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A Message from LWV President Dianna Wynn

Our Nation

Congress is back in session this week, and key decisions are already on the table. The House must act on the Senate-passed bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The League continues to advocate for funding that supports DHS operations without allocating resources to ICE or CBP.

Meanwhile, the SAVE Act remains in play. Because the Senate has not yet voted to end debate, the bill can return to the floor at any time for discussion,

amendments, or a cloture vote. We urge you to take action and [contact your Senators](#) to voice opposition to this legislation. (**Update:** *The SAVE Act is no longer pending business in the Senate! This is a victory for voters everywhere. LWVUS will be launching a new action alert to thank Senators for standing against the bill next week.*)

Looking ahead, House and Senate Republican leaders are expected to release instructions for one of two potential reconciliation bills. The first would focus narrowly on extending funding for ICE and CBP, with a June 1 deadline set by the President. The League intends to continue opposing additional funding for ICE and CBP, and we urge you to [contact your members of Congress](#) to let them know you are opposed as well. A second, broader package is anticipated later this summer.

We are closely monitoring these developments and will mobilize as needed in alignment with LWVUS positions and legislative priorities.

Our League

National Volunteer Appreciation Week, taking place April 19–25, 2026, is an important opportunity to recognize and celebrate the dedicated individuals who power the League's work. From organizing community events to advocating for voters and strengthening democracy, our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do. Their time, energy, and commitment make a lasting impact in communities across the country.

To all of our volunteers: thank you. Your passion, dedication, and belief in this work drive our mission forward every day, and I am deeply grateful for all that you do.

Dianna Wynn

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR LWVML VOLUNTEERS!

We have just completed one of the FOUR Candidate Forums we are putting on for our communities. Impressive. Great job everyone!

By [B.J. Hansen](#) Published **Apr 24, 2026 11:43 am** on MyMotherLode.com



**Gabe Wingo and Zack Abernathy at
the League of Women Voters Forum
on April 23rd**

Sonora, CA — Another forum was held Thursday evening featuring the two candidates running for Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools.

Zack Abernathy, the incumbent, was first elected in 2022, and challenger Gabe Wingo is the Superintendent of the Twain Harte School District.

The event, in the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors meeting room, was put on by the League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode, and lasted just under an hour.

The candidates were allowed time for opening and closing statements and answered several questions.

During opening statements, Wingo noted, “The county schools office exists to serve the districts and the students of our county. Funds should be tied to programs and services that our districts use and that our students need. Currently, the county schools office has \$24 million in its General Fund balance that is not being used to support students. This race is about ensuring that these resources are utilized to benefit the students and families of Tuolumne County.”

Abernathy noted, in his opening, that his family goes back generations in Tuolumne County and highlighted the work of educators. He stated, “As I grew up in Tuolumne County, I had some of the best teachers in the world. I wasn’t a real ‘school guy,’ and those teachers were really integral in keeping me in school and keeping me going. I found myself working extra hard for the ones I loved and respected. As I got older, I wanted to do that for other kids, like they did for me, and that’s what led to me ending up in this position.”

One question was in relation to how they would prioritize the various supplemental programs offered by the superintendent of schools’ office.

Wingo highlighted what he feels are current shortcomings in special education, stating, “Right now we spend \$2 million a year to send kids out of our county for their education, and that is not acceptable. We need to find opportunities and solutions to provide those programs in our county to make sure that those kids have an opportunity to learn and grow in their own community, near their families, instead of sitting on a van for an hour and a half.”

Abernathy praised several supplemental programs that are done at the Juvenile detention facility, and things like the TLC program for expelled youth. He noted that there are also three special needs preschools. He said, “One of the county functions is to run these programs, and we have never turned the districts down for a program that they wanted or felt they needed. And so, any adjustments that need to be made there, we’re willing to look at, and try to figure out. But, it is really 13 superintendents trying to agree on what’s needed. It is a lot of good ideas. We just need to settle on what we do.”

Asked about their three biggest issues and priorities, Abernathy said, healthy school budgets, improving the mental health of students, and making improvements to special education.

Wingo spoke about the need to improve academic achievements and learning outcomes, addressing staffing shortages, and improving special education.

[\(continued on page 3\)](#)

(continued from page 2)

Both agreed on the importance of expanding the Career Technical Education offerings. Abernathy highlighted achievements to this point and initiatives in the works, and Wingo added that he would like to see it expanded into the primary schools as well.

One question was about whether there are programs or offerings in other counties of California that could be beneficial in Tuolumne County.

