



The Voter | Summer 2024

Welcome to **THE VOTER** newsletter for the League of Women Voters of Montana!

Letter from the LWV MT President

Election 2024 and its aftermath will be a challenging time for our democracy, no matter who wins the election. The League has never been more important to the future of our democracy than it is right now. I encourage all League members to step up and be active in local, state and national League actions in the coming months. Now is not the time to sit on the sidelines!

Resilience was the theme for the LWV MT's 2024 annual membership meeting, and resilience is what the League needs going into the 2024 election, the 2025 Legislative session, and beyond. Part of resilience is remembering what is at stake. See Donna Veraldi's excellent Keynote address ([click here](#)) for the 2024 LWV MT Retreat for a fresh reminder of why we are in the League.

Read on! This edition of the state VOTER offers many opportunities to become involved with state-level League actions, as well as updates on what happened at both the state and National League meetings this summer, including approval of an upcoming national League study on the federal Judiciary!

Are you concerned about the integrity of Montana's elections? Let's start with a big "Thank You" to all League members who serve as election judges! You are the integrity of Montana's elections! For those who aren't election judges, League members will have an opportunity this fall to participate in an election observation initiative from the internationally known Carter Center. Volunteer to be an election Observer with the Montana Election Observation Project! See the article below about this Carter Center project and watch for outreach to local Montana League of Women Voters for volunteers to be Observers in Montana's November general election.

Want to stand up for democracy at the 2025 Montana Legislature? See the article below on preparing for the 2025 session, and sign up on an issue that matters to you. No experience necessary, LWV MT will provide training both for monitoring the session, and for responding to Action Alerts.

I will be coming to all of the local League membership meetings in September, to share more information about the state League and how we can meet the challenges to our democracy going forward. Here are the locations and dates:

Sept. 9 - Bozeman membership meeting, Noon, PILGRIM CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST. . 2118 S. 3rd Ave. Bozeman,

Sept. 10 - Billings membership meeting, Rib and Chop House, Noon - 1:00 pm

Sept. 16 - Helena membership meeting, Public Library, starts promptly at 6:15 pm - 7:45 pm

Sept. 18 - Missoula membership meeting, noon -1:00 pm, Cooper Room, Public Library

I hope to see you there!

Sincerely,
Nancy Leifer, President, LWV of Montana

LWV MT 2024 MEMBERSHIP RETREAT IN BILLINGS PREPARES FOR ELECTION 2024 AND BEYOND

“Resilience in the League, Resilience for Democracy” was the theme for the 2024 LWV MT annual membership meeting, hosted this year by the Billings League. Forty League members including participants from all four local Leagues spent two delightful days in Billings, getting to know each other and enjoying fabulous food and hospitality from the Billings League. A summary of the content of the Retreat can be found [here](#).

LWV MT VOTE411 PARTNERS WITH MONTANA FREE PRESS

LWV MT and Montana Free Press worked in partnership to bring Montana-specific VOTE411 to all statewide, legislative and multi-county election races for the 2024 elections. VOTE411 is a national database and website owned and operated by LWV US that allows candidates to respond to questions directly, entering their own answers unedited by LWV. In addition to candidate information, voters can enter their physical location to obtain comprehensive information on voter registration and elections specific to them. As of primary election day, 40% of the candidates had responded, including 84 Democrats, 54 Republicans, three Libertarians and 10 non-partisan candidates, including all those in races for Supreme Court seats. The Montana Free Press reprinted all of the legislative candidate information in their Voter Guide. Data indicate we reached over 10,000 Montana voters through VOTE411, with many more through the Montana Free Press!

Efforts to obtain candidate responses will continue through to the general election in November. Watch for more information on VOTE411 in the fall, and encourage everyone you meet to check it out! VOTE411 is a truly non-partisan source of information on the candidates!

GUEST EDITORIALS FROM LWV

Recent LWV MT Guest Editorials that ran in major Montana newspapers over the past six months:

- Local Government Review: [click here for PDF](#)
- CI-126 and CI-127: [click here for PDF](#)
- CI-128: [click here for PDF](#)
- Importance of Voting in the Primary Election: [click here for PDF](#)
- Letter to the Editor on Secretary of State Disqualification of Inactive Voter Signatures on Petitions: [click here for PDF](#)

CARTER CENTER COMES TO MONTANA TO OBSERVE 2024 ELECTIONS

The internationally respected Carter Center, that monitors elections in countries all across the world, is working with key leaders and organizations in Montana including the League to recruit volunteers to monitor and observe the general election in November in Montana. Headed up by a bipartisan team of former Commissioner of Political Practices Jeff Mangan and former Republican legislator and Fergus County Clerk and Recorder Geraldine Custer, the Carter Center's Montana Election Observation Project will be looking for volunteers to be trained as election observers in all local League counties. Election observation opportunities begin two weeks prior to the election when the voting machines are tested and continues through multiple election events such as poll observing and ballot counting on election day and observing the certification of local county results two weeks after the election, so there are plenty of opportunities to volunteer, even for those who are serving as election judges on November 5th. Watch for more information in September.

To sign up to be an Observer for the fall general election (and receive training), use this link: <https://mteoi.org/observation>

For more information about the Carter Center, [click here](#).

