## The League of Women Voters of Spokane Area *The Voter*February 2024 Issue Beth Pellicciotti LWVSA Civic Education

Many times we think that civic education is solely for students in K-12 schools. We might remember our own civics class in high school and wonder what is taught now. In Washington State, a semester of civic education is required for graduation from high school, legislation strongly supported by the League of Women Voters of Washington (LWVWA) in 2018.

However, civic education is also for adults, for those of us out of high school a few years or a few decades. As adults we learn civics through teachable moments; we learn because we are motivated to learn. League members learn how government works (one definition of civic education) when we study how a bill becomes a state law or how a city council passes ordinances.

Those of us working in voter education must learn Washington State election processes to answer questions about voting deadlines, signatures on the ballot, and the security of our state's mail-in ballot system. From our own learning about elections, we teach others.

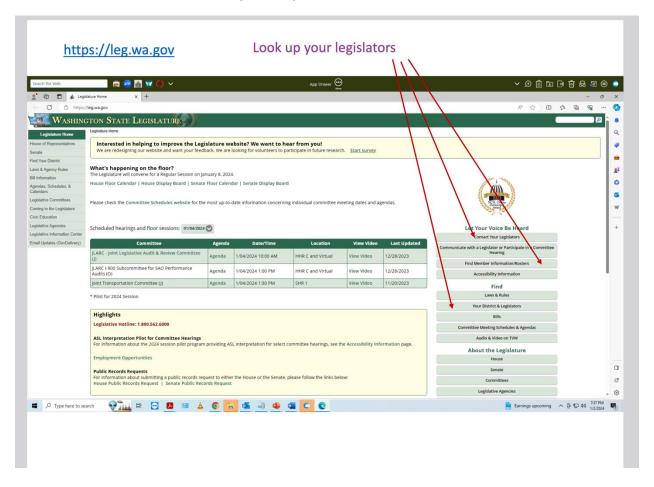
On January 6, League members from across the state had several teachable moments by attending the LWVWA Speak-up School. We learned how to research state legislation, write testimony, and possibly testify on legislation. Speak-up School PowerPoint covers these few hours of instruction and discussion and was preparation for LWVWA Lobby Week held January 22- January 26.

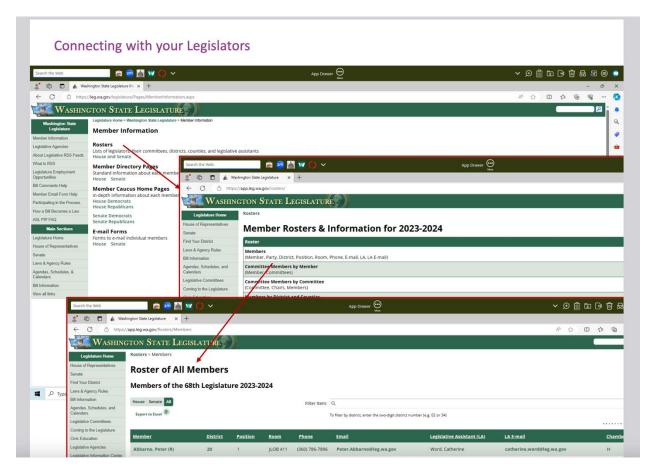
This article focuses on one part of Speak-up School, how to use <a href="https://leg.wa.gov/">https://leg.wa.gov/</a>, the comprehensive guide to state-level legislation. While I have used leg.wa.gov many times, until Speak-up School, I had never seen such clear depictions of that website's information. Here were my civic education teachable moments from the LWVWA Speak-up School.

**Using leg.wa.gov to look up and connect with my legislators**: A few years ago, I was a new member to the League as well as new to Spokane. I was flummoxed at one of my first League meetings when asked to identify myself by legislative district. I had no idea!

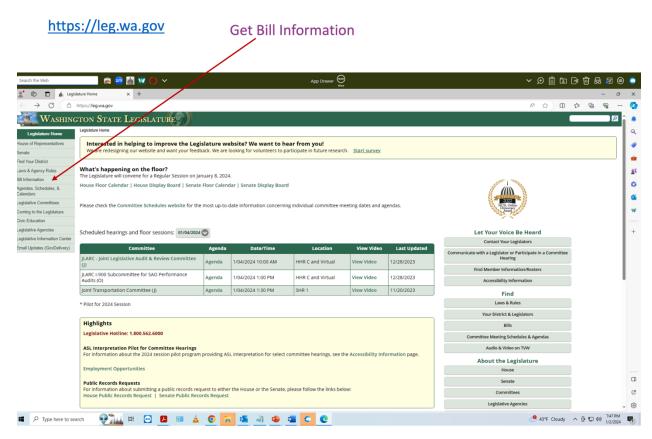
This is basic and critical information in a democracy. Who is representing me? How do I contact my representatives? These first two slides should help you "Look up your legislators" and "Connect with your legislators." When we make these connections to send an email or testify, we don't speak for the League unless authorized to do so, but we make

our concerns known as constituents. (The following slides were created by Cynthia Stewart, LWVWA Board, Advocacy Chair.)



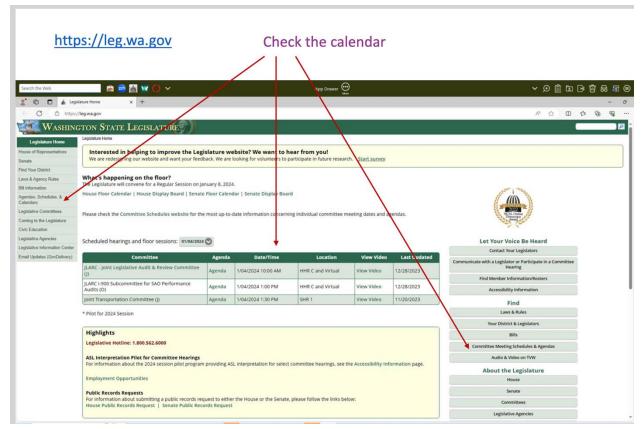


**Get bill information**: Read more about legislation for yourself. It is important to understand the nuances of the legislation that interests you the most. In 2018, I learned that legislation written to support civic education as a high school requirement was not the same as legislation making civic education a high school graduation requirement. The LWVWA pushed hard for that graduation requirement. One word made all the difference in implementation! (Read Washington State Civic Education History by Catherine Ahl, LWVWA Education Issue Chair).



**Check the calendar**: The current legislative session, called a short session, is swift; it is over in a matter of weeks. Within this flurry of committee meetings and House and Senate voting, League members work on your behalf in the legislature. These <u>Issue Chairs</u> speak for the League, write testimony, and testify on priority legislation based on League positions.

You can amplify their voices and testimony by signing up for the <u>LWVWA Legislative</u> <u>Newsletter</u> and sending your own support for specified legislation, as a constituent of your district. In Speak-up School, we learned that personal stories lend substantial weight to your support of or opposition to any legislation.



Finally, if you are a new League member, **take in this information in parts**. I am seven years in as a League member, and I know I am still learning. We learn and then we teach others through civic and voter education; this is how we Empower Voters and Defend Democracy.

## Check out the LWVSA Webpage for more information:

https://my.lwv.org/washington/spokane-area/information-voters/keeping-legislature-understand-follow-and-influence-legislation



## Keeping Up with the Legislature: Understand, Follow and Influence Legislation

Today neither distance or weather prevent us from understanding and participating in the legislative process. Citizen engagement keeps government transparent, inclusive, and accountable.

my.lwv.org