

THE VOTER

October 2026

Empowering Voters - Defending Democracy

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A Message from the LWVML Presidential Triad

As we head into the final weeks before the November election, we are grateful that we can continue to vote by mail just as we have before. After weeks of uncertainty, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to allow new federal restrictions on mail voting to take effect for this election. For California voters, the most important message is simple: You can vote in the way that works for you. You can vote by mail. You can vote early. You can return your ballot to a secure drop box. You can vote in person. Those choices are one of the great

strengths of California's election system. That said, **California election officials recommend putting your ballot in the mail at least seven days before Election Day to help ensure that it receives a timely postmark.**

We also want to acknowledge the passing of Gloria Steinem, who died September 2nd at the age of 92 after a lifetime spent organizing, writing, listening, and working for equality. The quote below is from the afterword to her 1992 book, *Revolution From Within* and it seems a lot like what we do.

Steinem dreamed of a "national honeycomb" of small, diverse groups that were both personal and political – places where people could build relationships, support one another, understand their experiences as part of something larger, and ultimately turn those relationships into collective action. She looked to Alcoholics Anonymous as evidence that such a network was possible: "If two white male alcoholics could start a national network of meetings that are free, leaderless, and accessible, so can we."

For more than a century, League members have been gathering in communities across this country. Our own League meets in living rooms and libraries, community centers and coffee shops. We learn together; sometimes it seems like the same thing over again, but we continue to improve and move forward. Sometimes, we disagree. We listen. We build relationships. And then we take what we have learned and turn it outward – into voter education, advocacy, civic participation, and action.

As we head toward Election Day, we hope you will do what League members have always done: talk to your neighbors. Share reliable information. Help someone make a plan to vote. Reassure someone who is worried about voting by mail. Learn about the measures on our ballot and share this information.

We want to thank all our members for your support. Whether you worked at a Candidate Forum, registered voters, helped with Pros and Cons, or "just" support us financially through your dues and donations, each of you makes our League stronger and better able to serve our communities.

See you Saturday at our General Meeting, where we'll discuss the Pros and Cons of each ballot initiative, **and bring a friend.**

Maria Benech, Jane Braga, and Leonides Russell



VOTER REGISTRATION AND OUTREACH

One of the important services the League of Women Voters provides to our community is voter registration and information about the election process and the issues. We stress the importance of voting and encourage community members to be active participants in our Democracy: "Every Vote Counts".

This election cycle, our team has been very busy working with several diverse community organizations to carry out our mission.

The first event was the Murphy's Pride 2026, behind the Mystic Emporium. I would like to thank Trudy Craig and Cris Barsanti for helping to register four people and make 10 connections.

I want to thank Columbia College for hosting National Voter Registration & Constitution Days, and Susan Medeiros, Tia Anderson, Deborah Rei, and Charlene Dambacher for helping to register five students and share information with over 40 students.

We also partnered with ICES, Infant/Child Enrichment Services, in Tuolumne Park where we registered two people, shared information with 32 people, and practiced voting with 42 future voters. Thank you, Tia Andersen, Susan Medeiros, and the ICES organization for this wonderful event.

We still have several upcoming events: the Senior Center in Sonora on September 29th, the Navigation Center on October 2nd, and the Calaveras Firewise Festival on October 17th at Ironstone Winery. If you would like to help out at any of these events or be involved in the future, contact Pam Vlach at pamelavlach@yahoo.com.



Photo Above: Susan Medeiros and Deborah Rei at Columbia College.

Photo Below: Young Voters practicing at the ICES Event.



October 3rd General Meeting

Join us for a discussion of the 14 ballot measures. We will present the Pros and Cons of each initiative and hopefully answer any questions you might have.

Bring your friends and neighbors!

October & November Meetings and Events

Thursday October 1st, 6 pm

California State Senate District 4 Forum

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors Chambers

Thursday October 8th, 6 pm

CANDIDATE MEET & GREET—All Candidates on the Tuolumne County Ballot have been invited.

