February 11, 2026, the House of Representatives passed the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) Act, legislation that would significantly change voter registration rules for federal elections. The question is, do we really need these additional requirements for our elections to be secure?

How does our current process ensure federal elections are protected from voter fraud and that only U.S. citizens vote in them? Here in California, U.S. citizenship for voter registration is verified through a driver's license or with a Social Security number. The information is verified by the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Social Security Administration. In addition, before being allowed to vote, the information must be verified by county elections officials where you are registering.

On the application form, the individual applying must swear/affirm that they are a U.S. citizen, are eligible to vote in California, and, under penalty of perjury, all information provided is true. The penalty for providing false information can be a fine, imprisonment, or (if they are not a U.S. citizen) deportation from or refused entry into the United States.

Despite its title, the SAVE Act does not safeguard voter eligibility. Instead, it risks confusing eligible voters and discouraging participation at a moment when democratic institutions already face serious strain.

For years, some states have erected barriers to voting—not to protect elections, but to shape the electorate by making participation more difficult for certain groups. The SAVE Act continues this troubling pattern. Rather than ensuring that every eligible citizen can vote, it places new obstacles in the path of lawful voters.

The bill would require individuals registering to vote—or updating an existing registration—to provide documentary proof of U.S. citizenship, such as a passport or birth certificate. In many cases, this documentation would need to be presented in person to election officials.

While framed as an election security measure, the practical effects are clear and unequal. Women and low-income voters are disproportionately affected. These groups are less likely to possess passports and may face real difficulty obtaining certified birth records. For many married women whose surnames differ from those on their birth certificates, assembling matching documentation can be costly, time-consuming, and burdensome. Requiring in-person verification further disadvantages people juggling work, caregiving responsibilities, or limited transportation.

Historically, the responsibility for verifying voter eligibility has rested with the state, using existing databases and records already on file. Non-citizen voting in federal elections is already illegal and extraordinarily rare. Decades of evidence show that voter fraud is virtually nonexistent. The SAVE Act addresses a problem that does not exist, while creating new ones that would disenfranchise many eligible voters.

This legislation is unnecessary, inequitable, and harmful to voter participation.

What can you do? Contact your senators today. The bill has not passed the Senate and remains under debate.

A healthy democracy requires both secure elections and equal access to the ballot box. We should demand laws that strengthen both—not undermine either.

[Maria Benech, Jane Braga, and Leonides Russell](#)
[Presidential Triad, League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode](#)

The SAVE Act, Three Women's Stories by "Treya"

Although the following stories are fictitious, they are based on conversations with three real women in our Mother Lode area who talked about how the SAVE Act would affect them if it came to pass. These women's stories are like those of thousands of women across the United States.

SAVE ACT STORY 1

My mom remarried twice while I was growing up. My name is Marie Louise, at least that is the name that has been mine and only mine for my whole life. My birth name, Marie Louise Baker, is not my maiden name because I asked to have my name changed to match my stepdad's name when I was 8 years old and attending school. I was then Marie Louise Gerber. I married after I joined the army, and then changed my name as my fiancé requested. My name is now Marie Louise Vanderkolk.

Recently, I moved from Modesto, where I raised my children, back to Idaho, where I grew up, and I went online to reregister to vote. Now that the SAVE Act (one of the new laws) has been passed, I discovered that I must prove my citizenship, in person, to register to vote. I am a veteran!!! I have voted in every election since I was 18 years old!

Why? My passport has the name Marie Louise Gerber. My driver's license and Social Security card have Marie Louise Vanderkolk. After waiting in line at the county recorder's office to register, I am told that I need a bunch of documents to prove that I am the person on that birth certificate. I now need copies of:

My birth certificate	\$38
Name change to maiden name at 8 yrs of age	\$50
Marriage license with maiden name	\$19

So, this presents several hurdles for me: time, money, and patience.... Also, I am offended! I am a United States veteran and have voted all my life. This is humiliating and, to say the least, quite inconvenient.

I ask myself if my vote matters that much. Do my representatives know that they have done this to me and all the women like me? Why have they turned against me? I changed my name when I married, like a woman is supposed to do. And, when I was young, I changed my name because I wanted to belong in my new family as any child would.

WHY is this happening to me now? Why are lawmakers blind to a married woman's situation?