Abernathy said that he's witnessed some county offices purchase apartment complexes to provide workforce housing for educators. He said it would be one of his "dream" scenarios. Wingo questioned the concept and said money should instead go to services for students.

They also talked about the role of the superintendent of schools' office, the need for teacher retention, and things like the relationship with the county's board of education.

Thursday's forum was filmed by Access Tuolumne and [can be found here](#).

Happy Birthday to Us!

Our Mother Lode unit was started in 2017 by a small group of women and men who were concerned about the democratic process in our local communities. We became an official League in May 2021 (that's right, during the pandemic).

We are now an active presence in our communities and well-respected by local leaders. Our Observer Corps attends all the Tuolumne Board of Supervisors', Sonora City Council, and TUD Meetings, as well as watching what is happening in Calaveras County. All our local elected officials know who we are. We are putting on four Candidate Forums this year. Our very first one was in 2020, and we have done several since then, but four at one time and on four separate days is a record (and a lot of work). We have four active Interest Groups: Democracy, Fire, Homelessness, and Water, all of which are educating our members and community about these important issues that affect us all. Our members make all this happen, thank you.

Join the celebration at our Annual Meeting on June 6th. The cake alone should be worth it!

Save The Date and Volunteer

Once again, LWVML will be doing a fundraiser with the Murphy's Creek Theater. We will be hosting the preview night for their production of "[What the Constitution Means to Me](#)" on **August 6th**.

If you're interested in helping with our fundraising event, please join the organizing committee. We meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 1 pm at the Senior Center in Sonora. Or contact Patricia Horsthius at 209-559-5242 to volunteer. We would love to have your help! Of course, we are hoping all members will attend the performance and/or sell tickets.

Volunteers are needed for: setup and takedown, League information table, food table manager for desserts and savory foods, greeters & ticket takers, photography, and to make a dessert or a savory appetizer for the reception. After the play, we will need help with the cleanup and takedown.

Saturday, May 2nd, 10 am to 11:30 am

General Meeting— Tuolumne County Library, 480 Greenley Road, Sonora

We will be reviewing our 2026/2027 Ballot and Budget and discussing the SAVE Act(s) and California's Ballot initiatives that could affect voting here in our state.

April/May/June Meetings/Events

Wednesday April 29th, 6 pm

Candidate Forum Tuolumne County BOS District 3
Library in Sonora

Thursday April 30th, 6 pm

Candidate Forum Tuolumne County BOS District 2
Tuolumne County BOS Chambers, 2 S. Green St.

Saturday May 9th, 9 am

Mother Lode Round-Up Parade—Walk or Ride
Join us in Sonora

Monday May 11th, 10:30 am

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

Wednesday May 13th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Membership/Fundraising — Patricia Horsthuis Chair/
Deborah Rei Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Friday May 15th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

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

Monday May 18th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday May 18th, 1 pm to 3 pm

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

Wednesday May 20th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Schnoogs

Wednesday May 20th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps —Jane Braga, Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Saturday June 6th, 10 am to noon

General Meeting—LWVML Annual Meeting—
We will be learning about the Constitution
(and voting) and celebrating our 5th Birthday.
Library in Sonora

Monday June 8th, 10:30 am

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

Wednesday June 10th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Membership/Fundraising — Patricia Horsthuis Chair/
Deborah Rei Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Friday June 19th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

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

Monday June 15th, 1 pm to 3 pm

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

Wednesday June 17th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead
Schnoogs

Wednesday June 20th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps —Jane Braga, Chair
Senior Center in Sonora

Monday June 29th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board
Senior Center in Sonora

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

Committees, **WHERE THE REAL WORK HAPPENS!**

Voter Services Committee:

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

The LWVML has been very busy planning and carrying out its Candidate Forums: April 23 – Tuolumne County Superintendent of Schools, April 29 - Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors District 3, April 30 - Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors District 2. Our final forum will be held on May 7 – Calaveras County Board of Supervisors District 5 to be held at the Veterans Hall in Valley Springs at 6 pm.

Thanks to all the League members who have volunteered to fill important forum duties. It has been a true team effort! The Candidate Forums provide a valuable service to our community, giving voters the opportunity to learn more about the candidates running for local offices.

In addition, Voter Services participated in the Tuolumne County Volunteer Fair on April 23rd. Pam Vlach and Tia Anderson (pictured right) represented LWVML with a table which shared voter and League information.

Voter Services has been dispersing the LWVC Easy Voter Guides in preparation for June's election.