Library in Sonora

Wednesday October 14th, 1 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthius Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Friday October 16th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead

Starbucks or Round Table in Angels Camp

Saturday October 17th, All Day

Calaveras Firewise Community

Ironstone Vineyards, Murphys

Monday October 19th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday October 21st, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead

Senior Center in Sonora

Monday October 26th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday October 28th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps — Jane Braga, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

No General Meeting in November

November 3rd—VOTE

Wednesday November 11th, 1 pm

Membership — Patricia Horsthius Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Monday November 16th, 1 pm to 3 pm

Voter Services — Susan Medeiros, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday November 18th, 11:30 am

Water Interest Group—Jane Braga, Lead

Senior Center in Sonora

Wednesday November 18th, 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

Observer Corps — Jane Braga, Chair

Senior Center in Sonora

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

Democracy Interest Group—Martha Rubin, Lead

Starbucks in Angels Camp

Monday November 30th, 11 am to 1 pm

LWVML Board

Senior Center in Sonora



Considering that you can't call 411 and get somebody's number anymore, this title seems a bit "last century". However, "get the 411" lingers on.

Vote411.org is a website originating with LWVUS and made available to all local Leagues. It is an online voter guide produced by the League of Women Voters. VOTE411 is the "one-stop shop" for election information and provides California voters with simple, accessible tools to help them navigate the voting process. VOTE411 provides personalized candidate information, voter registration details, polling place locations, and other helpful election information for all voters nationwide. It allows candidates to enter information describing who they are and answer some questions about their views. The entries are not edited by the League, except for a few rules about propriety; not even typos are corrected. It truly is a message from the candidate.

All of this is free, both to candidates and voters. How is this possible? With League members at all levels entering data, contacting candidates, and marketing the guide to the public. We, the LWVML, are on it! Brenda McHenry and Karen Caldwell have searched and found contact information for all candidates in Tuolumne and Calaveras Counties. We then sent email invitation letters to them describing the system and requesting their participation. We have also entered information on any measures that will be on the ballot. LWVML is responsible for facilitating content and information for VOTE411 for local races like city council, board of supervisors, school districts, and others. Statewide races are handled by the Statewide LWV. Many local candidates don't release their contact information. If you know anyone running for office, let them know about VOTE411.org and ask them to email one of us.

The next challenge is following up these emails with phone call reminders that urge them to add their information and views so that voters can make decisions about their votes. **We need volunteers to help us with this.** Fortunately, no computer knowledge is required, and phones are ubiquitous. We can give you a general script to use. Karen and I are stuck to our keyboards, and we can't do it all. Please email us if you would like to help. Thanks in advance.

Brenda McHenry, Calaveras/Tuolumne Coordinator
bmchenry@cavote411.org 408-340-3092 cell

Karen Caldwell, Tuolumne Local Coordinator
kcaldwell@cavote411.org 209-559-9527 cell

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

Observer Corps (OC):

Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors (BOS)

September 1st. This was a particularly contentious, negative meeting. The 2025-2026 Grand Jury members, now private citizens, spoke in response to the BOS response to their report. The Board did not like hearing what they had to say. Supervisor Kirk, at one point, chastised the audience, saying that they had “nothing better to do on a Tuesday than” come to a Board of Supervisors meeting. The audience responded vocally. It was very unpleasant.

The Board approved Amendment #9 to the Professional Services Agreement with Tuolumne River Preservation Trust, doing business as (dba) Yosemite Rivers Alliance for program administration and project management related to the County’s Master Stewardship Agreement with the Stanislaus National Forest. There was a lengthy discussion. Some board members were confused about the agreement.

September 15th. Discussion of the status of the County workforce vacancies. County has been having a difficult time hiring qualified staff. Several departments are understaffed. Does the County administrative workforce need to be restructured?