SAVE Act STORY 2

I have only a first and middle name that are true to me. I can rely on them to accompany me for all my days. But my last name has had many faces. Now in my seventh decade, I must find a way to prove I am me and that I am a citizen of the USA because my last name is not the name on my birth certificate.

Let me explain: Why now you may wonder? Have my representatives in Congress left me out on purpose, have forgotten I exist, or don't want a senior citizen like me to vote? Or have they just been negligent? NO ... it is because there is now a misguided effort to safeguard our voting rolls from illegals. I say misguided because the new law casts such a wide net that this "reform" is creating disinterest in voting by eligible citizens.

I was born in New Jersey, and voted for the first time there. My birth name was Marie Louise Merchant. When I married, I became Marie Louise White, and after my husband passed away, I remarried, and my name is now Marie Louise Dixon. I voted in my first election when I was 25. Fortunately, that was after women first got the vote in the United States in 1920. I raised eight children in Ohio and worked as an executive secretary for the mayor of Springfield before I recently moved to Nevada to help care for my new husband's dying brother.

Story 2 continued from page 9 ——— SAVE Act Stories by “Treya”

I am trying to register to vote in my new state, and yesterday I was told that in order to register in Nevada, I must now prove that I am a citizen of the USA. I cannot use my driver's license, but must obtain a copy of my birth certificate, my first marriage license, and my second marriage license, and then drive fifty miles to an office with limited hours and present all these documents to register to vote. At my age, driving fifty miles round-trip in one day to wait and present these documents is a formidable obstacle. Also, obtaining copies of all these documents is an inconvenience, to say the least. The fees are not extreme, but added up are between \$100 and \$200. Additionally, there is the time involved, and I also must produce an ID in order to obtain those documents. I discovered that neither my passport nor my Social Security card is sufficient because they both are in my second married name. I am offended that I must now prove I am an American citizen, and bewildered to say the least that after voting in 12 Presidential elections, I now must prove I am an eligible voter. Maybe my vote doesn't really matter. It is unlikely that I will complete this obstacle course. Marie Louise will now be silenced. Also, I feel betrayed by our custom to change names when married. I advise every woman getting married NOT TO DO SO!

My first two names are all I have ... The rest of my name has betrayed me.

SAVE ACT Story 3

Every woman who changed her name when she married must again fight for her identity...to be herself and exercise her right as a United States citizen to make her voice heard.

It now seems that a woman should just keep her maiden name. Forget tradition or risk losing your voice in our democratic process.

This is my predicament. As a married woman, moving to a new place, I must now jump through multiple hoops to register to vote in 2026. Never has this even entered my frame of reference before moving or taking on my husband's name until now, and I am not unusual.

I have recently remarried and moved, and now I must prove that I am a US citizen. I have never lived anywhere but in this country. I have a passport, and I was told that's what I need ...but it has expired. So now I must dig deeper into my background. I need a birth certificate to prove I was born in the USA, and the name on my driver's license doesn't match the name on my birth certificate, nor does the name on my marriage license match my birth certificate. I was told after waiting some time at the county clerk's office that I also must produce not only my birth certificate, but also my marriage license. And now that I've remarried, I also must provide a copy of my second marriage license. So, to prove I am the same person who has voted in the past 22 elections, I have a lot of work to do.

All of this requires contacting various offices in different parts of the country. This will take submitting my ID electronically, sending money, waiting for documents, assembling documents, and reappearing at the county clerk's office, where I will be given the privilege to re-register to vote. This is a privilege I was given when I was first old enough to vote (at 18) in this country, and a right I have exercised multiple times as an adult. Re-registering has always been a simple process involving only one picture ID, and sometimes a Social Security card.

I'm not so sure my one vote is worth all this trouble. Actually, now that I think about it, maybe that's the point of this new law. The stated aim of the law is to secure our voting process, ensure only citizens are voting in our national elections, and purge our voting rolls of non-citizens. I know that illegal aliens are not allowed to vote, as the current law states. Enforcing current law is all that is needed, so I am mystified. Why more bureaucratic nonsense? Why is this law written in such a way that I, a wife and mother, must now jump over all of these new hurdles to exercise my right to vote? Isn't my vote as important as that of any other US citizen?