Always looking for League members who would like to be a part of the Voter Services Committee, especially during this busy Election Year. Contact Susan Medeiros at susanmedeiros@gmail.com or 209-840-2066.



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)

April 7th. Supervisor Grier had concerns about a Consent Calendar item (#17), a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Under Canvas, Inc. County Council tried to clarify for him. Grier did not seem satisfied.

- Audit is progressing. \$212,000 (not to exceed), was approved for Human Resource Department.

April 22st. It was reported that Supervisors Grier and Kirk met with CalFire to discuss the contract. Other BOS members were not informed of the meeting. Concerns about transparency. Personal agenda?

- In Staff Reports, OES Director Dore Bietz resigned, citing the decision by the Board to move the OES department to be under the Sheriff's Department rather than the County Administrative Office. She felt strongly that OES should be independent of first responders and of elected officials.
- The board considered amending the CalFire cooperative agreement, not to exceed \$32,442,015.00. Much discussion. Much citizen input. Concerns about the closure of the Mono Way fire station. Two-hour discussion suggesting amending the Resolution. In the end, Resolution 44-26 passed with a 3-2 vote. (Grier, Holland, Kirk vs. Brandon/Campbell.)

Committees continued:

Observer Corps (OC) continued from page 5:

Sonora City Council

April 6th. Approval of expenditure to create a Mobile LiDAR database of all city-owned streets. Approval of expenditure for Meeting in a Box for outreach for public comment requirement for Active Transportation Grant (ATP).

- The Big News of the meeting was the vote to close State Highway 49 and surrounding streets for the Mother Lode Round-Up Parade. Council also voted to allow open consumption of alcohol during the parade. Citizens pointed out the hypocrisy of accepting funding for high DUI rates in the county in light of this vote. Chief VanderWiel pointed out that this request is made by the Sheriff's Posse, not Sonora PD. Council noted that it is only for a few hours. It's a tradition going back "thousands of years."

Tuolumne Utility District (TUD)

April 14th. In Public Comment, a citizen commented on the March 31st TUD Human Resources (HR) Committee meeting. He was disappointed in the behavior of the board chairperson, who had discussed items not on the agenda and made comments about staff, which could be a violation of State Labor Laws.

- Don Perkins, TUD General Manager, in Staff Reports, addressed the March 31st HR Committee Meeting. He wanted to set the record straight. The staff was accused of wrongdoing. There were no wrongdoings. GM Perkins works for the Board; the staff works for GM Perkins. The HR committee chair had complained of failures. Perkins listed the many successful accomplishments of the staff in the past year, including two prestigious awards.
- In Board Reports, Director Kerns, after expressing his concerns about the March 31st HR Committee meeting, which he had attended, asked to add an agenda item to the April 28th Board of Directors meeting. The item is to remove Director Ringen as President of the TUD Board. The request needed the approval of two board members. Two members, Directors Hollis and Jacobs, did so. The item will appear on the April 28th TUD agenda.

Next OC meeting is Wednesday, May 27th at 1:30 pm at the Sonora Senior Center. 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.

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.

From Jenny Farrell, Esquire, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of California

Update: the California Voter ID initiative advanced by Assemblymember Carl DeMaio officially qualified for the November ballot on April 24th. Our coalition of organizations opposing this measure released [this press release](#) and the reporters are picking it up, so you should see some coverage. This measure would make it harder for millions of eligible Californians to vote, expose voters to potential identity theft, and cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. More to come on how we can all work together to DEFEAT this dangerous and unnecessary initiative!

And, while I'm sharing updates, there was [a nice piece today published by Annenberg Media](#) about the other ballot initiative that LWVC is leading the way on - the campaign to pass the California Fair Elections Act, which would remove the ban on public financing of campaigns in non-charter cities. More to come on how we can all work together to PASS this initiative!

When you look at these two initiatives side by side, the contrast is striking: One – the voter ID initiative - makes participation in our democracy harder. The other – removing the ban on public financing - makes participation easier.

And that is the choice before voters this November.

Fire Interest Group (FIG)

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

Check our website for links to all the films and some of the presentations from our "[Living with Fire](#)" series.

We learned a lot from this first effort and feel like we have met our primary goals of educating the public and ourselves and motivating people to do the work (Several people have let us know that they are removing vegetation from around their homes and being more vigilant about leaves, vents, etc.).