Discussion about CalPERS. It is getting very expensive.

County is making an effort to transition from Leased Spaces to County Owned Spaces. Discussion to speed up the remodeling of the old courthouse.

Board members expressed pride in making adjustments in each district to free funds to fix roads.

September 22nd Members of the last Grand Jury spoke, explaining the Grand Jury process. The need for respect and civility in public discourse was noted. Former jurors commented that Supervisors had every right to disagree with their findings. They expressed concern about disparaging jurors. Supervisor Holland denied that he had done that.

Two former supervisors, Mr. Hanfeldt and Mr. Rodeffer, spoke criticizing Supervisor Campbell. Another speaker made accusations against Supervisor Brandon. And that was Public Comment!

Budget. The 2026-2027 budget was presented. Much discussion. Not always consensus. Comments about creative financing and rewriting history as far as what was and wasn’t done or addressed in the past. Station #56 was addressed again. Some disagreement about timing and funding. Many of the concerns about budget cuts were addressed by Roger Root, CAO, many of which will be addressed in January 2027.

Public Comment on the budget – speakers pointed out that the \$3.9 million “surplus” was on the backs of decreased staff and increased workload. OES (Office of Emergency Services) was told to find grant money to fund itself.

Camp Justice. Camp Justice opened in September 2013. Has served 219 people. 88 have transitioned out. 43 have gone on to permanent housing. These figures beat the State’s averages. The 45 residents at present cost \$8,126/month, or \$178/per person/per month. Opioid Settlement money provides part of the funding. Sheriff Vasquez clarified that Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) is another funding source. The vote was 4:0 to keep the camp in operation for one more year.

Observer Corps continued

Sonora City Council (SCC)

September 8th. During Public Comment, Supervisor Holland complained to Councilmember Merrill about comments he had made at a previous SCC meeting. There was some discussion back and forth, which violates the Brown Act. Mayor Segerstrom called an end to the exchange.

Appeal. Council accepted an appeal of a Planning Commission decision. Appeal Hearing set for October 9, 2026.

Approval of contracts for various projects within the City.

September 21st. Liz Peterson was sworn in as New Director of Administrative Services for the City.

Public Hearings.

- ♦ To approve the Formal Vacation Right-of-Way Area at the intersection of Old Wards Ferry Road and Sanguinetti Road.
- ♦ To approve an agreement to transfer land to the adjacent landowner, California Gold.
- ♦ To rezone a portion of the area from Open Space to General Commercial.

Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD)

September 8th. Consent Calendar. Director Ringen raised concerns about expenditures. Staff answered concerns.

Grants Process & Review. TUD has received close to \$70 million in the last 12 years. Types of grants include fuel reduction, disaster relief and reservoir improvements, infrastructure and consolidation, emerging industry solutions, smart water meters, and hazard mitigation.

The State looks at TUD as a “poster child” for consolidation.

TUD website, under Doing Business – information about grant-funded projects.

Director Ringen distributed a book about good boards.

Board President Hollis addressed rumors that GM Perkins had received raises without board authorization. He and Director Reel received the documents authorizing the raises in question. One was signed by Director Balen, one by Director Kerns, and one by Director Ringen, each while they were President of the Board.

September 22nd. The 2026 Strategic Plan Progress Report was presented. The plan has 7 goals. Each goal has 2-5 strategies and 1-6 actions.

Conflict of Interest. The Board approved amendments to the TUD conflict-of-interest code. After discussion, it passed 4-1. Ringen opposed.

Next OC meeting Wednesday, October 28, 1:30. Senior Center.

Water Interest Group (WIG)

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

In the county, we are following the completion of the New Melones long-term water service contract with TUD. As an in-basin contractor, TUD has priority for this water. The contract includes authorization for TUD to subcontract to Chicken Ranch Rancheria. Chicken Ranch has been a partner in this decades-long effort. The public comment period ended September 22nd.