DAVID TANGIPA, Assembly District 8,

A NO SHOW

Two members of the Fresno League, two from the Mother Lode League (Leonides Russell and Maria Benech), and two Cal State University Fresno student members attended the interview with David Tangipa's Legislative Director, Belle Castro, on January 28, 2026. The meeting with the Assemblyman had been scheduled by his office and was supposed to be with him, but he was unable to attend. In his stead, he originally asked his secretary to handle our interview. After we explained who we were and what types of questions we had, she asked Belle Castro to join the call since she could not answer any of our questions. His Legislative Director expressed uncertainty about the state legislative priorities for 2026, but she did suggest the budget deficit is a major concern.

Assemblyman Tangipa is the vice chair of the Budget Committee and sits on the Housing and Higher Education Committees. He is working on bills related to veterans, wildfires, and CTE football injuries in youth sports. While the bills are not finalized, he proposes vegetation management for fuel reduction and increased funding for more firefighters. He also has an interest in corruption in lobbying. He is putting forward a bill that would prohibit lobbying by anyone convicted of corruption. He has previously come out against cuts to the CSU system. No such cuts have been proposed thus far this year.

With respect to the local League questions, his Legislative Director gave the following answers. He would examine housing issues one at a time—no overall approach, although, as a realtor, he does not favor rent stabilization. With respect to clawing back the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) provisions to allow for more housing, he does think CEQA has gone too far in some cases. He introduced AB66 in the last session to allow secondary roads for egress and ingress in fire-prone areas to be built with minimal oversight. It has not passed out of committee at this time, and the State League of Women Voters is following it.

Asked about home insurance issues in the state, he was initially placed on the insurance committee, but evidently switched from that. No apparent current interest was reflected by his assistant.

We emailed him the questions each League had developed, which Ms. Castro could not answer (almost all of them), a couple of days after our interview in January. We are still waiting to hear from his office on those specific questions.

LWV of the Mother Lode questions for Assemblyman Tangipa.

1. Last year, during our interview, you said that the devastation (loss of homes and life) caused by the Eaton and Palisades Fires could have been prevented. You were asking for a full investigation. Can you tell us what you have learned about those fires since then, and what is being proposed to mitigate this sort of loss in the future?
2. Have you been able to work on the home insurance issue here in California? Helping to ensure Californians can get and afford it?
3. Given California's affordable housing crisis, what are your views on progressive measures, such as expanding statewide rent stabilization while also considering the profit goals of contractors and real estate agents? How would you define affordable housing?
4. California currently ranks in the bottom third in education, in part due to challenges like high student-to-teacher ratios. With the federal Department of Education now largely dismantled, limiting funds that will be available, what steps will you take to ensure all students - including those with special needs- receive a high-quality education in California?
5. You released a statement earlier this month urging constituents to ask the Governor to immediately provide a full water allocation to our farmers. This was, seemingly, based on the data provided by the U.S. Drought Monitor noting that California is free of drought; that no regions of the state are considered "abnormally dry" at this time. This, however, does not provide the whole picture. The statewide snowpack levels are 36% of average. Our reservoirs depend on the snowpack to refill after spills. If the farmers/agriculture receive their full allocation now, how do you propose to fill the reservoirs with a below-average snowpack? Couldn't this potentially harm the farmers later in the summer? How do you propose to adequately maintain our reservoirs throughout the year?

February General Meeting, Program and Party

The League of Women Voters turned 106 years old on February 14th, and we celebrated at our February General meeting, after we completed our business, of course.

Brenda McHenry, our Program Chair, and Jane Braga, our Co-President, led our discussion of Program. They introduced members to the wide range of LWV positions found in the "Impact on Issues" book. We reviewed the Rule of Law, one of the foundational principles of our democracy - the law applies to everyone equally. No one is above the law. They introduced the LWV DEI lens. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Our group agreed with consensus on the LWV 2026-2028 campaign "Women Defend Democracy: Democracy Under Siege." We also talked a lot about that here in the Mother Lode, natural resources are a priority for us too.

During her research into the process, Jane discovered an easy way to differentiate between Program, the overarching drivers and focus of League work and programs, which are things like meeting speakers or presentations. Just adding that little 's' to the end of the word makes all the difference.



The Program Conundrum by Brenda McHenry Program Director

In the League of Women Voters, what is Program? This has been a difficult question to answer for many of us. LWV has lots of “P words” that mostly point to the same thing: Platform, Principles, Program, Priorities, Positions, Policy...maybe more.