To see the press release describing the pilot project in Missoula County [click here](#).

DEFENDING DEMOCRACY IN THE COURTS: Update on LWV MT lawsuits

LWV MT is a plaintiff in two lawsuits currently underway in Montana state courts that challenge the constitutionality of two laws under the Montana Constitution. The first is the challenge to HB562, the "Community Choice" Charter School law that created a new administrative structure to oversee charter schools formed under this law. These charter schools would be exempt from most state laws and regulations governing public schools, and would be funded with public tax dollars with no public accountability for the funds or the quality of education provided. A district court judge has partially blocked implementation of this law, prohibiting the new administrative commission from accepting and approving charter school applications until the case is tried and decided. No date set as yet for when the trial will occur.

LWV MT is the plaintiff in state court challenging HB892, the law that discourages voter registration by creating felony penalties for those who register to vote without first de-registering in their former location and/or improperly fill out information on prior voter registration locations. This law was also challenged in federal court by other Montana organizations. The federal judge blocked implementation until the full case is tried and a decision made. LWV Montana's state suit is proceeding with a trial expected sometime in 2025.

PREPARING FOR THE 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION – Opportunities for Member Involvement!

Going into the 2025 Session, LWV MT has a two-part strategy that offers opportunity for League members to be involved.

Part One: Issue-Based Working Groups to monitor proposed legislation and draft Action Alerts

Last session, LWVMT had a team of about 15 League members who monitored the legislative session and helped prepare Action Alerts for League members to contact their state representatives and senators. This year, LWV MT is getting started even earlier with several Working Groups on specific issue areas already up and running. Current Working Groups are listed below. If there are enough volunteers in other Issue areas to form additional Working Groups, more can be formed. No experience necessary, we will have training sessions on all the skills needed to monitor the legislature and draft Action alerts.

- Affordable Housing
- Education
- Climate Change
- Defending Democracy (voting, elections and the Judiciary)

Here is a sign-up page for volunteering to help with Working Groups or to create additional ones: <https://forms.gle/8cxrzwkp6XXUZQKu7>

Part Two: Individual League Member Committee Testimony and Legislator Contact

LWV MT invites all LWV MT members to join in the second part of the strategy for the session: emphasizing testimony and contact from League members as individual citizens as the best way to influence the session. The strength of the League in swaying legislators lies in its individual members contacting legislators and providing testimony as constituents. This fall, LWV MT will offer a series of Zoom trainings for League members on how to contact legislators and how to provide testimony to committee hearings. Testimony can be given in written form that becomes part of the written hearing record, and can also be given live either through Zoom or in-person at the Capitol. Trainings will cover how to write and deliver effective testimony, as well as how to send messages to committee members and League members' representative and senator. Watch for more information in September.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LWV US National 2024 CONVENTION

Montana sent the largest delegation to the national convention in recent memory this year! Montana had a total of 12 voting delegate slots, and all were filled plus an additional League member went as an Observer. Three delegates were there in Washington, D.C. in person, and ten League members attended via Zoom. A big “Thank You” to the following League members: Pam Dimich and Dee Dee Welhaven from the Billings League; Rosanne Nash and Yvonne Rudman from the Bozeman League; Sharon Haugen, Cherri Jones, Becky Piske, Rebecca Johnson and Mary “Mickey” Harlow from the Helena League; and Mary LaPorte, Barb Holmes-Smith, Deb Knight and Nancy Leifer from the Missoula League.

Highlights from the Convention:

LWV US has hired Celina Stewart as the new CEO to replace Virginia Case-Solomon who left LWVUS after 5 very successful years to become the CEO of Common Cause. Celina Stewart served as Chief Legal Counsel for LWV US since 2018, so comes into the position already familiar with LWV US and ready to move into the future. Welcome, Celina!

Delegates elected a slate of representatives to the national board, including a new national President, Dianna Wynn. Dianna first joined the League in 2013 and served as president of the League of Women Voters of Wake County in Raleigh, North Carolina. Before joining the national Board, she focused on advocating for fair voting maps in North Carolina and ending gerrymandering in redistricting. The election was bittersweet, as we mourned the death of the former President Dr. Deborah Turner who would have been nominated for a second term. Welcome, Dianna!

The Convention approved the Budget for the next two years, approved retaining the current \$32 Per Member Payment until the new dues structure takes effect, and approved clarifying changes to the Bylaws.

The Convention also approved the Program for the national League for the next two years, along with a concurrence with a new position on local news media and a national study on the federal Judiciary. The Convention delegates also approved six Resolutions. [A summary of all of this can be found here.](#)

Montana delegates also attended a number of workshops and presentations on subjects such as “VOTE411: How to get Candidates to Respond”, “How to do a League Study”, and numerous other topics. Delegates are in the process of compiling their notes, but in the meantime, more resources are listed below:

Resources on How to Do a League Study

- Want to see what topics Leagues across the country have studied? Take a look at the [League of Women Voters Education Fund Clearinghouse webpage](#).
- Studies do not always turn into positions (which we need in order to act on an issue), but provide insight about issues Leagues have considered essential to maintaining our democracy.

- The LWV of Washington website has a list of excellent resources under the heading, [State League Study Process: From Inception to Position](#).

Thanks to Cherri Jones and LWV Helena for sharing this resource.