Tom Parrington updated us on the county Water Advisory Committee. Moving forward, the focus of the Integrated Water Regional Management (IRWM) will include downstream water districts for a more inclusive, collaborative approach to regional water management.

Statewide, we continue to follow federal NOAA attacks on the California Coastal Commission and the ongoing Colorado River negotiations.

Meetings are the third Wednesday of the month at 11:30 at the Senior Center.

Water Spotlight: Restoring and Managing California's Watersheds

October 2026 by Paul Burke and Jane Wagner-Tyack

Summary: Californians are experiencing an El Niño period, the effects of which will vary depending on where we live. One possible effect is flooding, and tens of thousands of Californians live in regions where protections against flooding are inadequate. El Niño will cause floods, mudflows, and mudslides. Dams can [break](#). Flood insurance and/or "Difference in Conditions" [policies](#) are needed to cover landslides, mudflows, quakes, and floods. If the premium looks high, the [risk](#) is high. Get it now. It takes at least 30 days to start. No insurance covers [mudslides](#). Inland, the main risk is rain. The Great Flood of 1861–1862 made the Central Valley a 300-mile inland sea. Floods this big are expected every [140-200](#) years. Coastal risks include storm surges, waves, and sea level rise. **Read the full article at:** floods.ourwater.us



LWVML CANDIDATE FORUMS and Something New

Our first Candidate Forum was on September 24th, and it was a very successful evening. The two District 1 Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) Candidates were civil and prepared. The audience was small, but Access Tuolumne filmed the event.

Our next forum is October 1st. The two candidates for State Senate District 4 will be here: Jaron Brandon and Alexandra Duarte. Join us at the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors chambers at 6 pm.

We are also planning **our first Meet & Greet candidate event on October 8th**

from 6 pm to 8 pm at the library in Sonora. At this event, candidates talk



directly to the voters, with no microphones or speeches, just one-on-one or small group discussions. This is an open house format; people can come in at any time. We will provide light refreshments.

Our League tried to put together a candidate forum for the Groveland Community Services District (GCSD), but we were unable to get commitments from many of the candidates. This is a very contentious race, and we did not want to host a forum with only the incumbents or only the challengers; we felt it was important to have all seven candidates at the event to best serve the voters.

We also canceled a planned forum in Calaveras County after one of the Supervisor Candidates passed away.

How to Renew/Join Today

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). You can also just mail a check to our Post Office Box if that is easier for you. Make the \$75 check payable to “League of Women Voters of the Mother Lode or LWVML” and mail it to: LWVML, P.O. Box 5393, Sonora, California 95370.

Our League offers full scholarships for anyone who wants to join, and LWV also has a sliding scale for members (pay as little as \$20 per year). Please don't hesitate to ask us about this; we do not want money to be a barrier to membership.

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.

September LWVML Board Decisions

- ♦ Looking to do more radio spots before and after the election to educate voters and promote the League.
- ♦ Working to build relationships with our local tribes. Do they need anything the League can offer regarding voter registration, education, or information?
- ♦ Janis Ossa and Maria Benech will serve on the Nominating Committee.
- ♦ The Board voted to participate in Sonora's Christmas Tree Lane again this year. It is already part of the budget approved by the membership.
- ♦ The Board voted to participate in the Pop Hudson Memorial Christmas Sing in Sonora again this year, a great community event.
- ♦ After the first of the year, we will form a committee to work on Pre-Voter Registration at our local high schools.
- ♦ The Board approved spending \$1,110 on the "Defend Democracy" "Vote" flags. We will sell them for \$25 each to cover our cost and make a little extra. Janis is donating her time and talent to finish sewing them together. Thank you Janis!
- ♦ We will send a letter to the editor about VOTE411. Brenda and Karen, our coordinators, will take the lead.
- ♦ We will have an informational table at the October 17th "No Kings Rally" at Courthouse Park in Sonora.



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 2026/2027 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.