Brainstorming of what could be next for the FIGs after a couple months of rest:

- ◆ Tour of Columbia College with Tom Hofstra for the League and friends.
- ◆ Tour of Fire Safe Projects (TFSC hosts it).
- ◆ Taking on CRC's, community requirements that don't meet the updated needs for fire resilience (like wooden fences).
- ◆ Giving talks to underserved groups.
- ◆ Educate others about local DIY projects.
- ◆ Training sessions – herbicides, home hardening, fire-resistant plant list (landscaping), etc
- ◆ One-stop shop for fire information. Hardscaping. Vent screens (1/8th, no smaller than 1/16th for air moving); fire retardant paint; etc.
- ◆ Master Gardeners/Native Plant Society/UC Extension help put together a list of fire resistant plants. Focusing on our area. Native plants.
- ◆ More Firewise Communities.
- ◆ Annual Award for native landscaping and fire-adapted/resistant. Businesses and Residential.

Water Interest Group (WIG)

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

The WIGs did not meet in April, but are gearing up for a field trip soon. The State League is now producing a monthly article on water issues in our state called **Water Spotlight**. This month's topic is Protecting the Public Trust: Mono Lake and Beyond. In 1983, the California Supreme Court decided, based on the public trust doctrine, that water levels at Mono Lake must be prevented from falling to a point that would cause the loss of this natural treasure. This doctrine continues to be used as a potent legal tool to protect the environment. Click [here](#) to go to our website, where you can find a link to the article under the WIG Section.

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

Democracy (in action) Interest Group (DIG)

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

The DIGs did not meet in April. Our focus will be on the upcoming primaries, the November elections, and keeping up with the SAVE Act.

Our next meeting is May 15th at 1:30 pm. We meet at the Angels Camp Round Table and or via Zoom.

For more information, contact Martha Rubin at 650-619-7136 or email rubinmartha@gmail.com.

Homelessness Interest Group (HIG)

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

Our Group is working to determine our next priority. How can we best serve our community?

Next meeting is Monday, May 11th at 10:30 at the Senior Center. All are welcome.

Mother Lode Round-Up Parade

The parade is Saturday May 9th. We will meet at 9 am at the south end of Washington Street (near Grocery Outlet). Look for Brenda's red pick-up. There will be room in the truck bed for anyone who would like to ride. Dress in vintage or patriotic themes, or wear your League t-shirt. If it is a hot day, remember to wear a hat, put on sunscreen, and bring water. Jeff Klay has made signs for us (thank you Jeff!). Reminder that parking is limited in the area. Consider being dropped off/picked up.

Contact Maria Benech at runmcb@gmail.com or 209-559-3504 for more information.



April LWVML Board Decisions

- ◆ Approved the 2026/2027 Proposed Budget and Slate of Officers. These will be sent out soon to all our members and voted on at our Annual Meeting in June. We added specific language about paying per diem if someone is driving to an event. We will use a flat rate based on mileage (checking California’s current rate).
- ◆ We will do an After Action Review once all four forums are complete.
- ◆ The Presidents will send out the thank you notes to the candidates who participated in our forums.
- ◆ Approved any additional funds needed to send our two delegates to the LWV National Convention in Columbus, Ohio.
- ◆ Brenda and Suzanne will look into a Venmo account for us. Easier for people to buy tickets to our fundraiser and donate to us.
- ◆ Looking to write a follow-up piece for the Union Democrat after the Forums are completed. Remind people to vote.
- ◆ Our League will be getting a new YouTube site.
- ◆ At our June Annual Meeting, we will celebrate our 5th birthday as a League. Cake!
- ◆ On May 4th at 2 pm, LWV National will host a virtual field call on the Voting Rights Act 60th Anniversary Day of Action (August 6th) and the menu of ways leagues can engage. We will be on this call.



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**
 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 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.



CANDIDATE FORUMS

6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Superintendent of Schools - April 23

Zachary Abernathy

Gabe Wingo

Location: 2 S. Green St, Sonora



Board of Supervisors

District 2: April 30 **District 3 - April 29**

Mark Brooks

Ryan Campbell

Steve Green

Juli Healy

Diego Martinez

Rayanne Tamayo

Location: 2 S. Green St

Anaiah Kirk

Tim McCaffrey

Location: Sonora

Library



BROADCAST on COMCAST
CHANNEL 8 ON DEMAND at
ACCESSTUOLUMNE.ORG



LWV

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF THE MOTHER LODGE



May 7, 2026

CANDIDATE FORUM

Public Event

6:00 PM - 7:00 PM



Board of Supervisors

District 5

Clyde Clapp

Bruce Giudici

Ben Stopper

Jenny Lind Memorial Veterans Hall

200 West Daphne St.

Valley Springs