Platform was used to describe our Principles until 1956. Now, Principles allow the adoption of Program and Action at all levels of the League.

Program is the plan of education and advocacy adopted by LWV at its convention to move our mission forward. This applies to the national, state, and local levels of the League.

Positions are what drive actions. After study, which is often a long process involving research, discussion, and consensus, a position is adopted. Our League has done one study resulting in a position. Fortunately, we can use positions already studied and adopted at other levels to take action here in our counties. Positions fall roughly under the four areas of government interest: Representative Government, International Relations, Natural Resources, and Social Policy. Our study on Housing and Homelessness was done under the Social Policy umbrella. Many specific topics come under those headings, too many to list. After all, we’re 106 years old; we’ve had lots of time to do lots of studies.

In the course of educating ourselves and others, we can present (there’s that “P” again) programs. “Living With Fire” is a great example.

All of these positions are meant to lead to Action. Action is advocating for those positions in the public forum, including to elected officials and voters. We are careful to differentiate between our educational/voter service efforts and our advocacy of the positions.

All of this is driven by the 7 Principles. Here are the first 4, and you can find them all on the LWV.org website.

The League of Women Voters believes:

- In representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.
- That all powers of the U.S. government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.
- That democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government, and it requires that government bodies protect the citizens’ right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible.
- Every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

Explore the LWV website for more positions, and become familiar with the principles and whatever positions interest you. LWV of the Mother Lode has some active groups with funny names (WIG, FIG, DIG, and HIG), which could use your voice and opinion. All of them are great ways to start taking action!

February LWVML Board Decisions

- ◆ Approved the publication of our SAVE Act piece in the Union Democrat and Calaveras Enterprise. This will be our second letter on this Act; Brenda had one published last March.
- ◆ Follow up with State Senator Marie Alvarado-Gil. Stanislaus League is not interviewing her this year; we will see if the El Dorado County League wants to do it with us. We will do it alone if not.
- ◆ Partnering with the Murphys Creek Theater again this year for a fundraiser. It will be on August 6th, and the play is “What the Constitution Means to Me.” It is about four generations of women, another great fit for our League.
- ◆ Participating in the No Kings Rally on March 28th. National has approved this, and we will work with the organizers in Sonora and in Calaveras County to be a part of them. We would love to have a League presence with approved signs to wave. Brenda is looking into the signs.
- ◆ Establish mailing lists for elected officials (local, state, and national) and send them our Voter newsletter each month.
- ◆ Decided on an Annual Meeting speaker from the State League level who could tell us what they are doing and how we can best work on saving our democracy.
- ◆ New date and time for the New Member Orientation. It will be on April 4th, directly after the General Meeting. We will provide lunch.
- ◆ Trying to figure out what our members can wear at events to be distinguished as League members. Janis is following up on some ideas.
- ◆ Janis brought a banner she had sewn, “Defend Democracy and VOTE,” which we could use as a fundraiser. Janis is looking into the cost of producing them.



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, and Leonides Russell**
 Vice President - **Karen Caldwell**
 Treasurer — **Suzanne Hennessy**
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 Observer Corp Director - **Jane Braga**
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LWVML 2025/2026 Non-Board Positions: Nominating Committee Chair - **Leslie Klay**; Nominating Committee Members - **Maureen Kelley** and **Charlene Dambacher**; Greeters — **Cris Barsanti** and **Jeff Klay**; Webmaster—**Dorene Hensler**; Historian—TBD

The League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode is a tax exempt organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code: Tax ID #87-3922182.

Join us for a FREE special event series.

LIVING WITH FIRE

Learn to live with fire and reduce potential losses from wildfires.

Films, speakers, panel discussions, and audience participation activities!

Session 1: Fire Risk – How did we get here? What now?

Saturday, March 7, 9am-1pm,

Location: Columbia College, Dogwood Forum Building

Session 2: Reducing Risk and Building Resilience

Saturday, March 14, 9am-1pm

Location: Black Oak Casino Resort Conference Center

Session 3: Community Prevention & Individual Responsibility

Saturday, March 21, 9am-1pm

Location: Black Oak Casino Resort Conference Center

For more
information
tuolumnefiresafe.org



Come to one, two, or all three sessions.
No registration required.

